

MEETINGS BEFORE THE GREAT GATHERING

1952-PART VII

Informal Talk with the Mandali

It was November 4th. Baba arrived at about 7:30 A.M. On His way to the hall He asked about the health of some as was usual. He was wearing a silk coat, unbuttoned at the collar, over a white muslin *sadra*. As He rested on the *gadi* He looked so divine that His radiance seemed to stretch in all directions. He gestured to us to sit down. Although I almost never looked into Baba's eyes, I often focused my attention, after taking my seat behind someone, on Baba's broad, resplendent forehead. I also loved to watch Baba gracefully move His hands to brush back His hair.

Being in a happy mood, He was joking and in general relaxing in His companionship with the *mandali*. He called for all the five "priests"—Kaikobad, Kalemama, Ramjoo, Murli and Daulat Singh. Four of them were in the hall, but Murli had not yet come. Someone went out to call him. Baba remarked, "He is so lazy that even if I were to promise him God-realization, he wouldn't come on time!" By this time Murli rushed in the hall. Baba then asked each of the five to repeat seven times a short prayer glorifying God, the Lord of all.

Ramjoo had a cold. The next day he was to read from the *Koran* on behalf of Baba, so Baba remarked, "May he be relieved of his cold by tomorrow." And with a pause He suggested, "What if he takes the medicine from Baidul? With Baidul there is no such thing as checking or studying one's symptoms. Baidul administers his medicine in his own way and the patient is either totally cured or his heart beats no more!" A little later He gestured, "As there will be a special and serious program beginning November 7th, let us have some light talk today." Feram Workingboxwalla was not feeling well and Baba commented, "Why worry, Feram, perhaps you will outlive all of us!"

"Gustadji," Baba continued, "is the one who is always in

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perfect health. He was the one who had no complaints about his health when we were in the West. He likes ice cream and there he had that aplenty so he was in a good mood as well. Sometimes he says, 'If you want me to live for 125 years in perfect health give me a dozen bananas each day.' Baidul likes non-vegetarian dishes, and when he gets them he forgets everything else!" Addressing all, Baba concluded, "Eat well and rest well during your stay at Meherabad but also remember that from November 15th, our Fiery Life—Karbala⁶⁸ begins."

By this time Anna 104 had arrived and Baba gestured that He always felt happy to see Anna with his peculiar dress and mannerisms. Baba announced to all that Anna liked buttermilk, but even more than that, he liked chewing tobacco. When Anna talked to others with his mouth half-full of tobacco and saliva, it was hard to understand what he mumbled, but it was frequently an amusing sight.

Baba's mood changed and He began to talk about some work. He instructed Adi to print in English and Hindi some of His messages which were to be delivered on the tour of the Fiery Free Life. He also gave some day-to-day instructions to various *mandali* and then discussed the important items of the November 8th program. While we were all gathered in the hall that morning, a bed bug was discovered on Baba's seat. God alone knows how it got there, since Baba's *gadi* had been carefully made up with a nice mattress and a spotless white sheet covering it. But the bed bug's presence, or perhaps its bite, had upset Baba, or at least it seemed so.

Baba reprimanded the *mandali* for not being more careful in checking things for Him. He looked at them and remarked in Gujarati, "I am trapped in the hands of these demons!" This loving admonition resulted in the entire hall being thoroughly cleaned. During lunch time Baba's seat and mattress were put in the sun, and everything was taken from the hall and put on the verandah for a careful inspection. Then the entire hall was scrubbed down. Baba's slightest wish and comfort were of immense importance to all of the *mandali*.

In the afternoon, Baba talked with the *mandali* about the

⁶⁸ The place in Iraq where Hassan and Hussain, the Prophet's grandsons, were killed in a battle and became martyrs.

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copies of the form He had sent with Eruch and Pendu to be filled in by those who were ready to dedicate either their money, services, or life in Baba's cause. Baba asked Minoo Kharas to sort out the forms later and remarked, "Until now I have not sent out a form of this kind. I do not expect even a *paise* (cent) if not given with love, even though at present I do not have a single *paise*."

Baba then put His hands into His pockets and demonstrated that they were empty. "However," He added, "Today, in spite of being the poorest of the poor, I have resolved to plunge into the ocean of Divine Love in my Fiery Life. And from November 15th onwards I won't accept money even if someone offers it."

God's Sense of Humor

It was a day for light talk and it seemed most appropriate that Baba touched on the subject of God's sense of humor. He stated that Creation is God's *Lila* (Divine Sport) and that it is sustained by His sense of humor. He also explained that the expression of God's humor varies with the scope and range of work that is ordained and accomplished in each Advent through the Avatar, *Sadgurus*, saints and *masts*. In fact, God's sense of humor is so pervasive that there is not a person who is totally devoid of it.

Baba began in a humorous vein, "Whether I am the Avatar or *Shaitan* (Satan) one thing is certain and that is I have a great sense of humor. It is my sense of humor that makes me rejoice to see Anna 104 and happy to listen to the irrelevant talk of Babadas. Anna's type of personality is more than enough to exhaust the patience and forbearance of *rishis* and *munis* (saints and sages). Yet, I cannot help but humor them both, and going out of my way to keep them near me. Both of them have rendered great and unique service to me and I know that they both love me sincerely."

Baba then referred to incidents from the different lives of the Avatar that expressed a deep sense of humor. He continued:

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It is said that once *Rasool-e-Khuda* (the Messenger of God) felt indisposed and someone suggested that that was due to an evil eye and that he should sleep on a pillow with an open knife underneath it. He did so, and thereafter declared himself to be all right. Call it ordinary or call it Divine; it was Mohammed's sense of humor.

It is a fact that, during the childhood of his grandsons, Hassan and Hussain, the Prophet predicted the Moharram "Karbala" to his daughter Fatima, the mother of (the) martyrs... the Prophet did not try to avoid (or avert) the . . . tragedy and... that was only because of God's Divine sense of humor in Mohammed.

Likewise, the strife between the Kauravas and the Pandavas and the consequent bloodshed was not only due to the Divine sense of humor in Krishna, but its height was reached when Krishna himself died through an arrow that accidentally struck one of his legs from the bow of an ordinary hunter who never had any intention of harming the *Rangila* (playful) *Avatar* in any way.

The kind-hearted Jesus knew very well that his nearest disciple would betray him and thus lead to his crucifixion; but, because of the Divine sense of humor, Christ could not help getting himself crucified, although the world rightly continues to look upon him as the Savior of humanity.

The funniest Divine sense of humor was on the part of Buddha when he simply died of simple dysentery, though his "medicine" for the spiritual *beemaries* (illnesses) of mankind holds the field to this day.

In short, save for a change in the circumstances, the atmosphere and the surroundings, the same old, old story goes on repeating again and again which by itself proves the Divine sense of humor....

The manifestation of the Divine Fun (Sport) or *Lila*, however, depends upon the Great Ones (Perfect Ones) of God who achieve Oneness with God; and, thus, in spite of raising themselves above the Law of Duality, they still retain the Divine sense of humor to uphold the universal

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law of ignorance through which Knowledge Divine is achieved for all eternity.

Those who were with me at the spot at the time of my car accident in America can alone well describe my own sense of humor as to how thoroughly battered, bruised and literally helpless and hopeless I was when lying with broken bones in a pool of my own blood together with my dearest ones, I yet maintained my silence and my consciousness throughout the crisis and the long period of convalescence.⁶⁹

The *Avatar* is the total manifestation of God in human form. He represents Reality in flesh and blood. It is in Him that the Infinite has defined itself. And so whenever God comes amongst mankind as the God-Man, He has an infinite sense of humor. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the *Avatar* is immensely loved by some and greatly misunderstood by the rest of humanity for whom He assumes a human form. What a timeless sport of the Ancient One!

"When I Give, I Give the Ocean"

Baba pointed at His finger where people wear rings and gestured, "*Masts* are like jewels. They are of great help to me in my spiritual work." Whenever Baba would talk about the *masts*, His face would be aglow with motherly love and pride. He would often refer to them as His beloved children. *Masts* love God for the sake of love. The God-Man is that love made flesh in human form. Baba then pointed out the difference between the unadulterated self-effacing love for God of the *masts*, and the self-controlling austerities of spiritual aspirants who seek God as Truth.

To clarify this issue, Baba cited a few brief incidents from the lives of the *masts*, and then as a contrast, related in detail the austerities of a seeker that Baba had contacted at Chitrakut, near Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. The gist of this story, as I recall it, is given below.

In his early years this seeker suffered from paralysis of his limbs. Owing to the help of a *yogi* whom he regarded as his

⁶⁹ *The Awakener*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 1-2, (1972).

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guru, he was totally cured of his disability. Thereafter he left his home and stayed in a remote cave for forty years practicing austerities. Soon he brought his body under complete control—so much so that he slept for only an hour each day and then on a bed of nails. As for his food, he lived on a *chapati* a day and drank water only 3 or 4 times in 24 hours. But in spite of such severe austerities, he did not receive a taste of the sweetness of God's Love; nor did he receive a glimpse of God. To see God or to taste His Love is an act of Grace, and Grace is independent, unconditional.

Baba further told us that there are thousands of persons who invoke Divine Grace. However, after many years, only one among them is blessed with it. And the instant it descends, the recipient experiences God-realization. No one should regard this rarity with extreme pessimism, but with the optimism of the brave. It is the height of this optimism which inspires true heroes—the real men of God—to lay their lives at God's feet for a taste of His Love, without any expectation, even for Union with the Beloved.

In this same vein, Baba now addressed Pleader, one of His *mandali* who under Baba's orders had observed fast and silence for quite a long time and made pilgrimages on foot. Turning to him, Baba teasingly gestured, "Pleader has become so desperate he thinks that instead of my talking about the height of optimism or of the Ocean of Love, I should give him just a spoonful or two of the Ocean. He even tells me, 'I don't want the Ocean, I would be satisfied with just a spoonful of it.'"

"However, the fact is that if I were to give anyone a spoonful, that very spoonful would later make it extremely difficult for such a one to receive the Ocean; that very taste would become an obstacle in his merging in the Ocean. So, when I give, I give the Ocean, not a drop."

Looking at Pleader, Baba gestured, "Wait. Wait. God keeps company with those who have patience. The time will come, so continue to wait till the end of April. Today, although I am in the state of a devotee, I am sure of one thing: I feel confident that by the end of April, things won't be as they are now for the world, for you all, and for me. Wait until April."

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The Opportune Moment

Baba continued, "In the *darbar* (the gathering of the close ones) of the *Sadgurus*, history repeats itself. There are always some disciples or devotees who grumble about the delay in getting a response from God the Beloved. They think: 'In spite of our intense and earnest longing, why haven't we seen God? Why haven't we had even a glimpse of Him?' In fact, they should well know that God, who is equally in us all, is infinitely more anxious for Union with each one of us, than we are for Union with Him. But He knows and waits for the opportune moment."

Tukaram, one of the prominent Perfect Masters of Maharashtra, is well known for his profound love of God and the intense agony of separation that he experienced, like a fish out of water. After God-realization, he wrote in one of his *abhangas*,⁷⁰ "Dear one, remember well that Union with God is never the result of your efforts, however desperate they may be. Your longing will not bear fruit until the divinely ordained moment dawns upon you. He *knows* best!" With God's infinite, unconditional compassion, this divinely ordained moment (*ghadi*) instantly annihilates all separation. It is the descent of the eternally benevolent Infinite, crossing the "abyss" to reach the "finite" and engulf it into Itself as Itself.

Baba then changed the topic and began to recall some funny stories from the early years. Once during Baba's *mast* tours, he expressed a wish for some entertainment. In those days, the general instruction for those with Him was to be very economical in all things and dealings. Baidul offered to arrange a *qawwali* program and this made Baba very happy. Soon the singers arrived, but their performance was poor in all respects. Their voices weren't good, their music wasn't good, and their *ghazals* weren't good. So Baba was forced to end the program early.

When Baba admonished Baidul for not being more careful and bringing a good *qawwal*, he replied, "Baba, you want us to be very economical. I had settled this program with the party for just two and a half rupees, including

⁷⁰ A meter used in Marathi poetry.

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transportation!" This gave Baba a hearty laugh, and perhaps that was more than enough entertainment and relaxation for Him.

Baba also narrated a few incidents illustrating the Herculean physical strength which He possessed in the 20's. He was very slim and wiry then, but once he slapped Buasaheb, one of the hefty and strong *mandali*, so hard that He knocked him over. Another time He lifted Kondiram just by his ears. "I had such strength," Baba gestured, "that when a fiery mood possessed me, people used to hide, even in the bathrooms. However, look at me now! The septum of my nose is broken, my feet are swollen. I can't walk well. The same strength is now expressed in bearing suffering. What a change!" I felt that Baba was indirectly hinting at His *Avataric* sense of humor.

By evening Baba left for Meherazad in a very relaxed mood He looked to me as radiant as He appeared in the morning.

Reading of the Holy Books

During my two-week stay at Meherabad, November 5th will be regarded as one of the special days preceding the three-day gathering. In the morning, as all gathered in the hall before Baba, He conveyed, "Today is a very important day for me and for all who are present here. Be sincere and serious about the duties entrusted to you whether these are in the *Agrakuti (jhopri)* or elsewhere." On Baba's left, there was a small table in the corner on which the Holy Books had been neatly placed. This was the day when Baba was to participate in the prayers conventionally conducted according to the different religions. All of the five "priests" were ready and waiting for Baba's signal to begin.

Nilu, one of Baba's personal physicians, was frequently at Baba's side to help Him move about. This being a day of prayers, Baba was expected to stand up, bend over or squat on the floor. But today Baba wanted Eruch to help Him in these activities, so He teased Nilu by gesturing that he did not seem to have had his bath in the morning, so He had to ask Eruch to take his place.

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At the beginning of the program, Baba sat on a cushion that had been placed on the floor. He applied a *tilak*⁷¹ on His forehead, tied a silk cord around His waist and lit a prayer lamp which had seven wicks. He then asked Kalemama (a Hindu priest) to recite in Sanskrit a couplet in praise of Rama, from a hymn composed by the great *rishi* Valmiki. After this, Kalemama read a Marathi commentary in the form of verses by the *Sadguru* Dnyaneshwar on the fifth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. This went on for half an hour.

The next reading was of the *Avesta*, the Holy Book of the Zoroastrians. Baba stood up near Kaikobad, wore a *kusti* and placed a Parsi cap on His head. Kaikobad read from the *Avesta* for about thirty minutes. Then Baba asked him to repeat the 101 names of God that devout Parsis often recite. At the end Baba gave the cap He wore to Pleader and the *kusti* to Kaikobad.

Now it was Ramjoo's turn to say the Moslem prayers. Prior to this he offered *nimaz* in which he assumed different postures in the conventional way. During this time, however, Baba sat quietly with His head touching the floor. Then followed the reading from the Holy *Koran* for half an hour. At its completion, Baba walked over to His *gadi*. He hung a cross around His neck and Murli, wearing a long gown, stood before Him. Baba gestured that Murli looked exactly like a priest.

Murli began, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost . . . Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven...." Baba asked Murli, when he had finished reciting the Lord's Prayer, to read "The Sermon on the Mount," one of His favorite parts of the Bible. Baba then took the cross that was hanging around His neck and gave it to Murli.

Daulat Singh was the last priest and he was directed to read from the *Granthaheb*—the holy Book of the Sikhs. Before the reading started, Baba placed an iron bracelet around His wrist, like that of a Sikh. It was 11 o'clock when this special program was over. At the end of each reading Baba bowed down to the priest who conducted the prayers. *Prasad* was

⁷¹ A colored powder applied by Hindus on the forehead, usually in the shape of a circle.

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distributed to all who were present in the hall, and without making any comments, Baba left the meeting and went to His cabin.

During the entire morning session, Baba looked very devout and presented Himself as a perfect aspirant before the "priests." He wholeheartedly participated in the religious programs conducted according to the different faiths of the world. It was indeed a very solemn and serious occasion, through and through.

"The Men of God"

When Baba was in His cabin, Sarosh told Him that Daulatmai, dear mother of Mehera, had died that day in the early hours of the morning. For many years (over 16) she had observed silence under Baba's order. In spite of this, she supervised all her household work in Nasik. In the afternoon, Baba disclosed the news to all in the hall. He also told us that Daulatmai loved Him very dearly and that she had passed away peacefully. In conclusion He remarked, "My dear Daulatmai, by God's grace, will live in me forever." Baba wished that this news be circulated among His closer women disciples and devotees.

With reference to the dropping of the gross body and the real death⁷² Baba quoted a couplet of Kabir's which means:

Discard the body, it remains;
Preserve the body, it goes.
And so the astounding fact emerges
That the (uncared for) corpse eats up death.⁷³

In the informal discussion that followed, Baba continued, "People die in all sorts of ways but it is nothing to be upset about; they are born again and again in different gross bodies. But during one's lifetime, one should do whatever one honestly feels without getting attached to actions.

"Changing bodies between lifetimes is similar to changing a coat. Some die young, such as those who died at the time of the 'partition' (of the Indian Subcontinent into India and Pakistan); some live long lives, they do not change their coats

⁷² For Meher Baba's discourse, "Born Once; Die Once," See: *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. II, pp. 342-347.

⁷³ *The Work of Meher Baba with Advanced Souls, Sadhus, the Mad and the Poor*, p. 24.

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soon, like Gustadji." (Gustadji was in the habit of wearing a tattered old coat with patches. He was always reluctant to change his clothes.) After this teasing, Baba told us that when Gustadji was with Him in the West a few months back, he had been a well-dressed person, although he retained his other unusual characteristics.

Baba continued, "The *masti* of *masts* neutralizes heat, cold and disease. This is the Divine Law. *Masts* do not worry about keeping their bodies healthy. Owing to their total dependence on God, the power of *Vidnyan* sustains their bodies—it descends of itself to help such souls. However, with a *mast's* slightest thought of retaining the body, the reception ceases automatically. In a way, a *mast* is a dead person except for his being conscious of the plane that he is experiencing. But a Perfect *Majzoob* has no connection with the three worlds. In his case the corpse (the body) has eaten up death. This is the Real Death, after which there is no more birth. It is not possible for scientists to understand the power of *Vidnyan*. They cannot reach even the fringe of the subtle world.

"Those on the gross plane are in *Anna Bhumi*; those on the subtle plane are in *Prana Bhumi*; those on the mental plane are in *Mano Bhumi*. A soul when united with the Oversoul becomes the Sun, not the sun you see in the sky but an altogether different one that is the source of Infinite Power, Bliss, Beauty, Sound and Knowledge. Every attribute of this Sun is Infinite. The Infinite *Tej* (Effulgence) or *Nur* that exists eternally first passes to the mental plane and then through the subtle plane until it reaches the gross plane.

"*Masts* are God-intoxicated souls. They have drunk the wine of Love. They have no attachment with their gross bodies. They are 'the men of God.' And so Hafiz says in one of his couplets, 'Be so intoxicated with Love that God Himself will have to look after you.'"

Dnyaneshwar and the Dnyaneshwari

A day earlier Baba had instructed Sadashiv Patel (Patil), one of the *mandali*, to visit Alandi, a small town near Poona.

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Alandi is a well known place of pilgrimage because Dnyaneshwar's *samadhi* is located there. Patel was asked by Baba to offer respects on His behalf at the *samadhi* on the morning of November 5th. Patel accordingly visited Alandi, paid homage at Dnyaneshwar's tomb and returned to Meherabad the same afternoon.

While he was reporting to Baba about his visit, it was found that by coincidence a special worship (*mahapuja*) had been arranged at the *samadhi* on that day. The time of the *puja* coincided with Baba's listening to the *Dnyaneshwari*⁷⁴ which was read out to Him by Kalemama in Meherabad Hall.

Hearing this Baba stated, "I have a very close connection with Dnyaneshwar and so with the *Dnyaneshwari*. And that is why I sent Patel to Alandi. Dnyaneshwar was a Perfect Master and his eldest brother Nivrutti was his *Sadguru*. His younger brother Sopan and his youngest sister Muktabai were also Perfect Ones. It is a unique happening in spiritual history that all the brothers and the only sister in one family were God-realized. Dnyaneshwar has written exceptionally beautiful and meaningful verses in the *Dnyaneshwari* on *Gurubhakti* (perfect surrender to the Perfect Master)."

Baba's above comment reminds me of an incident that happened in the mid-twenties at Meherabad. It was a period when Baba had permitted quite a number of His devotees to stay there. One of the residents used to read some verses from the voluminous *Dnyaneshwari* every day. When Baba, during one of His casual visits to different houses at Meherabad, learned of this He lightly remarked, "Read and meditate on Dnyaneshwar's commentary on the seventh verse of the thirteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*."

This part incidentally turned out to be a very illuminating description of the qualifications of the aspirant with particular reference to *Gurubhakti*. One may wonder how Baba could make such an exact reference. However, this is only one of the innumerable glimpses of Baba's All-knowingness.

Baba continued, "Dnyaneshwar received the experience of God-realization when he was in his teens, while Bayazid did not receive it until he was about 90. Even if someone with 99%

⁷⁴ *Dnyaneshwari* is a profound and lucid commentary in Marathi on the *Bhagavad Gita* comprised of hundreds of verses that explain, in a very graceful manner, spiritual truths in relation to the Ultimate Reality.

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spiritual preparedness dies, he has to take a body again for the remaining 1% preparedness. In such cases the grace of God-realization descends either in childhood or after 60 years of age.

"In Sufism the subtleties of the Spiritual Path have been clearly mentioned. The Sufi Masters have even classified the Perfect Ones according to their offices (duties towards creation). *Kamil* is the Perfect One; *Akamal*, the Most Perfect One; *Mukammil*, the Supremely Perfect One; and *Saheb-e-Zaman* is beyond the Supremely Perfect One. There is no difference in each one's experience of the Eternal Reality. However, the *Sadguru (Qutub)* experiences Infinite Perfection and infinite imperfection simultaneously."

After such a profound explanation, Baba suggested that we tell Him some humorous stories. Soon we found Baba in a jovial mood and some jokes gave him a good laugh. Before leaving the hall for Meherazad, Baba conveyed, "I am not feeling well now. But I must be in good health to carry out work on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of November. Some days before the Hyderabad meeting (June, 1951) I felt very weak and 'nervous.' But Nilu told me that I would be quite well by the time of the meeting, and it was a surprise to me that I remained very lively and active during those days. It is all God's Grace and nothing else." And He gestured, "Let us see what happens now."

Weep Within; Outwardly Remain Cheerful

For us visitors, things were proceeding at a leisurely pace on the morning of November 6th. Baba, however, was busy in His cabin discussing with different *mandali* various items connected with the ensuing gathering. He came into the hall at 9:00 A.M. and asked all of us to wash our hands and faces. We quickly left the hall and returned in five minutes. Nilu, however, who was having his bath, was late in arriving. Now Baba gestured that we should all stand up. Then he told Nilu, Padri, Baidul and Eruch to repeat respectively the following

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names of God seven times; *Om Parabrahma, Paramatma; Ya Yezdan; La Ilaha Illallah*; and O God, Father in Heaven.

These were the names used in the non-stop *jap*, or repetition, in the *jhopri*. When all had sat down, Baba smilingly gestured, "I forgive Nilu for his late arrival and in return he should bear with me for not giving him any sweets!" (Nilu was well known for his sweet tooth.) In Baba's company, serious and light-hearted moments often followed one another.

Baba then asked Goma Ganesh, an old-time devotee, to read out his poems to Him. In October, 1948, Baba had inaugurated a school for small children, named Babawadi, which was conducted by him.⁷⁵ At that time Baba had given a special message in which He stated, "I am also called 'Baba' which endearingly means a baby, and in fact, all God-realized souls are unsophisticated like babies. I, therefore, see and enjoy my purity and 'colorlessness' in the 'unselfconscious ones'—the babies." Today Baba casually remarked that babies in a way are "unconsciously conscious" of a state experienced by a Perfect One who is a *Majzooob* and not a Perfect Master and who lives a life of "conscious inaction."⁷⁶

Perhaps this could be one of the reasons why Baba liked people working for the welfare of the young. Baba also heard Goma Ganesh's report on the progress of Babawadi and expressed His happiness with the work carried out by the school. In the end, Baba conveyed to him, "Don't hesitate to pursue this work. Don't worry, don't fear. I will help you in your honest endeavor to serve children."

Following this there was some informal conversation about the *masts* during which Baba quoted a line from a Persian couplet as follows:

Ba khuda masti kun-o
Ba awalia hoshyar bash.

That is, "Do what you like with God the Absolute, but be very careful in your dealings with *walis*." Baba explained that a *wali* has access to the powers in *Vidnyan*. He is not bound either to good or bad. So if anyone plays mischief with him, he will not hesitate to use these powers, although unwittingly, in a fit of displeasure, for example. The *wali's* use of these powers

⁷⁵ For details see: *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, pp. 394-395.

⁷⁶ See: *The Awakener*, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 38.

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may sometimes wipe off the best of *sanskaras* that one may have. Baba also added that a *Sadguru* is like an ocean that absorbs everything that comes to it, including things like mischief and criticism. However, beware of your relationship with a *wali*—friend of God.

In the afternoon, people from Arangaon sang *bhajans* in the hall. Then followed a *qawwali* program which continued for about two hours. Regarding a statement in one of the *ghazals* about shedding tears, Baba conveyed, "It is very difficult to control tears which stream down the cheeks without your being aware of them. Tears are not bad, but if you could succeed in restraining them, you will find greater joy in the inner companionship with your Beloved.

"The spiritual path is closely connected with feelings; that's true. However, this does not mean that inner passion should be exposed through an outer display, such as the shedding of tears. Someone who has a pure and sensitive heart may even feel that he should weep for years and years in the memory of his Beloved. However, if you can experience within your heart a continuous and deep longing for the Beloved, without any external sign, so much the better. Weep within continuously; outwardly remain normal and cheerful."

At about five in the evening, the *qawwali* program was over. Baba asked us all for the second time to wash our hands and faces, and the same four *mandali* repeated the names of God as they had done in the morning. As Baba got down from His *gadi*, He turned to Nana Kher with a questioning look and gestured, "Why are you growing a beard?" Nana answered, "It is convenient for me." Baba looked puzzled and added, "It's good that you did not get married as your wife might not have like the sight of a bearded husband."

The real reason behind Nana's beard was that he had tough whiskers and it took him at least half an hour to get a close shave. Thus the growing of a beard was a time-saving device. However, Baba's casual joke in time resulted in Nana's shaving regularly, although this entailed a half hour ritual! Baba wants His people to live a normal life in the world while inwardly remaining detached from all circumstances, except

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our attachment to Him. When leaving the hall, Baba asked all not to worry about anything and to keep fit and trim for the three-day gathering.

"Gustadji, Are You on the Sixth Plane?"

Before taking up the momentous three-day meeting, I would like to add just a few comments about my impressions of the *mandali*. For this was the period when I had the opportunity, day after day, of seeing Baba surrounded by most of His men *mandali*: each one a strong character in his own right. As far as I remember, the *mandali* present were: Adi, Gustadji, Baidul, Sarosh, Pendu, Padri, Eruch, Vishnu, Nariman, Babadas, Anna 104, Murli, Chhagan, Nilu, Sidhu, Donkin, Jal S. (Baba's brother), Kaikobad, Meherjee, Ramjoo, Kalemama, and Savak Kotwal. Every day almost all were present. To see Baba in the midst of His *mandali* attending to His different types of work was indeed a unique sight, a marvelous affair.

And perhaps it is appropriate to mention here a funny incident concerning my earlier assumption that the *mandali* consciously experienced the spiritual planes. In 1944, I had finished reading the *Discourses*. I was especially impressed with Baba's explanations of the spiritual path, and the involution of consciousness as explained in the *Divine Theme*.

Later, Baba gave me the opportunity, in November of that same year, to be with Him for a few days at Nagpur. Owing to the busy programs that Baba had to attend, I hardly had time to get acquainted with the *mandali*. Each one of them was kept extremely busy. I just stared and feasted my eyes on Baba and that was more than enough!

However, eventually I came into contact with people who had had Baba's *darshan* quite a few times. They were strongly drawn to Baba and were also impressed by the *mandali* around Him. I heard someone say, "Since Baba is the Perfect Master, those who stay with Him automatically become spiritually advanced, experiencing different planes of

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consciousness." The man even went on to mention the specific spiritual status of some of the *mandali*: Adi was on the third plane; Dr. Deshmukh was on the 5th and Gustadji was on the 6th.

I wondered why Adi, who had met Baba in the 20's, should be less advanced than Dr. Deshmukh who had come to Baba much later. However, it made sense to me that Gustadji, having been with three *Sadgurus*, Babajan, Sai Baba and Upasni Maharaj, as well as Baba, should have attained such a lofty status. Also I knew that he was observing silence, which I took to be an additional indication of his spiritual worth.

In my excitement at discovering exactly which plane each member of the *mandali* was on, it never occurred to me to doubt the validity of my informant's statements. I took it for granted that the *mandali* were stationed on the planes of consciousness, and I was eager to confirm their spiritual status if the opportunity arose for me to do so. Baba, who has compassion even for a foolhardy follower like me, soon provided a suitable opportunity.

It was still in the mid-forties and Baba permitted me to be with Him for some programs. Once while with Baba, all of us went out for a leisurely walk. And who should I spot ahead of me on the road, wearing his long brown coat and round black cap, but Gustadji. I caught up with him and after walking in silence for a short distance, I could not restrain myself and said, "Gustadji." He looked at me and smiled. I continued, "One question, Gustadji. I heard that you are on the sixth plane, is it true?"

Gustadji, with a serious look, made a gesture meaning, "Yes." "Well, at least the information about Gustadji was correct," I thought. But after a short while, as I looked at him again, he smiled a mischievous smile and made gestures which meant that he had made a fool of me. That which I took so seriously was just a joke to Gustadji. And he continued to walk on as if he were not in the least concerned with the subject.

I felt bewildered that Gustadji should be so unaffected by such an important topic, and at the same time felt that this

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was a lesson for me—a loving reprimand from Baba to stop seeking such irrelevant details. This little incident has helped me to give up the habit of judging, or even attempting to judge, the spiritual status of those around Baba, or of any other person. It is not my business. How can an ordinary person like me judge or affirm the spiritual state or progress of others? Only the Perfect Master or the *Avatar* has the knowledge and authority to reveal this.

Self-effacement in Baba's Loving Remembrance

As years passed I learned that the *mandali* do not care about conscious or unconscious progress on the Path. They only wish to serve Baba with all their minds and hearts, more and more; and this too, for the sake of love and in the spirit of surrender that Baba has awakened in them. The way they responded to Baba's slightest wish was clearly demonstrated to me during my stay at Meherabad that November. Each one of the *mandali* possessed a rare quality which Baba, the God-Man, used in His own unique way even without their knowing.

Not conscious spiritual advancement through the planes, but self-effacement in Baba's loving remembrance is what Baba expects of His dear ones, I learned. Baba once conveyed, "The way of my work is the way of effacement which is the way of strength not weakness—and through it you become mature in my love."

During one of my frank conversations with Adi Sr. on the subject of spiritual planes, he explained to me certain points in a very convincing and appealing manner. The gist of what I remember is given below:

Self-effacement contains spiritual advancement, but conscious traversing of the Path does not necessarily imply self-effacement. When one is conscious of the inner planes on one's journey to God, there is a great possibility of one's succumbing to the allurements of the Path.

There is nothing wrong in anyone's aspiration for spiritual progress; that is quite natural. However, after

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coming into the love orbit of the *Avatar*, it is best to drown oneself in His Love and dedicate all actions to Him. This is the most desirable and also the safest course. Then, instead of the lover following the Path, the Path follows him.

In the arena of ordinary human consciousness, while the divine game of love is being played, the *Avataric* Presence, with infinite skill, arranges and unwinds various deep-rooted *sanskritic* patterns. And at the opportune moment, the God-Man bestows His grace on His lovers to release them from the snares of *Maya*. Such an attitude towards spiritual life completely saves the *Avatar's* lovers from getting caught in the allurements and pitfalls of the inner planes. The *Avatar's* way is simple. He declares, "Love me and leave the rest to me. If you love me at your level, I will take you to mine."

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1952-PART VIII

God's Mandate

The three-day *sahavas* at Meherabad from November 7th to 9th was a glorious and memorable occasion for the Baba lovers, a group of about three hundred people. They were invited for the special gathering preceding Meher Baba's Fiery Free Life. Most of them, especially those who came from Hamirpur and Andhra, were meeting Baba for the first time. They had heard about the different phases of Baba's *Avataric* work from Eruch and Pendu, when they, on Baba's orders, traveled throughout India the previous summer.

Since then, many of them had been yearning ardently for the opportunity to be in the physical presence of Meher Baba, the *Avatar* of the Age. Now that they had this opportunity, the exuberance of their inner joy was clearly visible in their walks and talks, and occasionally through the tears that sparkled in their eyes or silently rolled down their cheeks.

For me it was the first time that I had heard so many different languages—Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil and also English—being spoken at Meherabad. The clothes worn by the members of this gathering were as diverse as the languages. However, our love for Baba was what brought us together and indeed made us all feel like members of one family.

A large awning was erected in front of the Rahuri Cabin (behind the old Meherabad Ashram) for these meetings of the Fiery Life. Some improvised bathrooms and latrines were set up near the *nullah* that passed by Meherabad. Tarpaulins were spread inside the awning and a small dais was set up for Baba's chair. The Meherabad staff, under the direction of Pendu and Padri, was busy attending to the various requirements of the guests.

I especially remember a board fixed to one of the poles of

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the awning on which was written a Persian couplet in Roman script along with its English translation. It read as follows:

Ma parvereem dushmano ma meekusheem doost
Kas ra majaal neest ke chun-o-cher yema—Hafiz

This means, God says, "I cause my enemies to flourish and I kill my friends;
This I do, and no one has the right to demand the why and wherefore of me."

Perhaps this was a most casual display of the prerequisite for those who might wish to follow Baba, the *Avatar*, God in human form. The lives of saints, lovers of God and also of the closest *mandali* of the God-Man, Meher Baba, clearly illustrate the relevance of this couplet. This is God's mandate for His would-be lovers: that even under the most trying of circumstances, they surrender to His will with a smile, depending completely on Him.⁷⁷ Later, during the meetings, Baba referred to this couplet while explaining His Fiery Life phase.

Baba As A Seeker

After seven in the morning on November 7th, Baba arrived at Meherabad in Adi's car with Eruch and a few other *mandali*. He went to His cabin and called those connected with the arrangements for the meetings to get their reports and to check all details, as was His habit.

Two trains arrive at Ahmednagar Railway Station after sunrise, one from the south and the other from the north. Most of the Baba lovers invited for the *sahavas* came on these two trains. Some from Poona came in buses.

At 9:30 A.M., Baba came into the hall where His lovers were expectantly waiting for Him. Suddenly a deep silence filled the hall and all eyes were focused on Baba. Those at the back craned their necks to feast their eyes on Baba's radiant face. Baba gestured for all to sit down and a little later He asked the *bhajan* party from Poona to sing. Madhusudan, L. B. Thade, Ramchandra Rao, and Dholakram soon filled the hall

⁷⁷ On several occasions, Meher Baba has also quoted the following couplet of Hafiz:

Dar miyaane ga'are darya
takhatah bandam kardayee;
Ba 'ad mee gooyi keh damaan
tar makun hushiyar baash.

[Tied to a plank, I was tossed in the ocean (by the Master) and told to beware and not let the hem of my garment get wet.]

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with devotional songs composed in praise of Baba.

Baba teased Gadekar by saying that he had brought a cold with him and was now passing it on to others. Of course those who had a cold were not permitted to sit close to Baba. To Dr. Deshmukh, Baba said, "I feel I will be free in April." To this the learned doctor replied, "Baba, you are eternally free." Baba remarked, "I'm eternally bound but from time to time, I set myself free; God willing, this time, it could be by the end of April. I will make this point clear tomorrow."

Baba continued, "So, tomorrow being a very important day for me, I want you all to be here. By being here I mean that each one's mind and heart should be open and totally attentive to what I say, explain, decide and declare." With a smile He added, "Deshmukh should not think of his family members in Nagpur!" Looking at the gathering Baba continued, "I am accepted as the *Avatar* or the Perfect Master, but for Baba (me) to become a devotee has the greatest significance. Why? This too will be explained tomorrow."

Those who were in the hall, particularly those who were meeting Baba for the first time, were so overwhelmed with Baba's divine presence that I wondered whether they followed what Baba meant by being a seeker. Perhaps they already knew that in the life of the *Avatar*, mystery and simplicity are blended to perfection, and so they did not even bother trying to figure it out. To be frank, I must confess that even now I do not understand the significance of Baba's statement mentioned here.

Looking at those who were in the hall, Baba continued, "The time has now come for the revelation of the Infinite in the universe. The Fiery Life which begins on November 15th and ends with the end of April will (in time) reveal that only God is Real and all else is illusion." Then He switched to another subject and instructed the assembly, "After this morning gathering is over, have your lunch and rest. In the afternoon I will call you one by one for interviews. Now go wash your hands and face and come back to participate in the repetition of God's names."

When all had returned to the hall, Baba conveyed, "God is

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present in you and in me. Let us take His name sincerely and wholeheartedly so that He who is within us is touched. Now four of the *mandali* will repeat aloud the names of God representing different religions. You should repeat these names quietly, in a very low voice, and think that God is within you and is listening to you."

Baba got up, washed His hands and face and solemnly stood up by His seat. All rose; most of the people folded their hands. Then Dr. Nilkanth (Nilu), Padri, Baidul, and Eruch respectively repeated aloud seven times the following names of God: *Om Parabrahma Paramatma; Ya Yezdan; La Ilaha Illallah* and O God, Father in Heaven. At the close of this sacred recitation, Baba gestured for all to leave the hall except those who had come from the Hamirpur District. Shripat Sahai, Keshav Nigam and Babu Ramprasad then introduced to Baba those who had come to Meherabad for the first time.

"Join Me in Prayers Wholeheartedly"

In the afternoon when Baba was coming into the hall, Gustadji, Baba's friend and disciple of the Old Life, and also a companion of the New Life, garlanded Baba. This was a delightful surprise to Baba on the eve of the important meeting concerning the Fiery Life. All of us followed Baba into the hall, but as He wanted only those who had not met Him in the morning, many of us left.

When all gathered again, Baba explained that although in Eternity time as such does not exist, the next day (November 8, 1952) was an important day for Him. He also added that God, the infinite, eternal One is so inseparable and indivisible that even to call Him One would be ignorance, and yet to experience that Oneness is the goal of life.

Baba continued, "Tomorrow I will tell you about the Fiery Free Life. Keshav Nigam, Dr. Deshmukh and Dr. Dhanapathy Rao will translate whatever I explain in English into Hindi, Marathi and Telugu. As tomorrow is an important day, before you come to the meeting at 8:00, take a bath, or at least wash

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your hands and face. Also, wash your minds with your love for me and join me in the prayers wholeheartedly.

"I have called you here to share in my humble prayers to God who is in us all and in whom we are all one. Let us not be hypocritical before God who knows everything. For the last so many years, I have been bowing down to *masts* and saints for their love of God, now I bow down to the love of those who, with total faith and unadulterated love, love me."

Hearing this, someone from Poona, who was fond of lecturing before crowds, stood up and delivered a speech on the importance of loving and realizing God. Perhaps this person, out of sheer habit, had started lecturing in the presence of the All-knowing One. Baba, however, listened very attentively, and at the end remarked, "Good, today I had the opportunity to listen to some good words!" The silent smiles that shone on the faces of those present lightened the seriousness of the meeting and Baba also looked delighted.

Three Types of Conviction

Baba then instructed everyone to wash his hands and face and to then come back into the hall. When they did, the divine names of God were again repeated aloud by the same four *mandali* and in the same way as in the morning, and the assembly silently participated, inwardly invoking God.

Baba asked His lovers from Poona to sing. Madhusudan, Gadekar and Thade had another opportunity to please their Beloved Master. The singing continued for about an hour. At the end of this program Baba explained:

Knowledge, which in Sufism is termed *marefat*, is the certainty (conviction) of becoming what you really are. There are three types of conviction:

- 1) Intellectual conviction.
- 2) Conviction through seeing (by sight).
- 3) Conviction through becoming (by Realization).

Few have intellectual conviction. Vedantists explain about our being one with God; that does not mean that they

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have intellectual conviction. But when this understanding is embedded in simple yet rock-like faith in God (or the God-Man), it becomes real intellectual conviction. Nothing can upset the one who has such conviction.

When one actually sees what one has grasped through the intellect, i.e., sees God face to face, he has conviction by sight. And when one becomes what one sees, that is *Dnyan*, or conviction through becoming, or certainty through Realization. A Perfect Master (*Sadguru*) can bestow this *Dnyan* in a twinkling of an eye.

Baba continued, "And if you think Baba has *dnyan* it must be due to my Masters (*Sadgurus*)—Hazrat Babajan and Upasni Maharaj and more directly Sai Baba my Grand Old Man—and if I have *Dnyan*, which is so rare, then I must see my Self in you all and all of you in me. Hence, by bowing down to your love for me, I bow down to God and to the Masters who are all one in Him."

At 6:15 P.M., all except those who came from Saoner (MS) were asked to leave the hall. Baba asked Pophali about that group's journey. After some intimate chat and jokes, He took their leave and left for Meherazad.

Prelude to Prayer

Saturday, November 8th, will remain as one of the eventful days in the lives of those who were called to Meherabad for this "Fiery" gathering. In the early hours of the day people were animatedly performing their morning chores, including taking a hot water bath. In Maharashtra, November weather is really delightful and the mornings are especially cool and refreshing. Chhagan, one of the *mandali* in charge of the kitchen, had prepared nice tea and delicious *rava*. Any of us could have as much *rava* and as many cups of tea as we liked; a culinary feast preceding the spiritual one!

Merrily moving about in groups around Meherabad Ashram, people with fervent hearts were anxiously waiting for Baba's car to arrive from Meherazad. After 7:15 in the

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morning, Adi's car brought the Beloved Master and He majestically walked to the *mandap*. Most of the people rushed there but Baba gestured, "I have some work with the *mandali* so don't crowd near the dais. Don't be on my chest! I will call you."

After half an hour all were summoned under the awning. When the devotees and disciples came in, Baba stood up. Holding the alphabet board in His hand, He spelt out, "Today is a very important day for me and for my work in the Fiery Life which begins on November 15th. And so I have called you to be with me on this day. To begin with, I will bow down to your love and faith for having responded to my call."

Baba got up from his seat and reverentially folded His hands to offer homage to the love of His lovers. Resuming His seat Baba continued:

I want you all to patiently hear what I say, declare and what I have decided. Before I make clear my Fiery Life, I will explain to you the stand of a devotee that I have adopted today.

For an ordinary devotee, there exists attachment of every kind. Ignorance being the predominating factor, desires and duality persist, and due to this ignorance, virtue, sin, good and bad have their meaning. Worries, doubts, upsets and miseries are the products of this ignorance. Birth and death, which in *Dnyan* are superfluous, have meaning in ignorance. Therefore, for a devotee, good, bad and all forms of duality exist till *dnyan* comes. And so today I am taking the stand of an ordinary devotee who seeks forgiveness of God for his mistakes.

After this short introduction, Baba asked Dr. Donkin to read on His behalf the following "Statement" in English which He had dictated earlier. Hindi and Marathi versions were read out to the gathering by Keshav Nigam and Dr. Deshmukh.

In a few minutes I am going to repent to God and ask His forgiveness for my sins and also for the sins of everyone connected with me.

Because I shall include myself in this repentance and prayer, it is important for you to know that I shall, for the

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time being, take my stand as an ordinary devotee; that is, as one whose devotion and longing for Union with God are weakened and corrupted again and again by evil thoughts, evil feelings, evil words and deeds.

I know that only God exists and in the same way I also know that good and evil are merely aspects or manifestations of God Himself.

For the ordinary man, and even the ordinary devotee, this knowledge of the true nature of good and evil is only the fruit of faith and reason. It is therefore theoretical, and not real Knowledge and so it does not free him from the law of *Karma*—the law that is based on God's Will—the law that pervades throughout eternity.

The *Dnyani*, however, because he knows the Truth by actual experience, is utterly free from all his bindings and he, therefore, knows that, as a *dnyani*, he is exempt from the law of *Karma*; and since he knows the true nature of good and evil, he also knows that no one is to be blamed for anything he thinks or feels or says or does. And he knows, too, that sequels to good and evil, such as heaven and hell, dying and being born again and again, are the results of God's Will functioning through Cosmic Law, but also that they exist only because ignorance makes them exist.

Thus the *dnyani*, who may often intercede with God for his devotees and for humanity at large, never repents to God and never asks forgiveness for anything concerning himself.

By a special dispensation of God, also, the very highest type of devotee whose whole being is permanently focused on the Divine Beloved is as completely exempt from the law of *Karma* as the *Dnyani*. Unlike the *dnyani*, however, such a devotee is utterly ignorant of this exemption.

But the ordinary devotee, no matter how sincere in his devotion, remains bound by the law of *Karma*, and so his best course is to apply this law to his own spiritual advantage by the constant practice of virtue and the constant abstention from evil. And when he fails in virtue,

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or falls into sin, he must throw himself on the boundless mercy of God and ask His forgiveness.

This repentance and prayer for forgiveness will now be uttered for me, for you and for all who are connected with me.

When Donkin finished his reading, Baba added, "Maybe some of you, or many of you, or all of you have no bindings, or desires and attachments. But as today I am in this state (of a devotee) I would like you to join me, to encourage me in asking God's forgiveness." At the end of this comment Baba stood up on the dais and all those present automatically rose. Then Nilu, Padri, Baidul and Eruch invoked God by respectively repeating seven times these four names of God: *Om Parabrahma Paramatma; Ya Yezdan; La Ilaha Illallah; O God, Father in Heaven.*

Prayer of Repentance

After this invocation Donkin read out the following supplication which in later years was repeated in Baba's presence hundreds of times, and is now being said daily by hundreds of Baba lovers in the East and West.

Prayer of Repentance

We repent, O God most merciful, for all our sins, for every thought that was false or unjust or unclean; for every word spoken that ought not to have been spoken; for every deed done that ought not to have been done.

We repent for every deed and word and thought inspired by selfishness, and for every deed and word and thought inspired by hatred.

We repent most specially for every lustful thought and every lustful action, for every lie, for all hypocrisy, for every promise given but not fulfilled and for all slander and backbiting.

Most specially also we repent for every action that has

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brought ruin to others, for every word and deed that has given others pain, and for every wish that pain should befall others.

In your unbounded mercy we ask you to forgive us, O God, for all these sins committed by us and to forgive us for our constant failures to think and speak and act according to your Will. Amen.

Marathi and Hindi translations of this prayer were read out and these too were received reverentially by all.

When all had made themselves comfortable on the carpets, Baba continued:

Before I explain my Fiery Life, I must say that for *Dnyani* and for Lover, these attachments and forgiveness for attachments do not exist. For the *Dnyani*, nothing exists but God. For him, every one is God, every thing is God, not merely through intellectual conviction, but, as I said yesterday, by actual *becoming* He knows through continuous conviction, and experiences from the beginningless beginning to the endless end that he, and he alone, is.

My message to the world, which has been a message throughout eternity, is Love. This Love has two aspects, and both aspects are real. Any other attachment, which we, through ignorance, call love, is nothing but the illusion of *Maya*.

Love for God Personal or Impersonal with intense longing for oneness with the Beloved is one aspect of real Love. Such a lover forgets everything, forsakes everyone and annihilates himself in the fire of Divine Love. In the second aspect, he loves humanity at large as being part and parcel of God. Here, the lover forgets his own interest, forsakes his own happiness and tries to make others happy or uplifted. If this love reaches its height, he also, like the Divine Lover, forgets himself completely and is lost in Love, and Love alone.

My Fiery Life is based on this Love by which the Lover is lost in the Beloved after being consumed in the fire of Love.

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Plunge into the Fiery Life

Once again Baba asked Donkin to read out another explanation that was previously dictated by Him:

My Fiery Life begins on November 15th, 1952. In April, 1953, the climax of the internal working of that Life will be reached

From untold ages, every Lover of God has had to bear unnumbered burdens, face remorseless opposition and be tormented by humiliations and frustration, by bodily sickness and mental despair, until the final Union with the Divine Beloved.

I myself and also all who are to be with me in the Fiery Life must, therefore, be prepared to stand firm in the face of hardship, difficulty and every conceivable kind of attack, our only weapons being an unshakeable faith in God and a complete resignation to His Will. All our sufferings will have to be borne in this manner until that final moment when the Fiery Life shall, by God's Grace, emerge victorious.

The readings of translations in Hindi and Marathi gave the listeners an opportunity to reflect upon what Baba had just had read out, and the profundity of Baba's statements was deeply felt by all. The main part of the morning program for which this gathering was called was practically over. At the end, Baba again asked Donkin to deliver, on His behalf, a message that He had dictated a day before. Baba declared:

All these years, I have been recognized as a *Sadguru* and as the *Avatar*. Later, in my New Life, I lived the life of an ordinary humble human being.

In the *Manonash* period, I lived the life of an aspirant in order to achieve complete mental annihilation. During the period of my Free Life, I've been leading the dual role of strength and weakness, retaining simultaneously the roles of Master and devotee.

Before plunging into my Fiery Life, I intend for the first and last time to pay homage to the three Masters with whom I have connection, viz., Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj

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and Babajan, at their respective resting places (Shirdi, Sakori and Poona).

I shall then proceed to Bombay and bow down at the feet of *Masts* and Saints in Bombay and then plunge into the Fiery Life wherein I will be the Lover of God.

When the reading was over, Baba looked even more radiant and happy. Looking at the assembly, in a jovial mood, He gestured, "Now, a recess of fifteen minutes. Go out, drink water, smoke, relax . . . when you come back we will have some *bhajans* and *ghazals*."

When all had returned they noticed Baba still sitting in His chair on the dais. He beckoned to the Poona group to start singing. After a couple of *bhajans* He made a sign to Rustamkaka who then sang an *abhang* of Tukaram in a very melodious voice. Now Baba looked at Abdur Raheman and jokingly gestured, "Everyone be attentive. Now you will be listening to a master *qawwal*!" Abdur Raheman then sang two *ghazals*, one composed by his brother Dr. Ghani and the other by Khaksaheb. Thus, in a way, he was instrumental in Baba's remembering these two members of His *mandali* who had passed away during the last two years.

Baba looked pleased with the way Abdur Raheman presented the *ghazals*. He remarked, "Ghani, Abdur Raheman, Sailor and Baily were my childhood friends. We roamed about, played together and even quarreled, all in the same alley. But one thing is certain: they all loved me dearly."

Baba then made Sailor stand in the gathering and put this question to him, "We were playmates then, but what do you think of me now?" Sailor's instantaneous reply was, "That you are God personified!" Then Baba asked the same question of Baily and he answered, "Baba, words to say what I feel escape me; you are my all in all."

Hearing these replies Baba's eyes glowed. His face shone with a smile and He good humoredly remarked, "Such high comments from my old *mawali* (mischievous) mates, made after a period of forty years, make me believe that I could be Someone extraordinary!" This made all laugh heartily and, as it was past noon, Baba ordered a break for lunch.

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Conditions for the Programwallas

Baba had His food in His cabin, but He hardly rested for we soon heard someone calling out that Baba wanted to see someone, or some group. People gathered on the Ashram verandah, waiting, just in case one of them should be called by their Beloved Master, for this was a rare chance not to be missed! When people came back out from Baba's room there would be a glow on their faces or they would be deeply absorbed over what Baba had said to them.

Baba resumed the meeting at 4:45 P.M. He wanted to work out the details and settle the dates for the *darshan* programs of the Fiery Life. In addition, He also brought the following three points to the notice of those who were connected with the *darshan* arrangements.

During His Fiery tour, when visiting any place, whether a city, a town or a village, the first thing He wanted to do was to contact the local *masts* or saints, if any. Secondly, He wished to wash the feet of seven poverty-stricken people and feed them with His own hands. Thirdly, before the beginning of any public program, Baba wanted to pay homage to Baba, His own Self in the masses, by offering His humble salutations through *namaskar* (folding of the hands to express reverence). Then people could take Baba's *darshan* or even perform His *arti* if they wanted to do so. Baba the worshipper and Baba the worshipped!

Baba also made it clear to all that these three conditions had to be observed carefully. If the programwallas felt that they would be unable to comply with any of these conditions, they were to candidly admit this to Baba; He wouldn't mind canceling His visits. None expressed an inability to abide by these stipulations and there then followed a free discussion about the programs which had been arranged at different places.

Baba in a Jovial Mood

Some from the north asked Baba, "Will you be giving special messages to the masses?" Baba replied, "Yes, and you

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can collect these from Adi and print them in the form of a booklet or leaflets—whatever is convenient for you—for distributing them to the public. If you cannot print these messages, don't worry; people will have my *darshan* and that is enough. But remember one thing: no one should request an individual interview with me. If I call anyone that is a different matter. As for any extra explanations or discourses, it all depends on my *hukki* (whim) of the moment."

A group head from Hamirpur asked Baba if He would visit small villages. Baba replied, "I will go wherever you take me with love. I will not mind traveling in a bullock cart." And with a smile He reminisced: "On one of the *mast* tours Baidul hired an old cart. The road was bumpy and the cart driver was a very enthusiastic person. He drove the bullocks in such a way that when we reached the destination and got down, I felt shaken up for five minutes!" With a smile Baba added, "I hope you will not hire such a vehicle or driver!"

Looking at the devotees who had come from Andhra, Baba continued, "T. Dhanapathy Rao and Y. Ranga Rao will be in charge of the programs in the West Godawari District (A.P.). I will even visit the Godawari River if they take me there!" From Baba's encouraging remarks, Vadivelu Mudaliyar gathered his courage and asked if Baba would visit Madras. Baba lovingly looked at the old man and said, "Dear Vadivelu, you have brought with you the whole of Madras; so don't worry about my going there in person."

Someone from the *bhajan* party wanted to sound out the possibility of Baba's coming to Poona. Baba answered, "Why not? I was born in Poona. Also I had promised Ghani that I would give *darshan* in Poona. But at present the date of the visit is uncertain. Let me discuss this matter with Patel (Sadashiv Patel) and Gadekar. Wait and see." Then he changed the subject.

Baba asked those gathered if they had a good lunch and many voices simultaneously uttered, "Fine, Baba." Then turning to Chhagan—the one in charge of the kitchen—He said, "Ramjoo is not feeling well. If Nilu's medicine does not cure him by tomorrow, do not prepare *rava* for breakfast. Let

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all fast." I did not personally inquire whether Nilu's prescription worked well on Ramjoo or not, but I guess it did because we had a good breakfast and a sumptuous lunch the next day.

In comparison with the morning session, the atmosphere of the afternoon meeting was very jovial. Through His sense of humor, Baba was making each one feel His closeness and love. Mentioning one of the *mandali*, Anna 104, He began, "Since the 1920's the phases of my work and the surrounding atmosphere have changed considerably, but Anna 104 is the same as he was. His habits and his dress seem unchangeable." When Baba found someone's remarks a bit disjointed, He remarked, "I should not blame Babadas for being incoherent. There are quite a lot who belong to his tribe!"

Now Baba wanted to have a dig at Baidul. Addressing the programwallas He continued, "Baidul will arrive at each place one day in advance of my visit, to collect information about *masts*. Baidul 'smells' *masts*, and if there are no *masts*, he will 'create' *masts*. By the way, you should also know that although he is an expert at finding *masts* you should beware if you ask him about anything else! He might even lead you into a ditch!" Baba gestured and smiled.

Over an hour had passed and Baba was still wearing the garlands that had been offered to Him on His arrival at the *mandap*. Baba passed His fingers swiftly over them and gestured! "They are really nice. I do not feel like removing them and I also can't keep them on for too long as they are weighing on my shoulders. Wearing them is like chewing something that you can neither swallow nor would like to spit out." This was, in fact, a signal for one of the *mandali* to remove the garlands. Whether with or without garlands, Baba's expressions and actions reflected His divinity, purity and beauty.

The Momentous Meeting Was Over

There were about 300 people under the awning and the work was going on in an informal way. So, the people started

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talking among themselves a bit loudly. Baba remarked, "Listen, God knows I want eternal rest, but I have to be eternally restless. If you would become quiet for a short while I will be happy." Of course all stopped their chattering and Baba completed His reply to one of the programwallas thus, "For train timings, etc., you should ask Eruch or Pendu." Baba also agreed to Dr. Deshmukh's suggestion to inaugurate the Ramana Maharshi Hall at Amravati (MS).

Even during the meeting, the continuous repetition of God's names was going on in the Agrakuti. Baba inquired of those who were given the duty of repeating the names at night whether they kept wide awake or had catnaps. Whenever Baba gave any instruction to a person, He was very particular to get the details about how it was carried out. Savak Kotwal was one of the night japwallas. Baba gestured to him, "Keep awake or both of us will come into trouble!"

Someone asked, "Baba, when will you call us here again?" Baba replied, "If this body survives after April, I may think of it." With a smile, He added, "With the blessings of saints and Nilu's medicines, I will not drop the body. But for this, Chhagan must give *basundi*⁷⁸ to Nilu to keep him hale and hearty!" Baba often teased Nilu about his sweet tooth.

Looking at the programwallas Baba concluded, "So, I agree to visit your hometowns. About twenty-five persons will accompany me. You do not have to pay for their railway fares, but you will have to provide them with simple boarding and lodging facilities. One more point for you to note: the house where I will reside should be in a quiet locality, preferably in a secluded area. And when I retire at night there should be no disturbance of any kind outside the house. Personally for me, the Fiery Life is quite a different thing; it has nothing to do directly with the *darshan* programs. Don't take lightly what I have been saying. If the conditions mentioned are not properly followed it will put me into trouble."

The change of expression on Baba's face was enough to indicate the gravity of what He conveyed. In response to Baba's serious mood a deep silence fell over the gathering and automatically all eyes were focused on Him. Such moments

⁷⁸ A sweet dish of condensed milk.

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helped the participants to make their love for Him deeper and more sincere.

Baba fixed the dates of His visits to the different states. *Darshan* programs were to begin in the Hamirpur District (U.P.) in the north on November 18, 1952 and were to be concluded in the West Godawari District (A.P.) in south India on January 28, 1953. After this two-month period of strenuous traveling and crowded public programs, Baba wished to rest at Meherazad until February 14th. He planned to finish the rest of His internal work, connected with the Fiery Life, by the end of April, 1953.

Earlier during this meeting, Baba asked a programwalla from Hamirpur if he had anything to ask Him about His visit. The person humbly said, "Nothing to ask for except your blessings." Baba looked pleased and lovingly raising His hand, gestured, "My blessings." Perhaps this was the secret, I think, that made the public programs of the Fiery Life immensely successful.

It was now past six in the evening, and the momentous meeting of November 8th, when Baba first introduced the Prayer of Repentance and which also provided glimpses of His profundity and practicality, laced with His sense of humor, was over.

Baba, the Richest and Poorest

With Baba's permission, some people left Meherabad on the night of November 8th. The next day we assembled not under the awning but in the big hall at Meherabad Ashram. Baba came in the hall at ten in the morning. After some general conversation, He opened the subject of the printed forms which he had received, duly signed, from His people. A few months earlier a letter incorporating this special form was either personally given or mailed to some of Baba's disciples and devotees. This letter gave them the opportunity, if they so wished, to dedicate their properties, money, etc., in Baba's cause. It was not compulsory to give anything, other than to return the form conveying the decision irrespective of what it was.

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Adi and others brought the contents of these forms to Baba's notice. They were scrutinized and the wishes of His dear ones were listed under the four headings mentioned in the form (money, property, life and service).

Baba began, "Now this particular list will be read out. But prior to this I want to tell you all that all of you love me and are willing to do whatever you can. I am pleased with you. If circumstances do not permit you to give any money, do not worry in the least. The love you have for me is what I want; it is what I need for my Fiery Life. Give what you can conveniently spare. If anyone of you has already signed to pay some amount and now feels that it is not possible, you should not worry; I free you from this commitment.

"Before the list is read aloud, I want to make one more point clear. Some have expressed their desire to send money by monthly installments. But from November 15th to the end of April I will not accept money, and after April there will be no need of money! So whatever anyone wants to give must be given before the 15th.

"If during the mass *darshan* programs of the Fiery Life someone spontaneously offers me money, it will be given to the group-head of that area with instructions to use the amount for my work. As for those who have expressed a wish to dedicate their properties to me, I have decided not to accept any." At the end Baba added, "I am the richest of the rich; I am the poorest of the poor. I say this with authority. It is not a formal statement, it is the truth."

Baba then related the external ways of His Masters in relation to money. At Shirdi, Sai Baba would demand from visitors whatever cash they had with them, down to their last penny. And by evening of the same day he would give away the total amount to whomsoever he wanted. Upasni Maharaj alone knew the spiritual significance behind this strange drama, enacted daily at Shirdi.

At Poona, on the other hand, if someone tried to offer any amount of money, large or small, to Babajan, she would become very wild and drive the person out. Baba reminisced, "In the 1920's, during my stay in Poona, for a certain period I

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deputed Gustadji to sit near Babajan for the whole night. When out of love and respect people tried to give her some money, Gustadji noticed that Babajan would chase the person with a burning stick and a volley of abuses." Of course, in both instances the Master's actions were only meant to free their devotees from their internal sanskaric attachments to worldly riches.

Baba concluded, "I feel very happy today as I had the occasion to remember my three Masters who are deeply connected with me and who are now lodged in me." As He completed this sentence He stood up. Naturally everyone in the hall got up to join Baba as He reverentially bowed down to His three Masters. Perhaps He was demonstrating to us how profoundly we should feel whenever we remember the *lilas* of our Beloved Master—Meher Baba.

Next, Baba told the programwallas that they should not on the spur of the moment think of giving any extra contributions, for they would be required to spend a considerable amount when He visited their hometowns with a large group of His *mandali*. There were some people in the hall who had not received the above-mentioned form. To make them feel pleased that they too had shared in this "giving," Baba suggested that each should contribute at least one rupee as a token of their love. Baba knew that my friend Mauni—the silent *sadhu*—had no money with him, so He asked me to give one rupee on Mauni's behalf.

Minoo Kharas was to read out the list and Meherjee Karkaria was given the duty of collecting the money. Those who attended the meeting had not been informed earlier that the amounts they had mentioned in the form were to be collected from them during the Fiery Life gathering. So they were asked to register with Meherjee only the amounts they wished to give. Later, on their return to their hometowns, they were instructed to send money to Adi K. Irani. Baba, with laughing eyes, looked at Meherjee and gestured, "Now, whenever you like, you can open your office on the verandah."

Baba looked more relaxed and in a good mood when He finished with this money matter. Addressing the *bhajan* party

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from Poona, Baba gestured, "Sing so well that it will make all happy and hungry too!" For half an hour all enjoyed listening to Baba songs in Baba's presence. After this singing Baba went to His cabin and we left for our lunch.

Importance of Instructions

After 1:00 P.M., Baba gave interviews in His cabin in connection with the forthcoming itinerary of the Fiery Life. He came back into the hall after 3:30 P.M. In no time we all gathered inside. Baba asked the programwallas to sit according to their groups. To be in Baba's presence at any time was a dynamic affair. Although this afternoon meeting was the closing part of the three-day gathering, Baba appeared rather tough though not harsh. Whenever His work was concerned, He would be very exacting and precise. Baba explained:

My Fiery Life is not a joke. During this period I have to work for the whole world, and I am bent on ending the universal mess. During this phase of work, side by side, there will be *darshan* programs. However, you should know well that my work of the Fiery Life is an entirely different affair. I may even cancel the programs if I find that they interfere with my work.

Before coming in the hall, I learned that a lot of people were expecting personal interviews with me. I know, it was all through your love for me; it was, in a way, quite natural. But if such a disturbance can occur when I am with those who know the importance of my work, then how much more disorder can I expect when I visit your places?

I want an absolute guarantee of careful organization and it will be the duty of the programwallas to inform all that no one should ask for a personal interview with me. Although I am eternally bound, I am also eternally independent. The moment I feel that things are not going as they should, I will become childlike and immediately leave the place. I am going to burn myself in the Fiery

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Life, so I don't want to hear about petty things.

But the question is how can you guarantee the behaviour of the masses? Yesterday I told you that those who will be with me will have to face every kind of hardship, mental despair, bodily ailment and ridicule; these are the side issues of the Fiery Life. They won't bother me but the disturbance which I felt today will surely interfere with my work. So I warn you all: no personal interviews and no individual meetings.

Think over my instructions seriously and tell me now whether you will be able to observe them or not. I have to say this because you have no idea, dear souls, about my Fiery Life Work.

As a rule, Masters ought not to hold any bar against the expression of love. Yes, that is true, but in this Fiery Life of mine there is no other alternative. Now I have said all I wanted to say.

After attentively listening to Baba's words, the programwallas assured Baba that with his grace they would certainly and wholeheartedly carry out his instructions. Baba, the compassionate task master, beamed with a big smile and concluded, "So, I agree to come but I won't make any compromise with you at the sacrifice of my work."

During our stay at Meherabad, we were not allowed to go up the hill. At the close of the day's meeting, Baba permitted all to visit the Dome (now known as the *Samadhi*) on Meherabad Hill. He told us that He had confined Himself in the crypt of that Dome for a long period. He added, "It is a place of immense spiritual importance and I have ordered my *mandali* that when I drop my body it should be buried there." He directed us to go up and offer our respects to the threshold of the Dome. In later years, I noticed Baba referring to this place as His "Final Resting Place."

It was close to evening. Baba folded His hands as a parting *namaskar* to those who were called for the meeting. Then He very lovingly gestured, "The work is over. Now you are free to go by any train that is convenient to you." Baba stood up to leave and all who were in the hall, with their eyes reflecting

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gratitude for the privileged time spent in the company of the God-Man, watched Him going to his cabin. No one knew when there would come another opportunity to be at Meherabad in the divine company of Beloved Baba, the Fiery Comforter.

The people went home, richer in His love than ever before. Their faith was now more firmly anchored in Baba's divinity, and as such it was not only more stable but more a living part of their lives. They felt that Baba was the One to be loved and feared; He was the One who would compassionately lift them at every fall and lead them on. The blessings of His blazing *nazar*, they believed, would help them to run the fire of His love through their veins and purify their lives.

A Little Mischief

On Monday, November 10th, Baba arrived in the morning at Meherabad. The big gathering was over but He had some other details to attend to. He gave final instructions to the *mandali* for preparing the list of those who were to journey with him or stay with him during the different periods of His Fiery Life. Eruch, Pendu, Gustadji, Baidul, Kaikobad, Aloba, Vishnu and Savak Kotwal were to be with Him until the end of April.

Baba wished to call Pleader, Raosaheb Afseri and Minoo Kharas to stay with Him during the last fifteen days of April, 1953. Other *mandali* members were to join him for the different periods of His Fiery *darshan* tour. He also reminded all those going with him of the duties allotted to them.

Baba then told us that He wouldn't be coming to Meherabad for the next three days. He had some other work at Meherabad. Besides, Donkin wanted to take Baba to a hospital in Ahmednagar to have His injured leg x-rayed. He wanted to ascertain whether the bones had been well set, and whether it was advisable for Baba to walk about freely during his *darshan* visits to big cities and out-of-the-way villages in different parts of India

Baba concluded, "From November 15th until the end of April my Fiery Life will be, for me, internal. There will be

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internal fire and external humiliation, with mass gatherings where people will perform *bhajans* and sing my *arti*. Be prepared to share in my glory as well as my humiliation. Participate in happiness when thousands come to touch my feet, but in case you find opposition to me and to my work, be ready to witness that too. The resident *mandali* who have been with me for years, such as Eruch, Pendu and Baidul, must be very careful and particular in obeying my orders."

In the end, Baba expressed His happiness with the arrangements made by Pendu with the help of Padri, Chhagan and the others staying at Meherabad. It was all done to Baba's complete satisfaction. So a lovely smile flashed over Baba's face and He gestured, "I am pleased."

November 14th was the day of departure for Baba and the *mandali* from Meherabad to begin the Fiery *darshan* tour. Baba arrived at the Ashram after mid-day. When I saw Him in the hall He did not look physically well. He complained of feeling feverish and of having an uneasy stomach. He did not look cheerful. He called for a glass of water and drank a little of it.

Some days earlier, Donkin had sent an x-ray of Baba's leg to an eminent English surgeon in London for his advice. His reply had just been received. The surgeon and local doctors were of the opinion that as the bones had not been set as well as they should have, Baba should minimize His walking. The report of this English surgeon was read out; it was not at all encouraging. Baba looked a bit concerned over the opinions of the doctors. He conveyed, "What the surgeon writes is true. In addition, it seems that the local doctors are unable to say why I have a fever. They think that it might turn into anything! But in spite of whatever the doctors and the surgeon state, I will carry out the programs the way they have been chalked out during the Fiery Life gatherings." We all dispersed and all began to get ready for a long journey.

After an hour or two, Baba's car and the big State Transport bus carrying the *mandali* left Meherabad by 4:30 P.M. I was the only person left at Meherabad except for the residents. My school job did not permit me to join Baba in His

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itinerary of the Fiery Life. After waving to the *mandali*, I returned to the hall where Baba had sat. There was no one there but it was (and still is) vibrant with His presence.

I saw the glass of water, half full, on a low stool near Baba's chair. No one was around. I hastened toward the stool, removed the lid from the glass and hurriedly sipped some water from it. I did not dare to finish all of it lest Padri or Sidhu suspect this mischief of mine. And what madness—I believe that Baba had purposely left water in the glass for me!

I returned to Kurduwadi, my hometown, on November 15th and resumed my teaching job. But a few of Baba's statements, with their mystical ambiguity were often ringing in my ears; they were as cryptic and obscure as those He had made during His New Life. They were not meant to contradict reason or confuse anyone; they only illustrated the inability of words to explain or express the deeper mystical aspects of Baba's inner spiritual working.

As I recalled my stay in Beloved Baba's company at Meherabad, I vividly remembered His radiant face, graceful gestures and His sense of humor. With these reminiscences, thoughts of probing further into intellectual explanations would disappear, and the mind would confirm that Baba is unfathomable.

Once we know about Him, or, to be more correct, once He draws us into His love orbit, we do not care much for words. We need Him; we have Him. Someone wrote about the followers of Jesus the Christ, "They do not understand His words, they understand Him." And Baba lovers feel that Baba knows us more deeply than we can ever know ourselves.

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Baba Visits His Three Masters

After leaving Meherabad in the late afternoon of November 14th for the Fiery Life *darshan* programs, Baba and His *mandali* reached Sakori by sundown. Until 1921 Baba at times used to visit this village to see Upasni Maharaj. His last visit to Sakori had been in July, 1921 when he had stayed with Maharaj in a thatched hut continuously for a period of six months. Twenty years later, Maharaj passed away on December 24, 1941. Since Maharaj had passed away, there had been a few new buildings constructed around his *samadhi*. This was Baba's first visit to Sakori in 30 years.

The residents of the *ashram* welcomed Baba with great respect and warmth. When led to the *samadhi*, He very reverentially circumscribed it and humbly placed His forehead on its edge. As He got up, pointing at the *samadhi* and then to Himself, He conveyed, "Maharaj is here and not there." When He was shown the place where once stood Maharaj's thatched *jhopri* (hut), Baba recalled, "It was on this site that one night Maharaj outwardly acknowledged me to be the *Avatar*. He folded His hands and said, 'Merwan, you are *adi shakti* (the primal power); you are the *Avatar!*' "

No wonder some felt that the brief visit to Sakori was significant, as it preceded Baba's candid declaration to the masses that He is the Ancient One. Those at the *ashram* had arranged a delicious refreshment and asked the *mandali* to partake of it as *prasad*.

Now Baba's car and the big bus sped on to Shirdi, a village a few miles away to the north. Shirdi has changed considerably. Since Sai Baba dropped his body, big modern structures have been built for visitors. Although it was night, a number of people were moving in and out of the main building. Baba offered His respects at the marble shrine of Sai Baba whom He used to call the "Grand Old Man."

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He then led the *mandali* to an old mosque where Sai Baba used to sit and listen to the *Koran*. He also took them to Khandoba's temple where Upasni Maharaj, at Sai Baba's order, had stayed for three years without food. Baba told His men that during this period Sai Baba used to eat large quantities of food and yet complained of feeling hungry.

This was the place where Baba first met Maharaj. To bring out the importance of Baba's visit to Khandoba's temple, it is better to quote His own words. During the *Sahavas* of November 1955, Meher Baba reminisced:

Finally (December, 1915) I felt impelled to call on Sai Baba, the Perfect Master among Masters. At that time he was returning in a procession from Lendi (in Shirdi), a place to and from which he was led everyday in order to ease himself. Despite the crowds I intuitively prostrated myself before him on the road. When I arose, Sai Baba looked straight at me and exclaimed, '*Parvardigar*' (God-Almighty-Sustainer).

I then felt drawn to walk to the nearby temple of Khandoba in which Maharaj (Shri Upasni Maharaj) was staying in seclusion. He had been living on water there under Sai Baba's direct guidance for over three years. At that time Maharaj was reduced almost to a skeleton due to his fast on water. He was also naked and surrounded by filth.

When I came near enough to him, Maharaj greeted me, so to speak, with a stone which he threw at me with great force. It struck me on my forehead exactly where Babajan had kissed me, hitting me with such force that it drew blood. The mark of that injury is still on my forehead. But 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 sound sleep, man is unconscious, while I, being superconscious, was wide awake in sound sleep. With that stroke, Maharaj had begun to help me return to ordinary consciousness of the realm of illusion. That was the beginning of my present infinite suffering in

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illusion which I experience simultaneously with my infinite bliss in reality.⁷⁹

After visiting Shirdi and Sakori, as planned, Baba and the *mandali* drove to Poona. They reached there by 2:00 A.M., in the early morning of November 15th. Naturally the *dargah* of Babajan was closed, but arrangements had been made to open it so that Baba and His people could have *darshan*. At such a quiet hour when most of Poona was in deep sleep, Baba, the Awakener, paid His respects to Babajan whom He always referred to as the *Shahanshah* (the Emperor). This was the place where Babajan made Baba feel what He ever is—the *Avatar*, the Ancient One.

Baba did not stay long in Poona but proceeded to Bombay where he stayed at Breach Candy in Nariman Dadachanji's flat, Ashiana. In this overgrown city He wanted to contact *masts*—the selfless lovers of God—who were residing in different suburbs. He casually remarked that among these God-intoxicated souls, Umer Baba and Mungasaji Maharaj were the spiritual lords of Bombay.

Baba also conveyed, "When the world will be blessed with my Grace, it will be due to the eternal Grace I enjoy from Babajan, Sai Baba and Maharaj." This statement from Baba is enough to indicate the immense significance, even grandeur, from a spiritual viewpoint, of Baba's visits to the three places connected with His three Masters before He started to kindle the *Avataric* fire of love in the masses.

Glimpse of Baba's Omniscience

November 15th was the first day of Baba's Fiery Life. He consented to have a small *darshan* program in the afternoon at Nariman's residence in Bombay. The news spread from the Baba families to their relatives and friends, bringing many to Ashiana to see the Radiant One. They came with smiling faces and dancing hearts, carrying fruits and garlands in their hands as love offerings for Baba. Due to the lack of space, the public had to reach Baba in single file and leave immediately

⁷⁹ *Listen Humanity*, pp. 248-249.

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after *darshan*. However, this arrangement provided each person with Baba's personal attention as they came closer to Him.

Coincidentally, Irene Conybeare from England also arrived in Bombay on November 14th. She met Baba the next day. He allowed her to accompany Him during His *darshan* tour. She was the only woman, and a westerner at that, to go with him. With His usual care and concern, Baba sent her ahead by train to Kanpur with Meherjee Karkaria. They traveled first class and after a journey of 24 hours reached Kanpur. They stayed in the station resting-room for the night because Baba was expected to arrive the next morning.

Baba and His *mandali* traveled in the crowded third class compartment and entrained at Kanpur on the morning of November 18th. After a while Baba walked to the resting-room and met Irene. Later she wrote in her diary, "I was surprised that His (Baba's) first remark was a reply to an unspoken question at the back of my mind during the train journey north." She did not disclose in her diary what the particular question was, but such unexpressed questions and their clear answers from Baba reveal various aspects of the game the *Avatar* plays with his lovers.

During Irene's first meeting with Baba in 1941, a similar incident occurred. Later she wrote the details of it in her autobiography, *In Quest of Truth or How I Came to Meher Baba*⁸⁰. I wish to present this typical happening, the way I understand it. Perhaps this will shed some light on Baba's game of hide and seek and the way He conceals and reveals His omniscience.

Irene's first meeting with Baba was in the summer of 1941, when she sailed from Cape Town to Bombay and took a long, tiring journey to Dehra Dun. Baba's western disciples were at the station to receive her. After first making her comfortable in a hotel, they broke the news to her that Baba was not in Dehra Dun, that He had gone out for His work with the *masts*. However, they added that Baba had left a special message for her.

Although a bit disappointed she looked up expectantly and

⁸⁰ See: pp. 96-102.

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willing to go to America one of the disciples said, "Baba wants to know whether you are for His work." Irene exclaimed, "But Baba hasn't seen me, He doesn't know me!" Whereupon Baba's disciple replied, "Baba doesn't have to see you to know you." Irene did not grasp the depth of this statement about Baba's All-knowingness and so she did not immediately give her consent. After some days, however, she expressed her willingness to go to America. This pleased Baba and He sent instructions from Ajmer to one of His *mandali* to attend to Irene's visa papers for her visit to the States. He also sent Irene a message that He would see her for a few minutes.

So one day she was taken to Ajmer where Baba was staying in a large, unfurnished house, deeply engaged in His work with a few God-intoxicated souls. At the time of Irene's interview, He was sitting on a bare, wooden chair, clad in His white *sadra*, with His hair flowing neatly on His shoulders. Baba's stay in Ajmer coincided with one of His intense seclusion periods. Hence, although Irene was allowed an audience with Baba, she was instructed not to touch Him, not even to shake hands.

During this short *darshan*, Baba dictated to her from His board, "I am happy to see you. Your connection with me is not of this life; you will be convinced of this. It is not necessary for you to tell me anything; I *know* all." This was an authoritative statement from Baba expressing His status as the Ancient One. Then Baba gave her some formal instructions, which she was to observe during her visit to the States. However, He did not reveal, even indirectly, the nature of the work she had to do in America. Strange! It was as if she had only to concern herself with going there, Baba knew why she was going—that was enough.

He made it clear that all her expenses would be paid for by His American disciples whom she would be traveling with. He also added that during her stay in the U.S., she should accept Norina Matchabelli's advice in spiritual matters. This was a bit of a shock to Irene who was a strong-willed person. She even argued, though mildly, with Baba over this issue. But Baba, perhaps with a meaningful twinkle in His eyes, did not

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agree to change or modify this order. Sometimes Baba would entrust a common work to two "fighting friends." Thus for Irene, the interview turned out to be quite different from what she had anticipated. She hadn't dreamed that a meeting with Baba, the Perfect Master, could have such a mysterious as well as mischievous aspect.

Perhaps Irene's visit to Baba illustrates one of the *Avatar's* ways, wherein His love and authority are skillfully blended. Irene had traveled thousands of miles, all the way from England to Africa and then to India, and finally the tiresome rail journey from Bombay to Dehra Dun, during a time when travel of any kind because of the war was difficult. It was all due to the irresistible pull of love. On her arrival she was not permitted to stay with Baba as she had hoped; not only that, but at the outset of her one brief interview with Baba she was forbidden to ask Him any questions on any subject. Perhaps verbal replies from Baba were not necessary. Immediately, she had to again be ready for another voyage of 10,000 miles to America, without even being given a clue as to what it was all about.

This was not an easy lesson for Irene to understand. However, Baba softened it somewhat by giving her a glimpse of His All-knowingness on the eve of her departure from India. Since Baba had arranged to have all her expenses paid for, Irene, through Norina, asked Baba to accept a check of British currency which she had and her spare change as well which amounted to eighty-three rupees. Baba asked Norina to return the rupees to Irene as extra spending money and casually remarked, "She will have fifty rupees left."

On reaching Bombay they found that owing to the war the American liner they were to travel on was delayed by two weeks. They were compelled to stay in Bombay. A day before they were finally going to leave, Norina suggested that Irene bank her Indian money as she would only need dollar bills on the liner and in the States. Irene emptied her purse and on counting her money commented, "I have just fifty rupees left."

Hearing this Norina was greatly surprised and said, "Listen, Irene, when Baba asked me to give you the sum of

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eighty-three rupees for pocket money, He incidentally told me that you would have fifty rupees with you by the time you left India." Now it was Irene's turn to feel greatly astonished. Baba's casual remark to Norina not only astounded Irene, but it deepened her conviction in Baba's omniscience, which operates, to quote her words, "down to the smallest detail, even about a little personal matter of insignificant consequence."

To resume the Kanpur account, Keshav Nigam, Pukar, L. Paliwal, Khare and other programwallas were at the railway station to receive Baba. After profusely garlanding Him, they led him to the retiring-room where Irene met Him. Then for a while Baba was left alone and, from the movement of His fingers it seemed probable that He was busy working on the inner planes of consciousness. Later, He asked Meherjee to read the headlines of the English newspapers. In the meantime all the luggage of the *mandali* was transported to the bus waiting outside the station. Baba was requested to get into the car provided for Him. Irene, Meherjee, Eruch and also one escort got in the car with Baba. With Baba's car in the lead, the *Avataric* caravan of buses and cars left for the *darshan* tour of the Hamirpur District.

The Richest Feast

The drive from Kanpur to Hamirpur, a distance of about 45 miles, was quite pleasant. The crops waving by the roadside were lush green; the morning was cool and delightful. On the way the party had to cross the river Yamuna (Jumna). A new bridge over this river was due to be completed by New Year's Day. However, Baba lovers in the area, with the help of the Government authorities, succeeded in having a pontoon bridge constructed and it was completed the night before Baba's arrival; His car was the first public transportation to cross it. Baba reached Hamirpur by 10:00 A.M. on November 19, 1952. As He got down from the car He remarked that this area of Uttar Pradesh had a high spiritual atmosphere. There is a legend that the Ancient One in His Advent as Rama had

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stayed in this part for some time during His fourteen-year exile of jungle wanderings. Here He had also carried out His work with the spiritually advanced *rishis* and the God-intoxicated souls.

A large bungalow of the resident Magistrate was put at Baba's disposal. Another nearby house was reserved for the *mandali*. It was one of Baba's instructions that His men disciples should be accommodated neither too close nor too far away, as they always had to be at His beck and call.

Baba expressed His happiness with the arrangements made for Him. He asked Bhawani Prasad to have His food—*dal*, soft rice and *ghee*—ready by 11:00 A.M. Owing to the night journey, all preferred to have a hot bath which was to be followed by a sumptuous north Indian lunch. There were no *masts* in Hamirpur, so after his meal, Baba had a little rest and then left for the *darshan* grounds.

Although it was noontime, hundreds of people—men, women and children—had gathered under the awning. In response to instructions given over the microphone, no one tried to rush towards Baba. With hands folded, people loudly cheered, *Shri Meher Baba Ki Jai*. In the corner of the *mandap*, Baba washed and dried with a soft towel the feet of seven poor people, six men and one woman. He then placed His forehead on their feet and gave each fifty-one rupees. Then He went to the dais and lovingly bowed down to the gathering. Now they were allowed to form into a queue and the first *darshan* of the Fiery Free Life began.

As people were offering their homage to Baba, sweet music and devotional songs resounded through the large enclosure which was open on both sides. Baba looked divinely radiant and people appeared delighted to find the *Avatar* in their midst. Many had come on foot from nearby villages; others in bullock carts, on horseback or whatever other means were available to them.

While things were proceeding in an orderly manner, an unexpected *darshanite* reached the raised platform where Baba was sitting. Irene Conybeare who was present wrote, "Suddenly without warning a strange wild-looking man

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appeared right in front of Baba, . . . He was triumphantly waving, with rhythmic action, a bowl with a flame in it, performing *arti*. My first impression was that the man must be a '*mast!*' To my surprise Baba embraced him very warmly."⁸¹

This man, Shiv Narayan, had come all the way from his village Sisolar, 22 miles away, prostrating himself full length on the ground each step of the way. He had carried the *arti thal* (plate) in his hand and had fasted and also observed silence during this spiritual feat as a mark of reverence for the *Avatar* of the Age. Fortunately he managed to reach the dais in time for Baba's *darshan*. After a close embrace, Baba gave Shiv Narayan some fruit to eat as His *prasad* and this priceless gift turned his fast into the richest feast.

After the mass *darshan* program, Baba went to Bhawani Prasad's residence. There, according to Baba's telegraphic message, he had called all his kith and kin—the Nigams. His eldest brother, Bhinda Prasad, was the first one in Hamirpur to hear of Baba from Babadas. He intuitively accepted Baba as the Expected One. This deep, instantaneous receptivity became a living conviction when he had Baba's *darshan* at Mahabaleshwar in October, 1950. Two of his other brothers—Bhagawati Prasad and Shital Prasad—were also greatly drawn to Baba and had attended the Fiery Life meeting at Meherabad. It was a big family gathering. No wonder that the reception was most loving and cordial.

Baba was also in a good mood and disclosed to the Nigams, "In one of my previous Advents I stayed in this area." He also added that they were especially blessed as He had begun His house visits of the Fiery Life with their home.

The next day Baba also stayed in Hamirpur and graciously consented to pay visits to some more houses. Everywhere people's wholehearted love for Baba was manifested in many ways. Hundreds of yards of cloth and silk embroidered *saris* were spread on the road and in the houses so that the cloth could be sanctified by Baba's holy feet. The faces of both young and old radiated their reverence for the *Avatar*. Many were shedding tears as they came close to Baba. In between the tears they gently touched his feet. It was obvious that Baba's

⁸¹ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 16, (1953).

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connections with the devotees in Hamirpur had a rare charm of its own. How else could people express such one-pointed love for Baba at their first contact? This is obvious even until this day.

After accompanying Baba to some places, Irene, who was not used to dust and crowds, became very tired and caught a most appalling head cold. Baba decided that she should not continue her journey with Him, and when she was sufficiently recovered she was asked to go back to Poona with Meherjee.

Life Eternal

Before proceeding with the account of Baba's tour of the Hamirpur District, I wish to say something regarding His messages that were read out to the public. Earlier He had dictated seven special messages in English and they were given to the programwallas for translation into the Indian languages. These leaflets were meant for free distribution to the public.

Generally during the big programs, an address in Baba's honor, recognizing His claim to be the *Avatar*, was read aloud by His people. Then one of Baba's seven messages would be delivered to the public. To avoid repetition and as a convenient structure for my narrative, I intend to quote these messages in the order that they were printed in a separate booklet entitled, "*Fiery Life and Seven Other Messages*." The caption of the first message is "Life Eternal" and in it Meher Baba states:

Without beginning and without end, the caravan of evolutionary creation marches on to the Immeasurable. Most persons on the way get caught up in the transient immediate and evolve by conscious or unconscious reactions to it. Some can detach themselves from the transient immediate. But since their detachment is only intellectual, they enjoy freedom only in the realm of the limited intellect, which now tries to comprehend the past, or anticipate the future, as best as is allowed by the limitations under which it works.

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They try to shape the present in the light of their knowledge of history as well as in the light of their insight into the possibilities for the unborn future. But the limited intellect is not competent to grasp quantities, which are beginningless as well as endless, with the result that the purely intellectual perspective, even at its best, inevitably remains only partial, sketchy, incomplete and, in a sense, even erroneous.

The intellectual perspective is workable and even indispensable for planned action. But in the absence of deeper wisdom of the heart, or the clearer intuition of the spirit, such intellectual perspective gives only relative truth, which bears upon itself the stamp of uncertainty. The so-called planned action of the intellect has behind it many mighty forces which have not even come close to the fringe of consciousness; and it also actually leads to many valuable results, which are entirely beyond the ken of the so-called planning.

In other words, intellectual planning turns out to be a planning mostly in name, containing in it only as much of truth as is necessary to justify the players in feeling that they have had a real share in the entire game

In fact, everyone without exception has his true existence only in and as this Limitless Being of God as Absolute Truth....

For ages and ages, God has been working in Silence, unobserved and unnoticed except by those who experience His Infinite Silence.

I personally feel that these messages were meant for those seeking Truth who had an intellectual background. And the above message is an example of how Baba played with the intellect of intellectuals. However, a sentence of two that Baba gestured according to His *hukki* (whim), on the spur of the moment, or the messages He dictated from His board equally expressed His divine authority and unconditional love. These latter expressions were meant for the masses who flocked to Him to have His *darshan*. They did not come for any doctrine but for the impersonal divinity enformed in Baba as the

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Avatar. And above all, His physical presence was more than all the messages put together.

14 Boys 14 Years of Age

On November 20th, some of the *mandali* went ahead with Bhawani Prasad to Inghota to make arrangements for the *darshan* that was to be given there. Arrangements for it were made under a large, shady tree at the end of a grove which bordered an open field. This village is the native place of the Nigams, so the news of the program reached the nearby villages well ahead of time. Baba arrived a little after mid-day and the mass *darshan* began at 3:30 P.M.

Over 5,000 people received *prasad* at Baba's hands. Although the gathering was a large and crowded one, Baba detected that owing to the rush of people, Bhawani Prasad's son was finding it difficult to come closer to the dais. Baba called Bhawani and ordered him to bring his son to Him and both of them were then asked to sit near His feet for the entire program which lasted until 5:00 P.M.

The next day Baba visited Laxmichand Paliwal's house. He is one of the influential persons of that district and also a well-to-do landlord of Inghota. He owned a large, well-built house. From the extensive compound of the Nigam's residence, Baba wished to walk to Paliwal's. It was not a long distance. The *mandali* and a small group of people including Pukar followed Baba.

Pukar thought, "Is Baba only for the rich? Does He like to visit the houses of only well-to-do people?" As soon as this thought crossed his mind, Baba sat down in the dusty road for a minute without any apparent reason, and then stood up and walked ahead. Again the same thought flashed through Pukar's mind and again Baba sat in the dust in His clean clothes before getting up and continuing His walk. When this happened a few more times Pukar's political approach to understanding Baba's actions received a considerable jolt. In the beginning Pukar kept trying to understand Baba's work

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with his mind not his heart. But here he deeply felt that Baba was demonstrating to him that a seat in a mansion or in a dusty road made no difference to Him.

When Baba reached Paliwal's house He sat down on a large stone porch at the front of the house. From a distance Pukar happened to look at Baba, and all of a sudden one of the special dreams that he had had as a boy was vividly revived. In Pukar's dreams, Rama, to whom Pukar was deeply devoted, appeared to him with a blueish complexion just as He is described in the *Ramayana*.

In one dream, though, Rama had a much lighter complexion. Not only that but He had sat on the same stone porch, in the same position, as Baba now sat in. For Pukar it was like seeing his dream come to life. The mystery of Rama's light skin in this one dream was solved as Pukar experienced that Meher Baba was Rama, come again as the *Avatar*.

This inner revelation was so clear and intense that Pukar's body began to twist and sway. It became hard for him to stay on his feet and he suddenly slammed to the ground with a loud thud. People rushed to help him up and eventually he was led to Baba. With a look of surprise, Baba asked Pukar what had happened. Pukar was sobbing uncontrollably and in a hoarse voice he related to Baba what had transpired within him during that short walk to Paliwal's house. Baba knowingly nodded and disclosed to Pukar that he had had close connections with Him in one of His previous Advents. Such a confirmation from Baba filled Pukar's heart with great joy.

It was a day for house visits so Baba sanctified some more houses of His lovers. In one of these there lived a strong, sturdy man, who was unfortunately crippled. It was hard for him to walk out into the front room of his house and greet Baba. So Pukar, in the exuberance of his love for Baba, went inside and asked the man to sit on His shoulders and then carried him to Baba.

It was a memorable sight to see the huge-framed Pukar carrying someone in that fashion to Baba for His *darshan*. Baba looked delighted. With a smile He said that Pukar looked like Hanuman with a lover of the *Avatar* sitting on his

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shoulders. (This remark was in connection with a picture of Hanuman carrying Rama and Laxman on each of his shoulders.)

During Baba's stay at Inghota, a social worker who was running an orphanage approached Baba for monetary help. Baba complied with his request on the condition that he arrange for Baba to wash the feet and bow down to the orphans in his village. The man agreed. So the next day on His way to Mahewa, Baba visited the out-of-the-way village with His disciples and devotees.

The necessary arrangements had been made, but owing to the unusual situation, the first boy became frightened when Baba was about to bow down to him and drew back his feet. This spoiled whatever spiritual work Baba wanted to do. He became so upset that He told the Hamirpur people that He would cancel the rest of the Hamirpur tour. His lovers begged Him to revoke His decision, but Baba hurried to His car gesturing, "We'll see."

When Baba reached the main road, He got down from His car and sat under a tree. He told Pukar that if he, with the help of his friends, could find 14 boys, each 14 years of age and have them ready at Mahewa by tomorrow morning for Baba to wash their feet, then He would continue with the *darshan* tour. Pukar told Baba that it was very difficult in the Indian villages to know the exact age of a person whether an adult or a child. Thereupon Baba replied that he should ask either the boy or his parents his age. If the reply was "14" that should be treated as true.

Baba continued with His journey to Mahewa. The last three miles of the road were through fields and sandy wastelands. Small bridges had been constructed over stream beds for Baba's car to pass safely. However, at one place after Baba's car had just passed over a bridge, a part of it collapsed. The bridge had to be repaired before the bus carrying the *mandali* and the other cars could cross over it. All got down and some began the repairing work with the tools that were at hand.

While the work was going on, Pukar noticed a young boy

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standing in the crops. He hurried over to him and asked the boy his age. To his delight the boy replied, "14." Pukar asked the boy (whose name was Munilal) to accompany the party in the bus to Mahewa. The boy gladly agreed. A good omen! Eventually, after the necessary repairs, the bus continued on to Mahewa which it reached by evening.

That night Pukar and other Baba lovers from the district were busy visiting near and far-off houses and huts and asking at each door if the family had sons and if so, what their ages were. It was indeed an unusual and frantic search! By the early hours of the morning, Pukar had succeeded in getting 13 boys aged fourteen. Although they had gone to every house, they were still one boy short. Pukar was fearful of the consequences if they failed to meet the conditions laid down by Baba. But there were apparently no more fourteen-year-old boys left in the village.

Finally, a little dejected, he led the 13 boys to the place where Baba was to give *darshan*. While he was making his way to the raised platform where Baba was sitting, he noticed a boy standing quietly at a distance from the crowd. Pukar felt impelled to go over and ask the boy his age; he was fourteen years old. Miraculous are Baba's ways in helping His lovers to fulfill orders or instructions that He gave.

Pukar quickly gathered him into his group of boys and most happily stood before Baba. He had fulfilled Baba's condition. This pleased Baba and the washing of the feet was carried out in the usual manner. No need to mention that Baba continued His *darshan* tour as previously planned.

Another side of this incident is also interesting. Perhaps Baba had symbolically conducted and concluded this exciting search in a very natural way. On His arrival in Mahewa, when He was going to a hut that had been specially prepared for Him, a young boy stopped his car along the way. He had come for Baba's *darshan*. Not knowing that Baba was in the car, he asked whether Meher Baba was coming. This gave Baba a chuckle. He looked at the boy and asked him his age. The reply was fourteen. Baba looked very happy and gestured, "A happy augury." Later he remarked that this boy was very lucky and

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will someday become a saint.

Baba's methods, internal and external, of getting things done in His own way are amazing and incomprehensible, but at the same time they are definitely meaningful and far reaching in their effects.

Love, the Most Precious Offering

Baba's visit to Mahewa will be especially remembered for His stay at Meher Astana. This was the name (*Astana* literally means a threshold) given to a simple mud hut which had been built on a small hill outside the village of Mahewa. During the meetings at Meherabad, Baba had discussed the details of the *darshan* programs with the Hamirpur people. He expressed His preference for His residence being in a secluded area during his Fiery Life tour.

On his return from the meeting, Keshav Nigam visited Mahewa, his native village. He selected a spot for Baba to stay on a hill which was in the center of a tract of virgin forest. Here he planned to build a simple mud hut about 10' x 15' for Baba to stay in. During those years this forest was frequented by panthers. The local people believed that it was a haunted area and few ventured into it. However, it has now become a place of pilgrimage. Keshav Nigam's brother, Mukund, who is closely connected with Meher Astana, had earlier visited Meherabad. At that time he was seriously afflicted with leprosy. When Mukund was taken to Baba at Meherabad he told Him about the medical treatment he had had for six months in a hospital for lepers at Kanpur. When he was discharged from the ward, the doctors told him that they feared he would be dead within a few months. After patiently listening to the story of suffering, Baba, out of His unbounded compassion, told Mukund not to worry. In addition, He asked him to fast on water for 24 hours, a day prior to Baba's arrival at Mahewa. He also gave Mukund an apple to eat as His *prasad* and gestured, "We'll see."

On Baba's arrival at Mahewa, Keshav told Him that

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Mukund had faithfully obeyed His order. Baba called Mukund and comforted him by saying that he would be completely cured by April 15th. However, as the months went by, there seemed to be no change in his condition whatsoever. Finally on the evening of April 14th, Mukund went to bed very discouraged for he still had not improved in the slightest.

The next morning when he awoke, however, to his utter amazement, he was completely cured—his skin was whole, fresh and unscarred. From this incident we can presume that the lepers Baba served over the years were not only spiritually benefited, but also received Baba's silent blessing for their physical healing. [Baba's blessings will definitely cure them of their disease, but the exact day of healing Baba alone knows.]

Out of his love for Baba, Mukund continued to stay at Meher Astana, seeing that Baba's hut was kept neat and clean, and in good repair. He also made sure that the hill itself was kept just the way it was when Baba had visited. From then, until his death in August, 1979, Mukund served as the night watchman at Meher Astana and faithfully followed the orders Baba had given him.

To resume the narration, since there were only a few days between Keshav's choosing the site for building Meher Astana and Baba's expected arrival, everyone had to work very hard to complete it in time. As it was early winter, the mud that the hut was made of did not dry completely. Although it was not comfortable inside due to this dampness, Baba preferred to stay in it. He liked the place and He was extremely pleased with the work that had been done by His lovers.

Among those who toiled day and night was a poor man who belonged to the so-called low caste. Working so hard and without proper rest, he caught a feverish chill from the damp and cold. Just when the work was complete and Baba arrived at Mahewa, he became very ill. He was led away with a high fever and could not go for Baba's *darshan*. During conversation with His lovers, Baba heard about the services of this old man and was greatly moved by his labor of love.

The next morning Baba told the *mandali* that He must visit this man who was living in an old dilapidated hut. As

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Baba was on His way to the hut the man received the startling news of His visit. At first he was happy but then he suddenly became worried for he had no flowers or fruits or sweets to offer Baba in homage. He didn't know how he could receive the *Avatar* of the Age empty-handed.

In this state of bewilderment he somehow managed to come out and walk some distance to meet Baba. He prostrated before the *Avatar*, his eyes sparkling with tears. In his feeble voice, he tried to explain how unworthy he was. He quite vehemently told Baba that He should not visit his hut as it was a miserable dwelling. Baba was very understanding. He asked one of His people to help the old man walk back to his place. And then Baba Himself entered the hut and sat on the rickety *charpai* (a simple bed with four wooden legs and a wooden frame which has coir cord stretched across it to serve as a mattress).

He looked very radiant and He told the man that his services had made Him extremely happy. Baba added, "Don't worry about not giving me flowers or fruit. Love is the most precious offering that one can give. And I am pleased with your love." The outburst of such dedication and love were common occurrences during Baba's visit through the district of Hamirpur.

During Baba's three day stay at Mahewa, He gave *darshan* to the villagers in the mornings and in the evenings. He had planned to leave Mahewa on November 23rd, but He later decided to stay over until the 24th. In the morning of the 23rd, the *mandali* and other lovers gathered around Baba in an informal way outside the hut, Meher Astana. Baba casually asked each one what he took Baba to be. There were various answers but each of them expressed the glory of Baba's love and their faith in Baba as Perfection personified.

When it was Keshav Nigam's turn he said, "Baba, what I have to say will take a little time." Baba gestured His consent. Then Keshav read out forty couplets in Hindi which he had composed in praise of Beloved Baba's Avatarhood. This composition, known as *Meher Chalisa*, was warmly received by Baba. In later years, during *darshan* programs, Baba would often

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ask Keshav to sing it aloud before him. During the East-West Gathering in 1962, a book with the title *Love Song to Meher Baba* was published. It is a versification of *Meher Chalisa* in English: 40 verses with 40 pictures of Baba.

"I am God. God Alone Exists. "

From Meher Astana, Baba journeyed to Rath where one of His stalwarts, Gaya Prasad Khare, lived. He was the person who had presented the white horse to Baba at Benares during His New Life. Arrangements for Baba's stay were made at the house of a principal of a college. Baba reached Rath at midday and the public program began at 2:00 P.M.

Although it was noon, literally thousands of people gathered on the large college grounds. It was reported that on this day the entire stock of flowers, fruits and sweets at Rath was exhausted. It was indeed the biggest program during Baba's Hamirpur Tour. One of Baba's Fiery Free Life messages given during such big gatherings had the caption "Miracles and Spiritual Healing." It is given below:

When people suffer physically or mentally, individually or collectively, they want immediate relief from that suffering. All over the world, man's strife is subject to the opposites of pain and pleasure. He does all he can to avoid the former, and he does all he can to have the latter. But he cannot always avoid pain nor always have pleasure.

Pain and pleasure are inseparable twins, born of a multitude of cravings and desires. Where the one is, the other also invariably is a constant companion. And so, man is interminably caught up in the quick interplay of these two opposites, unless and until he goes at the very root of both of them and frees himself from the self-perpetuating ignorance, which gives rise to a million cravings.

The scars left by the non-fulfillment of desires or by the assailment of unwanted happenings are difficult to erase as long as the mind continues to be swayed by winds of multifarious cravings. And when the usual worldly

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ways of seeking redress from suffering come to an impasse, man desperately turns to the supernatural for exploring unknown possibilities of seeking redress. This is the realm of miracles.

But even miracles, in the last analysis, are illusory, even as every happening of this world is essentially illusory. There can be no special point in producing some petty imitation illusions in the mighty Infinite Illusion already created by God.

The healing of physical or mental suffering can be achieved through the exercise of supernatural powers, just as it can be achieved through ordinary natural remedies known to man. But such healing has ordinarily no special spiritual significance. It is far less important than true spiritual healing which takes away, from the mind, the seeds of all possible suffering.

Miracles are justified only when they are performed for the purpose of drawing humanity at large towards the final goal of realizing God; otherwise they are definitely an interference with the natural evolutionary process. In fact, people should look upon physical and mental suffering as gifts from God. They bring their own lessons of the futility of the passing and the intrinsic worth of the Eternal. When accepted with grace and understood in their very root-cause, they chasten the soul and introduce it to the Abiding Happiness of Truth.

The next day in the morning, Baba and the *mandali* left for Nauranga, which is now well known to Baba lovers for the programs regularly held at Meher Dham (*Dham* literally means a house). Nauranga is a small village about nine miles from Rath. It is the native home of Babu Ram Prasad who first met Baba in 1949. During that year in August, he visited Meherabad with Keshav Nigam and Shripat Sahai. Before going to sleep that night Babu Ram Prasad's heart was suddenly filled with a feeling of remorse as is common when one visits Him. And he repented for the reckless life he had led and the misdeeds he had committed. That night in a dream he saw Baba who just said to him, "I am God."

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The next morning during His interview with the Hamirpur people Baba casually remarked, "People call me the Lord of the Universe, but I am actually the Servant of the Universe. I am the Washerman who has come to clean the dirty clothing of humanity." Babu Ram Prasad felt that Baba had indirectly assured him that his heart would be cleansed. And now, two years later, he was fully convinced of the truth of Baba's words and he was happy that the Lord was graciously visiting his village.

With the help of the villagers, Babu Ram Prasad repaired the road that ran for nine miles so that Baba's car could reach Nauranga without great discomfort. During that time of year the canals around Nauranga were full with water. It was an additional facility provided to the farmers by the government. In this village there were some people who were misinformed about Baba's visit.

One person who was extremely prejudiced broke a canal dike and flooded the perimeter of the village, including the road by which Baba's car was to pass. So Baba decided to give *darshan* to the villagers under a neem tree that was just on the outskirts of Nauranga. Babu Ram Prasad became very upset over this mischief but Baba calmed him down and the *darshan* program continued very peacefully for about three hours.

Janak Singh, the son of Babu Ram Prasad, was a school-going youth. He was watching the entire program from a distance, but at the close of the *darshan*, Baba called him near. He lovingly blessed Janak by lightly placing His hand on the boy's head. With this Janak felt as if the weight of a mountain were on him. He thought that he would soon lose consciousness and tumble to the ground. Just at this moment, Baba lifted His palm and Janak felt relieved; his eyes, however, were filled with the tears of a blissful awakening. Baba asked Janak Singh, "Tell me honestly if you believe in the existence of God." The young boy replied, "My belief is not embedded in my personal experience but in the words of elders and the Books." Baba gestured, "I am happy that you are honest in your reply. But, remember well, God alone exists." As the days passed after this contact, Janak began to experience Baba's love for

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him through the many happenings in his life, and as a natural response he felt happy in repeating Baba's name wholeheartedly.

Babu Ram Prasad asked Baba to visit his residence, but Baba declined to do so. However, He promised He would come again and visit his home. Perhaps this was the moment when Baba first disclosed his intention of revisiting Hamirpur, which He did in February, 1954. During the second visit the man who broke the dikes repented before Baba for his action. Baba not only forgave him but also very lovingly embraced him.

Political and Spiritual Aspects of Life

After Nauranga, Baba visited Jarakhar where Shripat Sahai Rawat, also known as Shribhai, was Baba's host. Before continuing the account of the *darshan* tour, I feel it will be interesting and fitting to narrate the circumstances under which Baba drew Shribhai into His orbit of love. Such stories are part and parcel of Baba's visit, for in them are the roots of Baba's first *darshan* tour in the district of Hamirpur.

From the early 40's Shribhai had been a staunch revolutionary, fighting the British for India's independence. Being an orator of the first order, he would incite the masses against British Rule. The British Government wanted him so badly that a reward of 1,500 rupees was offered for him dead or alive.

His colleagues therefore advised Shribhai to leave the British territory and retreat to a small state governed by an Indian Rajah. During one of his early morning walks while in exile in this state, Shribhai happened to see a certain bird (the *khanjun* bird) which was rarely seen in that area during that particular time of the year.

He reported this unusual event to one of his religious-minded friends who told him this sighting heralded a coveted spiritual fortune: he would soon come in contact with a God-realized Master. Although impressed with the prospect of meeting a Master, Shribhai did not pay much heed to the possibility.

After some days he went to Nagpur (of course incognito)

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and stayed with a friend who was an active member of the Indian National Congress. From his youth, Shribhai had been interested in *raj yoga* and *hatha yoga*. While in Nagpur he attended a meeting conducted by a local *yogi*. When he returned to where he was staying he told his friend about the *yogic* practices that were mentioned in the lecture. Hearing this his friend asked him frankly, "Is it possible to pursue both spirituality and politics at one and the same time?" After a little discussion, Shribhai said that he had always felt that they were compatible. To this his friend quickly responded, "If you really feel this way, then why bother going to a half-baked potato (the person who had lectured on *yogic* practices) when there is Meher Baba?"

At Shribhai's request his friend gave him the address of Dr. C.D. Deshmukh, one of Baba's disciples who was living in Nagpur. However, when he went there, instead of meeting Deshmukh, Shribhai happened to meet Babadas. On his advice Shribhai immediately wrote a letter to Adi K. Irani with a request for Baba's *darshan*. After a few days he received a reply that Baba was at Meherabad and was soon expected to come out of His seclusion. When Babadas learned the contents of this letter he suggested that Shribhai not waste any more time but go immediately to Meherabad and try his luck. He gladly agreed to take this risk.

So, late one evening Shribhai reached Meherabad in the simple Indian clothes generally worn by Indian farmers. He expressed his desire to the *mandali* to have Baba's *darshan*. No one was allowed to stay at Meherabad for the night without Baba's permission. So Sidhu went up the hill to tell Baba about this new visitor.

Without asking any specific information, Baba instructed Sidhu to take good care of the "guest," and He gestured, "one of my people." This was a bit surprising to Sidhu, especially since only a day earlier a Rajah from one of the states in Rajasthan had come to Meherabad and asked to see Baba but had been flatly refused. Such incidents testify to Baba's remarks that His connections with us are not just of one lifetime.

Next morning Baba came down the hill and Shribhai saw

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Him as He made His way to the Rahuri Cabin. This first glimpse of Baba made an indelible impression on Shribhai's heart. From that moment he felt that the most important thing he could do was to lead a purely spiritual life and forget about politics. Baba motioned for him to come in and gestured, "Take *darshan* without touching my feet." Then Baba asked Shribhai what brought him to Meherabad and later asked him to briefly relate his life history. Such opportunities were meant to make one feel close to Baba's divine presence.

At the end of his narration, Baba conveyed, "I am happy about your honest seeking for the Real. I am pleased with you. Ask me what you want; you will get it. But express your wish in one sentence." Shribhai was overwhelmed with Baba's love and compassion. On the spur of the moment he said, "Spiritual advancement." For a moment Baba looked serious. After a while He gestured, "Granted."

Baba continued, "You say that the conflict between a political and a spiritual life is now resolved. As you do not want to involve yourself further in politics, turn yourself in to the police authorities. Send a telegram to this effect to the District Magistrate of Hamirpur." It was a moment of decision, for Shribhai was one of the top leaders of a revolutionary group. He, however, decided to follow Baba's orders.

On his way back to Hamirpur, Shribhai got down at a small railway station to meet a friend. After walking some distance he noticed that his wallet with all his money in it was missing. He had become penniless. In a mood of dejection, his mind questioned Baba's authority as the *Avatar* and it remonstrated, "How can I take you as my Master when you cannot even keep me from losing my wallet?" Indeed a silly thought, but to a confused mind many things seem to make sense.

Just then he clearly heard a voice within him say, "Return to the station and search." So he made his way back to the station. By the time he reached it two trains and a lot of passengers had come and gone. He walked around looking at random for his wallet but thought there was no chance it would still be there.

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Luckily, as he happened to walk by the ticket window, to his great surprise, he saw his wallet. It was lying there in plain sight of anyone purchasing a ticket and could have been easily picked up. Who concealed it from the sight of the crowd? Who had spoken within him? None but God, Baba, he concluded, and his failing faith was again filled to the brim of his heart. Who? Who? What a question! If with every "Who?" the mind poses, the heart were to reply, "God," how wonderful it would be! A big hurdle would be removed and the real journey would begin.

Shribhai proceeded to Hamirpur and turned himself in. He severed his connections with politics but he was still put into jail as a political prisoner. It was here that Keshav Nigam had hot discussions with Shribhai on the subject of Meher Baba being the *Avatar*. Later Shribhai also talked with Pukar and the Nigams about Baba. He was the first person from Hamirpur District to have Meher Baba's *darshan* and the first who accepted Him as the *Avatar*.

Darshan scenes during Baba's visit to Jarakhar were not very different from those witnessed at other villages. I have earlier mentioned that before coming to Baba, Shribhai's heart was often pulled between the political and spiritual aspects of life. So instead of narrating the details of the *darshan* I prefer to quote one of Meher Baba's messages given during His Fiery Life with the caption "Religion and Politics":

The Fiery Life, which as God ordained, has commenced from November 15th, makes me plunge into my Divine Mission of bringing the Life in the Truth to every one, without allowing it to be limited or coloured by the illusions of duality.

As the Divine Life embraces in its being One and All, including even the members of the animal and vegetable kingdom, and since from the moment of the attainment of *Manonash* (annihilation of the limiting mind), I have attained complete unity with that immeasurable and illimitable Divine Life, I cannot and will not identify myself with any caste, creed, religion or political party.

From my point of view, all religions are great; but

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God is greater. In the same way, all political parties are, in their own way, noble, at least in their consciously accepted objectives. But the claims of the undivided and indivisible life are irresistibly supreme, and, as such, greater than those of any party, howsoever noble.

So, I love and adore all religions; but I am of no religion. Nor do I seek to establish another religion or add to the numberless illusions that divide man against man. No religion was ever intended to be anything more than the Gateway to God as Truth; but every religion has, in the course of time, gotten converted into a veil, obstructing the undimmed perception of that One Truth.

As soon as the Truth of direct inner realization is intellectualized and formulated, it gets enmeshed in creeds and dogmas. They have a tendency to bind the soul in the very attempt to emancipate it. They cover the Truth in the very act of seeking to express it

First Hamirpur Darshan Tour Ends

Baba's Hamirpur *darshan* tour was ten days long. By the time He reached Jarakhar, more than a week had passed. So before closing the account of His visit, it will not be considered amiss if I relate some "stories" (*lilas*) which reveal different aspects of Baba's divine personality and also illustrate the love of the people of Hamirpur for Baba. As I am not certain of the sequence of these incidents, I have grouped them together at the end.

There was an old man, a *tantric*,⁸² who had heard of Baba five years earlier. He was so touched with Baba's picture and His message of love that he gave up his *tantric* practices and began to love Baba as the *Avatar* of the Age. He was looking forward to the opportunity of having Baba's *darshan* which had been arranged near his village. But unfortunately he got his times confused and arrived at the *darshan* scene only to learn that Baba had just left by car. Although it seemed impossible, he began to run in the direction Baba had gone in the hope of catching up with Him. A fantastic idea!

⁸² One who follows *Tantra*, a science of esoteric or occult practices.

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But Baba, the All-knowing One, who was riding in the car miles ahead, asked the driver, under some pretext, to stop the car. He told the driver to wait for some time by the side of the road. This was Baba's wish and no one questioned it. Some time passed and as night fell, Baba's people saw someone running in their direction. It was that old *tantric*. It seems that before he reached Baba his one-pointed love had reached the heart of the *Avatar*. The man looked extremely happy to see Baba. He was breathless for he had run many miles. Baba asked him to stand still until he regained his normal breathing. In that brief *sahavas* the old man opened his heart to Baba and had his unforgettable moment with Him. Baba very lovingly blessed him and the car moved on. Again the man began to run after it and Baba had to order him to stop. The pull of the God-Man's love is maddening!

Another example of Baba's omniscience and compassion as witnessed by a disciple is given below in his own words. He writes:

One extremely poor, old couple in the village of Amarpura, who lived in a hovel far outside the village, were determined to do their share in the welcoming of the Master. The man spent what little he had in having a small raised square built in front of his hut in order to receive Baba. In spite of his wife's doubts of Baba's coming out of His way to their humble dwelling when there were so many better houses in the village itself, and in spite of the fact that they also had not the courage to invite Baba, the old man was sure that his love would draw the Master to him.

The day of the mass *darshan* in the village being over, Baba and His party—followed part of the way as usual by the crowd—proceeded the next morning to the adjacent town. But instead of taking the usual road Baba insisted, to everyone's surprise, on taking the little-used path lying almost in the opposite direction.

After a time He had the car stopped, and getting down went straight to a mean-looking little hut. It was the home of the old couple who could only sob in their happiness. Baba embraced them both and seated himself

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on the erected square to be garlanded. He had accepted their hearts' tribute.

It was only after reaching the next village that Baba's men heard the whole story of this love and faith.⁸³

Dhanauri is a small village with a population of 2,000 people. They all loved Baba so deeply that on October 16, 1951, the day when Baba began His *manonash* phase, the entire village observed fast. They also invoked God for the God-Man's success in His concluding work of the New Life. One can imagine the naive delight and fervor of the villagers, both men and women, to find the Beloved of their heart physically in their midst. It was in response to such wholehearted receptions that Baba once remarked that the devotion of His lovers in the district of Hamirpur touched His Universal Heart.

During this tour Baba happened to visit a small school in a village. All the children were given the privilege of having Baba's *darshan*. At the close of this program Baba lovingly stroked the cheek of one child. Seeing this, the rest of the children insisted that they too should be blessed in the same manner. Baba looked amused and He graciously consented to grant their common demand. All the children filed past in a single line and each received the enviable precious pat from the *Avatar*.

In this period of ten days Baba visited the following 17 places in the district of Hamirpur: Hamirpur Town, Sumerper, Inghota, Mandaha, Mahewa, Mahoba, Panwari, Rath, Nauranga, Majhgwan, Jarakhar, Dhagwan, Amarpura, Tola-Khangaram, Dhanauri, and Banda. The last place was Harpalpur where Baba was taken in a colorful procession. To give a general picture of the response given by the public to Baba, I have included some excerpts below from Eruch's letter dated 8th December, 1952, addressed to the Baba lovers in Andhra Pradesh. He wrote:

Dear Brothers of Andhra,

First, let me express to you all that the Love Feast that we all experienced throughout Hamirpur District falls short of any length of descriptive letters; it was a

⁸³ *Mass Darshan of Meher Baba*, pp. 5-6, (July 1953).

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sight and scene for the really fortunate ones to witness through physical presence

From Hamirpur we proceeded . . . to many other centres of *darshan* programmes. Even on the roadside there were unforgettable love scenes where the loving public, all anxious for the holy *darshan* of the *Avatar*, actually blocked the regular route and road and forced very lovingly to divert Shri Baba's route through villages where the inhabitants were awaiting His arrival, anticipating with complete faith that their love would surely bring their dear Baba to them, although they knew that their place was not included in the programmes and the centres.

Shri Baba bowed down to their love and submitted to their fervent appeals Although it was extremely tiresome for Shri Baba it was the love of His lovers that often made Him go against His own fixed rules and principles, chalked out to us, at Meherabad

It was one complete ten-day serial Love Drama . . . where the Beloved showered Love and the lovers got completely drenched in love

The first incredible *darshan* tour of the Fiery Free Life, which began at Hamirpur with a most cordial reception on November 18th, ended with a grand procession at Harpalpur on November 27th, 1952. These 10 days will be remembered as the matchless manifestation of the *Avatar's* compassion, dispensed to villagers who did not come to hear any discourse from him, only to receive His love, the kernel of spiritual life.

DELHI, KHULDABAD, AMRAVATI, SAONER, NAGPUR

1952 - PART X

Pukar Finds an "Ideal Boy"

From Harpalpur, Baba went to Jhansi with His *mandali*. After a day's stay over, He proceeded for Delhi, arriving there by train on the morning of November 29th. Baba lovers very warmly received their Beloved Master. He was driven straight to the residence of Was Deo Kain, 16 President Estate, New Delhi.

In His New Life phase, Baba had visited Delhi in May, 1950 for three days. At that time He had stayed in Kain's place for two nights along with Eruch. On that visit as soon as Baba's car reached the house, Kain had been instructed to turn off the outside lights until Baba was in His room. However, this time it was quite different as He had come to give *darshan* to the public.

Those accompanying Baba were taken to 10 Tagore Road, where Harjeevan Lal's son was staying. Kain and Harjeevan were Baba's hosts in Delhi. After having a wash and breakfast, the *mandali* set out for Baba's residence. But due to some problems with their bus, they arrived late. This annoyed Baba since it meant He could not begin His work with the poor at the appointed hour. When all had finally arrived, Baba carried out this work the way it had been done at Hamirpur. Then He went out with Baidul to contact the *masts*, the "fools" of God who roamed about in certain suburbs of India's capital.

In the afternoon at 2:00, there was a private program at Kain's house primarily for Baba lovers. Prabha Kain performed an appealing *kirtan*. Some Hindi *bhajans* of Mirabai, Kabir and other saints were sung to the accompaniment of harmonium and *tabla* (Indian drums). In the midst of this singing, Baba dictated from his board, "Be true, be honest to your own self and to God." Perhaps this was the kernel of the *bhajans* being sung. Baba seemed to enjoy this program, and

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at the end distributed *laddoos* (sweets) as *prasad* to all who were present.

While this program was going on, Pukar was busy in Delhi on a special mission. During the gathering at Meherabad, one of Baba's instructions to the programwallas was that the *mandali's* residence should not be too far away from Baba's, for He might need them suddenly at anytime. But because Delhi is a sprawling metropolitan city, covering an enormous area, this particular instruction could not be adequately adhered to.

It so happened that on the morning of the first day, the vehicle carrying Baba's people from 10 Tagore Road to 16 President Estate broke down along the way. Baba was so displeased at this, and His mood was so upset, that the programwallas feared He might cut short His stay in Delhi.

No one tried to argue with Baba, but those concerned with the transportation arrangements apologized for their faults. In the end Baba suggested that if Pukar could find and bring a boy who met certain specifications, He would then wash the boy's feet to compensate for the delay in His service to the poor caused by the *mandali's* late arrival. Pukar expressed his readiness and asked Baba for more details concerning the boy. Baba continued, "He should be between 16 and 18 years of age, a lover of God, obedient to his parents, first class in his studies, and he should have a pure heart."

It seemed that Baba wanted to contact an ideal boy in Delhi, but Baba didn't give Pukar any hints on how he was supposed to find such a boy. When Pukar, undaunted, decided to start his search immediately, Baba further ordered him to wait until after he had his lunch, thus curtailing the time at Pukar's disposal.

After a hurried meal, Pukar started out on his incredible pursuit along with Dr. Daulat Singh and Babadas. Daulat Singh was a strongly built person in his fifties with an impressive personality. Babadas wore long hair and had a flowing white beard. He was wearing a white *kafni*. It must have been a sight to see these three together. They decided to begin their search by contacting the principal of a college.

This visit turned out surprisingly well as the principal patiently heard what they had to say. And although their request was perhaps unusual, he was very cooperative and offered his help. He told Pukar that he knew of a boy studying in his college who fit the requirements. This boy was called into the principal's office. He respectfully listened to Pukar and then responded by saying, "I understand your request, but before I can accompany you I must have the permission of my parents." Pukar was very pleased with the boy's response because it fulfilled one of Baba's requirements. So they hurried off to the boy's house.

The father of the boy readily agreed with Pukar's request to take the boy to Baba but his mother flatly refused. She was of the firm opinion that it was utterly improper on the part of her son to allow a person of a high spiritual status to bow down at his feet and to give him money. On the contrary, she thought that it would be more appropriate for her son to place his head on the feet of such a person and give him whatever money the family could conveniently afford. The trio tried to convince her but failed. So at last with great disappointment they left the house.

They again thought of going to the principal. But time was running short and they could not decide what to do. As they were walking, Pukar saw a boy coming along the road. Desperate, Pukar started talking with him on the off chance that he might come close to fulfilling the qualifications that had been laid down by Baba.

Pukar asked him his age and some other questions. From the answers the boy gave, it seemed that he fit Baba's requirements even more than the first boy. So Pukar told him that he should come with them to Meher Baba who would bow down to him and give him a certain amount of money as *prasad*. Instead of agreeing to accompany them, the boy replied that he must first have the consent of his parents

After his earlier experience and because time was so short, Pukar decided that it was too risky to visit the boy's parents, so instead he lovingly pleaded with the youngster, "Believe us. Don't think that we are going to deceive or harm

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you. We are elderly people, like your parents, so why not ask our permission instead?" Perhaps at this moment Baba turned the key for, to Pukar's astonishment, the boy willingly agreed, and asked Daulat Singh's and Babadas' permission to visit Baba. The trio was amazed at how all of this had come about and that too in a most natural way.

When they reached 16 President Estate with this boy, Baba looked pleased and bowed down at the teenager's feet. He also gave him 51 rupees which the boy accepted very reverentially. Pukar and the others heaved a sigh of relief because Baba's mood was restored and now they felt that all the programs at Delhi would go well.

I have narrated this event in detail to show one of Baba's methods of accomplishing His inner spiritual work through creating seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and then helping those doing their best to obey Him to overcome them. At first glance Baba's instructions to Pukar might appear to some as capricious, but the ensuing results clearly reveal that they were anything but.

In trying to obey Baba one sometimes has to pass through moments of doubt or confusion, but these are followed by unexpected events through which the will of the God-Man gracefully operates for the deeper awakening of one's love for Him.

An Illustrious Scholar Meets Baba

The next two days, November 30th and December 1st, were scheduled for public *darshan* at 10 Tagore Road, New Delhi. A big *shamiana* (awning with decorative cloth) was erected outside Harjeevan's residence. Baba's devotees in Delhi and people in general availed themselves of this opportunity to be in Baba's *sahavas* in the mornings and in the evenings. During these gatherings the following two messages from Baba were given to the public:

Rituals and ceremonies:

The diverse rituals and ceremonies of different religions and cults are intended to release Divine Love, but

they mostly bind the soul to the repetitive mechanism of expressive forms. Attachment to the rigid forms of external expressions of love to God not only limits the love itself but creates separative divisions between one religion and another. Therefore the rituals and ceremonies often bind the soul to ignorance and illusory separateness and become an obstacle to real illumination.

The true spiritual aspirant is therefore more keen about the inner life. Inner life is based on love for God, and it is this love that annihilates all desires keeping in only one desire and longing—that of union with Beloved God. He has no obsessions for expressing his reverence in any set forms. Such obsessions twist the real life. A free soul is never entangled in any of these inessentials, and never allows itself to be overpowered by the separative tendencies released by attachment to rituals and ceremonies.

God and the Universe:

Ordinary persons are caught up in the Universe and its allurements, but the entire Universe is nothing but a shadow of God or Truth. The Masters are always immersed in the joy of union with God and can never be caught up in the mazes of the illusory universe. Just as ordinarily we do not pay any attention to shadows, so the Masters do not pay any attention to the universe except to divert the attention of humanity from the shadow to the Substance.

Dr. Niranjana Singh, the Principal of Camp College, learned of Baba's visit to Delhi from Kain. He was a distinguished scholar in chemistry. Previously he had been the head of the Chemistry Department and the Dean of the Science Faculty of Punjab University. He was also interested in spirituality. He accepted Baba as a great spiritual personality but not as the *Avatar*—God in human form. On Kain's invitation he came to have Baba's *darshan*.

Some people were sitting in front of Baba and some were in line for *darshan*. Dr. Niranjana Singh was introduced to Baba and He gestured for him to sit down. After a while, Baba pointed to a piece of paper, which was rolled up like a pencil

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that peeked out of Niranjan Singh's pocket. Baba gestured, "What's that?" The learned doctor, as he was trying to unroll the paper, said, "I have some questions for you to answer." Baba smilingly gestured for him to put the paper back and added, "If you come tomorrow I will answer each and every question." Niranjan Singh dared not say anything. He might have felt a bit dejected but he was lucky to receive an invitation to visit from the Avatar Himself.

Later, Baba, of His own, opened a conversation with this learned visitor and casually stated, "I am told that you are the principal of the largest college in Delhi. Why don't you invite me to your college?" Niranjan Singh looked startled at Baba's request. Instead of answering his subtle questions, perhaps Baba had put to him a subtler problem. The reply was not easy.

He said, "Baba, you know these days that the younger generation in college is not interested in spirituality. The boys scoff at saints and lovers of God. Besides, there are some hooligans among them who behave like monkeys. They sometimes insult and hoot at guests. And I do not want you to be insulted. Will you please excuse me for not inviting you?" Baba knowingly smiled and gestured, "As you please!"

The next morning Niranjan Singh came again. This time he was accompanied by his wife. This was completely unexpected for she was one of the orthodox Sikhs. But the previous night she had a very moving dream about Meher Baba that revealed His divinity to her. On their arrival they quietly sat at the back without disturbing anyone. They respectfully watched Baba's every move and tears occasionally rolled down their cheeks.

After some time, Baba signaled for them to come closer and sit near Him. Then he asked Niranjan Singh, "Where is yesterday's piece of paper? Now I am in the mood to answer your questions." The Principal folded his hands and said "Today no questions Baba; all of them have been answered." Baba looked delighted and made one of His special gestures of touching His forehead with His middle finger, meaning, "fortunate."

The conversation now was like yesterday's, only in reverse. Niranjan Singh asked Baba to pay a visit to his college. With a puzzled look on His face Baba gestured, "But there are hooligans among the college students, they act like monkeys; they will hoot me down and that will be an insult to you!" With tears in his eyes the principal asked Baba's pardon for what he had said. He again pleaded with Baba to grace the college with His presence and to bless the students. Finally, Baba consented to visit Camp College on December 2nd at 6:00 P.M.

Niranjan Singh's meeting with Baba reminded the *mandali* of a casual remark Baba had made at Rath (Hamirpur District). To those gathered around Him, He gestured, "You won't find me in such a happy mood in Delhi. However, during my stay in the capital I will contact one intellectual giant." Dr. Niranjan Singh was indeed a genius. Clearly Baba knew the principal before he gave him His physical *darshan*. Many a time Baba has told His lovers, "I know you more than you can ever know yourself."

Civic Programs in Delhi

Baba's visit to Camp College was made known to the public through a special notice. Political and social leaders and sometimes eminent scholars would be invited by the college authorities to address the students. But the visit of a Silent Master was an unfamiliar occurrence for the collegians. A group of students thought of making a little mischief if Baba arrived late for the program.

Unlike the "big" leaders, Baba's car reached the college campus just at the appointed time. These students saw Baba coming out of the car. They were so impressed by His divine demeanor that all thoughts of any mischief or scoffing at Baba were instantly shed. Instead, they formed a cordon and helped the *mandali* to take Baba to the dais.

Niranjan Singh looked very happy as the program began. In his welcoming speech he introduced Meher Baba and His spiritual greatness to the students. His talk was very well

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received by the gathering which numbered more than two thousand. After the speeches, the following two messages from Baba were given to the students:

Soldiers of God:

Let us become the soldiers of God. Let us struggle for the Truth. Let us live not for our own selves but for others. Let us speak truly, think truly and act truly. Let us be honest as God is infinite honesty. Let us return love for hatred and win over others to God. Let the world know that above every thing the most dear to our hearts is God—the Supreme Reality. I give you my blessings for the attainment of this Truth.

Spiritual Freedom:

India has gained its national freedom. Let us now try to gain our Spiritual Freedom, beside which every other kind of freedom is a binding. Spiritual Freedom is marred by the bindings of lust, power, greed, anger, hatred, jealousy and low desires. When the prison of these bindings is torn asunder, the heritage of freedom, which is born of Infinite Power, Wisdom, Peace, Love and Bliss, is gained. To attain this Freedom, we must realize God who is the source of Freedom. To realize God we must love Him, losing ourselves in His Infinite Self.

We can love God through intense longing for union with Him. We can love God by surrendering to the *Sadguru* (the Perfect Master) who is God's personal manifestation. We can also love God by loving our fellow men, by giving them happiness at the cost of our own happiness, by rendering them service at the sacrifice of our interests, and by dedicating our lives at the altar of selfless work for the downtrodden. When we love God intensely through any of these channels, we finally know Him to be our own Self.

The purpose of life is to realize God within ourselves. This can be done even while attending to our worldly duties. In everyday walks of life and amidst intense activities, we should feel detached and dedicate our doings to our Beloved, God.

Enough has been done to make people food-minded. They must now be made God-minded. The downtrodden and the poor must be made to understand that from the spiritual point of view, their misfortunes and miseries could be made weapons for the struggle for Truth. They should feel that these miseries can be counted as gifts from God and, if faced bravely and cheerfully, can become the Gateway to eternal happiness.

I give my love and blessings to one and all, for the understanding of the One Infinite God residing equally within us all, and beside whom everything else is false and illusory.

After the reading of these messages Baba addressed the assembly of pupils: "I feel both one with you as well as one of you. The purpose of my coming here will be served if you try to follow the two messages that have been read out to you." At the close of the program the Silent One stood up and blessed the students; His blessings were received in total silence. As He got down from the dais to go to His car, the students reverentially stood up and made a way for Him. With a loving good-bye and perhaps with a mischievous glance at Niranjana Singh, Baba got into the car and left for Kain's house.

On this day in the morning, Baba had been pleased to attend the reception held in His honor by the Delhi branch of the Theosophical Society of India. It was very well arranged and was also well attended by prominent persons of the metropolis. One of Baba's special Fiery Free Life messages—Life Eternal—was read out at the function.

On December 3rd, in the morning, a public *darshan* was arranged at Rajendra Nagar, which was then one of the colonies for the refugees who had come to India after its partition in 1947. Here Sant Kirpal Singh of Ruhani Satsang welcomed Baba and introduced some of his followers to Him.

In the evening Baba visited Delhi University, the Arts Faculty Building. This meeting was attended by several distinguished foreigners, including Americans and Chinese among others. Baba dictated the following from His board which was read out on His behalf:

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The purpose of life is to realize oneness with the Infinite. That can be achieved through love for God. Infinite love makes us true to ourselves and to others. It makes us love honestly, comprehending that God Himself is Infinite Honesty.

Divine Love is the solution to all of our difficulties. It frees us from all cares and worries. It makes us speak truly, think truly and act truly. Divine Love purifies one's heart . . . I give my love and blessings.

This was the last day of Baba's stay in Delhi. So the Kains gave a farewell party for Baba and His *mandali* at their house. Baba was in a good mood and distributed *prasad* with both hands, perhaps as a sign of the fullness of His giving. That night Baba lovers gathered at the railway station to give Baba a hearty send-off. The train, the Pathankot Express, left Delhi at 10:00 P.M.

"Don't Imitate Me; Love Me"

From Delhi, Baba went to Meherazad, arriving on December 5th. In spite of having walked considerably more than was anticipated during His visits in the districts of Hamirpur and Delhi, Baba's injured leg had not proved to be a problem. But he developed a severe cold on His arrival at Meherazad which gave Him a terrible time. He also felt tired. But on Adi's arrival, He finalized the details of His visit to Khuldabad. He wished to go there on December 12th and instructed Adi to make reservations at the *dak* bungalow or a government guest house for a period of one week.

Khuldabad is a small undeveloped village 84 miles to the northeast of Ahmednagar. Its importance lies in the large number of shrines and *dargahs* of saintly personalities which abound in the vicinity. The simple villagers have a rich spiritual heritage indeed.

Ali Shah (also known as Bapjee), a *mast* residing at Meherabad, was brought one day for Baba's work. He was with Baba for some hours and then he was sent back. In the

mail there was a letter from one of Baba's people at Nagpur. As the programwallas of that city had not literally observed Baba's instructions, He had canceled His visit there. However, the dates fixed for His public *darshan* at Amravati and Saoner remained unchanged.

On December 12th, Baba left for Khuldabad in Adi's car with Adi driving. Baba was sitting in the front seat and would often ask Adi to drive faster. Near Loni, a small village, a group of women were hurriedly crossing the road. One girl was slightly hit by Adi's car while crossing to the other side. Baba signaled Adi to stop. The injured girl was put in the car and then taken to the hospital for treatment. She soon regained consciousness and the doctors reported that within a few days she would be her normal self.

Khuldabad, with its spiritual background, is a place of pilgrimage for Hindus and Muslims alike. On the second day of His stay, Baba visited many shrines and *dargahs* to offer His respects to the saints and masters. First, either an Urdu or Marathi translation of the Prayer of Repentance, given by Baba on November 8, 1952 at Meherabad, would be read out by one of Baba's disciples. In the *dargahs*, in addition, Ramjoo would recite the *Fateha*, a prayer comprised of the opening lines of the *Koran*, and Baba would join him in silence in this act of offering *nimaz*.

At every place, at the end of His visit, Baba would put His forehead on the edge of the shrine. He would also direct someone with Him to place some silver coins in the tomb or *samadhi* and would leave the inner chamber with backward steps until He reached the entrance.

Baba was busy with this program for about four hours in the morning. On His return to the guest house, He conveyed to one of His dear ones who was allowed to accompany Him during His visits, "Today you saw me bowing down and offering prayers at so many places. But, remember one thing: on your return home do not start on a round of paying visits to shrines and *samadhis*. Don't imitate me; love me. Do what I tell you to do."

In fact, imitation of any kind, however small or insignifi-

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cant, distorts the beauty of spiritual life. However, if others label one's sincere way of living as "imitation," one should not worry; what matters most is wholehearted honesty.

The place of foremost spiritual importance at Khuldabad is the shrine of Zarzarizarbakh (literally the Giver of the Wealth of Wealth). In the early twenties Baba had told the *mandali* that Zarzarizarbakh was the *Sadguru* of Sai Baba. It was through his grace, operating over a span of centuries, that Sai Baba gained the experience of God-realization. Besides the old and spacious *dargah* of Zarzarizarbakh, Baba visited the large *dargah* of Zianudin Shirazi. Coincidentally, it was the day of a yearly fair held in honor of Shirazi. So thousands of people who had gathered at Khuldabad were unknowingly blessed by the *Avatar's* physical presence.

"I Am What I Am"

The guest house at Khuldabad is an old-fashioned but fine building, with a nice garden. It is on the edge of a hill overlooking the entire area around the Ellora caves. But the *mandali* had no time to derive pleasure from such a spectacular landscape. The world famous rock-hewn temples of Ellora were just a mile or two away, but none visited them. And since they were with Baba, it is quite likely that no one even thought of doing so. To give an idea of the time the *mandali* spent with Baba at Khuldabad, I quote below some paragraphs from Ramjoo's article. He had accompanied Baba during this tour:

For Baba's men this trip was a very trying and exacting time both physically and mentally. To begin with, there was no breakfast, only tea in the mornings; and the two daily meals consisted of simply cooked *dhal* and rice at eleven A.M., and bread and some vegetable at six P.M. Turn by turn, they had to keep awake in pairs each night, and as they were not permitted to sleep during the day it happened that two of them each day remained without sleep for a stretch of about forty hours. During the day they were formed into different groups, and each one

entrusted with sufficient work to do, to keep him busy from five in the morning till nine at night.

Baba would call His men together for about an hour every evening after sunset, when He would listen to, and Himself tell, stories and events concerning men of God. He was more interested in anecdotes of great devotees than those of great Masters. He liked best the narratives of love and faith of those devoted to God or to their masters and of the wonders born of such devotion.

He would then ask some of His men to pray to God on His behalf, according to their respective religions, at which time He too appeared to be praying, with great devotion. Finally, He would place His forehead on the feet of each of His disciples as they passed before Him in rapid succession (they having been previously instructed to wash their feet). Preparing the men for this ordeal, Baba told them on the first day, "Don't try to understand the 'why and wherefore' of my work. Do as I say. When I touch your feet, try to imagine yourselves to be just stones"

During this short period Baba was more than ever the Devotee as well as the Master, playing both these roles to perfection. When approached about it He would invariably say "I am what I am."⁸⁴

Temporary Relief and Perfect Hope

On December 16th some poor and needy people, Hindus and Muslims, were brought to Baba. Twenty-five Hindus were gathered at the guest house and forty Muslims were assembled at the *dargah* of Shah Hussaine, father of the renowned Perfect Master of Gulbarga, Bandanavaz. As usual, Baba's service to the poor was done in His own quiet way. In the company of the *mandali* He later remarked, "My bowing down to the poor is an entirely different thing than your act of bowing. It is Godhood bowing down to God." (*Khuda ko lekar Khuda ko jhukta hoon.*)

Then He explained a subtle difference between relief and His help. He used different languages while commenting on

⁸⁴ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 23-24 (1953).

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this subject and the gist of it is as follows: "You feel sorry to see a beggar, an injured or diseased person, or someone in a miserable predicament. And naturally you are prompted to do something to relieve the person from his/her suffering. But this gives the person only temporary relief.

"The real remedy, however, is primarily to awaken in others the spirit of accepting suffering as part of one's *karma*. People should not fear suffering; while overcoming it they should develop a proper understanding of it. This is the beginning of real happiness. However, this act of awakening perfect hope in the hearts of others is bestowed only by the Realized Ones.

"This does not mean that you should not feel distressed for the poor and the afflicted. However, whatever is done in response to one's honest feelings, should be done in a spirit of selfless service."

On December 17th, Baba left for Aurangabad where He stayed for two days in a *dak* bungalow. The same day He visited Daulatabad Fort. This fort is situated nine miles to the northwest of Aurangabad. The topography of the area made the fort impregnable and in the 12th century the Yadavas, who ruled the Deccan, made Deogiri (Daulatabad) their capital. At present the fort is in ruins. In and around the fort are shrines of saintly people and, in addition, there is the *amadhi* of Janardan Swami, the *Sadguru* of the erudite poet and Maharashtrian Perfect Master, Eknath.

The next day Baba went into the city of Aurangabad to contact *masts*. The *mandali* hired a taxi but unfortunately it broke down in the crowded market. Some people recognized Baba. The word spread and although Baba wanted to remain incognito, He had to accept the homage of those who hurried to the car.

When He returned to His residence, the *mandali* noticed that a clerk from the District Court had come to request that Baba permit a small *darshan* program in the evening, to which Baba agreed. A good number of people, including some government officers, availed themselves of this unexpected chance to see Baba.

Dr. Ranade had helped Adi in making Baba's lodging arrangements at Khuldabad and Aurangabad. His maternal uncle said to Baba, "I am going to retire soon and I intend to settle down somewhere near Hardwar in the Himalayas, I wish to lead a secluded life, dedicated to God." Baba gestured, "Those places (Hardwar and Rishikesh) have grown into big cities and you won't find a peaceful atmosphere there. Inform me when you retire; I will tell you what to do." Baba's presence in the city was widely known now, and so He decided to leave Aurangabad the next morning.

Unusual Condition for a Day's Stay

The following morning Baba boarded a train for Manmad. The *mandali* got into a third class compartment, but it was already overcrowded. Hence, it was decided that Baba should travel by second class. As Baba got into a second class compartment with Eruch, He noticed that there was another person in it. Baba conveyed to Eruch, "If this man is going to be on my 'chest' until Manmad, I would prefer to travel in the third class compartment with a crowd of fifty people, as in that case their attention would be divided and not focused on me."

The train moved on and some minutes later the man quietly approached Baba and took His *darshan*. This was the appropriate time for Eruch to suggest that the fellow traveler change his compartment at the next station and leave Baba alone for His work. The man readily agreed and no one else got in the compartment until the end of their journey.

When the train was passing through the extensive railway yard at Manmad, Baba pointed at a bungalow with a fascinating garden and casually gestured to Eruch, "Nice. Perhaps the best in Manmad." Soon the train stopped and all got down at the station. They were to leave for Amravati via Badnera by the evening train, so Baba sent out two of the *mandali* to find a secluded accommodation for Him for the rest of the day.

The *dak* bungalow and the rest house of the Central Railway were already booked. So as a last resort, Eruch

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approached the resident engineer of the railways, who was a north Indian, and requested his help. In the beginning, he expressed his inability to do anything, but in the end he said, "My family members are not here. And if you don't mind accommodating yourselves on the veranda of my bungalow you can go and stay there." Eruch thanked the engineer and added, "But I will have to ask my elder brother about it. He has His own ways of deciding such things. We will let you know of our decision."

When Baba was apprised of the talk, He agreed to go there on the condition that the resident engineer (whose name was Chunilal) did not visit his home while Baba was there. This was indeed a strange stipulation, depriving the owner of the right to visit his own house! But even more surprising was the fact that when Eruch told Chunilal of the condition he willingly agreed to abide by it. Perhaps, intuitively, he might have felt that the one who could dictate such terms must be someone great!

Eruch got the bungalow's number and location and he took Baba there. On reaching it he found that it was the same bungalow that Baba had pointed out to him before the train stopped at Manmad!

As they arrived, however, they saw Chunilal opening a door to the main hall. Baba called him and gestured, "How is it that you are here? It is against the condition that you agreed upon." Chunilal replied, "I have come to unlock the doors." Baba added "Why open the rooms? I am going to stay on the verandah. Do you know who I am? People call me Meher Baba. It is your great fortune that I have come here."

Chunilal was immensely impressed with Baba's presence and requested Him to stay inside the house. He also asked Baba's permission to arrange for His meals. In response to Chunilal's repeated requests, Baba agreed only to step into his living room and to have tea with him. In the living room there were large pictures of Rama and Hanuman. Evidently Chunilal was a great devotee of Rama but he did not know that Rama had come again as Meher Baba. Baba did not change His decision to stay on the verandah. The engineer instructed

his servants to attend to the needs of his guest and then left for his office.

Eruch put Baba's things on the verandah. Baba looked so relaxed that He gestured, "I am reminded of my stay in Jal Kerawala's house." Some time after lunch Baba wished to have His tea. The servant gave the *mandali* sugar and milk but the tea leaves were locked up. Chunilal came at 2:30 P.M. and Baba conveyed to him, "I have already had my tea. It was prepared with your sugar and our tea leaves." The engineer answered, "I am sorry; I did not know that you would have tea so early."

Baba told him not to worry and added, "You remind me of one of my disciples, Jal Kerawala, who was a Class One Government officer. He also had the habit of keeping his tin of tea locked up." Baba, however, allowed Chunilal to be with Him for some time on the verandah. At sundown, Baba went to the railway station and left with the *mandali* by the evening train for Badnera.

Mast Contact at Badnera

Baba reached Badnera on the morning of December 20th. A hot-tempered *mast* lived on the outskirts of this town. Baba wanted to contact him. Generally when contacting a *mast*, Baba would go with two or three disciples, but this time all those who had accompanied Baba from Manmad went with Him. This crowd of people irritated the *mast*, and as no *mast* cares for his appearance or image, the *mast* began to blurt out in his fiery mood, "I will use my machine gun to hold them off."

So Baba instructed His people to keep at a considerable distance from the *mast*, and with Pendu and Meherjee He went close to him. As Baba started pressing the *mast's* feet, his wild mood began to subside.

After a while the *mast*, pointing at the clothes that Baba was wearing, said, "Why do you wear these (red) socks and this (particular) coat? Throw them away." "Should I give them to you?" Baba gestured. "Not me, just don't keep them on." Baba

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instructed Meherjee to bundle up the garments and place them somewhere at the time of the *darshan* program in Amravati. Now the *mast* asked for some small silver coins, each one worth one fourth of a rupee in the minting year of 1945. Baba often catered to the wishes expressed by any *mast*. So Pendu did his best and got 16 coins of the required year and denomination. Baba left the *mast* when he found that he was now in a happy mood.

When Deshmukh, Baba's host, came to Badnera, the party left for Amravati in the cars arranged by him. After reaching their destination, Baba told Deshmukh, "First I will have my food and then I will rest for two hours." However, during Baba's rest period, Deshmukh sent Him a message which stated that the required number of poor people had arrived and that it would be a good idea if Baba finished His work with them. Thus Baba's "rest" (which in fact involved His inner spiritual work) was disturbed. In an annoyed mood Baba agreed to Deshmukh's request.

In this small group of poor people there were two school aged boys whose inclusion was against Baba's earlier instructions. So when this work was over, Baba told Vishnu, in Deshmukh's presence, that He had complied with Deshmukh's request and that Vishnu should now get the railway tickets to return to Ahmednagar. This made Deshmukh very nervous and he apologized for his mistakes and assured Baba that he would thoroughly follow His instructions during His entire stay at Amravati.

In the evening the members of the reception committee, who were the elite of the city, met Baba. They informally requested Him to give *darshan* the next day to their city's people. This reception was arranged for Joshi Hall. Later, Baba conveyed to the *mandali* that He disliked having a *darshan* program in an enclosed hall. He also added, "I am not a big man whose reception should be in a hall. I am for the poor. I am for the masses." With a pause He continued, "I am neither small nor great yet simultaneously, I am the smallest and the greatest."

The next day it turned out that the committee's idea of

organizing the program in the hall was rooted in its fear that not many people would come for Baba's *darshan*. The members even told Baba that He should not leave for the hall until He received a message from them.

Baba Visits Joshi Hall

The *mandali* stayed in Professor Vinayak Kher's bungalow. A nice *shamiana* was erected in front of his house. Baba arrived here on December 21st at 8:00 A.M., and the morning *darshan* began with Jairam Bua performing a touching *kirtan*. In the afternoon, well before the appointed time, Joshi Hall was completely filled

and one of the committee members hurried to Deshmukh's residence to ask Baba if He could start a little earlier. Baba smiled and gestured, "But this will be well before the time that has been announced." And the man politely confessed the doubt the committee had had about the response from the gathering. Baba with a smile gestured, "All right, I will start soon."

By the time Baba reached the hall, it was so full that it was hard for the *mandali*, including Deshmukh, to reach the dais. Among the prominent figures present on the stage was Shri Punjabrao Deshmukh, Minister for Agriculture in the Central Cabinet of India. After Baba was garlanded and some *bhajans* were sung, a few speeches were delivered. Shri M. D. Sagne, addressing Baba as the Perfect Master, said,

"Our good luck has dawned today for we have with us Shri Meher Baba, the greatest spiritual personage of the time. In His all-pervading love, He has fulfilled our long felt desire for His *darshan* and blessings. Since our joy knows no bounds, with the blissful feeling of happiness within, we pay our humble homage to Baba. And for help in bringing about the occasion, we all thank His devotee, Dr. C.D. Deshmukh.

"Meher Baba, after passing through the different phases of the spiritual spiral, you have now entered upon a life, Free and Fiery. We believe that the assumption of

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this Free and Fiery life is full of purpose, coming as it does at this time. The world is at present passing through an acute crisis. It is caught in the vortex of distress and degradation, and the dismal clouds of destruction are hanging thick over it

"Meher Baba, we the unhappy people of this disturbed world have waited long for peace, joy and light. We are now weary and have grown impatient. Efforts on a mundane level, made in the name of peace and prosperity, could not and would not give the needed relief. For they lack the necessary spiritual background and the blessings of a creative leadership of the Self-realized. We are in despair and we are distracted. Our only and lonely hope, therefore, lies in you for stemming the soaring tide of deterioration, degradation and destruction. Our last hope lies in you.

"O Meher Baba, we are convinced that an adjusted integration and balanced enjoyment of the moral, material and spiritual aspects of life alone will lead mankind to the Golden Age of peace, prosperity and happiness, and also that the creative leadership of the Self-realized alone can guide it along this rightful path. We, therefore, fervently appeal to you for your public manifestation.

The above paragraphs will give readers an idea of what the speeches made at other programs and towns during Baba's *darshan* tour were like. Baba appreciated the sentiments expressed by the speaker and in response dictated from His board, "Our dear Sagne has asked with the deepest love that I should manifest and break my Silence. His loving appeal has tempted me to declare that God willing, by the end of April, God will make me manifest the Infinite, which alone is real and which we should find in ourselves."

When the program was over the crowd tried to rush towards Baba to touch Him. The situation seemed uncontrollable, but just then a strong young wrestler came to the *mandali's* rescue. He checked the people crowding near Baba and made a way for Him until He got into His car.

"Beautiful Birds in Ugly Cages"

On December 22nd, at the invitation of Punjabrao Deshmukh, Baba paid a visit to Janata College, conducted by the Shri Shiwajee Education Society, to unveil a portrait of Shri Ramana Maharshi of Arunachala. Availing himself of this opportunity, Harjeevan Lal, one of Baba's dear ones from Delhi, presented the college with a large colored photograph of Beloved Baba. So Punjabrao pleaded with Baba to unveil His own photo also. With gratitude he added, "This will remind us of your visit to the college."

Baba's message on "Religion and Politics" was read out to the gathering. Principal Jwala Prasad was a learned scholar of *Vedanta* and had written some books on the *Upanishads*. He requested Baba to give His blessing so that he could complete his commentaries on these ancient and sacred books.

He also took Baba around the college premises—laboratories, libraries, work shops, etc. Perhaps he had no idea of the sufferings that Baba had undergone some months back owing to His fractured and injured leg. That day Baba walked over two miles. When the students gathered in the assembly hall, Baba's message, "Soldiers of God," that was given in the Camp College at Delhi, was read out to the students.

In the evening Baba visited a leper colony, which is about five miles from Amravati. This work was conducted in a spirit of dedication and as a selfless service to this despised section of humanity. It has been noticed that serving lepers was very dear to Baba's heart. He moved freely among them and when they gathered in the clean, small Hall of Prayers, Baba was pleased to convey through His board some words of cheer and advice to them all. He dictated:

God loves most those who suffer most. Uninvited suffering is a blessing in disguise. Both pain and pleasure ultimately end in nothing. Lepers must give up despondency and despair and look upon their afflictions as a God-given opportunity to get nearer to Him. Compared with the few suffering from

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physical leprosy, many in the world today are suffering from leprosy of the mind. And I have a plan of my own to open a world wide asylum for all kinds of lepers⁸⁵

On one of the occasions when Baba was washing the leper's feet He remarked with reference to them, "Beautiful birds in ugly cages."

On this night after supper, it was arranged that Baba would attend a *qawwali* program at the house of one of Sai Baba's devotees. But, unfortunately, the *qawwal* had to leave for Bombay. So after a fifteen minute visit, Baba returned to His residence. During Baba's stay at Amravati this was the only program arranged at night. While returning in the car He gestured, "It's really good that the *qawwal* did not come; I truly needed a good night's rest."

Baba Performs His Own Arti

On December 23rd, in the morning, Baba participated in offering the Prayer of Repentance to God. Then He bowed down to each of the *mandali* who had accompanied Him to Amravati. Baba then stood up before His picture in the prayer room of Dr. Deshmukh's house. To the surprise of all He remained standing in front of this painting while those in the room sang His *arti*. In the end He bowed down before His own picture and others followed suit.

Then He took His seat and all quietly sat on the carpet. Baba looked divinely radiant. He conveyed, "People say I am the *Avatar*. But when it is impossible even for the *rishis* and *munis* to understand me, how can they know what I really am? Only the Perfect Masters know me. I am the Ancient One, the *Adi Purush*. I alone can really perform my own *arti*."

Looking at His disciples and devotees, He continued, "So do one thing. Leave aside altogether the thought of understanding me; obey me, love me. That's all." Such statements, expressing Baba's real status and authority, created a profound,

⁸⁵ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 27 (1952).

soul-stirring atmosphere in the room. For a while none dared speak.

To change and lighten the seriousness of the atmosphere, Baba resorted to His sense of humor. He opened a different subject. He conveyed, "You know, I like to be punctual. So I need a cock who will crow at the appropriate time to remind me of my appointments." All looked very puzzled at this strange demand. But Baba pointed at Dhake and gestured for him to imitate a cock. At Baba's signal, Dhake crowed loudly which made all laugh, and then Baba dispersed the gathering.

On this day a special program was also arranged at Vidarbha Mahavidyalaya. Punjabrao Deshmukh was invited to inaugurate a "Philosophical Society" in this college. It had been announced earlier that Baba would also attend this function. However, for one reason or another, Baba had canceled His visit. When the students of the college heard of this, they felt disappointed and sent their representatives to Baba to request that He reconsider His decision.

In the end Baba complied with the pleadings of the students. The college staff and a large number of the students attended the program. Punjabrao began his speech with the following words: "It is really difficult for me to say anything on philosophy in the presence of Meher Baba." However, he delivered a reasonable speech. There were also some other speakers, including the learned Doctor Nerula, the Principal of the College.

Another of the days activities was Baba's private visit, with His men, to Tai Maharaj, a middle-aged saintly woman. She had a sizable following in that city. She very reverentially received Baba with tears of joy sparkling in her eyes and said, "The *Avatar* has come to me." About 500 women had gathered and they took Baba's *darshan*. During this period Tai Maharaj remained seated near Baba's feet.

When Baba got up to go, she requested Him to step into the inner chamber of Lord Krishna's temple. Baba happily did so and pointing at the idol of Krishna gestured to her, "I am in there." On returning home Baba remarked, "I appreciate the simple, humble behavior of Tai Maharaj, especially so in the

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presence of her followers who regard her as their guide. At present, hypocrisy is rampant and you know that I prefer even vagabonds to hypocrites—the self-styled saints."

The same afternoon, with a special message from Baba, Eruch went to see Principal Nerula. Eruch told him that Baba was touched with his love and faith and that He had sent him His love. Nerula was greatly delighted and felt blessed. He then asked Eruch if similar messages had been sent to other speakers. Eruch replied, "No."

They both then had a long candid conversation in which the principal disclosed, "I love and have faith in Ramakrishna Paramhansa as my Master. When I heard that Baba was attending the program, I felt nervous about my speech. For the first time I prepared my talk in advance and read it through. Whenever I used the words *Avatar* or Baba in my speech, I meant my Master, Ramakrishna—I take him as the *Avatar*." At the end of their talk, Principal Nerula also expressed the wish to have a personal interview with Baba.

During the Fiery *darshan* tour Baba had stopped granting individual audiences, so Eruch asked him to attend instead the evening *darshan* at Deshmukh's house. When Eruch returned he told Baba about his conversation, and that evening, when the principal entered the hall to be in Baba's *sahas*, Baba asked him to sit near His seat. While the *bhajans* were going on, Baba lovingly looked at Nerula and gestured, "I authoritatively declare that I am the *Avatar*, the Ancient One. Do you think that I do not know what I am saying? Is it meaningless?" Nerula kept quiet.

Baba continued, "Ramakrishna was a rare type of Perfect Master (*Sadguru*). Go on loving him and one day you will find him." Nerula humbly but softly asked Baba, "In this lifetime?" Baba was touched with the earnestness and unadulterated love Nerula had for his Master. He gestured, "A few hours before your death you will see me in the form of Ramakrishna and you will realize God." The *bhajans* continued. The singers always felt that Baba gave them His undivided attention. Yet, in between songs, such personal meetings of profound significance quietly took place and this was not unusual.

Veerbhan Proclaims Baba as the Avatar

On December 24th some followers of Veerbhan Maharaj, a *mast*-like recluse from Devargaon, approached Baba and requested Him to pay a visit to their village. Baba very gladly accepted the invitation and reached the village within a few hours. Veerbhan extended a touching welcome to Baba and said to Him, "You are the Master of all masters. The villagers are indeed blessed by your presence." Baba expressed His love for Veerbhan by pressing his feet and remarked, "I am for those who love me, and those who love me are my *gurus* (masters)."

Hearing this, Veerbhan felt overwhelmed and tears of joy began to roll down his cheeks. He repeated aloud two lines in Sanskrit from the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. These words of Lord Krishna, freely translated, mean: "Whenever righteousness declines and crime flourishes I, the *Avatar*, assume human form." Then turning to those present Veerbhan added, "Meher Baba is the *Avatar*. You may not understand what I mean but I know."

Akabarali Indorewalla, a prominent citizen from Amravati, had driven Baba in his new Hudson to Devargaon. He was so humble by nature that, in the beginning, some of the *mandali* thought he was a hired driver. While returning, the car stopped after a short distance due to some malfunction. Some villagers who could neither go to Amravati nor to Devargaon thus had the opportunity of Baba's *darshan*. It seemed as if Baba knew of their inner longing.

In the meantime, Indorewalla noticed that a battery wire was disconnected, which in the case of his new car, was most unusual. Baba smilingly asked him, "What has happened?" And Indorewalla humbly replied, "I don't know; you *know*." Perhaps he meant that Baba's wish to grant *darshan* to the villagers was the tacit reason for the disconnected wire.

In the late afternoon a public *darshan* program was arranged in the Harijan Colony, or slum area. It was here that the poor people of Amravati had a chance to be in Baba's *sahavas*. Jairam Bua, with his followers, specially attended

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this program. Patukar performed a *kirtan* based on Beloved Baba's message of love. Baba bowed down to the people, and informed all that each one of them need not now try to come to Him for His personal touch. Gadekar, who was privileged to sing Baba's *arti* in Marathi during the Fiery Life tour, was joined by hundreds of people in offering it to the Master of masters.

Earlier, Jairam Bua had also performed a *kirtan* before Baba in which he indirectly mentioned his inability to understand why Baba was observing silence. At the end of that *kirtan* Baba had called him near and gestured, "In spite of my silence, I speak with all the tongues of the world." This last *darshan* turned out to be the biggest and the most triumphant during Baba's stay in Amravati.

On Christmas Eve Baba left Amravati for Badnera where He boarded a train for Ahmednagar and reached Meherazad on Christmas morning by 10:00 A.M.

The Divine Heritage

After a brief stay of four days, Baba left Meherazad for Bombay on December 29th at 1:15 P.M. in Sarosh's car with Adi driving. To avoid the glare of the sun during the journey, Baba changed His seat two or three times with those in the car; this was one of Baba's habits. Adi halted at Thana for about twenty minutes and then drove to Victoria Terminus, the railway station in Bombay, arriving at 6:30 P.M.

Nariman and Meherjee were awaiting Baba. They had made an advance booking for Baba and His party bound for Nagpur. Baba instructed Adi to return after his supper to Ahmednagar that same night. This meant another continuous five hour car journey on Indian roads for him. Of course Adi returned the same night. Life with Baba was very dynamic; sometimes pleasing, at other times nerve racking.

After getting down at Nagpur, Baba and the *mandali* proceeded by cars to Saoner which they reached on the

evening of December 30th. Dinkar Rao Pophali, an advocate, A.M. Khan, a revenue officer, Bhawalkar, Harkare and other Baba lovers, including some city fathers, had aroused great interest in the public about Baba's visit.

There were many welcome arches, welcome signs and bunting displayed for over a mile on the road by which Baba's car was to pass. Baba had visited this town earlier in 1944⁸⁶ and since then there had sprung up some Baba centers in the nearby villages. Owing to the villager's simple faith in, and love for Baba, the *mandali* would sometimes refer to this area as "Hamirpur Jr."

Arrangements for Baba's stay were made in the *dak* bungalow of the town. The *mandali* stayed in Bhawalkar's house; for meals, however, they would go to the advocate Pophali's residence. The next day December 31, Baba's work with the poor, as was characteristic of His Fiery Free Life, was carried out in the morning. At this time Alexander Markey, one of Baba's American devotees, was also present. In those days he was working on a film at Alwara in Rajasthan. In the early forties, he had compiled Baba's discourses which were later published in the States under the title, *Silent Revelations*.

During Baba's stay at Saoner He visited some of the homes of His devotees. At one of these small receptions, Harkare spoke so fervently on Baba's divinity and about Baba's work in the area that he could not contain himself and burst out sobbing. Baba appreciated his love and, in response to such speeches made in His honor, He also dictated from the board, "Miracles do not consist in bringing the dead to life, but in the living becoming dead to the ego. Miracles are small illusions in the great illusion called the world."

For two days the public programs were arranged under a big awning where thousands of people, including villagers, flocked for Baba's *darshan*. At the beginning Baba bowed down to the public assembled for His *darshan*. Then, amidst the singing of *bhajans*, He began distributing *prasad* to each one who would pass by His seat in single file. To avoid any sort of disorder near the dais, people were requested to sit in a

⁸⁶ *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, pp. 61-64.

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queue and slowly move ahead in a sitting position until they were close to Baba.

On December 31st, a Marathi translation of Baba's message in English—The Divine Heritage of Man—given during His earlier visit, was read out to the public. The original text is given below:

In all climes and in all places, man is constantly striving for happiness; but there are very few who have it, because there are very few who truly know the secret of happiness. Man is constantly feeling thwarted and limited, and he is ever in the clutches of unrelieved agony of suffering, because, not knowing his own true nature, he identifies himself with the body or the desires or the limited individual mind, and thereby becomes a victim to their respective limitations and sufferings.

It is only by knowing himself to be different from and beyond all these that he can fully enter into the Divine Heritage of the Abiding Happiness, which is inalienable from his true being as God.

The man, who through *sanskritic* attachments identifies himself with his body or desires or the individual mind, is caught up within the prison of his ignorance. All his efforts to break through his shackles only lead to his being in their firmer grip, just in the same way as the parrot which desperately beats his wings against the bars of its cage succeeds only in injuring its own wings, without being able to make any headway towards its freedom. It is like a person, who is stuck up in deep mud, and who, because of his very efforts to extricate himself, finds that he is more deeply stuck up in it.

The individual and the unaided efforts of the aspirant are so often unsuccessful, because the very source of such efforts which is the ego, is rooted in ignorance This does not mean that the aspirant should not try for spiritual freedom and fulfillment. He must try his best for their realization; but he must at the same time open himself out to the abundant and indispensable help that comes to him from the Master.

The Master does not give to the aspirant something which is not already within the aspirant in a latent form; he only unveils the real Self of the aspirant himself and enables him to come into his own Divine Heritage which is rightfully his.⁸⁷

Bhau's First Meeting with Baba

One of the remarkable events during Baba's visit to Saoner was Veer Singh Kalchuri's meeting with Baba. He later became one of Baba's close resident *mandali*, and is now known as Bhau. In 1952, he was studying at Nagpur College for his Masters degree in administration and law. His married sister was living at Saoner and his brother-in-law was one of the prominent persons of the town.

When Bhau reached the place where Baba was giving *darshan*, he found that thousands had already gathered there and had lined up in a queue. They were all sitting and in that position were slowly moving forward. Although this was an unusual arrangement, it had been fixed by the programwallas so that all could feast their eyes on Baba's divine form until they got closer to His person. Bhau also sat down and proceeded in a similar way.

Some people who knew Bhau suggested that he should leave the line, as his brother-in-law could easily arrange for Bhau to have Baba's *darshan* without waiting in the queue. Bhau refused this offer, however, and continued to watch Baba giving out *prasad* from where he was sitting. He slowly moved ahead gazing at Baba and he noticed that as Baba distributed *prasad* He would sometimes flash a loving smile at the recipient, making each one depart all smiles.

At last Bhau's turn came and he expected some loving response from Baba, but Baba suddenly turned His head away and began to communicate with those who were gathered near His seat. Without even looking at Bhau, He handed him a banana as *prasad*. Bhau tried to catch Baba's attention, but he

⁸⁷ *Messages of Meher Baba*, compiled by Adi. K. Irani (1949), pp. 78-79.

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was pushed on by those next in line. Though Bhau was a bit upset with Baba's indifference, he nevertheless ate the banana Baba had given him, without even peeling off the skin!

Baba's benevolent indifference intensified Bhau's desire to see Him again. He decided that if Baba were his Master, he would ask Him if he could stay with Him permanently. With this intention, he tried to contact some Baba people to ask them to arrange a personal interview with Baba. Everyone he asked replied, "No," as Baba had placed a ban on seeing people individually. However, Y. Ranga Rao, a Baba lover from Andhra, told Bhau that he would definitely arrange what Bhau wanted provided that he came to Eluru during Baba's visit to Andhra Pradesh. He even made Bhau promise that he would be there to see Baba.

On New Year's Day, 1953, Bhau tried his luck in the *darshan* queue a second time, but it turned out almost a repetition of the previous day. Again Bhau ate the *prasad*, a banana from Baba's hand, along with its peel. Despite Baba's treatment of him, Bhau felt that Baba was his Master, and with the intention of seeing Him in person, Bhau visited Baba's residence, but to no avail.

The next day Baba left for Nagpur and Bhau followed him. There one of Baba's close ones, after hearing Bhau's story, arranged for him to meet with Baba. When he was ushered into Baba's presence, instead of asking him anything about himself, Baba gestured, "Will you obey me 100%?" Bhau's unhesitating reply was, "Yes, Baba." This seemed to please Baba and He continued, "Will you go naked and beg if I ask you to do so?" Again the reply was, "Yes, Baba." Hearing this, Baba gestured, "Then do it!" Instantly Bhau began to take off his clothes. Baba, however, motioned for him to stop.

He again asked Bhau the same question, "Are you sure you will obey me 100%?" Bhau again replied in the affirmative. Baba then concluded this meeting by saying, "Then listen carefully. I want you to appear for the forthcoming examinations for your M.A. When these are over, come to stay with me wherever I may be." This simple yet decisive meeting between Baba and one of the prospective *mandali* was over in a few

minutes. Accordingly, when the examinations were finished some months later, Bhau came to stay with Baba permanently.

Love Surpasses All Unusual "Experiences"

During Baba's Saoner stay He gave to one of His devotees the following four instructions, to be observed for a specified period:

1. Let people know about my message of love.
2. Beg for your food; eat whatever is received in *bhiksha*.
3. Accept no money from anyone.
4. Carry out the program outlined for you at the cost of your life.

Baba asked this person to leave Saoner the next day for his journey to the Himalayas in the north.

Baba also called one of His lovers, with his son, from the south. Baba had been informed that the son, a teenager, was not attending to his studies. He was going into trances instead, sometimes for only awhile and sometimes for long periods, and people had started respecting him for this achievement. Receiving homage from others at an immature stage is spiritually harmful. That was why Baba had urgently called him, even though He would soon be visiting Andhra Himself.

Even at Saoner this teenager was occasionally seen with closed eyes as if he were sleeping, but his fingers would be moving just like Baba's, although they were in different rooms. This was really amazing. Once someone asked him while he was sitting with his eyes closed if he could recognize one of the *mandali*. He had not met the person before yet he easily identified him just by feeling his hand.

When Baba heard this He commented that it was really remarkable but, as Ramjoo has reported, He also added, "Unless the boy was firmly and sympathetically discouraged forthwith from succumbing to his present impulses, which

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were quite honest and natural, he would later be tempted to play the saint without actually becoming one and that would ruin him.⁸⁸ Baba kept the boy near Him for a day and then sent him back with his father to Eluru in Andhra Pradesh. After going back to his hometown the boy resumed his studies and regularly went to school. With Baba's blessings, he began to behave like a normal school boy of his age. At present he is leading a normal life as a householder.

Although it is rare, after coming into the *Avatar's* contact unusual changes may take place in one's state of awareness. But such experiences should not be misconstrued as indicating advancement on the spiritual path, much less demonstrating one's attainment of a higher plane of consciousness. These experiences are transitory and although they have potential to aid in one's journey to Him, if not properly understood and viewed in a true spiritual perspective, they can become an obstacle in one's way.

Any unusual abilities, especially those which superficially resemble spiritual ones, can become a temptation for the one possessing them. If one succumbs, and places some intrinsic importance in the ability itself, the blessing it might have conferred instead becomes a curse. An honest simple life in Baba's love and service, without any glory about it, is best. A seeker or an aspirant wants to know more and more about God, while a lover of the God-Man longs to lose more and more of himself in His omnipresence. Unadulterated love surpasses the entire range of unusual "experiences."

On January 2, 1953, Baba left Saoner at 7:30 in the morning. While leaving town He suddenly and casually instructed that the car be stopped in front of a Hanuman temple. He walked over to a pippl tree and sat on the ground beneath it for about 10 minutes. Then He got up and proceeded with no explanation. On the way to Nagpur, Baba stopped again, this time at Angewada. A good many villagers had already gathered at Meherashram to pay their loving homage to Him. Baba looked very pleased to be in their midst and spent about half an hour with them. He reached Nagpur at 9:30 in the morning.

⁸⁸ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 29, (1953).

"I Want to Become Your Disciple"

Baba stayed in Nagpur with two or three disciples in Baristar Verma's bungalow on West High Court Road. The rest of the *mandali* were housed and fed at Gopalrao Kher's house in Dharampeth. Baba began His work with the poor and finished it by 2:30 P.M., and as there was no program of contacting *masts*, He agreed to spend the afternoon visiting the houses of His dear ones in Nagpur.

He was first driven to Dr. Deshmukh's newly built house "Meher Bhawan" in Gokulpeth (Dr. Deshmukh was teaching in Amravati and had rented a house there, but his family home was Nagpur.) There was a small cellar in this house which was designed to be used as a prayer room. Baba inaugurated it by cutting a ribbon that had been strung across its doorway. He then descended the flight of stairs and sat awhile in the cellar while the Deshmukh family performed Baba's *arti*. On this occasion He looked exceptionally radiant and happy.

In the evening at 5:00, all sped to the Seminary Hills and on the premises of the Parsi cremation ground (*Arampah*), Baba placed a wreath of lovely roses on the grave of Jal D. Kerawala who had died on October 6, 1952. Those who accompanied Baba were also told to offer a rose on it. Over the years Baba had visited many *dargahs* and *samadhis* of saints and spiritually advanced souls, but visiting the grave of one of his disciples was unprecedented. This shows how dearly Baba loved Jal Kerawala.

Later Baba remarked, "Jal lived for me and died in Me." Baba also dictated these words for a special circular that was issued after Jal's demise: "His love for me was unbounded, his faith in me complete, his obedience to my orders implicit, and his surrenderance to my will absolute."⁸⁹

The party continued its journey to Sakkardara where Raja Raghujee Bhosale welcomed Baba. Here Baba visited the *Dargah* of Tajuddin Baba, one of His five Perfect Masters and paid His respects to him. The *mandali* also offered their *namskars*. After visiting a few more houses, including that of advocate Sherlekar whose persistent efforts and pleading to

⁸⁹*Life Circular*, No. 7, issued on October 10, 1952.

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Baba at Amravati had finally resulted in Baba's agreeing to come to visit Nagpur, Baba returned to His residence. (Baba had originally planned to visit Nagpur earlier, but as the programwallas were unable to fulfill some of Baba's conditions, the visit had been canceled. Sherlekar apologized to Baba when He was in Amravati and begged Him to reconsider His decision.)

The next two days were crowded with public programs. On January 3rd, in Gita Mandir, more than a thousand children between the ages of 5 and 10 had gathered by 9:00 in the morning. On Baba's arrival they gave a demonstration of physical exercises and accorded Baba an "honor guard." Baba freely moved among the children and then took His seat. One little boy, dressed like Narad Muni, performed a *kirtan*.

Narad, a mythological figure with a tuft of hair on his head and a lute in his hand, is regarded as a singer and as a messenger of the Lord. He is believed to be able to carry the Lord's message to anyone residing in any of the three worlds. He is also the originator of *kirtan*, a way of glorifying the *Avatar* through songs that are interspersed with interesting stories and explanations on spiritual subjects.

The little boy, in spite of a large crowd, did his job so well that for a while Baba sat on the ground and intently listened to what was being sung or said; He had become a child among the children and when the *kirtan* was over, He, as the Compassionate Father, distributed *prasad* to all. As the costumed Narad received his share he whispered in Baba's ear, "I want to become your disciple." No doubt this gave Baba a hearty chuckle and we can assume, therefore, that Baba granted this simple, guileless request.

"Positive Way" of Remembering Baba

That same afternoon, after a simple lunch of rice and *dal*, Baba returned to the premises of Gita Mandir where a large number of girls and women in bright *saris* were seen eagerly awaiting Baba's august arrival. Mrs. Kain and Irene Conybeare

had specially come for the Nagpur *darshan*, from Delhi and Poona respectively. Mrs. Deshmukh read out Baba's message in which He explained the specific importance of the male and female forms that everyone has to take before realizing the sexless Self. Citing Mira's example, He exhorted the women not to lose sight of the Goal of life. At the end of the reading He blessed the whole crowd.

In the late evening, by 6:30, thousands of people from different parts of the city had assembled in Gita Mandir for Baba's *darshan*. The *Nagpur Times* published the details of this program on the front page. In the concluding paragraph the reporter wrote, "At night the Darshan . . . was open to all and over ten thousand people had gathered at the Temple at the time of reporting. For sometime the temple, otherwise calm and quiet, became a place of pilgrimage and people jostled each other to force their way nearer to the Saint"

Owing to request from the people, Baba agreed to give *darshan* again at Gita Mandir the next morning. At the beginning of this open-to-all program on January 4th, Dr. Deshmukh recited the hymns in Marathi which he had originally composed in English, following his first meeting with Baba on December 8, 1932 at Knightsbridge Hotel in London. Given below are the opening and closing lines from his first poem, "The Meeting":

My eyes beheld that Divine Revelation
Of Peace and Holiness, Love and Insight.
Like a piece of camphor, sending up a golden flame,
My heart pours its devotion at His Sacred Feet.

The poet concludes:

And so my heart takes courage to pray:
"Good or bad, take me up unto you."
And like the moon's rays flowing from the blue sky,
In peace-imparting ripples, His love Divine engulfs me.⁹⁰

About this particular program, Ramjoo, one of the *mandali*, in his articles on the Fiery Free Life, writes:

A remarkable feature of this gathering was the sudden appearance of a local *mast* known as Kuttawala

⁹⁰ *Life Circular*, No. 7, issued on October 10, 1952.

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(keeper of the dogs). Just as the function was about to start, the *mast* walked in quietly and deliberately sat inside the roped-off passage where the people were shortly to receive *prasad* from Baba Baba signaled to His men not to disturb him. After Baba had bowed down to the gathering, a special message was read on his behalf. The *mast* also appeared to be listening with rapt attention and as soon as it was finished he walked out as unobtrusively as he had entered."⁹¹

This incident could be regarded as one of the unique ways of Baba's working with the *masts*. In May, 1948 this particular *mast* was brought to Ahmednagar for a week's stay with Baba.

This was the last day of Baba's stay in Nagpur. After lunch a *qawwali* program was arranged at Verma's bungalow. Songs of love and longing—the lover's praising and challenging of the Beloved—were being sung. After one of the songs, a devotee sitting close to Baba said, "Baba, for many years I have been following you, thinking of you, but I still have thoughts of lust, greed and anger; sometimes these are overpowering."

Baba gestured, "Don't worry. Continue to remember me as this is the positive way of putting an end to all thoughts and desires good or bad." He then quoted a Hindi couplet meaning, "Where there is Rama there is no *kama* (lust-desire); where there is *kama* there is no Rama."

Baba continued, "This is a fact. So long as you do not see me as I really am, thoughts and desires, good or bad will remain. But don't feel disheartened; don't stop remembering me. I will help you." The authority and ease with which Baba conveyed these words were enough to convince and console the uneasy heart of the questioner. Remembering Baba wholeheartedly results in cleansing the heart much more than mechanically repeating His name.

Again, remembrance should not merely be equated with the repetition of His name. It entails living a life of aspiration, a life of ever increasing yearning and longing, in His love. Then His grace will light a spark within, which will dispel the

darkness of unwanted thoughts and feelings. This is, I gather, what Baba means by the "positive way."

In the evening on January 4th, a good number of Baba's devotees gathered at the railway station. They thronged around Baba's

⁹¹ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 31, (1953).

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carriage to have a last glimpse of their Beloved Master. Baba was profusely garlanded, but the fragrance of His presence surpassed all the fragrant flowers. Baba left Nagpur with the *mandali* by 6:00 for Allahabad.

MEHER BABA'S FIRST ANDHRA VISIT 1953 - PART I

Kumbha Mela at Allahabad

After Baba's Nagpur visit there was a short break in His program of giving *darshan* to the masses. But this interval was not a period of rest for Baba; in fact He utilized these days for His intensive work with the *masts*, the spiritually advanced, and those interested in spirituality, who had gathered at Allahabad. Baba left Nagpur with His *mandali* by a slow train, traveling third class.

After a tiresome journey of 36 hours, the party reached Allahabad on the morning of January 6th. This was the time of the *Kumbha Mela*, the largest religious affair in India, held every twelve years at the sacred confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna (Jumna) rivers, a mile or two away from the hallowed city of Allahabad.

Thousands of *sadhus*, monks and mendicants of different sects, following various systems to inwardly fathom the fathomless One, had gathered there. Tens of thousands of people, pilgrims from various parts of India, had journeyed to Allahabad with the intention of seeing the *sadhus* and participating in the auspicious bathing in the sacred rivers on specific days. Every twelve years the *Kumbha Mela* is held at Allahabad, and Baba had also visited the *mela* grounds in 1941 to contact the *masts* and *sadhus* who happened to be there.⁹²

Baba stayed in the city for five days, visiting incognito the different camps of the *sadhus* and the saintly souls. The outer way of contacting the saffron-robed, the clean shaven or the naked (*nangas*) was the same as was followed earlier at Hardwar—Baba quickly touched the feet of the person and rapidly moved ahead. In this city there were also some *masts*, the vehicles of the Spirit, the beloved children of the God-Man. He did not forget to bless them with His blessed contact.

⁹² See: *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, pp. 272-276.

MEHER BABA'S FIRST ANDHRA VISIT

Some of the *mandali*, including Baidul and Eruch, were sent to visit the *Mela* grounds and get information about the saintly souls who were camped at different places known as *akhadas*. This helped Baba to finish His work more quickly.

Pretense Dangerous to Spiritual Life

Later, Ramjoo Abdulla, one of the *mandali*, compiled the information on Baba's external activities during the Fiery Free Life. While narrating Baba's way of giving spiritual help to the *sadhus* assembled at the confluence of the two rivers, he wrote:

On January 9th, ten of his men (previously selected by Baba) had to file past him the first thing in the morning, whereupon he touched his forehead to the feet of each fifty times. He then led the ten to the riverside and in their presence touched his forehead to the feet of one hundred holy men selected from different camps. The ten were then told to go to different camps and each was instructed to touch his forehead to the feet of any *sadhu* he came across until he had thus bowed down to fifty *sadhus*, equal to the number of times that Baba had paid obeisance to his ten men.

During those five days Baba once remarked that in spite of Allahabad being such a big city, it contained only four persons who were actually on the Path.⁹³

Baba did not like His people to wear long robes. One of His men, Babadas, in addition to this had long hair and a beard. Whenever he used to visit Baba places, especially the villages, he was regarded as a spiritually advanced person, and people would place their heads at his feet which was harmful to him spiritually.

During a casual conversation at Allahabad, Baba brought up this subject and instructed Babadas to cut his hair and shave off his beard. He also asked him to wear trousers and a coat instead of a robe. Babadas willingly agreed to obey Baba's

⁹³ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 33 (1953).

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instructions, but this made him look like an entirely different person—a *sadhu* turned into a gentleman! When I happened to see him in Andhra it was hard for me to recognize him. To make this abrupt change easier for him and for others, Baba asked him to observe silence till the end of April. No discussion, no problems!

With His sense of humor, Baba had thus helped Babadas to learn that the inside of one's head is more important than the outside; it is not what the body dons, but what the heart yearns for that matters. Any pretense is a danger to a spiritual life. Appearances cannot deceive the Omniscient One; He sees through all disguises.

"Now Let Them Eat. Feed Them!"

After His work at the *Mela* in Allahabad, Baba took another long journey of over 900 miles by rail to Madras, a port on the southeast coast. The *mandali* and Baba traveled by third class and their carriage was often crowded with passengers getting in and out with a lot of hustle and bustle at different stations. To cheer up His disciples during this tiresome and cramped journey, Baba asked some of His *mandali* to present on short notice a humorous skit and this provided all with some comic relief.

Previously (in April, 1947) the people of Madras had come in large numbers to Meher Bhawan⁹⁴ in Saidapet for Baba's *darshan*. However, the present visit was a secluded one. Even the Baba lovers residing in the area had no idea that their Beloved Master was going to stay in the city for three nights, freely moving about in different localities.

Baba's main object in this visit was to contact some masts. *Masts* are those who drink deeply of God's love until they become intoxicated with it. The pomp and show of the world does not entice them, as their hearts are set on the hidden Treasure of treasures—God, the Divine Beloved. The mast's love for God or the God-Man's love for the mast is a matchless relationship. It is love for the sake of Love. In their self-

⁹⁴ *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, pp. 201-219.

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consuming love for the Beloved, masts practically own nothing and need nothing. Once in Meherabad in January, 1942, Baba listened to and explained the lines of an Urdu *ghazal* that portrayed the life of a mast. In these lines (translated here into English) the lover says to the Beloved:

How delightful it would be to have you and your tavern;
And therein to find myself with my distracted heart.
Our only interest is the enjoyment of your sight;
Whether it be in a church, the *Ka'aba* or a temple.
When discerned carefully everyone has been found to be
afire (with Love);
Whether it be the lamp, the lover or the moth.
We need in life, land only two cubits in measure;
Irrespective of its being in a city, a town or the wilderness.⁹⁵

On His way to Madras for reasons of His own, Baba casually remarked to the *mandali* that unless He completed certain inner work in that city, those accompanying Him should not expect food or good sleep. "I am going there for my special work, not for a picnic," He added. After getting down at a railway station, all settled themselves in a nearby lodge. Immediately after a wash and a change of clothes, without having had any breakfast, Baba set out with His men to contact masts.

Like Hyderabad, Madras seemed to be a gathering place for masts. In July, 1945, Baba visited this city and during His two-day stay He contacted as many as 19 masts. He started the present visit at nine in the morning, moving about from one part of the city to another. Baidul, the *sardar* of the *masts*, led the way, for he knew the lanes and by-lanes where the *masts* roamed and stayed.

At about 2:00 P.M., Baba arrived in a locality known as the beach area. In one of the nice houses, Baba contacted Moti Baba, a high *mast* who had not been in Madras in 1945. Baba spent some time alone with this *mast*, and when He came out He looked very radiant and pleased. Baba told His men to go inside the house, have a look at the *mast*, and then return

⁹⁵ *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, pp. 201-219.

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quickly. As all came out, Baba gestured, "I have good news for you. At the end of the meeting the *mast* lovingly said to me, 'Now let them eat. Feed them well'" The *mast's* utterance was particularly welcome as no one had had tea or snacks since very early morning. Such a corroboration, during Baba's work with the *masts*, was not infrequent.

Another remarkable contact during this stay was of a Muslim *mast* who stayed with a Hindu family. The men of God know no distinction of religion. Baba's stay in Madras was only for meeting the *masts* of high and low "intoxication." So on the morning of January 16th, Baba left this city with His small group for Vijayawada in Andhra. Perhaps Baba's inner work with the *masts* of Allahabad and Madras was a link that knitted together His external work of giving mass *darshan* in the northern and southern parts of India.

Remain Natural in His Love

The Godavari, one of India's main rivers, has its source near Nasik, from where it flows eastward and pours into the Bay of Bengal. Its estuary near the coastal area of Andhra divides a large region into two districts known as East and West Godavari. It was at this point—from Tadepalligudem to Eluru—that Baba's *darshan* programs were arranged. This was His first public visit to Andhra.

On the morning of January 16th, Baba left Madras and reached Vijayawada, a large railway junction. It was here that some Baba lovers from Hamirpur, Delhi, Ahmednagar, Amravati, Nagpur and Saoner had previously been instructed by Baba to join Him in His Andhra programs. Baba called all the lovers who had come from the different parts of India into the large waiting room of the railway station. Because of the experience at Amravati, He told them to remain close to Him during the public programs and to protect His person from the enthusiastic crowds that would try to reach Him.

During the entire tour, each one had to carry out the duty assigned him and to obey Baba implicitly. Baba also casually

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mentioned that no one should purposely begin a conversation with Babadas, who had been ordered by Baba to observe silence.

Fifty people were expected to accompany Baba on this tour, but some others from Hamirpur had come uninvited, for they could not resist the chance of being in Baba's *sahas*. A cry from their hearts led them to Him and now their eyes glowed in His love. Pointing to them Baba gestured, "Why have you come?" Eyes sparkling with unrestrained tears, some of them replied, "For your *darshan*, Baba." Baba continued, "Good. But now that you have had my *darshan* go back to Hamirpur."

After a little pause they nervously pleaded, "Baba, if you will just let us come along with you, we will not be a burden to your host in Andhra. We are willing to bear all our traveling, lodging and boarding expenses." Baba looked concerned over their request. He held an orange in His hand and began to juggle it in the air. Then He threw it in the direction of this group. Bhinda Prasad, one of the Nigams, caught it and put it in his own pocket. This seemed to please Baba and He lovingly complied with their entreaty. He even added that the Andhra Reception Committee would see to their transport and boarding expenses. A wave of Baba bliss engulfed the hearts of the Hamirpurwallas.

In the afternoon, by two o'clock, Baba and His people boarded the train. Baba's phase of moving around incognito was over and His identity was no longer concealed. So a big crowd remained around His carriage until the train whistled and left Vijayawada. At Eluru over a thousand people had assembled on the railway platform with the expectation of having a glimpse of Baba's radiant face. This delayed the train for one hour. In the carriage, Baba was in a communicative mood and enquired of many things from those who had come from various parts of India; He teased and poked fun at some of them.

In that atmosphere of divine affection, Baba conveyed to all to remain carefree and jovial during the Andhra visit. He gestured, "I have lost my limited self, but not my sense of

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humor." He also added that whatever they were to do, wherever they were to go, they should not fail to remember Him wholeheartedly. One has to be natural, but such unaffectedness has to be rooted in the *Avatar's* loving remembrance—a journey to one's Original Nature. As Francis Brabazon has written:

That is heaven which you do for your Beloved, and do well; What you do for yourself closes round you as a prison cell.⁹⁶

Darshan at Tadepalligudem

The train journey of five hours was interesting owing to the sharing of humorous stories with the One who has the perfect sense of humor. Amidst this delightful atmosphere Baba once remarked with a serious air that love without display is the antidote for anger.

By 7:30 P.M. the train reached Tadepalligudem. The railway platform was crowded with people holding garlands in their hands for their Beloved Master. Dhanapathy (Dr. Thota Dhanapathy Rao Naidu) was the chief host. He was to garland Baba first on behalf of the Andhra Reception Committee. In the hurry of attending to the last minute details, he handed over a beautiful garland to someone to hold for him. Just then the train arrived, and before Dhanapathy could reach Baba through the crowds, this person could not restrain himself from garlanding Baba, giving Dhanapathy quite a start. Perhaps this was the crowning touch to the humorous stories Baba had heard in the railway carriage.

Baba was taken in a grand procession, with a band playing in the lead as an expression of the great enthusiasm with which His Andhra lovers greeted Him. Baba was lodged in the Traveller's Bungalow, while those with Him resided in the Board High School. The different tasks were efficiently managed by other Baba lovers. N. Dharma Rao drove Baba in his car during most of the programs in Andhra. Baba once gestured that the opportunity to drive Him in any vehicle

⁹⁶ *In Dust I Sing*, p. 68.

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insured the person's safe spiritual journey through the planes to Him.

The next day Baba visited Dhanapathy, who had done the most to introduce Baba's name to the people of Andhra. When he was young he had had a dream in which Lord Harnath told him that he would meet the *Yuga Purush* (the *Avatar* of the Age). Later, in the early 40's, he was drawn to Baba after reading C. B. Purdom's book, *The Perfect Master*. He became profoundly interested in Baba, but was not convinced that Meher Baba was the *Avatar* until the late 40's. Now his heart was in rapture for he had the unique chance of welcoming the *Avatar* of the Age in his own house.

According to the well-planned programs, Baba washed the feet of seven poor people and gave each one 51 rupees as *prasad*. Baba also gave the following instructions to the three boys who received monetary help from Him: "1) Repeat my name before going to sleep; 2) Don't speak lies; 3) Don't commit any immoral action." At the end, Dhanapathy, his face exuding indescribable delight, introduced all the members of his family to Baba, who blessed them all.

While returning to His residence, Baba preferred to walk the distance. After a walk of about 50 yards, He suddenly turned into a by-lane and sat at the entrance of a filthy hut for a few minutes. This hut belonged to a Yerukula—a member of the depressed class of pig keepers. Baba warmly smiled at those who stayed in the hut. However, before the rest of the Yerukulas could gather round, Baba got up and left the hut as suddenly as He had come.

The afternoon was devoted to a *qawwali* program especially arranged at the Traveller's Bungalow for Baba's entertainment. Here, Baba families from the locality were allowed to be in their Beloved's company. It was a day of various activities: every movement of the God-Man, whether it was a visit to a slum, an act of service to the poor, or the *sahavas* with His lovers, was a silent act of dispensing His grace and compassion.

On January 19th, there was a public *darshan* program under a huge awning which could easily accommodate five

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thousand people. It was well decorated with flowers, trimmings of many trees and large coconut leaves. Before Baba's arrival, hundreds of expectant faces were seen sitting facing the dais. The local police helped the organizers to maintain order. Baba had deputed Shatrughna Kumar as the commanding officer, and so for matters of protecting Baba's person, Kumar's instructions had to be followed.

On His arrival Baba bowed down to the masses. The gist of what was read out on His behalf by one of His people is as follows: "God alone is Real and worth striving for. Each one of you is God but owing to ignorance you do not experience it. I know and experience Him. Now I have bowed down to you as God, and so you need not bow down to me, for we are all One." On this visit, Baba did not want people to bow down to Him or touch His feet.

B. Bhaskara Raju recited a Telugu song in praise of Baba: *Namo Meher Baba Avatar Namu Dev Deva*. This song was composed by his elder brother. The previous morning Baba had heard it for the first time. He remarked that He liked it very much and that it had touched His heart. In later years this composition became one of the most popular songs of Baba devotees in Andhra.

Some welcome addresses in Baba's honor were then read out over the microphone. One of them stated, "Meher Baba . . . Thou hast been transmitting tremendous power from Thy infinite inexhaustible dynamo, silently awakening love through inner contact" Such thoughts, strewn in various addresses, expressed the depth of faith the people had in Baba's authority and divine work.

After this reading, the queue for *darshan* started moving. There were separate rows for men and women. At each place of *darshan* Baba invariably started with the women, alternating them with the line of men. This *darshan* continued until midday. Later, it was resumed from 2:30 P.M. until evening.

About fifteen thousand people received *prasad* at Beloved Baba's hands. A festive spirit prevailed throughout the day. Waiting in the sun and pushing in the queue was endured with

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delight by the masses, for what they witnessed from a distance filled their hearts with love.

By the time that Baba left the awning, there were large piles of bananas and other fruit near His seat that had been given to Him by the crowd as their love-offerings. Baba gave; Baba received. A part of the message read during this tour is given below:

In the world of quiet speculation, as well as in the world of surging political activity or individual striving, men are desperately trying to remedy the many ills to which humanity is heir. All our creeds and faiths, all our parties and "isms" are so many practical solutions offered towards this purpose. But, though good in their intention and starting point, they often create confusion instead of clarity because they lose sight of the inescapable truth that all external organization is doomed to failure unless it is implemented by inner spiritual transformation of the individual.

I am therefore not concerned with parties, creeds or "isms" but only with those fundamental values, which must be wholeheartedly and universally accepted, if humanity is to be truly saved.⁹⁷

The Sevenfold Veil

Since the day Baba had arrived in Tadepalligudem, He had not been able to sleep well at night as He had a cold as well as a sore throat. In fact, throughout the Fiery *darshan* tour, Baba complained about body aches and sleeplessness. On January 20th in the morning, Baba arranged to visit the houses of His lovers who lived in the town. He began this round of visits with Dhanapathy's house. Yogi S. Bharati had especially come to Dhanapathy's house for Baba's *darshan*.

To the group of people who had assembled there Baba conveyed, mostly through gestures, the following, "To know and experience God as He is, total honesty and purity of heart is essential; hypocrisy and dishonesty keep God away....I

⁹⁷ *Fiery Free Life And Seven Other Messages*, (Nov. 1953).

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shall make the world know that God alone is real and all else is illusion . . . Ordinary 'I-ness' (ego) binds but with the experience of the 'I am God state' 'I' does not bind." At the conclusion Baba added, "I am happy to meet all of you and I give my blessings to you all."

One of the *mandali* later wrote the following about Baba's house visits in Andhra,

"After the mass *darshan* programme, Baba would visit the houses of His lovers. The overflowing love and devotion of these families is something never to be forgotten by those who were present . . . On entering a home, Baba would be welcomed by the members of the family and by all their neighbors who had gathered there Baba made no distinction as to caste or creed, high or low. He went to the high officials of the town and to the humble homes and hovels of cobblers and sweepers as lovingly and spontaneously as if He were one of them."⁹⁸

On the afternoon of the 20th, Baba was visited by His lovers in the Traveller's Bungalow for a program of musical entertainment and *bhajans*. Bhaskara Raju sang the "101 names of God" in praise of Beloved Baba in a *qawwali* style. Each name represented an attribute of the *Avatar*. When Bhaskara Raju came to the name of *Nataraj*, the primordial dancer, Baba stopped the singer and remarked, "Yes, I am really that (*Nataraj*). When I danced my first dance Creation sprang forth and came into being." He also added that the first dance He danced had bound Him eternally to Creation and that is why He had to "come" again and again.

Someone else sang some of Kabir's song to the accompaniment of a clarinet. Kabir's songs are replete with spiritual truths. After hearing a song with the refrain *tere ghunghat ke pata khola tujhe Rama milega* (open the folds of your veil and you shall find God), Baba was pleased to explain the mystical meaning of the words *ghunghat* (veil) and *pata* (folds). He was in one of those rare moods when He wanted to give a lengthy discourse and the listeners remained spellbound. At the outset Baba conveyed:

The ability to exercise a constant control over one's low desires is no mean achievement. The success in

⁹⁸ *Mass Darshan*, (1953).

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establishing a lasting sublimation of all desires is indeed a greater one. But the greatest is the burning away of all one's desires once and for all, which Divine Love alone can do.⁹⁹

Later, He explained the seven-fold veil by saying that each fold has a deep, dark color, signifying a root desire. After commenting on the experiences of the different planes, Baba concluded the discourse with these words:

Where there is light, darkness is no more. Where there is Knowledge, ignorance is absent. And, as the folds, the veil and the valley of separation are all in the domain of ignorance, a Perfect Master—who is the "Sun" of all Knowledge—can, in the twinkling of an eye, impart God-realization to anyone he chooses.

God alone is Real, and as we are permanently lodged in the Divine Beloved, we are all One.¹⁰⁰

At the end of this profound discourse, Baba remarked while looking at those gathered in the hall, "Even if you do not understand what I explained, don't worry. There are some people abroad who are eager to receive this explanation with great love." And perhaps that's why this entire message was included in *God Speaks* which was published two years later in the U.S.A.

Young Man with Two Cans of Gasoline

On the morning of January 21st, Baba left Tadepalligudem for Eluru. During the journey He gave *darshan* at Pentapadu and Pippara. At Pentapadu hundreds of people came for Baba's *darshan*. Here a very strong-looking young boy persisted in touching Baba's feet, even though this was against His instructions. The *mandali* tried to restrain the boy, but he would not listen. Baba even offered the boy *prasad*, but he would not take it.

So Baba signalled to Pukar to take the boy away. Pukar grabbed him in his arms, and despite the boy's vehement

⁹⁹ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 8 (1954).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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struggle, he was able to finally calm him down, only to have the boy break out crying loudly. Baba then gestured to Pukar to release the boy, who then fell at Baba's feet with great emotion. The Beloved thus yielded to the wish of His lover. The boy got what he wanted, but failed to have what the *Avatar* wanted him to receive which would have been much more beneficial to him spiritually!

On that night, Baba stayed in the Panchayat's Office while His people were lodged in a nearby building. In the early hours of the morning of January 22nd, Baba called some of His lovers from Hamirpur and admonished them for staying up late into the night singing *bhajans*. During *darshan* programs, Baba expected His people to take good care of their health, without, of course, pampering themselves. One of the instructions was to go to bed early. So although their singing of *bhajans* was a good thing, it was being done at the wrong time!

In a short address read in honor of Baba on behalf of the people of Pippara, it was stated: "In this age of (impending) atomic destruction, your message of Love is the only remedy for universal peace." Baba smiled as the reader looked at Him and conveyed, "This is the simplest address I have received. I thank you and bless you."

From His alphabet board Baba also dictated the following message: "I feel very happy to be amongst you all today. My message since eternity has been of love. God alone is real, and to know Him, we must love Him. God resides in us all equally; He needs our silent love within. We can also love Him by loving our fellow men. If we love God honestly, all our doubts and worries vanish. I give you my blessings so that through love you can see me in everyone and everything" ¹⁰¹

At Nidadavole, after the public programs, Baba visited two houses of His dear ones and then proceeded to Kovvur. On this trip, the *mandali's* bus followed Baba's car. The bus, however, ran out of gas and became stranded. All got down and waited to see what those in charge of the transportation could arrange. There was no nearby town and the prospects of coming up with any gas in the immediate future seemed almost nonexistent.

¹⁰¹ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 12 (1954).

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After only a short wait, the driver of the bus noticed a young man on a bicycle carrying two cans of gasoline. There was a conversation with him in Telugu, the local language, and the young man voluntarily offered to share the gas. His only condition was that he be given a ride in the bus to Kovvur and that his bicycle be carried on top. All wondered why he had been carrying two cans of gas on his bicycle to begin with, a most unusual happening, but when Baba wants to help He makes anything possible.

Baba reached Kovvur in the afternoon. K. Krishna Rao had made good arrangements for the *darshan* program. From Kovvur, the *mandali* were transported in a special launch across the Godavari river. Here the river is about two miles wide and the ride across was a welcome change from the buses and trains they had been riding on and was enjoyed by all. Baba, however, wished to continue His journey by car and drove on to Rajahmundry.

On the way the car crossed the great dam of the Godavari at Dowlesharam just as the sun was about to sink below the horizon. Baba gestured for the car to stop, got out, and facing West, dipped His hands and feet into the river. The dipping of the *Avatar's* hands in a river is regarded as a rare and significant event. Earlier, in 1938, when Baba was at Jabalpur He dipped His hands in the river Narbada at Bedheghat. Baba reached Rajahmundry a little after sunset.

Aura and the Halo

On January 23rd, Baba's *darshan* was arranged in the Navabharat Gurukul (residential school). People from the surrounding area came for this blessed occasion. Here I intend to give an account related by a Baba lover who had his first glimpse of Baba at Rajahmundry. I think this story will represent many similar stories that have a similar result—the heart's awakening to Baba's Godhood.

Rentala Suryanarayan Murthy from Shrirangapatnam had especially visited Gurukul for Meher Baba's *darshan*. He

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received a banana as *prasad* from Baba. He was overwhelmed with Baba's presence. He felt that God's grace had touched his heart and he shed tears of joy uncontrollably. He stood at a distance and just stared at Baba. At that moment he suddenly remembered a conversation he had with his father some years before.

His father was a devout worshipper of the Spiritual Sun (*Aditya Hrudaya*). He had told his son that if he ever happened to meet a person with a visible radiant halo, he could safely regard that person as the Divine Incarnation. As Murthy now stared intently at Baba, he clearly saw a bright halo around Baba's face. This convinced him that Meher Baba was the divine personality that his father had indirectly hinted about.

In January 1952, his father died. Being a saintly scholar, he had a sizable collection of religious books. Two weeks after Baba's *darshan*, Murthy was leafing through the different books in his house at Shrirangapatnam, and to his great surprise he found in one of the books a beautiful picture of Meher Baba taken about 1930, along with some printed pages of His sayings. These were from the monthly "Meher Message" published between 1929 and 1931.

He also remembered that his father had once made a reference to a Great One in Maharashtra who was observing silence. Now he knew that although his father did not disclose His name, he had meant Meher Baba. Murthy was deeply moved with this entire episode and feeling ecstatic, ran to his mother to tell her all about it. This little incident was enough to awaken the Murthy family to Baba's love.

To clarify the effulgence that Murthy and a few other Baba lovers have seen around Baba's face, I wish to quote below some parts from Meher Baba's discourse entitled "Aura and the Halo":

. . . Few people know that an aura and a halo are quite different in their respective natures, despite their close interconnection. No man can ever possess both aura and halo completely developed at one and the same time . . . An aura is the reflection of the emotions of an individual

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mind, just as any physical thing possesses its shadow on the physical plane. The halo begins to appear when the aura begins to disappear

An aura, therefore, is the mental reflection of the aggregate impressions of thoughts and actions gathered by and stored in an individual mind. As long as the impressions are there an aura is always there, as an envelope of very fine "atmosphere" comprised of seven colours which remain more or less prominent according to the nature of each individual's impressions

The halo begins to develop and an aura begins to disappear only after an individual starts advancing on the Path to God-realisation. When the aura begins to get more and more faint, the halo commences to shine more and more, getting brighter in proportion to the progress of the individual's consciousness on the Path

In the seventh plane of Reality, the God-realised One is, once and for all, entirely free from each and every impression because the very storehouse of impressions itself, the individual mind, is then annihilated and there remains neither aura nor halo When One who is God-realised is able to return with his God-consciousness simultaneously to all the planes of illusion as a Perfect Master or *Sadguru*, his halo is the most bright It is out of the question for anyone, other than those who have attained the consciousness of the sixth plane, to behold the divine effulgence of the Master's halo

If, due to love for his Master, a man happens to see what appears to him as the halo of the Master, it is not actually the halo but a part of his own aura as is temporarily reflected by the effulgence of the halo of an illumined one or of a Perfect Master.¹⁰²

During this morning *darshan* at Rajahmundry, Baba's short message to the public was: "To know God you have to be 100% honest; hypocrisy drives God away. God alone is worth living for and dying for." B. Bhaskara Raju, who had accompanied the Baba party up to Rajahmundry, had to leave for his hometown to resume his job in school. When he was about to

¹⁰² For details see: *In Quest of Truth*, pp. 292-295.

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go, Baba gestured, "I know you love me; now spread my Name and let people (of Andhra) love me."

This casual remark from Baba later helped him to accomplish this work through the performances of a ballad story (*Burra-katha*) which presented Avatar Meher Baba's life and disseminated His message of Love to thousands of people in Andhra Pradesh.

Baba with His *mandali* left Rajahmundry for Eluru by an afternoon train. Baba was in a happy and humorous mood. He teased some of His people and very playfully distributed *prasad* to those who were with Him in His special carriage. As the train stopped at different stations, Baba was also pleased to give *darshan* to the crowds assembled on the railway platforms.

Game of Marbles

By nightfall, the train reached Eluru. As Baba got down from His carriage, He was profusely garlanded by the members of the reception committee. He was then driven straight to Katta Subba Rao's garden that included a small, nice cottage carefully arranged for Baba's use. In the premises of the garden, large pandals had been erected for lodging those who had accompanied Baba. Y. Ranga Rao, secretary of the Eluru Meher Mandali, was the chief organizer of the programs during Baba's stay in Eluru.

Baba's food was served to Him. The first thing He did when He took his seat was to pick out some pieces of red chillies from the pot of *dal*. Their presence was contrary to the instructions given earlier to Y. Ranga Rao about Baba's food, so Baba sent for Ranga Rao who deeply apologized for the mistake. Baba forgave him, but after his departure, He ate practically nothing that night.

On the morning of January 24th, I reached Eluru. What a joy it was for me to join those who were already with Baba—the source of Bliss. In fact, I had wanted to come earlier, but as

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I had already taken two weeks leave in November to be at Meherabad, I had hesitated to apply for more. However, with Baba's grace, the principal of my institution allowed me to take another week off from school.

After some loving embraces and a delicious breakfast, I rushed to Baba's cottage for His *darshan*. Most of the people accompanying Baba were already there, and Baba was having an informal chat with some of His lovers. Then He brought to the notice of all that as the number of Baba lovers coming from the out-stations had considerably increased, none of us should complain or grumble about any sort of inconvenience.

Baba then came out and walked to the other end of the garden as if inspecting the lodging and dining arrangements. He expressed His satisfaction with the details that had been taken care of by His lovers of Eluru. During this stroll He sat under a tree and Gadekar performed Baba's *arti*. On His return, He stopped at the awning erected in front of His room and washed the feet of seven poor people and offered fifty-one rupees to each.

The next program of the morning had to be canceled for want of adequate transport for the whole group. So instead, Baba wanted to have some light entertainment. A lot of people had by now gathered in the compound. Perhaps they were eager to hear some words of profound advice from the *Avatar*, but He most unexpectedly wanted to play marbles.

The game started and there were many people standing around watching. The Indian way of playing marbles is to press a finger against a marble, aim at another marble, and then shoot at it. If one misses the target, then the next one gets a chance. When it was my turn, instead of putting my thumb next to the marble, I pushed it a little ahead to get closer to the target. At that time Baba, who was standing quite far away, noticed this infraction and immediately gestured for me to move my thumb back. I corrected my mistake, but felt very sorry and became nervous too. Needless to say, I miserably missed the mark.

However, this casual incident sometimes comes back to me and it vividly reminds me that nothing is hidden from the

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All-knowing eyes of the *Avatar*. Sometimes His gaze would fall on one with a pool of compassion, at another time with a flame of admonition, all because of His unbounded Love. When it was Baba's turn, He hit seven shots in succession and that ended the game.

When everyone was seated under the awning, Baba remarked, "After many years I have played marbles. In fact, since eternity I have been playing marbles with the universe and have never missed the mark. I am the smallest of the small and the greatest of the great simultaneously." He also added, "One whose heart is totally pure will know that I am in everyone. I have been repeatedly saying that we must be honest. The least hypocrisy drives away the Infinite that is Baba. My blessings for honesty in loving God."

By this time quite a crowd had gathered at the closed gate of the garden, clamoring for Baba's *darshan*. He went to the gate and blessed all those that were there. They were also told about the mass *darshan* program which had been arranged for that afternoon.

Baba Never Ignores Longing

At the invitation of Y. Ranga Rao, some families from far off places like Kharagpur, Tatanagar, Santragachi, Bilaspur and Calcutta had visited Eluru especially for Baba's *darshan*. They felt very happy in the morning at the opportunity of being in Baba's presence. However, during the crowded programs, none of them had a chance to garland Baba or to be introduced to Him. At 11:00 A.M. Baba went inside His room and ordered that all, including even the host, should leave the garden.

The families that had traveled overnight to meet the *Avatar* in person felt greatly disheartened. Some of them had spent hours in the early morning weaving garlands for Baba. The question was, should they take these back or leave them there? They thought that their love and devotion had not been

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responded to by their Master. At last they decided to offer their garlands to the big portraits of Baba's Masters—Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj and Babajan—which were displayed on the verandah of the cottage.

One by one, all left the garden, except A.V. Raghavulu from Calcutta who waited behind a mango tree. Eruch, who had come on the verandah for some work, noticed a person standing by a tree and silently gestured for him to leave. Raghavulu, however, beckoned for Eruch to come to him. Eruch went over and asked him what the matter was.

Raghavulu briefly related to him how some families had journeyed hundreds of miles with the sole purpose of meeting Baba, and that they felt deeply disappointed. Eruch agreed to convey their intention to Baba and also asked him to gather his group near the gate, in case Baba was pleased to call them.

Raghavulu enthusiastically rushed outside. When Eruch conveyed the group's request to Baba, He not only complied with it but, in response to their call of love, also left His room and came out on the verandah to receive them. He sent Kumar to call them in. As these men, women and children walked quickly to Baba's cottage, they had nothing in their hands, only Baba's Love in their hearts. As they approached Baba the thought of garlanding Him again occurred to them. They looked at each other and then decided to collect the garlands which they had offered to Baba's Masters. Baba, with a smile, allowed them to place these around His neck, accepting this as a gesture of their love.

Then Baba went into His room where each one was introduced to Him. Everyone had His divine embrace. He also gave a personal message to each to love Him. At the end Baba, with a beaming smile, picked up a bunch of bananas and gave it to one of them as *prasad*, to be shared with the whole group. Hearts filled with ecstasy and eyes filled with tears of joy, they left the room. The apparent delay in meeting these families was a preparation for the mature moment when they would be able to receive more of His love. The silent call of honest longing is never ignored but warmly responded to by Baba who is Love Itself.

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God as Ananda

Darshan for the public was arranged at the C. R. Reddy College grounds. Under a large, colorful awning there was a nicely decorated, raised platform for Baba and the *mandali*. Posters reading "Welcome to Avatar Meher Baba" were tied to the poles. Before 3:00 P.M. thousands of people had assembled. Some of them were holding garlands or bananas in their hands as their offerings of love and reverence for their Beloved *Avatar*. The two gangways, one for the men and one for the women, were already filled with devotees.

Baba arrived at the appointed time. Supporting Himself on the forearm of one of His disciples, He made His way to His seat. By raising one of His hands He accepted the thundering ovation from the crowd. Looking with great compassion at the mass of people, He made a gesture for them to sit down.

Baba Himself very respectfully bowed down to all, took His seat and conveyed the following, "I feel very happy to be among you all; consider me to be one of you. I am the poorest of the poor and the richest of the rich. Everyone of you has within you the source of Infinite Power, Knowledge, Bliss and Peace. And if in spite of the Infinite Power within you, you feel helpless, and if in spite of the Infinite Bliss within, you feel miserable, it is because of ignorance. The only way to remove this ignorance is to love God. If you love God sincerely, honestly and intensely you will find Him within you. I give you my blessings for this love."

On behalf of the Eluru Bar Association a welcome address was presented to Baba. Then one of Meher Baba's messages especially prepared for the Fiery Free Life with the caption, "God as Bliss," was read over the microphone. A part is given below:

The endless and fathomless Ocean of Bliss is within everyone. There is no individual . . . who is entirely cut off from God as the Ocean of Bliss. Every type of pleasure, which he ever has, is ultimately a partial and illusory reflection of God as *Ananda*. But pleasure, which is sought and experienced in ignorance, ultimately binds

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the soul to an endless continuation of the false life of the ego and leaves the soul exposed to the many sufferings of the ego-life.

The pleasures of the illusory world are comparable to the many rivers of mirage that apparently pour themselves into the ocean. Divine Bliss is ever fresh, everlasting, continuous, and is endlessly experienced as self-sustained and Infinite Joy of God.

Be united with your real Beloved, who is God as *Ananda* or Bliss!

After the reading in Telugu of Baba's message, people were allowed to have His *darshan* (without touching His feet). As they passed by Him in line, He gave each one *prasad*: men, women and children. Baba gave *darshan* at Eluru successively for three days, but the program on the 24th of January was perhaps the largest.

Avatar and the Five Sadgurus

On January 25th, at 7:00 in the morning, all of us gathered in Baba's cottage. Baba told us that He had had no sleep the night before. However, He showed great interest and concern about our sleep. Some said that they had slept like logs and this pleased Baba. He also teased some of the *mandali* about their loud snoring. In the course of this informal talk, Baba expressed His intention of visiting some poor people's huts. He also clarified, "I do not wish to visit them to put on a show of service. I am in all; I am the Goal of all. I am in the poor and I also love the poor."

One of us remarked that some people of Andhra were "madly" in love with Baba. Hearing this, Baba with a smile referred to a line in Urdu from Jigar's *ghazal* meaning, "Now, just the mention of the word love is enough to frighten me!"¹⁰³ Jigar was one of Baba's favorite poets. Baba added, "Jigar was not a realized soul. However, through the gift of poetic imagination he sometimes conveyed the best of spiritual thoughts in his *ghazals*." About the spiritual truths explained

¹⁰³ *Ab to name ishkase hi sakhta ghabrata hai dil.*

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in the works of Hafiz, Baba remarked, "Hafiz was not only a matchless poet, but he was also a God-realized person."

With reference to the remark mentioned above, Baba continued, "As for me, love cannot give me a fright because I am Love, the Lord of Love." Yet, with a twinkle in His eyes, He gestured, "However, there may come a time when the Beloved is afraid of His lovers!"

Baba changed the topic by putting a general question to all who were crowded into the room. First He stated, "I am the *Avatar*" and then gestured, "But I want you to tell me, 'How do you know that I am the *Avatar*?'" Gaya Prasad recited some *chaupais* (verses) from the *Tulsi-Ramayana*.¹⁰⁴ He said that the profound meaning, conveyed through these verses in praise of Rama, is made flesh in Baba's life. "And this convinced me that Meher Baba is the same One as Rama, the *Avatar*," he concluded. Baba remarked, "But it is also said that quite a lot of people in this *yuga* (age) will declare themselves as the *Avatar*. So, how do you know that I am the Real One and not a fake?"

At this point someone interjected that none had declared himself to be the *Avatar* as candidly and authoritatively as had Baba, and added, "This is one of the reasons why we take you as the *Avatar*." Baba gestured, "How do you ascertain that all I say is from my personal experience of being the Ancient One? Can anyone not imitate the ways and words of the earlier *Avatars* by studying their lives?"

One of Baba's devotees related some of his incredible experiences (he used the word "miraculous") and commented, "These definitely testify to your being the *Avatar*." Baba replied, "Deep faith and love for God can also give such experiences." Hearing this, Pukar tried to present his views from a different angle. He said, "Baba, I accepted You as the *Sadguru* but it was difficult for me to accept You as the *Avatar*. After a lot of confusion, I put a question to myself, 'Do I really take Baba as my *Sadguru*?' and the immediate reply was 'Yes.' And I thought that this honest response offered me a clue to my problem. For, I again said to myself, '*Sadguru* is Infinite Knowledge, and if one who has Infinite Knowledge

¹⁰⁴ Tulsidas (1532-1623 A.D.) was a great saint and lover of Rama. His great work *Rama-Charit-Manas (Tulsi-Ramayana)* is widely and daily read with great devotion in thousands of homes, villages and towns in north India.

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asserts Himself to be the *Avatar*, it must be so.' And that was that."

Baba seemed to enjoy the free conversation that was going on. He concluded, "Whatever you all may say, I don't feel that you really *know* of my being the *Avatar*. To *know* me as I am, you have to become what I am. As for myself, I *know* I am the *Avatar*. In 1921, during my last stay of six months at Sakori with Maharaj, one day when only two of us were in a hut, Maharaj folded his hands to me and said 'Merwan, You are the *Avatar*.'" Baba continued, "Although the *Avatar* and God are one, I want you to love me and obey me. Hafiz says: 'Only hold on to His (the Perfect Master's) *damaan* and leave everything else.'"

To make this point clearer, Baba continued, "Let us take an example of a moving railway train which has an engine with some carriages attached to it. Suppose that in one carriage there is gold, in another silver, in the rest different things including junk. But as long as a carriage maintains its connection with the engine, it will reach the destination, irrespective of what it contains. So while loving me, don't bother about thoughts—good or bad, best or worst—for they are the products of the illusory mind. The only thing that matters is to hold on to My *damaan*."

"It is beyond doubt that whenever the *Avatar* assumes a human form, He is the same Ancient One. His avatara¹⁰⁵ among the world is due to the five *Sadgurus*; they sustain Him. Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Hazarat Babajan, Tajuddin Baba and Narayan Maharaj are my five *Sadgurus*. Sai Baba was of a very very rare type, even among the *Sadgurus*. Maharaj was perfection personified. Babajan was *Shahanshah*—the emperor among the *Sadgurus*."

Sai Baba made me *assert* this time what I am.

Babajan made *me feel* what I am.

Upasni Maharaj made me *know* what I am.

What I am, I am.

There were big portraits of these three Masters on the verandah. Baba gestured, "Today I will bow down to these

¹⁰⁵ *Avatara* —Sanskrit, Lit., coming down, descent.

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three Perfect Masters." He got up and very reverentially paid His homage to each. Indeed, these were the most precious and wonderful moments for those who were present.

Baba returned to His seat and gestured to all to sit down. He quoted a line from Hafiz: "*Fiaq-o-wast che khahi reza-e-doost.*" ("O Hafiz, separation and Union are none of your business. Seek only to resign yourself to the Will of the Beloved.") Baba added, "Even God is pleased with those who obey me implicitly. To obey me, regarding me as the *Avatar*, is one thing, but those who obey me without any expectation is entirely another thing. It is much greater than the former. And those who obey me implicitly and wholeheartedly deserve my praise."

During the above discussion and the crowning event of Baba's bowing down to His Masters, I was sitting or standing quietly, witnessing the whole scene. To treasure such opportunities of being with the *Avatar*, I was noting down a word here or a phrase there from the different languages in which the conversation was going on.

From what Baba conveyed that morning, I gathered that to accept Meher Baba as the *Avatar* is His gift to His lovers, and to *know* Him as the *Avatar* is His final gift of Grace. So one's acceptance of Meher Baba as the *Avatar* is beyond all explanations, words and concepts; either you accept or you don't. And one's holding on to His *damaan*, one-pointedly, is the link that ensures one's safe journeying with Him and to Him—the Way and the Goal.

Laugh at Illusion, Weep for God

It was about 9 o'clock when Baba came out on the verandah of His room. By this time a number of visitors (*darshanites* if one may call them that) had gathered near the gate of the garden. Baba took His seat on a chair and asked the organizers to open the gates of the garden. With this sign of welcome, people rushed inside to get a seat under the awning,

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closer to Baba's person. The eyes of all were fixed on Baba. On such occasions, when meeting people, Baba generally looked more radiant. Songs in Hindi and Telugu were sung in praise of Baba. A reading of *Meher Chalisa* by Keshav Nigam and singing by Bhaskar Raju of *Namo Meher Baba* surcharged the atmosphere with Baba's love.

At the close of the *bhajans* and poem reading, Baba was pleased to convey mostly through gestures the following discourse on Love for God:

God is to be loved and not studied; God is to be loved and not argued about. God is beyond intellect; intellect cannot reach Him or know Him. At the most, intellect may direct one to the threshold of God, the Beloved. But the heart, with its pure love, leads one directly to the Beloved, God.

Anyone in spite of his being most poor and illiterate can find God within his own heart through love. Love demands no riches, no learning, no ceremonies. Love God as the Real Beloved. The poorest or the most illiterate person has an equal right and an equal chance as that of the richest or most intelligent person to know God through love.

God can be loved in everyday life. If you attend to each daily activity with a spirit of detachment, leaving the results entirely to God, you are really loving Him. God can be loved, and God can be seen. Anyone can love God; anyone can see Him. I am in all; I give my Love to all.

After this discourse, Baba washed the feet of one poor and illiterate person. This was a symbolic gesture of the *Avatar* assuring the poor and illiterate of His blessings. Poverty and illiteracy cannot rob anyone of the treasure of love.

After lunch, at about 2 o'clock, we gathered near Baba's room. The buses and cars were ready to take us to the *darshan* grounds. Baba also came out and sat with us. He looked resplendent. Among the informal inquiries, in reply to someone's question, Baba gestured, "Laugh at illusion and inwardly weep for God. When your longing to see Him becomes intense

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(unlimited) He lets you see Him, and later Divine Grace lets you become one with Him."

At Baba's signal we hurried to the buses and we soon reached the place where *darshan* had been arranged. The crowd scene was the same as the day before: smiling faces, expectant eyes, hands holding garlands or fruit. Baba bowed down to the masses and His message in English on Religion and Politics was read out along with its translation in Telugu.

Darshan began and each one received *prasad* from the blessed hand of the *Avatar*. The lines of men and women waiting to come to Baba seemed unending. People were moving quickly, but as the *Avatar's* eyes are not veiled by time, Baba saw everyone as a whole and His contact with each one was unique and complete. At about sunset, Baba made a signal to the *mandali* that He would soon leave for His residence and He did. Though tired, He looked both joyous and sad, and divine compassion lit His face.

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1953 - PART II

A Morning Meeting with Baba

Two days of our stay at Eluru were over. However, the banquet of the *Avatar's* physical presence was to continue in the city for three days more. On January 26th we woke up early; most of us had a hot-water bath. We were asked to be in Baba's cottage a little after sunrise. After a delicious south Indian breakfast, everyone hurried over. As there were over fifty of us, it was difficult to accommodate ourselves in the meeting room. We cramped together while the Spaceless One, Meher Baba, with a pleasant smile, silently sat in a corner awaiting all to come in.

Before any special meeting, Baba would often enquire if all who were expected had come or not. He began, "For me, last night was one of the worst nights. In fact, I haven't slept well for the past three nights, but I don't want you to feel concerned about it. Your concern should be to observe whatever instructions I have given you."

Baba was always very particular, even about the casual instructions that He might have given. They were not only commands of the God-Man, they were also the power lines for His work. It has been noticed that obedience to Baba's orders, whether big or small, has helped Him in His inner work, whereas the slightest disobedience caused Him Suffering—an impedance in the power lines.

Baba continued, "Now, I am going to tell you something important. Listen carefully, but don't ask me any questions."

"The *lila* of my crucifixion and humiliation in Andhra has not yet come to pass even one percent, but in April it will come with a vengeance. Today, in the early hours of the morning, I felt that by the end of April there is a 99.5% chance that I will drop my body. If the remaining 0.5% possibility of retaining my

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body comes off, then it will not be dropped for many years to come.

"If possible, I want every one of you to abstain completely from any lustful action until the end of April, 1953." With a look of assurance He then gestured, "Try, I will help you."

He continued, "Tomorrow (January 27th) night all of you should stay awake—don't sleep. You may sing *bhajans*, repeat the divine names of God, talk on spiritual subjects or keep quiet, but don't gossip." However, in the later part of the day, Baba permitted us to share among ourselves humorous stories and good jokes. He continued, "Those who sleep will be the losers. On the morning of January 28th, when I will offer the Prayer of Repentance, you should all take part in it. At its conclusion, I will bow down to all the participants."

When Baba concluded His "say," Dr. Deshmukh asked whether Baba would like to see the film that had been taken during Baba's recent visit to Amravati in December, 1952. Baba did not seem to be in a mood for it, and He gestured, "I honestly tell you that Deshmukh is one of my dearest ones, but sometimes when he gets a fixed idea he exasperates me with it." Then looking at Deshmukh, Baba gave a signal of approval, but He also made it clear through His loving gestures that during the present *darshan* tour Deshmukh was not to even utter the words "film" or "projector" in Baba's presence.

Family Interviews, House Visits, Darshan

After His lunch, Baba spent some time meeting with different families from Andhra. During the interviews He expressed concern over certain matters and at times He teased or joked with some people. In short, He made everyone feel His presence on each one's level. In general, He asked them to love Him more and more by remembering Him wholeheartedly. He also assured them of His help if they longed for it. To one of His dear ones He conveyed, "Obedience to my orders has its own importance. Even God is jealous of those who implicitly

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obey Baba with love and without expecting anything in return!"

One of His lovers, Dr. C. Kondala Rao, who later wrote an account of his meeting with Baba, stated:

"I did not take spiritual life or God seriously. I was a happy-go-lucky person. I was not very keen to see Meher Baba but this meeting came as a matter of course. When I was ushered into Baba's presence, He looked at me and gestured, 'What do you want?' I felt bewildered for I did not expect such a question. But before I could think, Baba's compassionate look made me forget my age and my position as the head of the family.

"With tears of repentance trickling from my eyes, I cried out loudly, 'Redeem me, Baba; Baba, pray redeem me.' This was a spontaneous cry from my heart and Baba's soft touch transported me into a region of inner bliss. From that moment I have felt that the process of redemption is continuously at work. And this has helped me to keep Beloved Baba as my sole companion in life."

Baba had started visiting the houses of local Baba lovers on the 25th of January. On January 26th, He visited K. Subramanya Sastri's house where the meetings of the Meher Center of Eluru were regularly held. Baba lovingly sat on a chair which previously had only held His framed picture. He pointed to one of the portraits which was displayed on the wall and asked who had painted it.

On being told that Y. Ranga Rao was the artist and that he had finished it on the eve of Eruch and Pendu's visit to Eluru in June, 1952, Baba got up and stood before the portrait. This immediate response from Baba seemed to link the two disciples' visit to the Master's august presence. Baba gestured for His arti to be sung, and the atmosphere became charged with a warm feeling of pure love.

Y. Ranga Rao was one of the chief organizers of Meher Baba's programs in Andhra. Baba wished to visit his house. Ranga Rao, however, instead proposed that Baba visit the house of another Baba lover and that he would gladly forego his chance. This answer did not please Baba. He brought out to those who were standing around Him the salient difference

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between His visiting anyone's house at the request of someone, and His wanting to visit a certain person or residence on His own. At the end He made a gesture that there was a world of difference between these types of visits.

Ranga Rao realized his blunder. With tearful eyes he prostrated before the *Avatar* begging His pardon. Baba gestured "forgiven," and we proceeded to Ranga Rao's house. The God-Man's offer should never be declined; it is a paramount spiritual need of that moment expressed through the Universal Mind.

During this short visit Baba told Ranga Rao's wife that her husband would remain in His service, and, while shouldering the family duties and responsibilities, she would also be serving Baba. This special visit helped Ranga Rao to be one-pointed in his love for Baba until he breathed his last.

In the morning on His way to the *darshan* program at Mandapalle, Baba visited T.V.S. Prasad's house. During the *darshan* hour, Prasad watched Baba constantly moving His fingers. He became curious about the swift movements of the fingers and later learned from Ramjoo, who was sitting on the parapet of a nearby house, that it was a visible *Avataric* expression of Baba's inner universal work.

The program of house visits was planned by the members of the reception committee. However, in His own way, Baba sometimes altered or added a few visits which, in some cases, revealed His omniscience and compassion. For example, R. Rajeshwari was seriously ill with cancer. She could not go to Baba's *darshan* either in the garden or the college grounds. One morning she wept bitterly over her misfortune of not being able to see the *Avatar* visit her city.

Although her residence was not in on the day's list, to her amazement Baba visited her house and fulfilled her earnest longing to see Him. Her relatives later remarked that it was only owing to Baba's blessings that she had a fresh lease on life for three more years—a gracious chance offered by the God-Man to live in His loving remembrance.

In Eluru, there was a boy of ten years who had become greatly drawn to Baba just from looking at His picture on

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posters. He deeply craved to see Baba on His arrival. However, by the time Baba reached Eluru, he was in bed with a high fever. His parents were not interested in Meher Baba and they knew nothing about their son's longing.

Once Baba, during His round of visits, on His own gestured to stop the car. He got down and went straight to the boy who was still sick in bed. He blessed him and the next moment left the house. The boy was in rapture and his parents, before they knew the whole story, found that their son had a picture of Baba under his pillow.

Baba's love for the sick and the poor was often manifested through such incredible occurrences. The *Avatar* in His all-comprehensive presence knows the hearts that are athirst for Him and, in His own unfathomable ways, He responds to these calls of longing.

On January 26th, Baba visited houses where the members of the reception committee resided. At the end of the day's house visits, He was driven to the city where a massive *darshan* program was arranged. The crowds that had gathered were so large that the local police were busy controlling the people. Baba was led to the stage from the rear and went to His seat as a roaring ovation from the crowd burst out at His sight. Baba paid His homage to the people by bowing down to them. Then one of the *mandali* read out a printed message from Baba.

The eager crowds then formed the seemingly endless lines of men and women that swiftly filed past Baba for his *darshan*. This kept Him busy for over two hours. Small and big bunches of bananas which people offered to Baba formed a heap which grew into a big mound as time passed by. At about 6:30 P.M., a cordon was formed with the help of the police and Baba got back into His car.

On His return to the garden premises, through His natural and graceful gestures, Baba very casually conveyed the following, "The time has come when the Ocean of Love has to flood the rivers which have gone spiritually dry. When you see me giving *darshan* and *prasad* to thousands of people, it is neither mechanical nor meaningless. These are the means by

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which my love flows to humanity." And with these gestures, Beloved Baba, the Ocean of Love, left for His room.

"I Am God in Human Form"

On January 27th, we were with Baba in the morning when he reminisced, "Babajan often used to say, 'A million holes are being drilled in my heart.' (What an incredible agony that must be!) And last night I had the same feeling. It seems that I will literally be consumed by my Fiery Free Life. In April, there is a great possibility of my dropping the body. During this month wherever I go all the resident *mandali* will be with me. In March I will reside either at Dehra Dun or Hyderabad. When I break my Silence the Ocean of Love will flood the 'rivers' which have become dry."

When we came out of the room, there were already some groups of people standing under the awning waiting for Baba's *darshan*. Baba came out and blessed the people. However, a little later He went back to the same room adjacent to the verandah. Prior to His leaving He instructed the chairman of the reception committee to summon the lovers and workers of the Eluru Meher Centre to His room. Only these people (about 20) were brought into Baba's presence and He asked the chairman to close the door. Baba had only Eruch standing by His side.

One of the participants of the meeting later narrated the details of this eventful gathering. The group saw Baba in a divine, resplendent mood. Baba stated, "I say with my divine authority that I am God." This revelation from the *Avatar* filled the hearts of those in the room with ecstasy and awe. A little later, after some casual conversation, Baba, His face aglow with a divine radiance, repeated the same statement and added, "I am God in human form. I alone am Real; all else is Illusion. Love me from the depths of your hearts."

No wonder that those who were in the room felt themselves immensely blessed by the intimacy of the love released by the God-Man. Each one felt that everything in the room was

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vibrant with the *Avatar's* Divinity. With tears of joy sparkling in their eyes, all came out of the room. After this short and memorable meeting, Baba left for Jangareddigudem in compliance with the request of those who longed for His *darshan* there.

During our stay at Eluru, we visited some Baba lovers for lunch, of course with Baba's sanction. One day someone came to Baba and entreated Him to come with His people for food at his house. Baba did not express His willingness to go. The person persisted with his request, and so Baba proposed, "If I alone visit your residence it will be tantamount to all the *mandali* also taking food, and so they need not and will not come. Now I give you a choice between my coming and my people coming for lunch!"

The person looked bewildered. On the spur of the moment he came under the veil of quantity and opted for Baba's people, for he was rich and had already made preparations to feed a large gathering. Baba with a smile gestured, "Granted." Later, the person may have realized that he had missed an extremely rare chance that comes only after lifetimes. He chose the many rather than the One who represents all—Baba, the Ocean-become-drop.

On January 27th, after we returned from lunch, we were again in Baba's company. In His compassion, Baba was giving us more and more opportunity of being in His *sahas*. He also granted personal interviews to His lovers from north India who had joined Baba on this tour. These lovers were to leave Eluru before Baba's departure. Some of them felt very sad with the thought of leaving Baba. To them He comforted thus, "If you have love for me, distance or being away from my physical presence doesn't matter. I am in you and the Universal Mind can give anything, to anyone, at any time. Just follow these instructions: Love me; don't deceive; don't commit misdeeds. I will be with you."

Baba also reminded all to stay awake that night and gestured, "Beware, don't sleep." This graceful gesture at times reminds me of the words of Jesus, "Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

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Letter of Confession to Baba

An interesting incident, with its background concerning a confessional letter from Pukar, is worth narrating here. During Baba's first visit to Hamirpur in November, 1952, Pukar was observing Baba's daily activities very closely. By the time the tour ended He was deeply touched by Baba's loving response to the unpretentious devotion of the simple-hearted villagers. Pukar, in spite of his political and critical outlook, could not find a single thing about Baba that deserved an adverse comment. To him, Baba's life appeared to be a divine dispensation of His unconditional love for humanity.

So, in all honesty, Pukar wanted to reaffirm his intention of dedicating his life in Baba's cause. As a sequel to this, he decided to write a letter of confession to Baba and wanted to give it personally to Him during Baba's ensuing visit to Andhra. On January 17th, Baba arrived at Vijayawada from Madras and had a short rest in a waiting room at the railway station. It was here that Baba saw His lovers who had arrived from north India to join Him on His first Andhra *darshan* tour.

When Pukar met Baba, he made a quick reference to the contents of his personal letter and tried to give it to Him. Baba lovingly looked at him and gestured, "What's the hurry? Can't you see how busy I am now? Keep the letter with you and read it to me when I am at leisure." A few other Baba lovers had also written letters to Baba concerning their personal problems. Baba asked them to hand over their sealed envelopes to Pukar and He instructed Pukar to remind Him about them during His spare time.

From January 18th to the 27th, the Andhra *darshan* programs were colossal. And in between these there were house visits and short meetings between Baba and His lovers. This kept Baba extremely busy. Pukar was very watchful for the right time to read out his letter to Baba. At last, one day when Baba was having His lunch, Pukar, with all the letters in his hand, stepped into Baba's room. Baba at once knew Pukar's intention and gestured, "Is this the time to listen to

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correspondence? Don't you want me to have some quiet, at least when I am taking my meal of rice and *dal*?" Pukar felt ashamed and he went away.

Later, on January 27th, Pukar and the other Baba lovers from Hamirpur had an opportunity for a personal interview with Baba. At that time Pukar mentioned that in spite of Baba's instruction, he was unable to find the right moment to read the letters out to Baba. He added that he was leaving for Hamirpur the next day. Hearing this, Baba looked amused and gestured, "Tell me, what do you take me to be?" And Pukar's immediate reply was, "God."

Baba then added, "God *knows* everything, *everything*." He continued, "And if your BABA is what He says He is and what you take Him to be, then no letter of confession, or the reading of letters filled with personal problems is necessary, and if your Baba is the one who needs letters to be read aloud to Him for the forgiving or for giving help in solving problems, then he is not worthy of being BABA (God)!" With His matchless smile, Baba then concluded, "In any case reading the letters that are with you is not necessary. It is better that you throw them in a river when you go back to Hamirpur!"

Pukar looked at Baba's eyes—the pools of compassion that convinced him of Baba's status as the Redeemer. In a hoarse voice full of feeling Pukar replied, "Baba, you are perfectly right; I should have realized this long before." After reverentially bowing down to Baba, Pukar left the room. On reaching Hamirpur one of the first things he did was to throw all those letters in the current of the river Betwa.

Prayers to Meher Baba, the God-Man, are heard and responded to by Him as soon as they are sincerely offered. Rumi has expressed this relationship in a very profound way: "With your every cry of *Allah* the immediate response is 'Here am I.' " Has not Meher Baba clearly stated: "I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself."

For most of us the first tender or fiery awakening of the God-Man's love and omniscience generally results in a longing to disclose to Him our weaknesses and moments of temptations. One may feel that such an opening to Him will cleanse one's

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heart of its blemishes; at least I feel that way. My own experience of this began in March, 1943 when I first read about Meher Baba. However, it wasn't until November, 1944 that I had the blessed privilege to have His *darshan*.

During this period of a year and a half, I used to write short letters to Beloved Baba and each time I received a reply through Adi with a line or two dictated by Baba. In one of the letters Adi wrote to me, "He (Baba) knows your feelings very well. He says that He is with you all the time." These words gave me an overwhelming feeling of His closeness. As a response to Baba's unconditional love, I wrote Him a detailed letter disclosing the "dark side" of my life. I also requested Him to forgive me for my failings and to help me to become worthy of His love.

Each of my earlier letters had a response of some sort from Baba but this particular letter remained totally un-answered. Nothing was mentioned about the contents of this letter in any of my visits to Baba. Years later, Baba's words of wisdom to Pukar provided me with the perfect answer. It is quite natural to feel prompted to write a detailed letter of confession to Baba.

However, I now know that the best thing to do after writing such a letter is to tear it into pieces in the deep faith that Baba, the Ancient One, in His infinite Ocean of omniscience, knows and forgives all. Thus Baba's direct reply to one's honest confession is His redeeming help to stay away from those actions and thoughts we have confessed to, as well as His help in one's attempt to lead a simple, clean life, worthy of His love.

Love God Honestly

Baba, after His interviews with those from Hamirpur, was ready for house visits. Y. Ranga Rao read out the names of the Baba lovers who expected Him to visit their houses. Baba, as He stood up to go, jokingly gestured to Ranga Rao, "In the beginning, I was told that at the most there would be about

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nineteen house visits in Eluru, but now it seems that the number will soon reach ninety!" Some of those who were around Baba could not suppress their laughter. Within a few minutes Baba's car and the buses reserved for His people sped out of the garden premises.

Our first stop happened to be a government building where the District Judge resided. He welcomed Baba warmly and when we were all seated, Baba was pleased to dictate the following message from His board:

I have lately been laying stress on honesty. If we love God honestly we become one with Him. Never before has dishonesty and hypocrisy prevailed in this world as today. If the least hypocrisy creeps into our thoughts, words, and deeds, God, who is the innermost Self in us all, keeps Himself hidden.

Hypocrisy is a million-headed cobra. There are today so many so-called saints who, even though they tell people to be honest and not to be hypocrites, are yet themselves deep in dishonesty.

I say with Divine Authority that I am in you all, and if you honestly love God you will find Him everywhere. And remember, if you cannot love God and cannot lead saintly lives then at least do not make a show of it, because the worst scoundrels are better than hypocritical saints.¹⁰⁶

Baba's stress on honesty at the residence of a judge seemed significant. It suggested to me that while judging others the first and foremost thing for me to do is to find out whether I am honest to myself and to my relationship with Beloved Baba—the Ocean of Honesty.

Before proceeding from the District Judge's house, Baba casually inquired if the name of the District Collector was on the list of house visits. The reply was "No." Upon this Baba remarked, "That's all right. The collector loves me; what matters is loving me and not a house visit." With a little pause Baba added, "Now, I wish to go back to my cottage in the garden, and after a little rest I will continue with the house visits."

¹⁰⁶ *Life Circular* No. 9, issued March 28, 1953.

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Naturally, Baba's car and the buses were driven back. When Baba reached the garden, Baba lovers from Eluru, to their surprise, saw the collector, with his family, waiting for Baba's *darshan*. He very lovingly garlanded Baba and Baba lovingly embraced him. Both looked pleased. Baba frequently changed His plans and went well out of His way to meet His lovers. It wasn't the house visits that were important, but the pull of inner love.

The *mandali* thought that now Baba would go to His room, but instead He directed all to get into the buses, for He wished to continue with His house visits; "rest" has often been one of Baba's excuses to meet His lovers!

The afternoon was spent in these house visits. At most places, Baba sat on the floor and R. K. Gadekar sang Baba's Marathi *arti* composed by Dr. C.D. Deshmukh. While the *arti* was being sung, the host and hostess waved an *arti* tray containing lit camphor; of course they stood at a considerable distance from Baba. During all this, Baba, His eyes flashing in different directions, held some fruit in His hands which He then gave to His devotees residing in the house. At the close of the "song of praise" Baba immediately got up, touched the sweets to be distributed to the people and left. At no place did Baba or His people have any drink or refreshment.

On our return to the garden, Baba reminded us to "keep awake for the whole night." This was not compulsory for the sick. Neon lights shone throughout the garden and in various ways we passed the night in Beloved Baba's delightful remembrance and wakefulness.

Baba's Omniscient Gestures

While the city of Eluru was wrapped in sleep, all those who had accompanied Baba on His Andhra tour stayed awake during the night of January 27-28. We spent this time in remembering and glorifying the God-Man who was residing with us in the garden. On the 28th, in the early hours of the morning, everyone had a bath as per Baba's instructions. At

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six o'clock in the morning we presented ourselves before Baba. Although He wore a serious expression, He looked a picture of freshness.

When all had come, Baba stood up and the entire assembly also rose. We joined Baba in offering the Prayer of Repentance. Baba gestured that His participation with us in this prayer was on behalf of all His lovers. Perhaps to express His active participation, at the inception of this prayer, in the November meeting at Meherabad, Baba chose to begin it with "we." Then He bowed down to each one present and later explained that through this particular action He had paid His obeisance to the living God-realized individuals, the fifty-six Perfect Ones who are always present on earth.

Baba had a word of cheer for His dear ones who were to leave Eluru after lunch. However, when Pukar's maternal uncle, Shital Prasad Nigam, had Baba's embrace, Baba expressed through gestures that Shital would soon find things "topsy-turvy," as if the world had been turned upside down and that he would find corpses on either side of him.

In the end Baba added, "But be brave, don't fear. Remember me. I will help you." Shital thought that Baba was referring to world-wide destruction preceding His Manifestation. "Why did Baba say this to me, at the time of parting?" Shital wondered. However, it did not take long for him, to realize the meaning behind Baba's omniscient gestures.

Some weeks after Shital's return to Hamirpur, he was traveling on a crowded bus. Suddenly, it swerved off the road, dashed against a culvert and overturned. Shital was badly injured. He tried to crawl out from the wreckage but was trapped with corpses on either side of him. In his helpless state, he vividly remembered Baba's gestures and whole-heartedly called on Him for help. After some time, a rescue team arrived. They broke through the windshield and helped Shital out of the bus. Thus Baba's gestures had come true in a most inconceivable manner. No doubt, the life of each of us is an "open book" for Baba.

To resume the narration of the day, by seven o'clock, Baba lovers from Andhra began to gather outside Baba's cottage.

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On the day of Baba's arrival, during a short walk through the garden, He unexpectedly sat down for a few minutes under a tree. Baba, in spite of His divine splendor, was in a very serious mood; obviously no one dared to disturb Him and we stood quietly around. It was apparent that Baba was then deeply occupied with some special spiritual work.

The owner of the garden, Katta Subba Rao, was greatly impressed with this significant event. A little later he entreated Baba to allow him to build a small room at that spot. On the last day of our stay at Eluru, January 28th, Baba agreed to K. Subba Rao's wish, and deposited some real pearls brought by him in the pit of the foundation for a Baba room.

On His return to the cottage, Baba had a final meeting with His lovers and workers in Andhra. He gave each one an opportunity to freely express his thoughts and feelings about the work that was being carried on in Andhra Pradesh. After patiently listening to the tributes paid and the complaints made about different people, Baba said that in His love everyone should try his best to work harmoniously with others.

Then Baba wanted to know if anyone of those present (of course with the cooperation of others) was ready to shoulder the responsibility of making the arrangements for Baba's second visit to Andhra, planned for 1954. After discussing the different proposals put forward by His lovers, He finally appointed the following four: Kutumba Sastry, Dhanapathy Rao, Ranga Rao and Mallikarjun Rao. These four were to schedule and organize the programs for Baba's next visit. For the sake of convenience they were collectively referred to as KDRM. Although KDRM later ceased to function as a committee, the contribution of each one in Baba's work was unique.

Matchless Efficacy of the Avatar's Name

Vishnu, one of Baba's *mandali*, with the cooperation of the railway authorities arranged to get a carriage on the Waltiar-Poona passenger train exclusively for Baba's people. This

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train used to leave Eluru each evening and Baba was to travel on it. On the morning of the 28th, Manik (Y. Manikyala Rao) sent Beloved Baba the following telegram, "Pray permission to arrange tea at Vijayawada." Although the passenger train wasn't expected to reach Vijayawada until 8:30 that night, Baba was pleased to grant this request. He also sent Manik the following instructions:

1. No one should approach Baba in His compartment.
2. No one should ask Him any questions.
3. Baba will give *darshan* sitting near the window, inside His compartment.

Baba's approval made Manik very happy. He and the other Baba lovers who were working in the railways wanted to make sure that Baba and His people wouldn't be disturbed by the other passengers on the train at each station. However, in trying to arrange this, they only succeeded in tipping off all the stations between Eluru and Vijayawada that Baba would be traveling by the W.P. Passenger.

So, as soon as the train carrying the *Avatar* stopped at a station (there were seven), we found people greeting Baba with folded hands and loud cheers. In fact, Baba was very tired from the ten-day *darshan* tour, yet He responded to the crowd with a radiant smile. However, as the train left each station, He looked more exhausted.

As Vijayawada is a large and important railway junction, all trains stop there for a long time. When Baba's train pulled in, the platform was swarming with people. Manik had not expected such a multitude. In response to a request, the window by Baba's seat was opened and people with folded hands began to pass by in quick succession.

After a while some began to ask Baba for His special remedial blessing. Someone would lift a sick person to the window to receive Baba's blessed touch and another person would say, "Baba, this man is suffering from asthma; please bless him." Or someone would raise a child to Baba and plead, "This little one is a victim of polio, may you bless him and heal him."

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Any questions at all, much less such requests, were counter to Baba's instructions to Manik. So He looked at Eruch and gestured, "Why are they asking me to cure their ailments? I am neither a doctor, a healer or a miracle monger!" Manik, a slim young man, was standing close by watching and listening to what Baba conveyed. A little later, Baba instructed Eruch to bring home to Manik what he should tell the people about Him.

Eruch took Manik to the end of the platform and lightly admonished him for telling others—the sick—that Baba would cure them. Such an intimation gave them a distorted picture of Baba's divinity and unconditional love. Besides, this had caused Baba a lot of inconvenience. Manik replied that he had not told people anything that would belittle Baba's status as the *Avatar*. In fact, he had no idea what brought people to the station in such large numbers.

Being convinced that Manik's replies were honest, Eruch affectionately told him that in each of His Advents, the *Avatar* is Love Incarnate, and the best thing that one can do is to love Him for the sake of love. One should not expect any miracles or healings from Him; the awakening of His love in one's heart is the miracle of miracles.

Both of them returned to Baba's compartment. The line of people formed for Baba's *darshan* stretched on. Manik found that when someone requested Baba to bless him for a healing or a cure, He sometimes expressed His displeasure to the *mandali*. However, Baba invariably gave a look of compassion or a loving smile to each sick person. To some He conveyed through gestures, "I am the Doctor of doctors; take my name 108 times a day. Don't be upset. I will help you." It appears to me that through this incident Baba has indirectly indicated that the most natural and effective remedy for all ailments is the wholehearted remembrance of His holy name. The efficacy of the *Avatar's* name is matchless.

Manik was amazed to hear Baba's authoritative instructions to the sick. A little later, Baba called him close and without any reference to the talk he had with Eruch, enfolded him in His loving embrace. With this, the tears Manik had

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been holding back burst the floodgates. Tea had already been served to the *mandali* and they all appreciated it. While all this was going on, Gustadji (a silent companion of the Silent One), who usually would be the last person to complain about anything, conveyed to Baba, through gestures, that the toilet in the *mandali's* carriage was stinking. The railway officers ordered the staff to take care of this. This delayed the train but, coincidentally, it allowed more people to have Baba's *darshan*.

When the train was about to leave, Baba asked for some carbonated soda water. Manik looked a little worried, not knowing where to get it. But just then he happened to spot a vendor coming through the crowd with a crate of soft drinks. Manik gave the required bottle to Eruch for Baba and the train began to pull out of the station. In spite of all the love Manik had for Baba, and all the arrangements he had made at the station, a silly thought crept into his head, "If that bottle goes with the *mandali*, I will have to pay extra money for it!"

So he began to walk briskly, keeping pace with the train, holding onto Baba's window with the intention of getting the bottle back. How illusive and funny the mind is! Just then, on Baba's instruction, Eruch thrust a nice garland in Manik's hand as a gift and also a ripe papaya as *prasad* from Baba. This was indeed a precious reward from Baba, worth countless soda bottles. When the *Avatar* on His own accepts any insignificant thing or service from someone, He bestows in return manyfold favors and above all His precious love.

"Is Meher Baba Imprisoned?"

The railway journey continued all day on January 29th as well. At Wadi we transferred to the Madras Express bound for Bombay. Baba traveled in it as far as Dhond and then came by car to Meherazad. During the train journey the *mandali* casually talked with Baba about the recent *darshan* programs. They appreciated the love of Baba workers in Andhra and

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admired their faith in Him as the God-Man. At the close of this conversation, Baba gave the following discourse:

You do not know me. You have not seen me; I am not this [physical] body which you see Physical existence is not God. God is in everything, everywhere, all the time. Your body . . . is not you. Even if a leg or an arm is cut off, you will still feel within you that you are one whole.

As a child, as a boy, as you are now and as you will be, you have been changing and will go on changing. Yet you continue to feel your same self, neither more nor less. Your very existence continues unchanged. In spite of the oft-repeated gaps during sleep, you do not feel any break in the continuity of this existence

Why is it I am God and you are not? It is because I am conscious that I am God and you are not¹⁰⁷

In the early hours of January 30th, the train stopped at my home town of Kurduwadi. I got down and hurried to Baba's coupe, but the door and window were closed. I waited on the platform with a greedy heart, to have a glimpse of Him. However, it is His way that when one expects Him, He draws a veil. The guard whistled, I folded my hands and the train slowly moved on. I had returned to my town after a week—a memorable and incredible week. The memories of this visit have often vividly come to mind, and I have often leafed through the notes I took and relived the incidents recorded therein as well.

The Madras Express carrying Baba reached Dhond at 8:00 A.M.; Meherjee and Nariman stayed on the train and proceeded to Bombay. Baba got off and Adi drove Him and Eruch in his car. At a crossroads Adi made a wrong turn which resulted in a forty mile detour. Baba often gestured to Adi to drive faster. To make things even more difficult, Adi got a flat tire just when Meherasad was in view. By the time Baba reached His residence He was utterly exhausted.

During Baba's Andhra tour, besides His small and big *darshan* programs, He granted interviews to some of His devotees. Among these was a married couple who had worldly

¹⁰⁷ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 12 (1954).

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riches but were very unhappy for they had no child. Both requested Baba to bless them with a son—an heir to their property and a continuance of the family tree. Baba gestured, "granted" and then gave them some *prasad*.

A day or two after Baba's arrival at Meherazad He was sitting with the *mandali* and gestured to Eruch, "You will have to make a return trip to Andhra." This surprised those who were present. Baba continued, "Today I remembered that I had granted the wish of a couple to have a child. But now I want Eruch to go back and convey the message that my blessings may be fruitful not in the immediate future but perhaps after some years or maybe in their next life!"

Baba was so serious over this issue that although Eruch was also physically exhausted, He instructed him to send a telegram to His Andhra devotees informing them of Eruch's return visit. Baba lovers were very happy to receive Eruch at the railway station. Many of them wondered what special message he had brought for them from their Beloved Lord and Master, Meher Baba. To Eruch's surprise, one or two from the crowd asked him in whispers, "Is it true that Meher Baba has been arrested?" They even pressed him for details about this situation.

Although Eruch was amazed at this most unexpected question, he maintained his poise and replied, "Wait. I will tell you everything." On reaching the house of his host, Eruch washed up, refreshed himself, and then completed the work that Baba had entrusted to him; first things first.

Baba lovers and workers were informed of Eruch's visit and a small gathering was arranged on the same day. All wanted to hear more about Baba. In this small get-together someone again asked the same question, "What about the rumor going around? Is Meher Baba under arrest?" Eruch replied in a serious tone, "Yes, He is." And then with a grin added, "Yes, Meher Baba is imprisoned in the hearts of His lovers!"

During Baba's visit to Andhra He once casually hinted at the forthcoming phase of His humiliation. Perhaps this statement had led some people with ulterior motives to start the

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rumor that Meher Baba had been imprisoned on His return to Maharashtra (then known as Bombay State).

Beloved Baba's Birthday

On the last day of His stay at Eluru, Baba had told Kishan Singh and Kumar that He intended to stay for some months in Dehra Dun after the middle of February. He instructed them to hire two houses for the *mandali* going with Him—one for men and the other for women. Kishan Singh said that he was residing in a spacious government bungalow which he would be happy to keep at the disposal of the men *mandali*; Baba granted this request and also permitted Kishan Singh to stay with them which made him even happier.

Owing to this arrangement, Baba told Kishan Singh to hire one nice house in a good locality for the women accompanying Him to Dehra Dun. He was also instructed to keep Baba informed about the developments in obtaining such a house.

On the second day after His arrival at Meherazad the following telegram was sent to Kishan Singh: "Arrange bungalows in Dehra Dun. We arrive 18th. No programs or *darshan* or interviews. (I) want to work there undisturbed. Confirm telegraphically on fifth (Feb.)—Baba." Kishan Singh, Kumar and Elcha Mistry tried their best and after a few humorous situations succeeded in securing a house. Luckily, it was close to Kishan Singh's residence where the men disciples were to stay.

The *darshan* tour in Andhra had been physically exhausting for Baba. His personal doctors required Him to come for a medical checkup at Poona before His departure for Dehra Dun. So on February 4th He visited Poona, but returned the same evening. On the seventh He called Yeshawantrao Borawake from Sakori and gave him a special message for Godavarimai. She was asked to see Baba in Ahmednagar on February 14th at 9:00 A.M. In fact, without taking a much needed rest, after a strenuous tour of months, Baba kept Himself as busy as ever, with the different phases of His work.

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According to the Zoroastrian calendar, Baba's birthday for the year 1953 fell on February 11th. This year He did not allow His *mandali* to celebrate it on a large scale. Even His close disciples from Poona and Bombay were not permitted to visit Meherazad for the occasion. However, as an exception, He asked Meherjee to come on the evening of February 10th with Irene Conybeare who was then staying in Poona. She was the only westerner to be with Baba when He gave the first mass *darshan* at Hamirpur and perhaps He also wanted her to be with Him at the end of his stupendous "Fiery" tour.

On February 11th, all at Meherazad got up extra early. For this auspicious day the women dressed themselves in lovely *saris* and at 5:00 AM., as Baba stood on the porch of His residence, they garlanded Him. At the same time the men, who were staying on the other side of the compound, whole-heartedly recited aloud seven divine names of God from the different religions. In later years they called out seven times: "Avatar Meher Baba *Ki Jai*." Some think that this is the simplest, yet the ideal way to celebrate the Beloved's birthday.

During the day Irene had a few sittings with Ramjoo to discuss certain points in the manuscript of her forthcoming book. Later, in 1955, it was published in England under the title *Civilization or Chaos?: A study of the present world crisis in the light of eastern metaphysics*. In a short article narrating her impressions about a wonderful day spent with Baba, she wrote:

At Pimpalgaon [Meherazad], there was an opportunity to ask questions, for Baba was at leisure, without visitors. So now was my chance. "Baba!" I said boldly, "Where do the 'flying saucers' come from?" Baba's face relaxed into a broad smile. "I would not answer that question for anybody, but you only! They do not come from any other planet" ¹⁰⁸

In the afternoon, Sidhu brought to Meherazad a *qawwal* from Bombay. There was a special program during the day to entertain Baba. He liked the *qawwal's* selection of *ghazals* and his style of presenting them through appealing *ragas* (melodies).

¹⁰⁸ *The Awakener*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 26 (1954).

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After this performance of singing for about two hours, the *qawwal* was sent back to Ahmednagar. Meherjee and Irene left the next morning.

Following the birthday feast, Baba ordered His men disciples to fast on the twelfth with only tea thrice during the day: no lunch, no supper. At 3:00 P.M., Adi as usual brought the mail and also a basketful of sweets (*julebis*) from Ahmednagar. Baba was in a humorous mood and asked the *mandali* what should be done with the sweets? To decide this issue He asked Nilu to toss His board into the air. If one side came up, the *julebis* would be given to the men, if the other side came up, they would not. Twice it turned up in favor of distributing the sweets to the *mandali*. So with a smile Baba allowed the men to have a lot of *julebis* with tea—fast and feast combined.

On February 14th at Ahmednagar, the members of Baba families in the area and some who were eager to have Baba's *darshan* gathered at Adi's office. Baba, with Eruch and Nilu, left Meherazad in Adi's car and reached Khushru Quarters at 7:30 A.M. People were allowed to go close to Baba to have His *darshan* but without directly touching His feet. The main purpose of this visit was to see Godavarimai who was expected to come from Sakori.

According to Baba's message sent earlier through Yeshwantrao, she came on time with two *kanyas* (young nuns). Godavarimai had a special interview with Baba who expressed His happiness to see her. Then He explained that although the receiving of homage from others by allowing them to touch one's feet creates serious binding (if one is not God-realized), Godavarimai's case was entirely different as Maharaj had entrusted her with a special duty.

In the end, He conveyed to Godavari mai, "Be firm in your conviction about following Maharaj's instructions. Do what you honestly feel to be best. Don't be influenced by what others say." He concluded gesturing, "I am everywhere; in everyone, in everything." Adi had arranged for a special photograph to be taken on this occasion to which Baba agreed. Baba returned to Meherazad by midday.

Kishan Singh confirmed by a telegram and also through a

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letter that the necessary lodging and boarding arrangements for Baba and those going with Him to Dehra Dun had been made according to the instructions he had received. This was happy news and Baba left Meherazad on February 15th. After an overnight stay at Poona, He boarded a train at Bombay the next day for Dehra Dun which He reached on February 18th.

Union with the Beloved

In February, 1952 with the culmination of Meher Baba's New Life, He stated,

"I have . . . regained my Old Life Meher Baba state, . . . retaining my New Life ordinary state. I have regained the Knowledge, Strength and Greatness that I had in the Old Life, and retained the ignorance, weaknesses and humility of the New Life. This union of the Old and New Life States has given birth to LIFE; life that is eternally old and new. "¹⁰⁹

This LIFE had three introductory phases and Meher Baba called them the "Complicated" free life, the "Full" free life, and the "Fiery" free life. His first visit to the Center in Myrtle Beach, U.S.A., and the subsequent auto accident in which the *Avatar* spilled His blood on American soil, fell in the period of the "Complicated" free life when "weakness dominated strength and binding dominated freedom." The interviews and *darshan* that He gave in New York with His leg in plaster but looking divinely radiant, and the subsequent short stays in England and Switzerland, were in the "Full" free life when "strength dominated weakness and freedom dominated bindings."

The phase of the "Fiery" free life began on November 15, 1952 when He left Bombay for His mass *darshan* tours in the north and south of India. These tours with their incredible *darshan* programs ended on January 30, 1953 when Baba reached Meherazad. Baba had earlier stated that in this phase "both strength and weakness, freedom and bindings would be consumed in the fire of Divine Love."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Life Circular* No. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Life Circular* No. 6, dictated at Myrtle Beach on June 13, 1952.

GLIMPSES OF THE GOD-MAN

In these three preliminary periods of LIFE a lot of people, for the first time, had Meher Baba's physical *darshan*. In His meetings with them, Baba communicated through His board and also with the fullness of His heart in silence. In His presence their questions evaporated and hearts became aglow with His love.

Those who came in closer contact were deeply impressed by Baba's radiant personality. Whatever He conveyed to them through casual conversation was vibrant with the touch of deep spiritual truths. His liveliness and especially His sense of humor helped them to befriend Him on their own levels. His loving gestures awakened noble feelings in their hearts which helped them to lift themselves from the world of tragedies and tears to a life of hope and cheer.

They felt that with the help of His renewing love, there was nothing which they could not bear. His compassion reached everyone alike and guided each one to resign to the will of Beloved God—a real adventure in which suffering and delights blend in the journey of love to Meher Baba, Love Itself.

To the masses, Avatar Meher Baba gave His presence, He gave His blessings, He gave His unconditional love. The end of His *darshan* tours did not stop His being with people. A meeting with Him insures his presence forever. The Timeless One becomes "time bound" through the life of the God-Man and fulfills the purpose of His divine game, which is to awaken a life of love and longing for the Real Beloved.

One of Meher Baba's dearest disciples once said, "It is a fact that we are all drops in the Ocean of Love—our Beloved Baba. However, it is equally true that the Ocean (Baba) is within each drop." The *Avatar* whose body houses Reality is the first drop-become-Ocean. Out of His Infinite Compassion, time and again, He assumes a human form to quicken the journey of each drop to Him—the Ocean of Love. To give this spiritual push to humanity, the *Avatar*, as a part of His gracious and glorious dispensation, takes upon Himself the sufferings of the world. The auto accident that Meher Baba met with near Prague, Oklahoma, is an expression of this.

FIRST ANDHRA DARSHAN TOUR ENDS

That is why, to those who came closer to Him during those three introductory phases of LIFE, Meher Baba again and again gestured, "Love. Love God. Love me. I will help you." And in the later years, at different times, to His dear ones He conveyed:

I am the Divine Beloved worthy of being loved because
I am Love.
Don't try to understand me.
My depth is unfathomable. Just love me.
My message always has been
and always will be of Divine Love.
True Love is no game for
the faint-hearted and the weak;
it is born of strength and understanding.
Long for one thing;
be restless for one thing;
long and wait for one thing
that will kill a million other longings.
Long for Union with the Beloved.

GLOSSARY

- abhangā*: A meter used in Marathi poetry.
- Adi Purush*: The Ancient One.
- Adi Shakti*: The Primal Power.
- Agrakuti*: Lit., front cottage. The first cottage built by the *mandali* at Meherabad.
- akhada*: A camp.
- Akmal*: A most Perfect One. A rare type of God-realized person who has a duty towards Creation but no circle of disciples.
- Allah*: God in the Beyond State. Almighty God.
- ananda*: Bliss.
- anna bhumi*: The gross world.
- A'ramgah*: Lit., place of rest. A "burial ground" of the Zoroastrians; a place where the last rites of the Zoroastrians are performed.
- arti*: A traditional Hindu way of worshipping gods, a saint, a *Sadguru* or the *Avatar* by waving a lighted lamp or joss sticks in a circle in front of the idol or picture of a saint, *Sadguru* or the *Avatar*. In the case of Meher Baba, His lovers do not necessarily do this when the *arti* (song of praise and dedication) is recited or sung.
- asthana*: A threshold.
- Avatar, an*: An incarnation manifesting a specific divine quality.
- Avatar, the*: The Incarnation of God, the Infinite in human form. The God-Man, Messiah, Christ. *Rasool, Saheb-e-Zaman*.
- avataran*: Coming down.
- Avesta*: The Holy Book of the Zoroastrians.
- baka*: Abiding.
- basundi*: A sweet dish of condensed milk.
- bemaries*: Illnesses.
- Bhagavad Gita*: Lit., "Song of the Blessed One." A section of the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, consisting of a colloquy between Krishna and Arjuna on the eve of battle.
- bhajan*: A devotional song, or the singing of devotional songs.
- bhakti*: Devotion.
- Bhakti yoga*: The *yoga* (path) of devotion and love.
- bhed*: A secret.
- boka*: Lit., a large male cat.
- Burrakatha*: A ballad story.
- chapati*: Unleavened, flat wheat bread.
- charpai*: A wooden bed frame strung with thin ropes.
- chaupai*: A verse. A meter used in Hindi poetry.

GLOSSARY

- damaan*: Lit., hem of a garment.
- dak*: Mail.
- dal*: A common preparation made from any of several types of lentils grown in India.
- darbar*: An audience hall of the court of a king or a Perfect Master.
- dargah*: A place of burial, especially of a Moslem saint, *wali*, *pir*, or a *Qutub*.
- darshan*: Formal audience. The appearance of the Master to receive homage and to bestow blessings on devotees or visitors as well as to sometimes give *prasad*.
- darshanite*: One desirous of *darshan*.
- dham*: House.
- dhuni*: A fire, often fueled with chips of sandalwood and ghee—clarified butter—which symbolizes a divine purifying fire.
- dnyan*: Also *jnana*: Gnosis. Divine knowledge.
- Dnyaneshwari*: Commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* in Marathi by Dnyaneshwar, a Perfect Master of Maharashtra
- Fana*, the final: Annihilation of the mind (self).
- fana-fillah*: The "I am God" state of the Perfect One.
- Fateha*: A prayer composed of the opening lines of the *Koran*.
- gadi*: Lit., mattress. A seat or throne.
- ghazal*: A short love poem. An ode. A special poetic composition in Hindi, Urdu or Persian.
- ghungat*: A veil.
- gopi*: Lit., milkmaid. A woman loving Krishna as her only Lord and Master.
- guru*: Lit., teacher. A spiritual preceptor or a Master.
- gurubhakti*: One-pointed devotion to the Master.
- Guru Granthsaheb*: The Holy Book of the Sikhs.
- haqiqat*: Truth. Reality.
- hatha yoga*: The *yoga* of physical perfection.
- Hu*: Lit., He. God.
- hukki*: A whim.
- jai*: Hail, praise, victory to.
- julebi*: A kind of Indian sweet.
- jap*: Repetition of a name of God or any sacred word.
- japwalla*: One who performs *jap*.
- jhalak*: A glimpse.
- jhopri*: (Sometimes spelled *zopdi*), a hut.

GLIMPSES OF THE GOD-MAN

kafni: A body-length cotton garment.
kama: Lust, desire.
Kamil: The Perfect One.
kamli: Coarse woolen blanket.
kanya: Lit., daughter. Also a virgin, young nun.
karma: The working of the law of action and reaction. Fate. The happenings in one's lifetime preconditioned by one's past lives.
karma yoga: The *yoga* (path) of action.
ki jai: Lit., victory to. Used in the sense of "hail to."
kirtan: A singing of devotional songs accompanied by music, interspersed with stories from the lives of the *Avatars* and His lovers, and also with some explanations on spiritual subjects.
Koran: The Holy Book of the Moslems.
Kumbha Mela: One of the largest fairs (*melas*) in India.
lila: Lit., sport. God's "Divine Sport" that manifests the Universe.
Laddoo: Round Indian sweets.
mahapuja: Special worship (*puja*) on a grand scale.
maja: A delight, fun.
majzoob: Lit., overpowered. One who is absorbed in a plane of involving consciousness. Also, sometimes used to denote one who is God-merged (more correctly called *Majzoob-e-Kamil*).
mandali: The intimate disciples of a *Sadguru* (Perfect Master) or *Avatar* (God-Man).
mano bhumi: The mental world.
manonash: Annihilation of the mind (self).
marefat: Divine Knowledge.
mast: (Pronounced "must".) A God-intoxicated man on the Path.
mastani: A God-intoxicated woman on the Path.
masti: Intoxication.
Maya: Lit., illusion. That which makes the Nothing appear as everything. The principle of Ignorance. The Shadow of God. In a general sense, false attachment.
mela: A religious or social fair.
Mukammil: The supremely Perfect One. A Perfect Master.
muni: A great sage.
mureed: A disciple or follower.
namaskar: Greeting, salutation.
nanga: Naked.
nazar: Lit., glance. A glance of protective grace.
nimaz: Prayer.

GLOSSARY

Nirvana: The stage of the real *Fana* after the annihilation of Mind (self).

nullah: A rivulet which is sometimes completely dry.

nur: Effulgence.

Om: The Primal Sound.

pahra: Watch duty (generally at night).

paise: One hundredth of a rupee.

pan: A masticatory containing a few spices wrapped in a betel leaf. *Parabrahma*: The Supreme Spirit. God.

Paramatma: Almighty God.

pata: (Pronounced as "putt.") A fold (of a veil).

prana bhumi: The Subtle World.

prasad: Lit., anything that is first offered to God or the Master and then distributed in His name. A gracious gift, usually edible, given by the Master as an expression of His love to a lover or visitor. *puja*: A worship.

gawwal: One who sings *ghazals* and *gawwalis*.

gawwali: A typical type of singing spiritual songs, usually in Urdu or Persian, accompanied by musical instruments. These compositions are addressed to the Beloved in a very intimate way. *Qutub*: Lit., hub or axis. A Perfect Master.

raj yoga: The *yoga* (path) of meditation.

Rasool-e-Khuda: The Messenger of God.

rava: A sweet dish.

rishi: A seer. A hermit with spiritual wisdom.

Sadguru: A Perfect Master. A Man-God.

sadra: A thin, ankle-length muslin shirt.

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

sahavas: Lit., close companionship. A gathering held by the Master or held in His honor where His devotees intimately feel His presence.

Saheb-e-Zaman: The *Avatar* (God-Man, Messiah, Christ) of the Age. *saja*: Punishment.

GLIMSPSES OF THE GOD-MAN

shamiana: Awning with decorative or colored cloth.

Shri: An honorific, a term of respect.

tabla: A kind of Indian drum played to maintain the rhythm
of

music and singing.

tantra: A science of esoteric or occult practices.

tej: Effulgence.

tilak: A colored powder, applied generally by the Hindus on
their foreheads in the shape of a circle.

tonga: A horse drawn cab.

veena: A lute.

vidnyan: The highest divine consciousness.

ya: Oh!

Yezdan: Almighty God.