

## *Introduction*

This volume brings to publication another major collection of the discourses of the Avatar of the Age, Meher Baba, delivered during the early years of his Advent when his great ashram in Meherabad was emerging into its first efflorescence and when the shape of much of his early working was first coming into public view.

The “Thursday Tiffin Lectures,” as these talks were designated on the cover of one of the principal manuscripts, were given by Meher Baba to his early men mandali over a sixteen-month period in 1926–27. “Tiffin” means “lunch”; and Thursday is called *Guruvār* or “Guru’s day” in the Indic languages. On most Thursdays during this period Meher Baba with his men mandali would walk from Meherabad to what came to be known as the “Family Quarters,” at that time the residence of Baba’s disciple Kaka Shahane on the north edge of Arangaon Village in the Ahmednagar district of what is now the state of Maharashtra. There Kaka would entertain his guests with tea and snacks, a real treat in those days of early Meherabad austerity; and Baba would hold forth with a discourse—a “lecture”—dictating with the aid of chalk on slate or, after the beginning of 1927, using the alphabet board. Actually, Baba was discoursing to the mandali with great frequency throughout this period, not just at Kaka’s house but at various sites in Meherabad and on days other than Thursday. Baba’s disciple and secretary Chanji (Framroze Dadachanji) was on hand to take notes. Chanji’s subsequent write-ups of Baba’s words on these occasions serve as the basis for this book. They provide us with an intimate view—a peep through the keyhole—into the spiritual education that the Avatar was giving to his closest men disciples during this foundational phase of his Avataric mission.

Imagine a scene such as the following. Meher Baba is seated on a chair or stool in the Family Quarters, or perhaps in the Makan-e-Khas (the men’s dormitory) in Meherabad. A stack of slates has been placed beside him. His disciples are spread out in a semi-circle, seated cross-legged on the cow-dung

flooring. Most of them—Rustom, Padri, Pendu, Adi, Gustadji, Ghani, Ramjoo, Vishnu, Arjun, Pandoba, brothers Behram and Jal—are still young men in their early twenties or thirties. All are watching intently as Baba, who had been keeping silence since 10th July 1925, gesticulates with his silent hand signs and facial expressions, nonverbal communication interspersed with writing as he turns to the slate and jots down words with chalk in English and Gujarati. Meanwhile an interpreter (such as Adi or Vishnu) is reading out Baba's gestures, and these spoken words give explicit articulation to a meaning that is made so much more vivid by Baba's own eloquent and fluent enactment of it though face and body language. Baba pauses and looks up at the interpreter, nodding in confirmation or perhaps correcting an inaccurate phrase, glancing around the room to make sure that the men have grasped his sense, sometimes repeating a thought or singling out one of the disciples to mark a point, now and again cracking a joke, and in general, engaging the attention and driving home what he wanted to convey to this group of intimate associates. When Baba has finished with a slate, it is passed along to Chanji who is meticulously recording the transaction. In this way much of Baba's own verbiage—both written and “spoken”—gets incorporated into Chanji's transcript. The slate, when Chanji is done with it, gets returned for wiping clean and use in another round of dictation.

Baba's topic for the day might be suggested by current events in the life of the ashram; or then again, Baba might choose to dilate upon some general theme of perennial spiritual interest. In late October of 1926, for example, after suddenly having announced his intention of closing down the Meherabad ashram—a step sure to precipitate criticism among the broader public—Baba devoted a session to explaining the nature of the work of a Sadguru (as compared with the work of philanthropic institutions) and the need on the part of his disciples to remain unaffected by the opinions of worldly people. On other occasions Baba discoursed on the hazards posed by occult powers on the spiritual path, or the character and manner of a Perfect Master's dealings

with his circle members, or the original inner meaning of certain religious ceremonies and their degradation through mindless ritualistic practice and dogmatic adherence. Individually the lectures were usually focused around a common subject; Baba spoke freely, but always with a purpose. As a collection, however, the Tiffin Lectures do not exhibit a thematic unity or organization in the sequencing of materials. What gives this assemblage of talks coherence is Baba's governing purpose in the spiritual training of his men mandali. Baba seems to have been imparting to them a foundation in the domain of knowledge and spiritual understanding that they would need in the upcoming years and decades of their discipleship to him. Obviously Baba took these sessions seriously, and plainly the mandali in attendance did as well. In perusing these accounts today the reader gets to become, as it were, a "fly on the wall," listening in on an intimate yet concentrated phase of Baba's work and training with these men that, after the reorientation of Meherabad life towards the Meher Ashram boys' school in the second half of 1927, came to a close and never repeated itself again in quite the same way.

*Tiffin Lectures* now takes its place in a significant and growing body of known literature from the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s that records both Baba's own discourses and the detailed account of his activities written by disciples. Most important among these literary works, and at the same time one of the chief enigmas in Meher Baba's life, is what he referred to as "The Book" (1925–26), a 300-page manuscript in his own handwriting that he characterized as "the future Bible, Koran, Avesta, and Veda" that will be "universally accepted by all castes and creeds."<sup>4</sup> Yet Meher Baba never allowed anyone to read it, except for a few pages on two or three known occasions; and the manuscript's whereabouts remains a mystery today. During the first half of 1926, while the composition of "The Book" was still in mid-career and at the very time that the Tiffin Lectures sequence began, Baba dictated a series

---

<sup>4</sup> "The Combined Diary," August 7, 1927 (ComD 2: f. 355).

of installments in a greater treatise recorded in the “Intelligence Notebooks” and published in 2005 under the title of *Infinite Intelligence*. A year and a half later, over a six-week period in 1927–28, Meher Baba delivered a carefully ordered sequence of thirty-four talks to the boys of the Meher Ashram school. Despite the youth of his audience, these Meher Ashram lectures present subject matter of extraordinary profundity, including esoteric secrets of primordial cosmology and about the planes of the spiritual path.

Though certain indications suggest that Baba’s mandali had an eye towards the possible publication of some of the content of Baba’s discoursing over this three- to four-year period, very little of it found its way into print then. Between 1929 and 1931, however, a monthly magazine dedicated explicitly to Meher Baba, the *Meher Message*, was issued from Nasik, and its pages carried several series of articles attributed to Baba (including edited versions of extracts from the Tiffin Lectures). Though we know that Baba himself was less than fully pleased by the way in which his words were edited and presented in this periodical, some of the dictations used in the *Meher Message* had been given originally by Baba to Ramjoo Abdullah, who released his own version of this content in 1933 under the title *Shree Meher Baba: His Philosophy and Teachings*.

Meanwhile, a coterie of industrious disciple-diarists had been chronicling their own accounts of Baba’s work and activities. Foremost among them was Chanji, a meticulous note-keeper, whose copious diaries provide what is probably the most important single source of biographical information for the two decades up through the disciple-secretary’s early death in 1944. Yet various brother-disciples maintained their own personal accounts, such as Ramjoo, selections from whose diaries were published in 1979;<sup>\*</sup> Adi K. Irani, a disciple from the early 1920s and Baba’s secretary from the time of Chanji’s death; Nadirsha N. Dastur, a Parsi from Pune (in those days called Poona)

---

<sup>\*</sup> Ramjoo Abdullah. *Ramjoo’s Diaries, 1922-1929: A Personal Account of Meher Baba’s Early Work*, edited by Ira G. Deitrick (Walnut Creek, California: Sufism Reoriented, 1979).

closely connected with the early Meherabad ashram; and perhaps others. From July 1924 through the end of August 1927 five of Baba's mandali collaborated in compiling "The Combined Diary," a two-volume, eight-hundred-page handwritten log that remains probably the most authoritative original source of information about this early Meherabad period. Overall, then, the Meherabad ashram was extraordinarily prolific in the production of "literary" discourse, oral and written. Since the tone and character of Meher Baba's "teaching" changed after the inauguration of the Western tours in the 1930s, we could describe this prior body of discourse as an early Avataric dispensation, unique in the vista on reality that it provides yet largely unattuned to the Western sensibilities of the era. Apparently Meher Baba did not in the main part want to bring this material before the general public at this time. Yet that task is being brought to accomplishment now, much to the enrichment of our knowledge of Meher Baba and his "teaching" to humanity.

The discourses in this present volume are edited texts based on a complex body of manuscripts from the 1920s. The immediate primary source is the typed manuscript entitled "Thursday Tiffin Lectures," both the top sheet typescript copy found at Meherabad shortly after Meher Baba dropped his body and the carbon copy (with important handwritten supplementation) recently discovered among the papers of Filis Frederick, longtime editor of the *Awakener* magazine. Whoever typed it up, the actual text of "Thursday Tiffin Lectures" was almost certainly the work of Chanji, who selected and edited this material from the extensive notes and records of Baba's talks and discourses in his diaries. In the editing of this present book, then, we have largely followed Chanji's decisions in what we take to be his final draft, which is to say, the draft with which he probably signed off on the project, intending to pass it along to a designated writer for final revision into book form. But we have also located many of Chanji's original diary notes, both in Gujarati and English. In certain cases these notes display the same lecture content in different versions, as Chanji took his own raw records and revised them into

intelligible renderings of Baba's talks. Further, we have located typed drafts based on these handwritten write-ups, typed drafts that evidently served as the immediate sources for "Thursday Tiffin Lectures."

The fact that this same lecture material appears in different drafts and versions suggests that a major literary project in connection with it was under way in Baba's ashram. Our records provide us with no explicit indication of the nature of Meher Baba's own involvement, but surely this literary compilation and editing must have proceeded with his approval, since no significant work or activity took place in the early Meherabad ashram unless Baba wanted it. This present edition aspires to be a continuation and carrying through to completion of this original undertaking of the 1920s. In compiling the texts that you will read in this book, the present editors have drawn upon all of the known manuscript sources, according special privilege to "Thursday Tiffin Lectures" as Chanji's final draft, but bringing into the text material from earlier drafts and diaries when it seems to enhance the discourse and to convey a fuller and more vivid sense of Baba's communication to his men mandali in 1926–27.

Can the discourses in *Tiffin Lectures* rightly be taken as "Meher Baba's words"? Readers should know that, literally speaking, Baba did not dictate all of the actual verbiage of these talks as it appears here. In many passages Baba "spoke" in Gujarati, and his original language had to be translated by Chanji into English; moreover, a significant portion of his communication was accomplished through the non-verbal media of gesture and facial-body expression. Yet the same can be said of virtually all of Meher Baba's books and messages from the later decades, including *Discourses*, *God Speaks*, and the great messages and declarations of the 1950s. Probably the process under way in the compilation of "Tiffin Lectures," as displayed in the trail of surviving manuscripts, provides us with a good model for how Meher Baba's later published works got composed. In his "Last Will and Testament," Meher

Baba used the expression “my literary works” to designate literary creations of his “published and unpublished, direct and indirect.”<sup>\*</sup> The Avatar Meher Baba P.P.C. Trust, to whom Meher Baba entrusted the copyrights in this material, has determined that “Tiffin Lectures” belongs to the category of Meher Baba’s “unpublished” and “indirect” discourse. Accordingly, Meher Baba has been named as the author of this book, and it is being presented to the world as one among his literary creations.

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that *Tiffin Lectures*, like *Infinite Intelligence* and other literary works that went unpublished during Meher Baba’s physical lifetime, differs in significant ways from the books and messages whose publication he personally oversaw. In particular, the editing of *Tiffin Lectures* was never reviewed by Meher Baba, and thus the form that the text has assumed in this book does not bear his personal seal of approval. Meher Baba did say, during the very period that the “Tiffin Lectures” collection was being compiled, that his “explanations may be re-composed in forceful and stylish language,” with the caveat that “the spirit and meaning must remain unchanged.”<sup>†</sup> The present editors have tried to carry out their task in keeping with this directive. Yet it is always possible that they may have erred, in ways great and small; and in future decades those responsible may see fit to emend the text as it has been presented here, or indeed, to begin again and edit the text afresh from its original sources.

Partly in response to these broader questions and the need to safeguard the integrity of Meher Baba’s words, this edition has been constructed with a view towards transparency, and in the Supplement interested readers can find many materials germane to the relationship between the edited text and its sources. The essay that opens the supplement provides a history of the early

---

<sup>\*</sup> For further discussion, see “A Statement on Meher Baba’s Words,” xv-xvi.

<sup>†</sup> “The Combined Diary,” Vol. II folio 355, entry dated 7 August 1927. For the full quotation, see *Infinite Intelligence*, p. 604.

Meherabad period, a detailed survey of the manuscript sources, and an account of the editorial principles and practices. Several of the appendixes delve further into sources and source relations and offer certain tools for persons who want to pursue further research in these areas. For those who would like to review the editorial decisions that led to the establishment of the text of this book, the endnotes give detailed explanations, offering inroads into many of the textual cruxes and citing manuscript variants. The glossary explores the non-English vocabulary of this book, a matter bearing significantly on the authenticity and “author-icity” of this text, since much of Meher Baba’s original discoursing was done in Gujarati and other Indic languages. As a companion to these tools and materials in the book’s Supplement, the Avatar Meher Baba P.P.C. Trust is releasing on its website facsimile reproductions of the source manuscripts, along with internet tools for the easy accessing of information related to the text of the edition. All of these materials collectively should open up the Tiffin Lectures to persons of many different needs and interests, not only in the present era but in the decades ahead. Advanced students and researchers can find among these tools and aids the means for exploring in depth the historical and textual backgrounds of this book. At the same time, readers who simply want to know in its essence what Meher Baba said to his men mandali in the 1920s and who are content to accept the decisions of this book’s editors can simply skip the Supplement and associated materials and confine themselves to the text of the lectures themselves.

*Tiffin Lectures* holds a unique place in the literature of this Avataric Advent. For it shows the Avatar in the active process of training his disciples during the early years of their association with him, and the discourses and explanations that he gives are intended for an intimate audience. Doubtless these talks of the Avatar will serve many seekers and lovers of God who would like the benefit of the spiritual training that Meher Baba gave to his close ones; and it will constitute a cornerstone in the foundation that he has laid for the civilization of the New Humanity that will arise in the ages to come.