



IN HIS SERVICE

JUNE / 2001

A NEWSLETTER FROM MEHERABAD

Pilgrim Season Ends in Celebrations

The nine-month pilgrim season at Baba Town (that is, Meherabad and Meherazad) ends each year with a bang and not a whimper, as the celebrations for Mehera's birthday, Christmas, Amartithi, and Baba's birthday follow one another in quick succession.

Mehera's Birthday

As Radha was to Krishna and Sita to Ram, so, in this Avatic advent, was Mehera J. Irani to Meher Baba – the "beloved of the Beloved," the one who loved Him most. Since her passing away in 1989 her birthday has been commemorated with a Women's Arti at Meher Baba's Tomb-Shrine at Meherabad. And so again this year, at ten in the morning on 22nd December, the women mandali from Meherazad joined several hundred pilgrims and visitors to offer garlands, prayers, and songs honoring Mehera's matchless love for the God-Man. As Baba's sister Mani wrote in a song to Mehera that was performed on this occasion,

"To the Glory of Love, to the Glory of Love,
Let us all sing to the Glory of Love!"

Christmas

At eleven in the morning on December 25th, arriving buses, jeeps, and cars disgorged out into the lot in front of the Meher Free Dispensary more than 300 happy Meherabad pilgrims come to Meherazad for the Christmas festivities. Set amid an ancient, semi-arid landscape with rocky hills and shepherds, Meherazad provides a perfect setting for Christmas, with gorgeous bouquets in Mandali Hall and a brightly colorful pandal in Mehera's garden adjoining the house on the women's side.

This year's programme of song, dance, and Christmas carols culminated in a short play – put on by the young adults – that featured as its villain that notorious Christmas-season killjoy, the Grinch. Declaring his special animus against Baba's lovers, this dastardly schemer set about stealing Baba treasures one after another – including, ultimately, the Samadhi from Meherabad

Crowds of pilgrims gather around the stage at the 2001 Amartithi Celebration at Meherabad.

Hill! When he discovered to his amazement, however, that he couldn't steal Baba from His lovers' hearts, the Grinch himself had a change of heart and was melted by the love of the God-Man.

Amartithi 2001

Of course, Amartithi on January 31st climaxes the pilgrim calendar. Recent Amartithis have witnessed more than eleven thousand officially-registered overnight Amartithi pilgrims – and this does not include the many unofficial visitors who sleep in adjoining fields or under the pandals; and at the noon-time observance on the 31st these numbers are vastly swelled by throngs of day visitors from Ahmednagar and the surrounding district. Indeed, for this brief 48-hour period Meherabad becomes, in effect, a small city, and an almost continuous programme of songs, bhajans, dances, talks, and films occupies the stage. Meanwhile at Baba's Samadhi, in an unbroken stream, pilgrims – many of whom have been waiting for this single opportunity for a year or more – bow down in self-offering before the Tomb of the One who, by assuming man-form, had bowed down to them. The large crowds, the dust, the hum and bustle of activity, the constant music over the loudspeakers, the bright colors and lights, the haze of sleeplessness, and beneath all of this, Baba's profound, oceanic Silence: these blend together into the Amartithi experience, which is reminiscent, perhaps, of the darshans and sahavases of Baba's own time.

As Bhau says, during their stay at Meherabad on Amartithi "people feel the active presence of the Beloved in their hearts, and they become oblivious to the world. For this reason pilgrims start dancing on the stage on the Amartithi programme's last day."

One special highlight in the 2001 Amartithi programme was a remarkable "opera" entitled

Letter from the Chairman

Dear ones of the universal family of our Beloved,

With the conclusion of the 32nd pilgrim season since Beloved Avatar Meher Baba dropped His physical form in 1969, His Trust is now sending to you, along with this newsletter, its second Financial Report. You will find there full details regarding the Trust's income and expenditures, as well as information about projected expenses under the Development Plan for the next three years. Beloved Baba's contributions to the Plan through you are the means by which Meherabad and Meherazad can continue to be enjoyed by the growing numbers of pilgrims in the future.

Beloved God is waking in every heart gradually, and thus we find more and more pilgrims every year. And as we are duty-bound to make arrangements for His dear ones for whom He is working so actively, we are trying our best to develop Meherabad and Meherazad, which are the places His lovers can feel the grace of His Light. This is the reason that we have taken up the Development Plan, whose main object is to provide facilities for his dear ones to stay at Meherabad when they visit Him at His Tomb.

As many of you will already have heard, Baba's aging mandali continue to suffer from health difficulties. I myself had to undergo heart bypass surgery this past April 6th – which was the anniversary of the day on which Baba signed the Trust Deed in 1959. Meanwhile, brother Eruch has become extremely weak. He now finds it difficult to walk even a few steps and to sustain even a short conversation.

The time has now arrived when you younger ones need to pick up the torch and march on boldly in His cause. But in reality, it is Baba Himself who does everything. He is the torch, He is the torch-bearer, and He Himself is the victory that He wins in the hearts of His lovers everywhere.

V.S. Kalchuri (Bhau), Chairman

AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST

"Be true to the trust that I have reposed in you."

– AVATAR MEHER BABA

Meher Dhara (or Meher Flow) that was created, directed, and performed by the Baba group in Wardha (in eastern Maharashtra). The subject encompassed the lives of the six previous Avatars – depicted through vignettes – and the life of Meher Baba Himself, dramatized through key episodes. Most of the action was related through original song and dance, exquisitely rendered. Meanwhile,

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Memories from the Ashram: Baba's Doctors

As the Perfect Man, Avatar Meher Baba embraced all aspects of human experience. These included experiences of poor health, particularly after the New Life. Interestingly enough, a large proportion of Meher Baba's close mandali were doctors of one type or another. Health care in the ashram was eclectic: it integrated allopathy, homeopathy, ayurved, chiropractic, and other medical systems. Meher Baba Himself received treatment in all these modalities at one time or another.

The list of longtime resident mandali whose medical services contributed in an ongoing way to the life around Baba and who worked under His direction includes:

Dr. Goher (Goher Irani).

Completing her medical degree (MBBS) in 1944 and joining Baba at Meherazad three years later, Dr. Goher was the individual most deeply involved in Baba's personal health care during the 1950s and 60s when He was afflicted by many acute medical problems – including diabetes, kidney failure and severe muscle

spasms that contorted His limbs. After 1969, Goher helped establish the clinics at Meherazad and Meherabad that have subsequently blossomed into the Meher Free Dispensary – Meherazad and the Meher Health Centre in Arangaon village.

Dr. William Donkin.

An orthopedic surgeon with a MBBS MRCS degree from London University, "Don" joined Baba shortly before the outbreak of World War II and remained in His close contact until his own death at Meherabad on 9th August 1969. Donkin played a major role particularly in the health care connected with Baba's two

automobile accidents in 1952 and 1956 in which He suffered severe bone fractures and lacerations on the left and right sides of His body. A man of remarkable talents, Donkin will probably be best remembered as the author of *The Wayfarers*, a magnificent study of Baba's work with the masts.

Dr. Nilu (Nilkanth Godse).

Joining Baba after the termination of his medical studies in late 30s, Nilu along with Donkin served as resident physician in many of the ashram clinics of the next two decades.

Chhagan (Sitaram Deshmukh).

One of Meher Baba's earliest disciples, Chhagan studied ayurvedic medicine with Baba's encouragement. During night watch, he would

Padri (Faridoon Driver).

An early disciple from the days of the Manzil-e-Meem, Padri was sent by Baba to Victoria Technical Institute and was encouraged by Him to learn homeopathy, which he practiced for the rest of his life. Over the years Baba often received Padri's treatments; in fact, He joked on this subject minutes before dropping His body on 31st January 1969. Widely respected as a doctor among villagers in the vicinity of Arangaon, through the 1970s Padri continued to give treatments from the veranda outside his small room in Lower Meherabad. He died there on 13th March 1982.

and practiced homeopathy for a living.

Baidul (Rustom Jafrabadi).

Although he never received formal medical training, Baidul took an interest in homeopathy; and for a short time, despite the skepticism of his fellow-disciples, he practiced his own unique brand of medicine with great success. As Eruch has humorously related, in the 1950s Baidul was invited by the Satara Civil Surgeon to treat patients at the Satara hospital whose cases were regarded as incurable; and his treatments cleared out the entire hospital ward! One of Baba's close resident mandali from the early 1920s onward, Baidul died at Meherazad on 23rd January 1970.

Dr. Ghani (Abdul Ghani Munsiff).

In 1920 a homeopathic doctor with a practice in Bombay, at Baba's suggestion Ghani began to sweep out his own dispensary with his own hands. Within a short time, as Francis Brabazon put it, Ghani "had swept away his practice and was free to follow God!"



Dr. Goher at Meherabad

Along with five other doctors in this list (Goher, Donkin, Murli, Baidul, and Ghani), Nilu accompanied Baba in the New Life in 1949. Nilu was in the car with Baba during His automobile accident in Satara on 2nd December 1956 and died instantaneously in the crash.

sometimes read out to Baba passages from ayurvedic medical books. An ashram resident until the beginning of the New Life, thereafter Chhagan lived at his home in Bingar (on the outskirts of Ahmednagar).

Dr. Murli (Murli Kale).

During the 1930s Murli along with Padri ran a homeopathic dispensary at Meherabad. He was one of the 20 companions who joined Baba in the New Life on 16th October 1949. Returning from the New Life, he settled down in Jubbalpur



IN BRIEF . . . FROM MEHERABAD

THE TAVERN IS OPEN

Since its inauguration in the year 2000, over 30 reports of the news and doings at Meherabad/Meherazad have been sent out through "Tavern Talk," the Trust's electronic newsletter. To subscribe, address an email to Listserv@ambppct.org, and in your message write, subscribe tavern-talk. (Subscriptions, of course, are free of charge.)

VIDEO CLIPS ON THE INTERNET

While in the hoary past news from afar had to be conveyed by heralds and messengers on horseback, in this technological age the latest reports about Meherabad and

Meherazad can now be gleaned through a new medium: web-casts! Though live broadcasts are not yet possible, with just a few-hour delay suffers of the internet this year were able to view (and listen to) clips of highlights from the Amartithi celebration, of Eruch in Mandali Hall, of the Samadhi on the morning of Baba's birthday, of the birthday play, and of Bhauji in the hospital in Pune. Tune in for more next season!



Sound crew at Amartithi

AMARTITHI'S SWEET SOUNDS

This year's

Amartithi was distinguished by a dramatic improvement in the sound system. Because of the generosity and personal hands-on supervision of a Baba lover who is one of the world authorities in this field, the musical performances and talks on the stage could be heard anywhere in the Amartithi pandal with crystal clarity. With many more programmes of various types in prospect for the years ahead, plans are in motion for further improvements, in equipment as well as in the training of personnel.



Dancer from Wardia at Amartithi

Pilgrim Life Grows at Meherabad

Pilgrim season 2000-2001 saw the continuation in a quarter-century pattern of gradual but consistent growth in the number of pilgrims. The tally of foreign pilgrims came to over 870 – an all-time high. Although the Pilgrim Centre has a maximum capacity of 56 people, over the season (excluding Amartithi) the average daily number of pilgrims accommodated through the Pilgrim Centre system exceeded 70, necessitating an almost continuous overflow to the Dharamshala, Hostel D, and (at peak times) Hostel C. Meanwhile, the 4941 pilgrims (4790 of them Indians) who stayed in Hostel D over the season (excluding Amartithi and Silence Day) represent another high water mark. Silence Day on July 10th, emerging as one of the peak events of the year, brought a wave of over 1000 overnight visitors – another record – of whom 995 were accommodated through the Hostel D and C system.

Because of the overcrowding of existing facilities, the Meher Pilgrim Retreat, a new pilgrim accommodation facility whose site lies a

kilometer to the west of Baba's Tomb, along with the new proposed Dharamshala (which will be constructed on the next hill to the south), constitute the centrepieces of the Trust's current Development Plan. Construction work on the Retreat got under way this past year.

Concerts and Talks

Meher Baba once said of His mandali that,



Eruch and Bhau enjoying a performance at Meherabad.

though they are not indispensable, they are irreplaceable. While fresh flowers of love for Him continue to arise in the younger generations, it is with sadness that we watch the aging and passing away of these matchless old lovers and servants of the Ancient One. In this respect one more sign of the times this past year was the closing of Meherazad to visitors on Saturdays.

The silver lining to this cloud, however, has

been a new creative blossoming in the form of Saturday afternoon concerts in the Music and Arts Centre. Every week or two, after tea and tasty treats, Meherabad audiences were regaled by pilgrim artists with song, instrumental performance, poetry, and drama.

Meanwhile, in the Pilgrim Centre dining room or the veranda of Hostel D, speakers of various nationalities shared their tales and

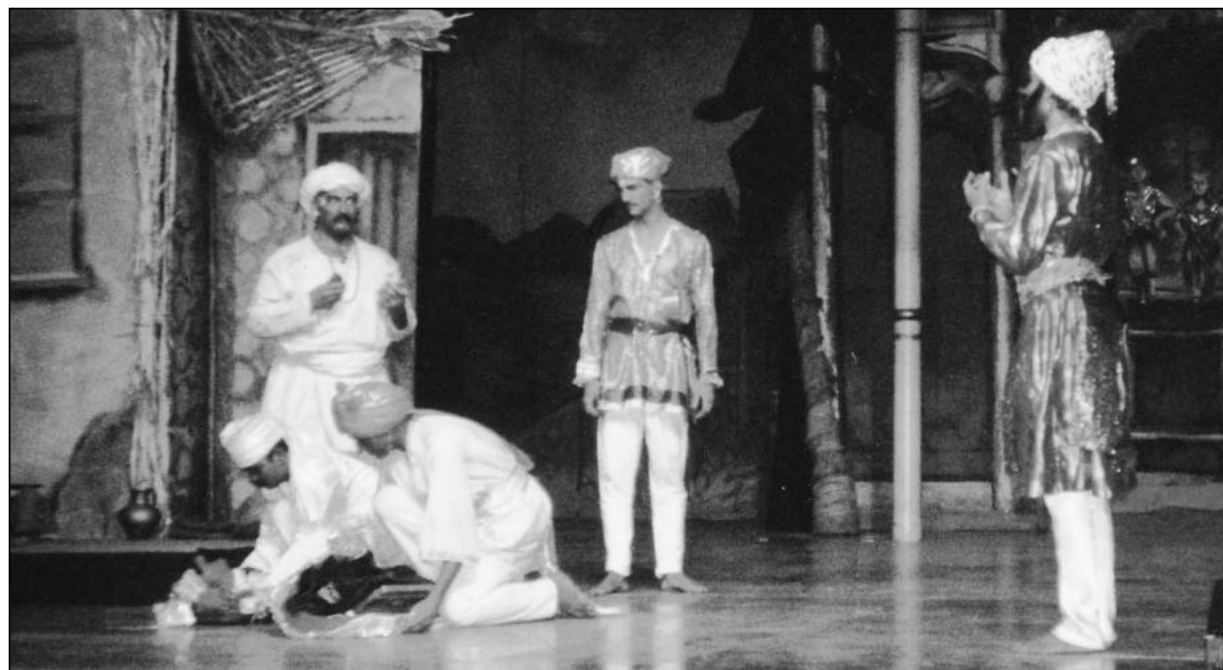
reflections. Bhauji, the Trust's Chairman and one of Baba's mandali, continued as in the past to give talks on Mondays and Fridays. In addition, more this year than ever before, other old-timers came forward to share their memories of the Beloved. Three of these speakers, Najoo Kotwal, Hilla Talwar, and Sarwar Taraporewala, had lived in the Meherabad ashram in the 1940s. Sam and Roshan

Kerawalla knew Baba from their childhood; Bill Le Page was a pillar of His work in Australia from the 1950s; and Tex Hightower was one of Margaret Craske's dancers drawn into His contact at the time of His visits to America in the 1950s. These and others, reliving their times with Him, shared with fellow-pilgrims something of the fragrance of His divine humanity.

The Younger Generation

Another trend of the last several years that became more evident in 2000-2001 was the appearance of a younger generation of His lovers. The rapidly growing numbers of pilgrims in their twenties and teens have added an unmistakable youthful zest and enthusiasm to the Meherabad and Meherazad scene.

One immediate fruit of this development has been the Meherabad Young Adults Sahavas, scheduled to be held at Meherabad from 22nd June to 2nd July 2001, for 80 Baba lovers aged 19-35 from all over the world. The Sahavas has been largely planned and organized by young people.



A scene from "Tukaram", Meher Baba's 2001 Birthday Play

Pilgrim Season Ends

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images in silhouette were projected on a backdrop, and for those in the audience too far away to see, the whole play was simultaneously cast on a large screen. The total effect was indeed mesmerizing.

Baba's Birthday 2001

During His physical lifetime Meher Baba had instructed His lovers that the focus of His birthday celebration should be at the different Baba centres around the world. For this reason this birthday celebration at Meherabad on February 25th, which marks the last major event on the pilgrim season calendar, does not transpire on Amartithi's grand scale. It is a far more intimate and homey occasion, not dissimilar in feeling to what is going on in other centres in India at the same time.

The celebration always begins with an arti at 5 in the morning, commemorating the Avatar's birth at that hour 107 years ago. After arti and seven shouts of "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" a long line of pilgrims awaiting their turn to bow down at his Tomb winds snake-like through the chilly pre-dawn darkness, while singers regale Him with their harmonious warblings to the accompaniment of guitar or harmonium and tabla. Down the hill, pilgrims warm themselves with tea and rava as they wait for breakfast.

For the last two decades a highlight of the Birthday celebration has been an original drama created, directed, and performed by an ensemble of Meherabad pilgrims and residents. For the 2001 production the subject was the life of Tukaram, a 17th-century Perfect Master much beloved among the Marathi speakers of Maharashtra for his devotional poems and abhangs (songs). As Bal Natu recalls, Baba Himself once commented of Tukaram, "Tuka mh_ro dilno tukdo chhe." The charm of this Gujarati phrase turns on the word-play between Tuka, meaning Tukaram, and tukro, meaning "piece." Thus Baba's phrase translates, "Tukaram is a piece of my heart."

And indeed, by play's end, many in the cast and audience would have said the same thing. Particularly moving was Tukaram's rapturous and unswerving devotion to Pandurang, who is Vishnu (the Hindu Godhead) imaged as a little boy. Most impractical as a bread-winner for his family, Tukaram is constantly hen-pecked by his wife Avali, who, though superficially a shrew, actually loves her husband heart and soul. Meanwhile, Tukaram's simple style of worship, centering in the repetition of God's name, is opposed by Salo, a hypocritical village priest jealous of Tukaram's reputation. Toward the end of his life Tukaram has a significant meeting with Shivaji, the hero-king of the Marathas who Baba said was a minor Avatic advent. Dropping his physical form, at the play's end Tukaram is transported to paradise by the heavenly eagle Garuda.

Contributions Needed to Support Trust's Work

The Trust's Financial Report accompanying this issue of In His Service provides details on all income and expenditures for Trust activities for 2000-2001 and projections for the next several years under the Development Plan. As you can see, it is in 2001-2002 that the very large expenditures begin in the development of the Meherabad Estate. The focus of this development is toward accommodating pilgrims; archiving Baba treasures; supporting educational, medical, and cultural charitable works; and preserving Meher Baba's Samadhi. All these objects were indicated by Meher Baba in the Trust Deed.

While income under the Plan has thus far exceeded expenditures, with construction of Meher Pilgrim Retreat now begun, this pattern is at risk of reversing itself.

To the present, 250 Baba lovers have either contributed directly or earmarked donations to the Development Plan. For the work to move ahead, what is needed now is both the continued support of those who have been contributing and the additional support of many others. Gifts small and large are needed and are welcome; the only qualification for a gift is that it be given with love. Your support and participation are means by which His imprint and legacy at Meherabad and Meherazad can be enjoyed by future generations.

In the case of Baba lovers from India, since their donations are already tax-deductible, it is most helpful if they donate directly to the Trust's Corpus fund rather than to the Development Plan. Corpus funds can be used for any purpose, including the Development Plan; but donations to the Plan cannot be used to support routine ongoing Trust operations that fall outside the scope of the Plan.

For citizens of the US and the UK, gifts are tax deductible if they are made to registered tax-exempt organizations within the UK or the US. For the UK the contributions need to be made to The Meher Baba Association. For details contact Trustwalla Sue Chapman, Aiden Cottage, 3 Whin Hill, Craster, Alnwick, NE663TP, England; Telephone: 01665 576957.

In the US there are nine tax-exempt Meher Baba organizations that have a grant in place with the Trust to support the Development Plan. Tax deductible contributions can be made to any one of the these nine organizations with the request that the funds be used for their grant to the Trust Development Plan. These nine organizations are: (1) Avatar Meher Baba Foundation Inc., (2) Avatar Meher Baba Center of Southern California, (3) Meherana (4) Meher Baba Center of The Twin Cities, (5) Meher Baba House, (6) Meher Baba Washington Gathering, (7) Meher Fund, (8) Meher Prasad, and (9) Sheriar Foundation. US Citizens who wish further information on these tax-exempt organizations, or who have questions regarding making bequests in their wills to the Trust or naming the Trust as a beneficiary of an Insurance Policy, Charitable Trust, or an IRA should please contact Emory and Susan Ayers, PO Box 398, Mystic, CT 06355, Telephone: 860-536-0303, email: EAyers88@aol.com.

Education at Meherabad

The Avatar Meher Baba Trust's current programmes in the educational front draw much of their inspiration from the work that Meher Baba Himself did in this sphere during the first great flowering of the Meherabad ashram in the mid-1920s.

The first intimations of this phase in the Avatar's work took place when He began attracting toward Himself some of the poor children of the untouchable caste in Arangaon village. Soon after this Baba opened at Meherabad the Hazrat Babajan School and the Meher Ashram, which gathered students of different castes, religions and communities from nearby localities as well as from as far away as Iran. Our own Aloba, one of the mandali now residing at Meherazad, was a school-boy in the Hazrat Babajan School in those days, and he has spoken of the superb basic education that he received in the greater enveloping atmosphere of Divine Love.

In late 1927 on through the next year the sparks which Meher Baba had been kindling



Meher Baba with children from Arangaon village, 1925.

caught fire, and a number of the boys, overwhelmed, lost all interest in their external environment and even, in some cases, seemed to have become absorbed in the experiences of spiritual planes. The beautiful stories from this time will no doubt be told and retold through future generations, and the names – Ali, Chotta Baba, and others – will long be remembered.

This was the foundation that the Avatar laid – in 1927-28 – for education at Meherabad. And it is the foundation on which the Trust builds today.

Though Meher Baba never again directly involved Himself in the creation and daily operations of a school, when He signed the Trust Deed more than 40 years later, He named schools for the benefit of

the public among its charitable objects. Since it opened its doors and began to function in 1969, the Trust has inaugurated a number of activities that are "educational." While its spiritual training programme is central among these, its major effort in the provision of free basic education has taken the shape of the Meher English School.

Founded in 1986 as a single classroom facility for boys and girls of the first standard, the Meher English School has grown to encompass all 10 standards of the pre-college curriculum and occupies a school building with 14 classrooms, 2 laboratories, an auditorium, a prayer hall, office and staff rooms, and a large central playground.

Its students are

taught by a full-time teaching faculty of 21 teachers. Transportation is provided by a Trust bus, and many poorer students receive scholarships providing for such expenses as books. Much of the student body is indeed poor, living in the vicinity of Arangaon, a poor village with a large population from the lower castes.

The Meher English School's curriculum follows the Maharashtra state guidelines. Thus all students take a comprehensive program of required courses. Additionally, computer studies have recently been enhanced by a computer laboratory with 6 computers. Since the school is "English medium," English is the language of instruction in all courses. Now that its basic framework as an educational facility has been completed, the Meher English School has added a prayer hall where prayers, artis, and spiritual songs are offered each morning, thus bringing the remembrance of God into the children's learning experience.

WHAT IS THE AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST

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

The Trust Deed calls for maintenance of Avatar Meher

Baba's Tomb and the creation of pilgrim facilities; for educational, medical, veterinary, and other charitable services; for estate development and procurement of sources of water; for the promulgation of Avatar Meher Baba's love-message through melas, lectures, publication, and the arts; and for spiritual training. The Trust's current Development Plan focuses on the creation of new facilities for pilgrim accommodation at Meherabad and other goals.

Inquiries and contributions

can be sent to: The Chairman, Avatar Meher Baba Trust, King's Road, Post Bag 31, Ahmednagar 414 001, M.S., India. Subscriptions to this newsletter can be sent to that address or to: Emory and Susan Ayers, PO Box 398, Mystic, CT 06355-0398, USA (tel. 860-536-0303, email EAyers88@aol.com). To subscribe to Tavern Talk (the Trust's electronic newsletter), send an e-mail to Listserv@ambppct.org and include in the text of your message the words: "subscribe tavern-talk."

Donations and inquiries should be sent to: The Avatar Meher Baba Trust, Post Bag No. 31, King's Road, Ahmednagar 414 001, Maharashtra State, India