

A Short Publication History of the Five-volume Set

The following account is reproduced from the essay entitled “A History of the Discourses,” published in the revised sixth edition of Meher Baba’s Discourses (Myrtle Beach: Sheriar Foundation, 2007), vol. 4, pp. 3-80; this extract is taken from pp. 27-31, with the original footnotes eliminated.

Though articles of Baba’s—or, at any rate, articles attributed to him—had been published in the earlier magazines, the discourses in the *Meher Baba Journal* presented his “spiritual philosophy” more fully, and in a manner better suited to the needs of a diverse international audience, than anything before them. Perhaps it was for this reason that, even while their publication in the *Journal* was still in progress, concurrently their collected publication began. The first four volumes of what is generally known as the “five-volume set” are each an annual compilation of the discourses released serially in the *Meher Baba Journal* during the preceding year. Thus the first volume, released in late 1939, collected the twelve discourses published in the first twelve issues of the *Journal* between November 1938 and October 1939; and the second through fourth volumes, published in 1941, 1941, and 1943, did likewise for their respective twelve-month periods. Each collected volume reproduced the discourses from the *Journal* faithfully, without editorial revision. Indeed, the collected volumes went so far as to present the discourses in the exact order in which they had appeared in the *Journal*, even when (as is the case especially in the fourth volume) this order is somewhat illogical.

The fifth volume, however, differs from its four predecessors in that it consists of eighteen discourses that had not previously appeared in the *Journal*. Three of them are markedly dissimilar from the rest: “We Must Live for God and Die for God” is only a paragraph long, while “Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity” and “The Task for Spiritual Workers” contain at places the language of personal address (“I” and “you”) from Baba to an audience of devotees—something rarely encountered elsewhere in the five-volume set. As it happens, these three discourses were prepared in connection with a definite occasion, namely, the gathering of ninety-nine men that Baba held at Meherabad late in December 1942;²⁵ and this no doubt explains their distinctiveness. The other fifteen discourses of the fifth volume, however, one cannot differentiate in any obvious way from the fifty-one *Journal* discourses that preceded them. Perhaps these fifteen Baba composed along with the other fifty-one with an eventual publication in the *Journal* in prospect; and when the *Journal* terminated with its October 1942 issue, as remaining unpublished pieces they were gathered together into a final fifth volume to complete the set.

These five volumes, then, first published between 1939 and 1943, comprise what is known as the first edition of the *Discourses*; and with this edition the *Discourses* begins its life as a collective entity. Though during much of this period Baba himself was moving about India in connection with the Blue Bus tours, Adi K. Irani, who usually acted as the publisher, maintained an office for the publication work. For several years

this office was in Bangalore, but his permanent office was in his family quarters in Ahmednagar, and from there, he had the *Discourses* printed usually by Mohan Printers on Station Road, located in the immediate vicinity of Akbar Press, a significant site especially in the early history of Meher Baba's advent. Between 1941 and 1955, as various volumes went out of print, they were reprinted, sometimes with minor corrections; and these reprints were identified on the printed books as separate editions, the second through the fifth. These names for the various editions—the first through the fifth, and later, the sixth and seventh—have become customary through their long use in the history of the *Discourses*, and this present edition accepts them as the standard nomenclature.

The fuller publication history of the five-volume set is an immensely complicated topic concerning which our information at present is still incomplete. The problem is that, until now, a comprehensive collection of the various editions has not yet been assembled and made available for study and comparison; to make matters worse, some of the publication details in the printed books are erroneous. Nonetheless, we do know that the editions came out on a volume-by-volume basis, not as complete reprintings of all five volumes. (For example, the second editions of volumes 1, 4, and 5 appeared in 1941, 1947, and 1945, respectively.) We also know that the type was reset for at least certain of the editions, and for this reason the paginations sometimes vary. We have not yet been able to ascertain whether there really were five editions for each of the five volumes and to what extent and in what ways they differ from each other. Available evidence suggests that changes were predominantly in typesetting and layout; cursory comparison has identified for the most part only minor differences in text or content, though the matter has not yet been adequately researched. Interested readers will find in Appendix 6 a fuller review of such information on this subject of the publication history of the five-volume set as we have been able to compile so far.