

Tales From the New Life with Meher Baba

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TALES
FROM
THE NEW LIFE

There are many books available by and about Meher Baba. For information please write: Meher Baba Information, Box 1101, Berkeley, California 94701.

TALES
FROM
THE NEW LIFE
WITH
MEHER BABA

NARRATED BY
ERUCH, MEHERA, MANI AND MEHERU

Edited by

D. E. Stevens
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Background

Meher Baba, born Merwan Irani in Poona, India, in 1894 and rechristened 'Compassionate Father' by some of the first who loved him more than as a human being, has been one of the most compelling contemporary masters of the inner life.

In January, 1969, to use his own language, Meher Baba dropped the body. This appears to have had no damping effect on the vitality of the influences Meher Baba set underway in contemporary life. From this observation one concludes that he was one who participated in that timeless ability to tap the Truth which characterizes the unforgettable great ones of science, poetry, music, mysticism and philosophy who, throughout the ages, provide mankind with the keys and sustenance to continue to struggle to understand the meaning of their existence. Not least of which has been his blunt statement that he is the Avatar, or Christ, of this age, as well as his observation of silence from 1925 until he left the body in 1969.

Meher Baba has generated many puzzles; his suggested keys to many of these questions have been cryptic. One of the most obscure of all has been the 'New Life' which he led with a few carefully selected adherents during 1949-1951. There has never in the past been the opportunity to capture the essence of such an experience from those who participated in it. The stories which unfold in the ensuing pages pose some of the most touching incidents and at the same time some of the most puzzling questions that have been caught in the arena of the inner search.

After more than twenty-five years of living closely with a group of devoted disciples in an ambience of guru-disciple relationship conforming generally and vigorously to classic structure, Meher Baba announced one day in 1949 that he intended to cut all ties with past associations and embark with a few close ones into a New Life. This volume describes from the memories of several of those who participated, the external and perhaps some of the internal characteristics of that period.

It has now been another twenty-five years since the occurrence of those events. There are slips of memory and inconsistencies which occur. I have not attempted to reconcile these, nor to interpret. The raw force of this tale speaks for itself and will add

one more insistent voice to the instinct of those who search for the reality underlying the puzzle of the pattern of their lives.

Madrid
2 April, 1974

D. E. Stevens

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have contributed in a great many ways in making this work possible. Among these one would wish especially to acknowledge the contribution of Georgina San Roque, Barbara Amos and the Society for Avatar Meher Baba.

‘This New Life is endless, and even after my physical death it will be kept alive by those who live the life of complete renunciation of falsehood, lies, hatred, anger, greed and lust; and who, to accomplish all this, do no lustful actions, do no harm to anyone, do no back-biting, do not seek material possessions or power, who accept no homage, neither covet honor nor shun disgrace, and fear no one and nothing; by those who rely wholly and solely on God, and who love God purely for the sake of loving; and believe in the lovers of God and in manifestations, and yet do not expect to receive any spiritual or material reward; who do not let go the hand of Truth, and who, without being upset by calamities, bravely and wholeheartedly face all hardships with one hundred per cent cheerfulness, and give no importance to caste, creed and religious ceremonies.’

Meher Baba
September 1950

Preface

Not long after Meher Baba dropped his body, Eruch was willing on an occasion together in Ahmednagar to recount some of his memories of the New Life. Several of the women mandali, knowing of the project, were also happy to combine their recollections. Having been urged years before by Murshida Duce to preserve such material in permanent record form for posterity, I asked if I might tape the accounts, and it was so agreed.

As the material spun out on the reels the flavor of life with the Avatar, with the balance pushed towards the man side of the God-Man, was so rich that I asked if I could have the transcript made and consider publishing it for a more readily available record. Again the answer was yes.

Then the sticky side arose. The original project was personal, with parts in the form of a dialogue. Too, there were some inconsistencies in comparing accounts of different persons. The decision that had to be made was whether to keep the original taped form and edit only for smoother reading, or to rewrite entirely as a story sequence. The mandali who participated left the decision to me. Although I took several months to decide, there was never any real doubt in my mind. The first public record of priceless source material must be as close to the original rendering as is feasible. Then, with this as the indisputable base, the gifted writers and interpreters of generations to come can give out beautiful renderings to delight all tastes. I knew that if I had tried to do this, I would have lost the exquisite sense of the presence of the Beloved that moves through the account of the mandali.

D. E. Stevens
Madrid

June 19, 1975

Introduction

I

I cannot help asking who I am to introduce this New Life. I did not see you, touch, live with you, though I have observed a few of your New Life companions as they are at the end of a lifetime of relationship with you. I can see what real love does to a soul and I like what I see.

I also know that a real live internal relationship is possible with you even though your body does lie in the Tomb on Meherabad Hill.

I am not sure what you did for us during that unique phase of your work which you called the New Life. I doubt if any of us knows (yet). This is, after all, only the beginning of the new avatic voyage and we are all in the same boat, each to his own but each in you.

I believe, however, that during your universal work you set into crosscurrents of my particular life stream the necessary cues, clues and opportunities by which I will uncover that profound, unlimited treasure which in my inheritance.

In the course of this life I have now come upon a most intriguing pattern, a pattern which you yourself have carefully woven into the fabric of the universe.

(A universe, by the way, with which we are all one and which breathes within each of its inhabitants. You said that your work as Avatar had been completed one hundred per cent to your satisfaction. This implies that the fires which you woke must now be smoldering within the heart of every individual mental universe. If the core of the universe is burning we have only to let it manifest from within. I am sure you have left ways to unlock and to contain that internal universal burning.)

In the course of this life I have come upon you and your work in the form of the New life, but you must have arranged that meeting; you don't leave opportunities scattered carelessly on the path. Now that I have been brought face to face with this intriguing pattern of living I sense that I have a responsibility to take it very seriously. I believe that I have both the responsibility and the right to 'penetrate into the essence of the being and the significance' of your New Life.

I find myself knocking at your door, begging an invitation, but who am I to introduce myself into your New Life? Well.....?

First, I am curious, and it might just be fun.

Second, I am reasonably aware that as a human being I have a responsibility towards the ongoing voyage of my own soul.

Third, I have an increasing suspicion that alone I am not capable of navigating this ship.

Fourth, there is a definite longing in here to hand over command to one who can master the soul.

Fifth, there is a mounting acceptance that you are, after all, the real and only master of the ocean.

Sixth, I have a nagging sense that I had better do something very real towards that handover, right now.

Seventh, the whole ship, voyage and ocean is in your palm anyway, so what do I lose by giving everything over to you?

Now these feelings draw me toward the New Life adventure and I suspect that herein will be found a new avataric way to the beloved ancient truth and the real love life.

II

There is something about the New Life which exerts a compelling and integrating fascination. I feel it as some kind of setting-off point for a grown-up mystical God-loving life.

Still and all, when faced with the bewildering behavior of you and your companions through 1949 and '50 I cannot help asking, 'Were you really doing anything for me?'

Even though the momentum of my this-life has brought me upon the rocky challenge of your New Life, who am I to presume to take up such a challenge?

Who am I?

As yet I hardly know, though sometimes, when sane, I do suspect that one day I will accept myself Whole Heartedly as God.

Meanwhile my heart is still in fragments and full of strangers, but I do often try and count myself among the many would-be lovers of you.

I know that part of my heart wants to be a lover of you. The other straggling fragments are beginning to feel that something about you and the New Life just might act as a focus about which

to pivot a scattered internal universe. Having gathered myself, might there not emerge opportunity enough to really hand over this collected heart to the lover within?

I suspect that it was to help that wavering, wandering lover, within each of us, that you drew so consistently from your companions that particular note of love which sounds throughout the tales of the New Life.

You introduced the pattern of the New Life into the way of the pilgrim; was it to call out, from within, that resilient one-pointed lover of God that we so tentatively contain?

You have resolutely set before us a love task that demands nothing less than one hundred per cent commitment to human life at its best. You have prepared for us something very adult to chew upon.

Craig San Roque
London

June, 1975

SONG OF THE NEW LIFE

Listen to the silent words of Meher Baba;
The life of all lovers of God is in these words.
You who are serious to follow the New Life
Will renounce your ephemeral existence.

We have taken to this life in which we rely only upon God;
Our will is strengthened by our oath.
We merrily sing the song of hopelessness;
We invite all calamities and difficulties.

We neither wail over lost hopes, not complain about promises,
Or covet honor, or shun disgrace.
Back-biting is ended and we do not fear anyone;
This is the tenor of our New Life.

No confusion in the mind now, neither are any ties left;
Pride, anger, lust and greed are sloughed off.
No religion for any of us, nor care for physical and mental aims.
The Sheikh and the Brahmin are now in the same boat.

There is for us all no small or great.
Neither disciple, master, nor Godhood exist.
Brotherliness is the link,
And our common enjoyment of suffering.

This world or the next, hell or heaven, we are no longer concerned
with.
Shaktis and *siddhis*, occultism and miracles, we are no longer
plagued with.
All false impression have been purged from the mind;
Now we live with the active present.

Dear ones, take seriously the words of Baba.
'Although now I am on the same level with you.
Yet all orders from me, good, bad, or extraordinary,
You should carry out immediately, leaving the result to God.

‘Even if the heavens fall,
Do not let go the hand of Truth;
Let not despair or disappointment ravage and destroy the garden
of your life;
You beautify it by contentment and self-sufficiency.

‘Even though your heart be cut to bits, let a smile be on your lips.
Here I divulge to you a truth:
Hidden in your empty hands is treasure untold;
Your beggarly life is the envy of kings.

‘God exists indeed, and true are the Prophets,
Every cycle has an Avatar, and every moment a *wali*.
For us, however, it is only hopelessness and helplessness,
How else can I describe to you what our New Life is?’

A translation of the song
composed by Dr. Ghani
31 October 1949

Don Stevens: We are sitting in Eruch's cabin in Meherazad on the second day of January, 1972, and Eruch starting to tell of Baba's last day in the New Life journey spent only a short distance from here.

Eruch: There's a place about eight miles away called Imampur where Baba halted the night before reaching Meherazad. We were all tired as we had walked a distance of about fifteen miles that day, and, in addition, on the way Baba had continued to do his work, meeting people, the masts, the mad, the poor and so on. There had been a lot of detours, and only when it was dark, at about eight-thirty, had we reached Imampur.

Baba pointed out to us what looked like a home, and we recalled that it was an old mosque used as a rest house. He said we would stay there for the night.

At the time of the British it was used as a rest house by the officers, but after Independence the Muslim community requested that it be handed over to them to be used as a mosque again. Now they have the mosque in their possession, but they don't keep it up very well. When we entered it was unused and unkempt, with a lot of dirty trappings. I had to clean it out so Baba could rest there for the night. As usual I had to attend to Baba's meal, after which he assigned us turns to keep watch and told the mandali to sleep outside as was customary. I shut the door from the outside and kept watch near the door.

After some time, perhaps half an hour or so, Baba clapped, and I entered the room and asked what was the matter. All this was going on at first in the dark as we had no lamps or flashlights. Then I found some matches which I had to use to observe Baba's reply, due to Baba's observing silence. He said with his gestures, 'What's the snoring going on? Are the mandali sleeping near-by?' I told him yes, although they were not too close. But Baba told me to wake them up and tell them to go further away. So I had to wake the tired mandali. There were three besides myself: Baidul, Gustadji and Pendu. I told them to move away from Baba's room, so they moved and I continued to keep watch.

After some time Baba called me again, and as I lighted matches to see his gestures he complained that there was a worse noise

inside the room. I wondered, because there was nobody there, how there could be any disturbance? Baba told me to wait inside and find out the cause of it. All of a sudden I heard the flapping of the wings of birds, so I told Baba, 'There are some birds over there.' I tried to find out where they were. 'There is a bird nesting,' I said.

Then again I had to bend down to see Baba's gestures, because Baba was lying on a rug placed directly on the floor, not the usual carpet that is in vogue now, but a very coarse rug that the shepherds use. We carried one for Baba and one for each of us. I had spread my rug for Baba to lie on, and Baba's was used to cover his body because it was a wintry month—December. After I had told Baba about the bird nesting in the room, I waited for his orders. He gestured that I should throw the bird out, so I went to the nest, trying in the darkness to touch the bird and to get it out.

Suddenly Baba clapped, insistently. There were different types of clapping by which Baba denoted different sorts of messages. There was a leisurely clapping, there was a clapping for applause, and there was another clapping that meant immediate attention—to leave everything and come at once.

When I heard that signal, I had to leave the bird and come to him instantly. Again, with the help of a matchstick, I started deciphering his gestures. He said, 'Leave the bird as it is. We committed a great mistake.' Then Baba started telling me through gestures that it was not proper for him to have given this order, and he reminded me about the standing instructions that he had given during his New Life. One of these instructions was that those of us who were on duty had to remind him if he gave any orders which conflicted with the very basis of the New Life, such as not expressing cruelty, anger and so forth.

Now it was my turn on duty, and I was one of the persons who had been told to recall these rules to him, but I hadn't done so. I had paid more attention to carrying out his orders and had forgotten my responsibility to remind him. It was a great mistake on my part.

All this had happened in the dead of the night, and now Baba was gesturing to try to bring to me that this was a very

serious mistake that we had committed in the New Life. I simply said, yes, that I agreed, and Baba said with his gestures that the next morning I should remind him of the incident.

Early in the morning we got up, and that was the morning we were to reach Meherazad. We had to get up well before Baba would come from his room, because naturally we had to be prepared to attend him. Sometimes the hour to relax and retire coincided with the time to get up. Then we might have hardly half an hour to lie down before it was time to rise again.

On this morning at Imampur we were ready, refreshed by washing with cold water. Then Baba called me in and I helped him to wash his face. You know, Baba always gave us some opportunity to serve him, even though he could easily wash his face himself. I don't mean that I had to wash his face, but to help him wash his face. I would pour water on his hands and then hold the soap pot, and we would take the soap and put it on his face. Then I would hold the towel. All these little things he allowed us to do for him to afford us an opportunity to serve him. It was all irritating to him, but in spite of that, being infinitely compassionate, he always afforded us these instances to serve him.

Mani: Clumsy

Eruch: Yes, we were awfully clumsy people, you know how difficult it is, when there's a tap running, to allow somebody else to help you. You feel so awkward, you see, But he, being infinitely compassionate, allowed us, and we felt happy. He allowed us all to think that we were doing something to help him. So that's why I say that I helped him to get his face washed and to feel fresh. Then he told me to collect the other mandali—the remaining three from the twenty-two. It was the last day of the New Life in the sense of journeying by foot and begging for our food.

I called the others into the room to Baba's side, and Baba told me to narrate the whole story of the previous night. After I had done this, Baba then gestured that it was a very serious mistake on Eruch's part. Eruch was supposed to remind Baba of the important rule that Baba shouldn't give any order which would result in cruelty to anyone or anything, and this had been sheer

cruelty. The bird was nesting in the night and had little birds there. It had made some noise. After all, what is wrong with this? Why should Baba behave so cruelly towards these little creatures? Eruch should have reminded him about the rule, but Eruch forgot and Baba would have had him throw the bird out, and it would have been the worst thing that had happened in the New Life.

‘Luckily,’ Baba said, ‘I reminded Eruch in time about it, because Eruch had completely forgotten.’ With all that, of course, I said it was my mistake. Baba said, ‘Now the only thing to do is that you—the four of you—must remove your sandals and slap me on the body with them. It’s my order to you.’ So we had to carry out that order.

Don: How long did you have to do it?

Eruch: Two or three hits from each one of us. And it was not just patting him with the sandals. You see, he was very serious. When we carried out the order it was to be very real. It was like hitting somebody with your shoe. Baba didn’t like any pretending, any sham. And so we all did it. Then Baba said that it was best that he order us to spit on him. We had to do that also, and then that was the end.

Don: But what about the big mistake, Eruch? How did you feel about it? How do you feel about the Avatar making a mistake.

Eruch: It was not just a mistake, it was an opportunity. Everything that Baba takes upon himself is another opportunity given to mankind, to show how man should behave on this, our earth, during this lifetime.

Mani: Baba releases these acts on our behalf, not for him, but for us.

Don: So it was not Baba’s mistake, but an opportunity?

Eruch: No, it was a mistake. Baba as man had committed this mistake. He *became* man, you see. He never *acted* as man, he *became* man. So it was his mistake, but that is an expression of the great compassion of the God-Man. He takes upon himself the whole thing.

Mani: That’s it.

Eruch: That is the great thing God does when, time and again,

he comes down as man and mingles with man as man, because he has become man. Unless and until he takes upon himself the suffering, it is not possible for him to share in or take away human suffering by taking the burden from humanity. Time and again we witnessed these little incidents. His mistake as man is not a mistake committed by God. It is a man committing a mistake. And he points out, as the God-Man to mankind, that we should not behave in such a fashion. But if we do, through oversight or weakness, then there are certain remedies to be taken. One has to become humble, to balance the act of arrogance, and that expression of humility is what he showed to us. He, being our companion, shared that little secret with us. And we could slap him with our sandals and spit on him only because we were so trained that we had to obey him.

We were like machines, you see, but we had our hearts too, and so since that day we have not forgotten the incident. We behaved as we did in order to obey Baba's command, but the other side still lingers in our hearts—that we were responsible for the God-Man having been in that humiliating situation. Had I remembered Baba's orders it might not have occurred. But that, too, is arrogance on my part. It is he who wants to set such an example in the world, so he makes us forget, he make us remember, he makes us do things. That's another side to it. But still, we are human—we have our feelings about all this.

Mani: From Imampur Baba came direct to Meherazad, but at that time they went straight to seclusion Hill. I remember Mehera and I were told to meet Baba, but Baba and the mandali walked towards Seclusion Hill on the far side so we walked over from here to meet him. Baba saw us for just a few moments and then he went up the Hill.

Don: How long did he stay on Seclusion Hill?

Eruch: It was seven to ten days as far as I can recollect. There were two cabins on the Hill at that time.

Don: The ones that were later brought down and joined to make up this one?

Eruch: Yes, this cabin in which we are now sitting. It's made out of the material, the asbestos-cement sheets, the flooring and the two windows from the two cabins—all was used except one

door. There should be two doors for two cabins, but only one door is used here.

After some days on Seclusion Hill Baba asked us to get the cabins down from the hill as soon as possible. In fact he used the word ‘immediately.’ So the four of us started working up there and Baba came down. I think he stayed in his room here in Meherazad for some days, till such time as we could get the cabin re-erected. We sent the material down from the hill, and Padri was called from Meherabad to reassemble it here. Until it had been rebuilt we stayed up on the hill in the open, although it was the month of December.

When the cabin was assembled, Baba made a kind of compartment by placing a partition here. Can you see these nails? Well, there is a tarpaulin which he used to hang here to make it into a sort of a separate room. This was the ‘office,’ where we are sitting. And in Adi’s office in Ahmednagar, have you seen those models of a Zoroastrian fire-urn, a church, Hindu temple, a Buddhist temple and a mosque carved from soft marble?

Don: I’ve never marked them. I’ll have to open my eyes.

Eruch: They can be seen in a glass case as you enter Adi’s office, those little models were placed on these two shelves you find here. I remember well, because I placed all those things here on the shelves, and then Baba never allowed me to touch them again. He would sit here on a chair, but I don’t know what he did because he would then ask me to close the door and I had to sit outside. When he clapped, I had to go in and read to him, anything he asked for.

Baba called this period the *Manonash* phase. ‘Manonash’ means the annihilation of the mind. Of course the Universal Mind cannot be annihilated. If the Universal Mind were annihilated, all our minds would be annihilated. The annihilation Baba intended took place, but that doesn’t mean that Baba needed the annihilation of *his* mind. I think that period accelerated Baba’s work of annihilating the minds of those aspirants who were aspiring for it. By this particular phase he helped them towards that annihilation of mind. I may be wrong, but that’s my guess. After some days Baba made me write some words down on a slip of paper. I don’t recall exactly what they were,

but they had to do with rites, rituals and ceremonies. The gist was this: 'Ceremonies, rites and rituals of all religions in the world are herby consumed in flames.' When I had written those words on a piece of paper, Baba read it to himself and then put it in his pocket.

In the evening he told me to dig a pit, which I did behind this cabin. Then he said, 'Collect some wood for it.' Although Baba and the four of us were living here at Meherazad at the time, we had nothing to do with the rest of the mandali or the women. We were like strangers. Even our food was brought from Ahmednagar, from my sister's place, where the Trust Office now is. The day we arrived at Meherabad we stopped begging, and Baba had me contact my sister to say that as the New Life continued into the Manonash phase Baba would be pleased if she could supply us food from her home. This she did, and so we had nothing to do with Meherazad for the time being. Even our water we took from another place.

Mani: Where did Baba sleep?

Eruch: Just opposite here in the room now used by Pendu.

Mani: And where did you sleep?

Eruch: Just there on the floor.

Don: So this was an office room primarily?

Eruch: This was really his 'office' for the Manonash work. And over there, across the partition, at that time was a room for relaxing. There was one very important thing about Baba, Don, even if there was only one room for his use, if he worked in it, he would leave some mark to denote that this was the place where work must be done. His work-space was always distinct from his retiring-space. He confined his retiring and his dinning activities in the same room there, but the work was done here. Always, when he worked he created the atmosphere of an office.

Don: And now the pit and the fuel?

Eruch: Yes. In the evening everything was ready. At sunset time Baba called us and he lighted the *dhuni*, as it is called. 'Dhuni' means fire mixed with smoke. Do you know that on every twelfth of the month the dhuni is lighted according to Baba's direction?

Don: Still?

Eruch: Yes. The memory of that dhuni is perpetuated. That

evening, Baba lighted the fire, and he and the four of us sat around the fire. I have not forgotten what he did then. He stood up, and he made us stand up also. He then folded his arms and we folded our arms too. All of a sudden, Baba brought out the slip of paper from his pocket. He asked me to read the lines loudly, forcefully, in the light of the fire. This I did, and when I had finished he took the slip of paper, tore it up and put it in the fire. Then—remember, this is important—he sat down and stayed all the while until the wood was consumed and the fire had died down. Then he said that the dhuni pit must be covered, because the ashes were to be preserved and that they should not be used by any man.

They are still kept. Do you know, Don, that the ashes of a dhuni are so sacred that people take them by handfuls and make them into small packets and preserve them? At the time of a death in a family the ash is applied to the forehead of the dead relative. Every day in some ‘Baba-houses’ these ashes are applied to the forehead as a symbol or remembrance of Baba’s dhuni, as a sign of leading a life of absolute renunciation in the midst of family life. Those particular ashes—there are two tins full of them—Baba packed with his own hands and sealed the containers tightly so that nobody would use or touch them.

Mani: Those tins are now in Meherabad in the room where we women used to live, where the things associated with Baba are stored. After Baba dropped his body we went up there to sort things out and preserve them. We used to put things that were not needed here at Meherazad in that room at Meherabad. When we lifted those tin boxes they were as heavy as if stones had been put in them. Somebody said, ‘Ashes!’ I said, ‘It cannot be ashes. Ashes, after all, are light things!’

So we had to open them, and found they *were* ashes. Then we remembered that Baba said to keep them like that. We asked Eruch, and he told us this whole story.

Eruch: The women at Meherazad did not know anything of all this at the time. The tins were removed after Baba packed them.

Mani: I must put a label on them sometime.

Don: Good heavens, yes, if they are never supposed to be touched! Presumably, Baba was saying officially at that point, ‘All right, the rituals of the formal religions are finished, as far as

power or efficacy are concerned.’

Mani: With his own hands he consumed them.

Eruch: He consumed them in the fire, At the same time he saw the end of it all. With his own hands he packed all the ashes in the tin boxes and said, ‘don’t touch them.’

Don: But, Eruch, wouldn’t that imply that one would see the world’s ritualized religions just gradually fall apart? That people would find nothing in them and that they would just die out?

Eruch: They will. What do you find now?

Don: I must say it seems to be working that way. But then I think of one other thing that Baba said so many times, ‘ I have not come to establish a new religion, but to revivify what has been given before.’ But apparently not through ceremonies, then.

Eruch: Not through ceremonies, no.

Mani: But through the heart of the religion.

Eruch: The ceremonies are not religion. All these rites and rituals are not religion. Yesterday you must have seen someone waving a joss stick.

Don: Yes, and I saw him knock off the lighted end and wondered if it was going to burn a hole through Baba’s rug.

Eruch: Yes. He was carrying out a simple ritual, a ceremony— it makes him happy. He knows little or nothing of why this custom was formed, and nobody else does here. Likewise the priests and the laymen know little of the original reasons that underlie their rites. They don’t know what they do. These are the ceremonies, rites and rituals that Baba was consuming in the flames of the dhuni.

All of this activity at Meherazad concerning rites and rituals occurred in the last days of the Manonash period. This part began in Hyderabad, which is now the capital of the state of Andhra. While Baba was staying in a bungalow in Hyderabad during the New Life period, he asked us one day to find a cave nearby.

Don: Where there certain characteristics about the cave that Baba had specified?

Eruch: None. He wanted a cave near Hyderabad—not too far, not too close.

Mani: Natural caves are a characteristic of the terrain there.

Eruch: How we came across this particular cave is typical of how things sometimes happen with Baba. It happened that we were in the market in Hyderabad one day when we came to know of a person who was manufacturing bamboo mats. So, in the course of events we came into contact with him and co-incidentally asked him whether he knew of any cave nearby which was easy to reach and where we could stop for some days. He said he did, and that he would accompany us. We were very happy, and the next day Pendu and I went together with him. When we saw the cave we approved it at once. The only problem was that there was no water on the hill except for a stagnant pool. It was very dirty, and we did not know if Baba would like this.

Don: Left over from the monsoons, perhaps?

Eruch: Yes.

Don: That would have been just about the end of the monsoons, perhaps October?

Eruch: Yes. We asked the man to make preparations for us, and we were very happy. There was also a shrine there to a certain saint, a *wali*. The peculiarity of the shrine was that there was no roof or shade over the tomb although the *wali* is much revered in that area. Thousands believe in him. Later we found out that some time before they had decided to build a shade over the shrine. They tried their best several times, but within a few days it was always blown off. Finally they gave up trying to provide any shelter over the tomb of the *wali*.

We took Baba there for inspection, and Baba liked the spot and ordered us to proceed further with the work. He gave certain instructions about a separate room he needed there.

Don: To be built into the cave?

Eruch: No, not into the cave. Right on top of the hill where the shrine was. Half way up the hill, on the other side from the shrine, was a cave. It was not on the side of the hill facing the village, but behind the hill. Baba liked the cave also, but the cave didn't need any provision for rooms. It was a good cave for Baba's use just as it was.

A day was then fixed for us to cart all our small pieces of luggage there. We were to stay for some days, and from there

Baba told us we could walk all the distance to wherever we were next to go when his work was finished. At this cave, he said, he would start the work of Manonash.

We prepared ourselves, and the day came when we had to transfer the bags. In the luggage, packed in a trunk, were the five emblems made of soft white stone which I spoke of earlier: the Christian church, the Buddhist temple, the fire-urn of the Zoroastrians, the Muslim mosque and the Hindu temple.

These were Baba's 'toys' to play with as he started his Manonash work. We did not know what he wanted to do with these things, but he wanted us to carry them to the hill. I packed them, and Gustadji, Baidul, Pendu and I were to take the luggage there. Then I had to take the car back to Baba. The next day Don (Donkin) was to drive us back to the spot with Baba, and work would then start.

When we arrived all together near the hill I parked the car in a spot suitable to stop and park a car. The other mandali started ahead to inspect the place and see whether the work was finished so that we could take the luggage up later. When I had stopped the car some urchins gathered around and started asking questions. It was for this reason I had to be particularly careful, and so I locked all the doors.

In the meantime the mandali had not gone even half way up the hill, and I started to follow them. Then, all of sudden, when I was about ten yards away from the car, it started moving. I thought that somehow I would be able to stop it. I tried to cling to it as it gathered momentum down the slope. I ran after the car like a mad man, trying to clutch something to hold onto it, but there was no room, not even a footboard. The windows were all rolled up, so I had no way to steer the car or to try to get in to do something. I just tried as if to caress the car as I ran beside it.

Mani: But you had locked the doors?

Eruch: Yes, I had locked the doors, and I had no way to unlock them now, because it was already going at 10 to 15 miles an hour and gathering speed. There were toddy palms about—like date palms. They often grow very tall, but sometimes they tend towards the earth in a sloping fashion.

You won't believe it, but the car jumped *over* many of these trees, and it jumped over rocks—like a horse, I tell you! By now all the mandali were down there, just watching. They were dazed. They didn't know what to do. For the first time in my life, and I hope it will be the last, I was really frightened. I was not worried about the car or our luggage. There was no luggage, practically, but I was very worried about those models. Baba had told me especially to be very, very careful of them, because only after long delay had we finally gotten them from Agra. They were made in Agra, by the way, in the north, near Delhi. You know the Taj Mahal?

Mani: The white, soft stone that they use for the models of the Taj Mahal.

Don: And these had been made to special descriptions given by Baba.

Eruch: Yes, to special specification given by Baba. Many things had been done to get them just right, you see, and I was very afraid for them. I thought that all of them had certainly been smashed by now.

Don: Months probably lost.

Eruch: Months, yes. But, what do I find after the car had taken a run of about three quarters of a mile? It went into a paddy field, and there it got stuck.

Don: What a miracle!

Eruch: It was a miracle, I should say. Slowly, I got my breath back, walked down to the car and then opened the door. I thought that the oil pump and everything must have been broken, and Baba had asked me to bring the car back to take him to the cave early next morning with Donkin. I did not know what to do. Sitting down in the driver's seat I tried the engine. It started, but at once it began making a very peculiar noise, in fact a frightful noise. I said, 'It's all broken.' So I just kept quiet, full of desperation. You see, I was frightened, really frightened.

In the meantime we were expecting a truckload of fuel to be delivered for our use. You know the type called 'faggots'? We had to have a fire there so we had ordered some wood for fire.

Don: Carried by an auto truck, not a bullock cart?

Eruch: An auto truck, yes. So while I was just sitting there the truck driver came with the truckload of wood. He came over to me and said. ‘What’s the matter with the car? How is it that you have parked it in a paddy field?’

I said, ‘Don’t ask me that. You should have come about half an hour earlier.’ So I asked him to help me get the car out. We towed the car from the paddy field with the help of the truck and brought it to a safe place. There, on level ground, we tried to find out what had happened underneath. Some of the straw from the paddy had caught underneath the motor, and this I removed. I again started the car. And you won’t believe it. Nothing had happened, nothing! Absolutely nothing had happened to the car, and it started working. The peculiar noise had been due to the paddy straw. There was nothing wrong with it, and further, it didn’t have a scratch on it.

Don: And the models had not been cracked?

Eruch: No! Of course, I had first to carry the models up the hill in their trunk and then unload the precious packages and try to find out whether there was any damage. Nothing! Not a scratch! Nothing had happened to anything. It was just that something had happened to the car to give me the fright of my lifetime.

Mani: It jumped in its evolution and became a deer.

Don: And Eruch jumped in his involution by planes.

Eruch: That was a sight. And still we remember it. Sometimes we reminisce, and we remember that hour. It was a nightmare, so to say.

Don: And did Baba hear of it?

Eruch: Yes, the same evening when I went back Baba inquired why I was late. What had happened? Was everything all right? And he was happy to hear all this and had a good chuckle. Just that, nothing more.

Don: Just a chuckle?

Eruch: The things I can never understand about the antics of that car is that it went first in the forward direction, then it would just stop when it had come almost to where there was just sheer rock—then it would reverse!

Don: Actually reverse, would it?

Eruch: Yes, it reversed. It would stop for a few seconds, and then start again and gather momentum in the reverse direction. Then it would stop again, reverse itself or take a turn, and go once more in the forward direction, meanwhile jumping over trees and stones and all that.

Don: Eruch, was the gear shift in neutral?

Eruch: Neutral, yes.

Don: Ah, because otherwise it couldn't have reversed.

Eruch: No. But I had put on the handbrake and everything was all right when I left the car. I'm very particular about cars, because I've had bad experiences sometimes when the handbrake was not properly set. Also, I had to pay particular attention because of the terrain there. It was only after inspecting the car carefully that I locked the doors. Unusual, the behavior of that car.

You know how Gustadji is when such things happen? More than what I narrated to Baba, it was Gustadji who made Baba happy. He embellished the story with different points of view. Because he was observing silence, naturally he had to act the scene. He would jump from place to place, sometimes acting the part of the children, sometimes acting the part of the car. This amused Baba a lot.

When the next day came and Manonash work started, they had already heard in the city that the first Prime Minister of Pakistan had been murdered. The hill where we were staying is in an area known as Khojagudda, where—you will be amused to hear this—the eunuchs were kept during the Mogul regime. Khoja means eunuchs. They needed eunuchs for the harem of the summer palace which had been located close by that hill. It was a huge place, and here the women would spend their summer vacations. It was a beautiful spot, with a palm grove. Because of this background there were still many Mohammedans there, and they spread the news immediately that the head of the Pakistan government had been murdered. I still remember, that was the day when we began the work on the hill for the Manonash period. The man murdered, Nariman says, was Mr. Liyakat Ali Khan.

Don: Eruch, let's go back, if you wouldn't mind, to describe

the five different models of temples.

Eruch: Baba had told us to get from Agra representations of these different five religions: the Buddhist, represented by the Buddhist temple; a mosque which represents the Muslims; a Hindu temple; the church of the Christians; and the fire holder or urn in the fire temple of the Zoroastrians—the *agiyari*.

Don: So there are four in the shape of buildings, while the fifth is in a symbolic form.

Eruch: Yes, it's shaped like the container that holds the fire. 'Agiyari.' 'Ag' means fire, and 'yari' mean friendship.

Don: When Baba gave you the description about how he wanted these constructed, did he say anything about what he was going to do with them?

Eruch: No, nothing. He just asked me to call for the five models representing these five religions. We had to do a lot of correspondence on this. We wanted a model of a church, so the stone worker must have seen a church there and made a model of it. We wanted a Hindu temple, so he made a typical temple. He did not know about the Parsi fire-temple, the *agiyari* as we call it. We said, 'Don't worry about that. What we want is nothing but a container that holds the fire,' and we gave him a sketch, because nobody is permitted to enter the premises of a fire-temple. The Zoroastrians don't allow anybody.

Don: But Zoroastrians of the faith are allowed into the inner temple aren't they?

Eruch: No, even devout Zoroastrians are not permitted inside the inner temple, except those who are qualified as priests. Not all become practicing priests, but those who qualify have a sort of license. Like Meherjee. He is not a priest, but he is of a priestly class.

Don: So he can go into the inner temple?

Eruch: If he wants to he can, but only after discarding his Western dress. He then wears a long gown, long pyjamas and a special turban, and he has to shade his mouth and nose.

Don: One question in relation to the Hindu temple. The form of Hindu temple with which I am most familiar is the stylized form of Mount Kailash, in which there is a higher peaked dome in the rear and then a lower front part, very much as Kailash

temple is built in the Ellora caves. But this Hindu temple is not in that form.

Eruch: No, it's not because there are various forms of Hindu temples. There is no one strict design. There are different types of Hindu temples—temples dedicated to Shiva, temples dedicated to Ram and Krishna, and temples dedicated to Jainmuni. They all differ. Have you been to Mt. Abu?

Don: Yes, you may remember that Baba suggested I go there in 1962 on part of my vacation.

Eruch: So you have seen the Jain temple there, and that's quite different from any other temple, isn't it?

Don: Vastly different.

Eruch: That's the Jain temple—all made of marble. So the designs differ. But the ones carved for Baba in Agra represent Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity. That's all that Baba wanted to represent.

Don: Are you able to say anything about what Baba did in the Manonash period with these five models, or is this something between Baba and himself?

Eruch: All that I can tell you is this, that he would ask me to take these models from their boxes and place them on shelves. But in the cave there were no shelves, so he would ask me to place them on a ledge of stone that was there—just in a row, that's all, and then I would leave. I don't know what he did.

Don: So he was alone in the cave with the models.

Eruch: Yes, just as he was alone in the Manonash cabin at Meherazad with the models placed on the shelves.

Don: This is during the period when you said he had the two cabins on Seclusion Hill brought down, combined, and he stayed there while you sat outside on occasion?

Eruch: Yes. I did not know what he did with them. All that I know was that I had to place them and leave the room. He would shut the door, and what he did with them I don't know. But he would do his work with these symbols representing the religions.

Don: These are the five major religions, as far as Baba is concerned?

Eruch: Yes.

Don: Were there other things that Baba did during that Manonash

period? You say that this particular episode at Hyderabad took place about forty days before he arrived at Meherazad, and the activity associated with New Life ceased. You said that this was a period of travel that was characterized by certain ways that you had to travel, and that it ceased when you got back to Meherazad?

Eruch: Not at once when we got back to Meherazad. When we got back to Meherazad Baba worked for several more days. Then one night he asked us to light the dhuni fire, and he burned that slip of paper on which were written those words dictated by Baba. I considered that to be the end of the phase of Manonash. But the New Life is eternal, as Baba has said. Even if there is nobody to live it, it will be there.

Don: Were there other activities or ways of going about daily life that were characteristic of the Manonash period?

Eruch: We were completely separated from the old life companions who were at Meherazad. Baba also kept his activities completely separate from the mandali there. Even to get food or water, we had no contact with the old life mandali who were living just next to us. We carried on completely secluded from them. In the Manonash period, too, Baba was always a companion to us. For example, when we left Hyderabad we came on foot, and I know Baba reacted when Gustadji got too tired. He would look at Gustadji and knowing well that he was getting tired, he would ask us to stop a truck to hitch a ride. So we would stop a truck to hitch a ride, and Baba and the rest of us all would sit on the load with our little belongings about us. Sometimes Baba would ask us to hire a bullock cart to carry our luggage for a short distance while we walked. At other times he would tell us to accommodate ourselves with the luggage in the bullock cart, and in this way we would travel for a short distance. Then the next day we would continue walking. In this manner he took us from Hyderabad back to Meherazad.

Don: Well, Eruch, then I take it from what you say that as far as external experiences were concerned, the chief thing that seemed to characterize the Manonash period was Baba's effort with these five models.

Eruch: Yes, quite right. Externally—to us—it appeared that those were the important things. But I would again emphasize the fact that we never once felt that we were out of the New Life, even during the Manonash period. It was a special aspect of the New Life, because the general conditions were always the same. We had to be his companions. He was our companion. We had to obey all sorts of orders that he gave, whatever they were. We had to put on a cheerful smile and never show that we were pained or that we were in a bad mood. That was against his order for the New Life. All those original instruction and directions and standing orders were still carried through.

Don: You said the start of the Manonash period at the cave at Hyderabad was about forty days before you arrived back at Meherazad. About how much longer did Baba carry on in his Manonash work before the dhuni was lit at Meherazad?

Eruch: I cannot recall now the exact number of days, but I can say that it must have been about a fortnight to three weeks.

Don: So all together it was about eight weeks total for the Manonash period?

Eruch: Yes including the journey.

Don: Yes, the journey was the greater part of it. There's another part that strikes me as curious. Going back to your literal translation of Manonash as being the annihilation of the mind—it seems strange to me that a period characterizing the annihilation of the mind should be centered on those five models, related to the five great religions.

Eruch: But as I told you, we cannot fathom his working during the Manonash period. Whose mind was to be annihilated? What was it? All I can think is that he accelerated the annihilation of the minds of the true aspirants who were aspiring for that annihilation.

Don: Did you, the mandali who were with him, notice certain things happening to you, to your own mental function?

Eruch: Nothing. We were so preoccupied in obeying and carrying out his orders and wishes that all these things remained absolutely insignificant to us. The greatest of the spiritual truths also were absolutely insignificant to us, because our whole-hearted attention was focused only on Baba's personality and

wishes. We never gave a second thought to all those things. ‘What is happening?’ ‘What’s all this?’ We had to follow him, that’s all.

We followed him completely blindfolded from all external activities and things. We were in the midst of all this, but we never gave a second thought to all these things. Our whole attention was focused on seeking the pleasure of Baba—that he should not get upset with us—that he should not drive us out of the New Life, but keep us as his companions—that we shouldn’t displease him in any way because there were so many orders to be obeyed, so many things to be followed. All other things were insignificant to us. Even when Baba contacted his masts and the poor during our New Life, we just took all these things for granted because one great thing was there— knowing that he was our companion in the New Life. We had accepted him as the greatest of all, the Highest of the High.

Eruch: Now that we have started at the end, let’s go back to the start. People are inquiring more and more about the New Life and how we lived the new life from day to day. The whole thing was wound around certain directions Baba had given us.

It all happened after the Great Seclusion, when Baba had sat in the blue bus for a period of about forty days. As the description of this period has been published we need not repeat all that. When Baba came out of the Great Seclusion, to the surprise of those of us who were with him at Meherazad, he started telling us that he had a plan for ‘those who were to follow him.’ We wondered what we had been doing all those years. Were we following him, or following ourselves?

One day he started dictating the outlines of his plan. He set out rules and disciplines for those who would follow him in what he called the New life, the most important being that we should not expect any spiritual or material reward. We should follow him in the New Life as his companions, and he would be our companion. The life would be one of complete helplessness and hopelessness, and we would have to beg for food.

Further, we would have to travel about on foot, and most certainly we would have to live in the ‘now’ as he called it. We should not give a thought to the past, present or future,

only concentrating on living with him as his companion. ‘At the same time,’ he said, ‘although I will be your companion, you will have to obey any and all orders that I give, good or bad.’

Then we set a day when all his close ones were to come to him at Meherabad, and he disclosed his plan to them. At the end he set the condition that those who wanted to go with him in the New Life should simply say yes or no and nothing else. A day was fixed for our decision and almost all wanted to say yes. But there were quite a few who hesitated to do so because they didn’t want Baba to be burdened with their presence. Baba then selected certain persons from those who had said yes whom he wanted to stay behind and see to the arrangements for his old life dependents so they wouldn’t feel stranded in his absence.

Baba gave us to understand that once we set out on the New Life, it would never end and that we had to turn our backs on our relatives, wives, children, homes and all.

Don: For the rest of your lives?

Eruch: For the rest of our lives. He told us we wouldn’t even have the opportunity again to see our old life companions—the old life mandali, our relatives, friends and Baba lovers. We were to completely turn our backs on the world, seeking a life of helplessness and hopelessness in the companionship of Baba himself.

Baba said he would do the same work that his companions had to do. If, for instance, we went somewhere to take shelter for the night and it was full of rubbish so that the grounds had to be cleaned, he himself would do it while we begged for food. The pots and pans would be cleaned by Baba, and Baba’s plate would be cleaned by him.

Normally we never allowed Baba to do such a thing, you see. Being so compassionate, he afforded us the opportunity ordinarily to serve him, but during the New Life he didn’t want us to serve. He wanted to remain with us as one of us—as our companion. People now come and tell us that the New Life must have been a hell of a life. To them my reply was and is that Baba’s being with us was everything. Although he was just a companion and not the God-Man, or God in human form, or even a Sadguru or a saint, his very presence was such that we never felt deprived. It

was really a very healthy and pleasant life, devoid of any hardship in spite of our being in the midst of difficulties.

Don: That sounds extraordinary, Eruch because as you describe the circumstance they seem to typify great deprivation.

Eruch: Yes, because I have described certain incidents from which you have made your judgment. But what I mean is this. There is such a things as physical hardship, but greater than this is the stress of mental agony that one goes through in the mind. We did not experience this deeper strain because we were fortified with certain orders from Baba, among them that we were never to express any moods. After a few days we didn't get those moods. We were so absorbed in moment-to-moment affairs with Baba that we had no thought for all those things. We had really left the world completely and we felt ourselves released. We didn't know if we would get food for the next day or not, but we didn't care because we had set out on a life of complete helplessness and hopelessness and we were completely determined to continue in this way, come what might.

Don: Eruch, can I go back for a moment to Baba's order not to express moods? It's terribly difficult to follow, as moods are usually generated by worries or frictions with the outside world, frictions with people who live close about. And you were a group of quite some persons living very close together. I would think it would have been almost inevitable that Eruch would become irritated because someone in the group did something wrong, or stepped on Eruch's toes. Or someone would become annoyed with Gustadji because he snored in their ear at night.

Eruch: Yes, but the order was that if we became irritated with someone, we were not to express that irritation in the presence of Baba.

Don: If you were irritated with another of your New Life companions, in no way could show that to Baba? And so the moods disappeared?

Eruch: Yes.

Don: It was not a case of your suppressing them then?

Eruch: No, they just disappeared.

Don: For everyone?

Eruch: I can't say for everyone. I can't fathom the hearts and

the feeling of every individual who was with us, you see, but I can speak for myself. There were, however, certain exceptions, so now I will narrate to you instance after instance of agonizing experiences that we had and how Baba solved them. This is very interesting.

There was an oldish person by the name of Dr. Daulat Singh who was a great lover of Baba. He was a very influential person in Srinagar in Kashmir. If what I heard was true, not only was he a medical practitioner there but he was also mayor of Srinagar. After partition he had to leave Kashmir and come to India, settling somewhere in the South. He continued through all this to adhere to Baba and was one of the persons who said yes to the conditions Baba laid down for the New Life. Baba allowed him to come with us into the New Life.

We set out on the New Life on 16th October, 1949. Hardly ten days had passed before we arrived for a lengthy stay at a place called Belgaum. This Baba called the training center for the New Life, where he intended to train us in how to lead the New Life through his own example. In Belgaum he swept his own quarters, washed his pots and pans, carried buckets, carried basins full of earth and helped to make the residence suitable for our stay. My duty in the New Life, fortunate as I was, was to be constantly with Baba. This was one of his standing instructions. One night while he was resting and I was by his side sleeping, he woke me up and said, 'Come on, let's go for a round of the camp.' As you know there were about twenty-two of us in the New Life, of whom four were women. All these people were spread over quite some area.

Don: In the open?

Eruch: No, there was a camp, a shelter, specially built for the purpose, with separate parts for the women and the men. Baba had his place between the men and the women. Baba took me out and I followed him in the darkness. We went from place to place, and finally we noted that one of the companions was not lying down, but sitting there and sobbing. That was the end of the New Life for him, because Baba had spotted him in a depressed mood. The man was Dr. Daulat Singh. He is dead now, but he has left behind many interesting stories of his life with Baba, not

only interesting but illuminating. He was an example for us all.

When we came upon him, Baba tapped him on the back, and said ‘well, doctor, what are you doing?’ Baba gestured, naturally, and I had to say the words. Dr Daulat Singh began to sob even more loudly, completely forgetting the standing order.

Baba said, ‘What are you doing? You cannot be in the New Life with me. You are no more in the New Life. Now forget about it and go to sleep, and tomorrow I will let you know what to do.’ Then Baba went on to say that he would also give Dr. Daulat Singh another order, a special order. ‘You shouldn’t worry about the order I will give, you will like it.’ How compassionate and kind our Companion was. From that you can judge many, many things. He was very firm and strict and at the same time there was always a kind word that would comfort us.

Then Baba left the place, but his facial expression said, it’s no good. I followed, and I was deeply moved. We all loved this old man. His very presence was full of love for Baba. I was pondering over this as Baba retired. Then I retired too. The next morning court would be held on Dr. Daulat Singh.

Don: All this occurred during what you called the training period?

Eruch: Yes. The next morning court was held. Dr. Daulat Singh was summoned, and Baba reminded him of the incident of the night before, asking him why he had broken Baba’s order. He started weeping again like a child.’ He said, ‘Baba, it was not in my hands. It was the mind that troubled me. It has nothing to do with the New Life. I am very happy here, but the New Life has nothing to do with it at all. It was my mind that troubled me.’

Baba asked, ‘So, what is the trouble? What is the worry? What is it that made you weep and sob like that? He said to Baba, ‘You had called all your disciples to Meherabad to say yes or no, and I was one of them. But between the time we said yes and the 16th of October, when we set out, my daughter became engaged to marry. She wanted me to stay back because the wedding was to take place on the 19th of October. I was helpless. I had given my word to follow you. So I left all the family behind and nothing worried me. I knew that I would be able to follow you without any worries, but all of a sudden, I remembered the last words my

daughter spoke to me.’

‘So,’ Baba said, ‘What was that talk?’ He hesitated, then blurted out, ‘Baba, she told me that knowing her wedding was fixed for a certain date I could have stayed back for three days and then joined Baba. But in spite of all her pleading and begging me to stay there, I was leaving her. She said that I was not her father. At that time I didn’t mind what she said, so I left and came to you, Baba, but tonight it suddenly came to mind. It pinched me and it hurt my heart. My crying was just the reaction.’

Baba said. ‘Whatever it may have been, it is impossible now for you to stay with me. Now you cannot be my companion in the New Life and I order you to go back to your home. Tell your people that you have returned because your daughter wanted you, but you must still continue this New Life—continue to be one of the companions. I will take you to be my companion. You will lead the New Life away from me.’

He went back to his home. It was a sight to see the old man carry his little luggage on his head. He left us all, he went completely. We were disassociated from him and from all our contacts with old life. For a long time we didn’t know what happened to him. But what tales we heard later! It was a terrible life he had!

One day we set out from the training camp on a journey towards the North, to Benares, and after going from place to place Baba at last came back toward Deccan Plateau. We had been a year and a half or more in the New Life and were now stationed in Satara. Baba was holding a meeting of the companions in one of the rooms where we were stationed. Suddenly Baba spotted a person sitting on a culvert by the roadside, far away. Baba asked me to find out who the person was. He was an old, haggard-looking person. As I got near him I couldn’t believe my eyes. It was Dr. Daulat Singh himself with a begging bowl, and still in the same New Life dress.

I asked, ‘Dr. Daulat Singh?’ He said, ‘Yes. Is Baba here?’ Yes.’ I answered, and he asked, ‘Can I come to Baba’s door to beg?’ ‘I can’t say,’ I replied, ‘but remember, Baba spotted you and sent me out to find you.’

He was so happy, so full of joy. He came and begged at Baba’s door and begged Baba to give him food. Baba got up from the

chair and gave him food and then embraced him with a cheerful smile. Baba asked him all that had happened, just to let us hear what the New Life was like away from him, and to compare it with what the New Life was with him. What a difference it was! He told us tale after tale of his hardships.

When he had left us he went back to his home in Hyderabad. For the first few days after his return his wife and children accepted him with great joy. But then they didn't like the idea when he continued to go out of the house to beg on the street for his food. This was in accordance with Baba's instructions to go back to his home and stay, but to beg for his food. One, two, three days of begging they didn't mind, but then they began to be most disappointed in him. They came from a very good family, as did all those in the street in which they lived. They didn't like the idea of the begging.

The wife and children reported this matter to the head of the community, saying that the doctor was going mad. But he was adamant. He wanted to follow Baba's New Life. Then the people in the town started hitting him with shoes and driving him from the street, trying to bring some sense into his head. But nothing stopped him, even when they hit him with stones and beat him with shoes. Eventually his family did the same thing—his own wife and children gave him a thrashing. Then they dragged him out of the house and told him not to stay there: they renounced him and said, 'We don't want you.' So that is why he was going from place to place, begging for food.

Baba was immensely pleased and he embraced him. He said, 'Now you are free from the New Life. Go back and do your old job again as a medical practitioner, and remember that one day I will come to your house. Now I want you to remain happy'.

So Dr. Daulat Singh went back. It was pretty daring for a person to go back to his home where he had been thrashed by his own family. But he did and he began to practice again, soon becoming a famous doctor. His family allowed him to come back into the house and they again respected him.

After Baba returned from the States in 1952—after the accident—he set out once again on mast tours. One day we came to Hyderabad and Baba said, 'You heard Dr. Daulat Singh was living

in Hyderabad?’ I said, ‘Yes, Baba, I have his address.’ ‘Let’s go to his house.’

It was in the early hours of the morning, about six o’clock. I asked some people where the house was, and when we arrived there I went inside.

‘Is it your car? Is Baba there?’ I said, ‘Yes, he is in the car. He has come to visit you. Remember his promise? Baba told us to remind him of the promise that he would come one day.’ He was so happy. He jumped like a kitten, ran out to the car, opened the door, embraced Baba and got inside. He did not know what to do—he was speechless.

Baba was taken up the steps into the sitting room. Dr. Daulat Singh sat at his feet and called his wife and children. ‘Take Baba’s darshan. He has come to our house. How blessed we are!’ Then he could say nothing more. He was absolutely breathless, and so he kept quiet.

After a time Baba said, ‘I have remembered my promise, and now I will leave you. Continue your practice and come whenever I call you. I am very pleased with your love. I am full with it. Nothing more is wanted.’ Then he got up to leave.

As Baba went from the house Dr. Daulat Singh started weeping and wailing and beating his chest. He did not know what to do. He had thought Baba would stay with them for some time and that he could give him something to eat, a little tea, later on in the morning.

Afterwards, he used to come to Baba and then go back to his home. He died in Baba’s service, telling people about Baba. He would tell the people boldly—the Sikh community—of Baba’s Avatarhood. All the Baba lovers in the Sikh community there are the fruit of his labor.

Don: From what you say, Eruch, it was not a hardship to be with Baba in the New Life.

Eruch: No. What I am trying to bring home to you is what it was like to be with Baba as a companion in the New Life. But I must not forget one more thing about Dr. Daulat Singh. I will take you back to the day when he had said at Meherabad that he was prepared to go into the New Life with Baba—one of many who said yes. When the session was over, Dr. Daulat Singh was

sitting on the verandah at Lower Meherabad. You have seen that verandah.

Don: Yes, a big wide, shady one.

Eruch: There was a bench there. He was sitting on it, relaxed, little knowing that Baba would come outside on the verandah. Baba strolled once, twice along the verandah, and there was Dr. Ghani smoking a cigarette. Baba went to him, pulled the cigarette out of his mouth and gestured to Dr. Daulat Singh to smoke it. Dr Daulat Singh smoked the cigarette very happily.

Baba said, 'Well done, my boy,' gave the same cigarette back to Dr. Ghani and gave Dr. Daulat Singh a pat on the back. 'You will do,' he said. That's all. You should know that Dr. Daulat Singh was a Sikh, and a Sikh does not smoke. Smoking is not permitted in their religion. But Dr. Daulat Singh's religion was to love Baba and to obey him. Dr. Daulat Singh believed in Baba as the God-Man—the Avatar.

Now we have ended the story of Dr. Daulat Singh. I pointed out to you, Don how hard it was for him to lead the New Life away from Baba. I will give you more stories that will make it very clear that the New Life with Baba, although full of hardship, never seemed so to his companions.

Don: As you continue, can you give more examples too of the manner in which friction among the companions, even though living so close together, gradually disappeared, at least as far as you were aware?

Eruch: Yes, I can touch on that also, but you must remind me later on.

Don: This is very unusual, because in most instances friction does just the reverse—it becomes worse, and finally, unbearable.

Eruch: Yes, but you must remind me about this. As I told you earlier, we were governed by certain rigid instructions from Baba. These were like handcuffs on us. We were even, so to say, in a straight jacket, and yet at the same time Baba made it very easy for us. All we had to do was concentrate on trying to keep ourselves happy.

Baba said, 'All these instructions boil down to one little thing which can be of great help to me in my New Life, and you, being

my companions, can easily do that: keep the company lively.’ Under no circumstances were we to have long faces. If we could do this, just keep happy all the time and not worry about anything, everything would go smoothly.

Don: Did he say in so many words not to worry about anything?

Eruch: Yes—not about anything.

Don: So he placed emphasis on that. This is the thread that goes throughout Baba’s ministry: ‘Don’t worry, be happy.’

Eruch: In spite of this life we were to lead of complete helplessness and hopelessness, he put that in the same way, ‘Don’t worry, be happy.’ And we tried our very best to do it. The companions who were with Baba were fully convinced that they were not going to return. They were convinced of this by Baba’s statements. And once they were convinced, the world did not exist because they had left behind their possessions, families, wives, children, brothers, sisters, mothers, aged people, everybody. They didn’t care for anything. They dared undergo anything. On a month’s notice, just one month, they turned their backs on everything and followed Baba. If they were able to do this, why should they care for anything else in the world? They were determined to go through this New Life with Baba.

So we started out on the New Life. As I told you before, the training camp was at Belgaum, a place south of Pooná. After we completed the program there we started towards the North. On an average we must have walked ten to fifteen miles each day, depending on the health of the companions. Sometimes we walked up to twenty-one miles in a day. So we went on and on with Baba.

On our way naturally we needed food, to keep us going. When Baba asked us to rest for the night he selected the spot for us. It was usually an orchard, a mango grove, or even an open field. It depended where we happened to be when it grew dark. Then we would spread out into the surroundings under Baba’s guidance to beg for grain and other food.

If on our way we passed through a village or town, Baba would signal to us to start then to beg for food for the group. We begged for anything the villagers would give. We never specified what they were to offer us.

Don: If you did not go through a village and you had no grain when it was time to camp, would you go into a field and collect some?

Eruch: No. We would find a peasant hut. We were ordered by Baba not to steal anything, you see, not to commit any felony.

Don: That is what I was trying to ask.

Eruch: Normally we had to go to the nearest village to get our food, or for grain or flour to prepare our food. The women's duty was to collect twigs and dried wood for the fire at night.

Now I will give you examples of how I found the life of begging made easy by Baba. As I told you yesterday, my duty was to be with Baba all the time, and so when we started on the road each morning I was to walk by Baba's side, followed by the four women, then by the rest of the mandali.

Baba would start off in the early hours of the morning. It was beautiful at that time and I felt as if I were the only free person in the whole world. Nothing mattered to me except to be by the side of the God-Man, whom we were not to think of as the God-Man, but as our companion. It was a real delight. In the distance Baba would point to smoke settling, as it does early in the morning.

Don: Yes, as I have flown into India this has always been very noticeable.

Eruch: Baba would point to the horizon and say, 'Look now, there is fire there, and breakfast is being prepared for us.' Then he would stop and ask me to cross the fields and beg something for breakfast. I would leave Baba's side and rush through the open fields—often a long distance, by the way.

Baba's instructions were that after reaching the village and having begged for food, I was again to join him at some distance along the road, because Baba wouldn't stop the journey for the sake of my begging. He would go on ahead and I had to catch up with him. You can imagine the speed with which I had to go and my concentration on begging for the food for Baba and the women. Meanwhile the men who continued to follow Baba had their duties to do as well, and if the chance came they too would beg.

Don: But you were the 'advance beggar' so to say? The others would also do some begging, but Baba sent you ahead?

Eruch: This was just at breakfast time when Baba would see smoke circling around a certain spot. Seeing the smoke, the appetite of the God-Man was excited, so to speak, and he would ask me to go ahead and beg for food.

I would like you to know about one or two incidents which occurred on these morning begging sessions. As I said, I would go very fast in order not to miss Baba or keep him waiting, because after continuing for some distance, if I had not yet appeared, Baba would stop and wait for me on the other side of the village. Normally Baba would never detour or slow up for begging, so I would hurriedly go and start begging for the food, trusting to rejoin the group before Baba found it necessary at last to stop and wait for the food.

During the begging I kept in mind a hint from a story that was narrated by Upasni Maharaj, Baba's Master. He advised us while narrating his story that if ever we had to beg for food we should not go to the front door, but to the back, because women have softer hearts. If you go to the front door the menfolk will drive you away. So go behind, go to the kitchen and approach the women. That hint of Upasni Maharaj I remembered.

In India the houses in the village often don't have a front and a back door. There may be only one door, if there is a door at all. In any case, I used to touch the hearts of the womenfolk by calling out, 'Ma, give me some food.' And they did, or sometimes an older woman of the house would peep out to see who was begging, and then would offer food. On occasion they would offer me two or three loaves of the coarse bread that farmers bake for their breakfast, and then they would ask me to wait while they prepared fresh vegetables, although they did not know to whom it was all going.

Don: They would volunteer this on their own?

Eruch: Yes, on their own, without asking a question. Very rarely would they even ask me where we were heading. If they did, I would say we were going towards the North. Sometimes they asked how many of us there were, or whether I was alone, and some would wonder why, at my young age, I was there, apparently having renounced the world. I would say, 'I am with a party of friends, my companions, and the head of our company is there.'

Sometimes I would call him ‘my elder brother.’ But we were told by Baba never to disclose his name.

These people would give me bread and cooked vegetable, and I would carry them back to Baba, the God-Man. Just imagine these things we were offered! Sometimes I was offered food for all. Whether offered much or little, Baba had instructed me to accept all.

After having begged for what I judged we needed, I would head as fast as I could go in the direction I thought Baba would be. When I reached them, Baba walking with the four women and the men following, all would come to a halt, and the men still keeping their distance. Baba would collect all that I had brought, and with his own hands he would divide it, giving each of us two morsels for the morning. This, distributed by Baba, would be just sufficient for a complete breakfast for us. Fresh bread, fresh vegetables, and distributed by the God Man! Our appetites were satisfied completely. On occasion there would be sugar cane sticks in addition distributed as dessert. Baba would hand a piece to each of us, we would eat it, and then we would move on again.

One very touching incident comes to my mind. Usually when Baba sent me to a village to beg for food I would have to go from hut to hut. At one, only a little bread might be offered to me and no vegetables, and so I would have to approach the next hut, and the next, until I had received that sufficient quantity for a couple of morsels each when distributed among twenty-two or more persons, with a little for Baba. In this way I had ordinarily to go through most of the village. One or two huts would not be enough, because we were a big group.

One day, as on many others, I went at Baba’s orders to start begging in a village for our breakfast. The first hut I went to was the home of an old woman. As I saw her lying there I shouted loudly, ‘Ma, *bhiksha*, give me something to eat.’ There is no translation appropriate to the word ‘*bhiksha*.’ It can’t be ‘alms,’ it’s not even ‘food.’ *Bhiksha*’ means anything that is offered when one begs. Is there any word in English for it?

Don: I can’t think of it, Eruch.

Eruch: It’s not ‘alms,’ as it is not doling out anything you see.

Don: ‘Sustenance,’ perhaps.

Mani: Here bhiksha means food, uncooked, like flour, grain, brown sugar, butter and so on.

Eruch: Right. The first word that Baba would want us to use is ‘Ma,’ which means ‘mother.’ And the second, third and fourth words are ‘premsay bhiksha dijye.’ This means ‘offer us, whatever you give, with love.’

That was how we called out as we begged for food. This morning when I went to the village and called out to the old woman, she started and said, ‘Wait, wait my son, wait, I will give you something,’ and she started opening some boxes inside her hut. Not a single box had anything in it . She told me to wait at her hut and went out to beg for my sake! As she made the rounds of the homes in her street they gave her a good quantity of food, and then she brought it to me.

Don: She did it?

Eruch: Yes, she did it . She wouldn’t permit me to leave empty-handed, you see. I still remember that old lady who went out to beg for the sake of the God-Man—who had sent me to beg for him.

Don: What did you do meanwhile?

Eruch: She had told me I must not leave her home, so I sat by her door as she went round her street. She brought back freshly cooked *bhakhri* (the bread that farmers eat) and vegetables and some chutney, gave it to me and sent me on.

Don: And you told this story to Baba? And what was his reaction?

Eruch: Baba was very happy.

Mani: Baba told Eruch to walk on, and he came to where we women were. He sat on a stone by the roadside and told us the story of the old woman and her begging for the food for the God-Man!

Don: What was the second incident?

Eruch: The second one happened this way. While on the road walking with Baba and heading for a particular destination that Baba had fixed for the evening, Baba sent me out to beg. I went hoping to get a good quantity of rice and pulse (that means rice and dal). Pulse with rice is the staple diet we liked to have when we could. If we could not get it, naturally we had to accept whatever was offered. We couldn’t press anybody for any special thing.

As I approached the nearby village, seeing that it appeared quite rich, I thought I could collect a good supply of grain and pulse. Everyone was really hungry that day. While I was striding fast from one street to another trying to get enough for the whole party. . .

Mani: Not a street, a lane.

Eruch: A little lane, a village street, yes—anyway, a man stopped me. He was with two or three other men, and the one who stopped me was an old man. He embraced me and kissed me on my cheek and said, ‘Young man, where are you going in such haste?’ I said, ‘I have to go and beg for food for my party.’ ‘Son, why do you want to leave the world and go out like this?’ It’s the pleasure of my elder brother,’ I said, ‘and my pleasure too.’

He said, ‘Do you know how fortunate you are to have such an inclination at this age, how blessed you are?’ I said, ‘Well, I know this much, that I am really blessed by being with the company that I have now.’ ‘Don’t be in a hurry,’ he said. He went to his house, brought out oil, quantities of condiments, salt, sugar, rice and enough pulse to have a good feast. To top it all he also supplied me with faggots of good firewood. Then he sent me on with another hug and said, ‘But may I suggest one thing to you? After you have finished your pilgrimage or whatever work you have in mind, will you come back to me and live in my house as my son? I said I couldn’t promise that and left, but I remember his words and the scene very clearly. It was a very touching meeting with somebody whom I did not know, and I don’t know why he greeted me like that, but he supplied me with the whole day’s needs for the whole party.

Don: Did Baba have any special reaction?

Eruch: No. Of course, Baba would always ask us for the little stories that we would bring from the village. He didn’t seem to . . .

Mani: Sometimes Baba would tell us whatever story Eruch had told him when Baba gave us the food he had brought back. Did Eruch tell you about the women making hot chapatis on a skillet? You see, when we were walking in the New Life, Baba and Eruch were normally ahead of us, then some distance behind were Mehera, myself, Goher and Meheru. We walked from early dawn in the cold—really cold—and even if we had our coats on

we couldn't button them because our fingers were too stiff. But it was so lovely once we had started walking on and on with Baba. We passed fields of mustard with their yellow flowers, and beautiful scenery, just walking, walking.

By the time it was six-thirty or seven, when the village people would start preparations to have their breakfast, we would be just in the mood to eat. But whether we had a bit then depended on Baba's whim. I remember once how Baba came back to us while Eruch kept walking ahead and talked with us a little. 'Hungry?' he asked. We said, 'Yes,' so Baba went back to Eruch and told him what to do. Baba sat with us and we waited and waited, perhaps seventy-five minutes. Then Baba saw Eruch coming back so he walked towards him, took what Eruch had begged from his hands, and came back to us and gave it to each of us. Then he told us the story, because he had asked Eruch how it had been offered.

Eruch: Baba was very particular to know how it had been given, what they said, what I said.

Mani: We gathered from the story that Eruch had gone to a house in this village—a hut-like house—and they had a fireplace on the floor with a nice faggot fire burning in it. Before it was a woman making bhakri, the native bread, on a skillet. One loaf was already baking when Eruch came and stood there, covering the doorway of the hut, because the huts are low.

She said, 'Yes?' and he asked for alms, for food, and she said, 'Wait, wait, it's just about ready,' that piping hot bread she was making. It was probably the family's meal for the morning—for the whole day—because that is their custom. We know it. They have just enough food for that meal, and then there's nothing more left in the house.

She gave Eruch two bhakri, and so much of a cooked vegetable called *bordas* to eat with the bhakri that it was enough for four or five persons. Baba was very pleased and very touched, I remember, and he kept saying, 'Isn't it delicious, isn't it delicious?' It certainly was, and hot! What more could we wish on the roadside, on a cold morning, eating not just something like bread and butter, but having this bread piping hot and served by Baba himself! Baba was very touched by it all.

Then in contrast there was another time when Kaka and Nilu were sent out. We were near a town and had settled for the night, as we often did, in a mango grove, or in some other isolated spot, big enough to accommodate us all. The mandali always slept in the open under the trees with the sky as their roof. We four women would get into the caravan for the night to sleep. On this occasion as on others, some of the mandali had been sent out to beg for food, with love. This time it was Kaka and Nilu, wearing their long robes and the turban of the New Life.

Eruch: A green turban.

Mani: Yes, they wore these simply because Baba told them to. They were doing what Baba wanted. It would have made no difference if Baba had told them to wear a crown, they would have done so. But they were not mendicants in the traditional sense—they were simply doing whatever Baba told them to do. It was so cold at this time that they put on everything they had—an old sweater, a quilt coat that somebody had given in bhiksha on the way, and on top of it all the robe. Neither Kaka or Nilu was slim to begin with. They were nice and healthy looking, robust, rotund, almost fat you might say, and after they had completed their dress they looked really round and fat. When they went to ask for food in the town, a man came out, gave one angry look at them and said, ‘You! You look like wrestlers and you certainly don’t look underfed, and yet you’re begging for your food. What’s the matter with you? Why don’t you go and get jobs?’

Eruch: ‘Have a wrestling bout and earn money,’ he said.

Mani: ‘You would make good wrestlers, but you certainly make bad mendicants! You should be ashamed of yourselves,’ and so on and so on. Of course, they came away empty-handed. Kaka took it very lightly, but Nilu! For a Brahmin to go out and beg is hard enough, especially when he thought of his family tree and traditions and so on. Now he was grumbling, ‘What insults we get!’

Don: But they would have to clear that attitude up by the time they got to Baba, wouldn’t they, or they would be disobeying Baba’s strict rule?

Eruch: In the presence of Baba they couldn’t have moods.

Don: No grumbles, no being disappointed.

Mani: Absolutely nothing. It didn't matter personally to Nilu, but here was another Hindu who would say that to him, a Brahmin, and all because he was begging for Baba's sake.

Don: What an injustice!

Mani: But you know, Don, in the Hindu tradition they're enjoined in scriptures, writings and traditions always to give food to a person who comes to their door, never to refuse, for who knows, one day that someone might be Ram himself in the form of a man—God in the form of man. So even though hundreds of years pass between the Avatar's comings, you give alms without worrying whether the mendicant or *sadhu* is real or false. No matter what, never refuse, because you never know who may be at your door one day.

Don: Of course, Mani, if they were clever and knew what Baba has taught us, they wouldn't give anything for six hundred years, and then for the next hundred or two they'd get busy giving to everyone.

Eruch: This should include the story of Shibri. It is a most touching story from the time of Ram, about seven thousand years ago, when Baba came in the form of Ram.

Don: Seven thousand years, you calculate?

Eruch: Almost, yes. There was devotee of Ram named Shibri, a *Bhilni*, who expected Ram to pass by her hut. 'Bhilni' is a woman of a certain caste who live almost naked in the forests, a sort of aborigine you might say. Shibri was a lover of Ram and a highly evolved soul, although born in that simple community. Day after day she waited, expecting Ram to pass by her hut. Being of that downtrodden caste and having nothing to offer the God-Man, she would go about in the forest and wherever there were fruit trees she would pluck the best, taste them, discard anything that was sour and keep the rest ready to offer to Ram.

Now tasting fruit to be offered to the God-Man is absolutely blasphemous. You cannot do such a thing. First of all, it is considered by the Brahminical class that the God-Man should be offered food only by the Brahmins. And for a low caste woman to taste the fruit—not even using a knife, but biting into the fruit and *tasting* it—this is something unimaginable.

Mani: If you take flowers from the garden for a gift, you never

sample the fragrance yourself.

Eruch: Otherwise you are taking the fragrance for yourself. What's the use of giving as an offering a second-hand thing? You shouldn't even have a sniff at the flowers you offer. They must be in their most original state.

Likewise with a food offering. It is to be done only with the right hand after you have a bath, when your body is clean. With your mind clean and your heart clean, the food is then prepared in a particular fashion, with nothing but repetition of the God-Man's name. These are the traditions to be observed.

But all these forms we discard in this story and come to the person who offers the food. This particular woman was not one who traditionally would be allowed to do it, yet in spite of it all she was still expecting Ram to go through that forest area in his exile and to pass by her hut. She kept waiting for him day in and day out, ready to offer him something when he passed by. One day it happened that Ram did pass by, and she saw him and invited him to her hut! And Ram sat there and ate the fruits that she had already tasted, and since then she has been immortalized in every drama or pageant which portrays the life story of Ram. For the sake of his love for mankind Ram stooped so low as to eat the fruits that had been tasted by one of low caste like Shibri. So it's very important that anybody who passes by your door never be allowed to pass by empty-handed, especially when he comes begging for food.

Don: Is that characteristic of the Muslim tradition also, or just of the Hindu tradition?

Eruch: This is the Hindu tradition, but in India it is observed by the Muslims also.

Don: Eruch, may I ask a few details about your living habits at that time? Mani mentioned that the men slept out under the stars, and the women retired into the wagon.

Eruch: And Baba had a special little tent. I think it was Elizabeth's, and I was in charge of pitching the tent for Baba every evening. It accommodated just one person, and the tent was so perfect and beautifully made that at the entry there were flaps fitted with a zipper so that there would be ventilation and yet no mosquitoes.

Don: Was the wagon that women were in the one that sits out in back just at the side of your hut?

Eruch: Yes, it's called the caravan.

Don: It was drawn by what animals?

Eruch: Two bullocks, one of them an English bull. There had been two at Meherazad, but one of them died just before the New Life. Baba had had Sarosh bring two calves, English ones, to Ahmednagar in his car.

Don: Yes, Sarosh has told the story of Baba sending him out and his difficulties in getting those two calves. And I think he had to get two pigs at another time.

Eruch: The two calves were brought to Baba, who would feed them with milk bottles. There are pictures of Baba feeding them. They grew up into hefty bulls, and Baba named them Raja and Wadjir. Rajah means 'king' and Wadjir means 'prime minister.'

Don: When it rained during your travels on foot, what happened to the men? Did you just put a cover over your head and stay out in the rain?

Eruch: Nothing. Our cover over our head was the sky. We had that coarse blanket called *ghongdi* which was supposed to keep us protected from rain, but not from heavy showers. So we just got wet and then dried out, that's all.

Don: Did Baba ever do any of the begging at any time?

Eruch: Yes. In Benares and in Satara Baba did the begging, and not only there, but also in Calcutta. That's a most touching story—we'll include it at this stage, now that you have asked about it.

During the course of our New Life Baba took us to Calcutta, where the famous place of pilgrimage is Kali temple. Ramakrishna Paramhansa had been the priest of this temple, and he got Realization while worshipping God there. It's called Kali Ghat, and although it was then some miles away from Calcutta, it is now a suburb of the city. Ramakrishna's room is there with his bed and so on.

When we reached Calcutta Baba expressed his wish to go to Kali Ghat and sit in the area. For his work he selected the dining hall of the compound where, after Ramakrishna had become realized, his followers collected to have their meals. In Kali Ghat

there are innumerable little buildings and temples surrounding the Kali temple, and one of these is the dining hall in which Baba expressed his wish to do his work

It was difficult for us to arrange this, but we had to. I approached the manager of the place and begged of him that he would permit us, without any disturbance, to be inside the dining hall for a couple of hours.

The dining hall is a plain room plastered with cow dung and with no furniture. One squats on the ground, as Indians do, and food is taken on a banana leaf or a specially prepared plate made of leaves.

Once inside the dining hall I remember Baba dropping all his clothes and staying with only a *langot* on. Do you know what a langot is?

Don: Loin cloth?

Mani: Loin cloth is right.

Eruch: Then he sat there. I don't know what he did then as he asked us to wait outside and shut the door. After some time, perhaps half or three-quarters of an hour, he clapped and we entered. Baba then donned all his clothes, the usual New Life dress with turban and a big long gown.

He told us then that we had a very important mission here and that we must follow exactly the instructions given by him. We said we were prepared to do what he wanted. He said the instructions were that I had to be with Baba, and Baba would go out begging. Behind Baba would be Pendu with a bag full of coins, and behind Pendu would be the other mandali.

This phase of the New Life happened just after the occasion in 1950 when Baba stepped back into his old life for one day, collected some money—some twenty-eight to thirty thousand rupees—and then proceeded towards the Calcutta area where there was a famine. There Baba gave help without anyone knowing who he was. He went right into the middle of the villages where people were dying. We were in the middle of it all. Nobody knew that we were there nor what we did. But before going into the villages he did this work in the dining hall at Kali Ghat, then came out and he himself started begging for food, followed by Pendu distributing handfuls of coins to the poor. Just imagine!

Now a most touching incident occurred. Soon after we walked out of the Kali temple area, we came back to the main road by taking a long approach on either side of which were peddlers selling incense sticks, idols of Kali, photos of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the usual paraphernalia that you find at pilgrimage places. We passed through all this, and as we came out onto the street Baba stopped and said, 'Now we start begging.'

Baba looked up and down, decided the direction we were to take and we started begging. At the first two or three houses there was no response to our begging. Either nobody came out, or those who came out said, 'No, we are sorry, go on, go on.'

Don: Did you call out for Baba?

Eruch: Yes, I had to cry out. But while I cried out, Baba's gestures were such that nobody paid any attention to the words that came from me. People thought that it was Baba himself calling out because Baba would gesture in such a way that the words seemed to escape through his mouth. No sooner did I say, 'Ma, premsay bhiksha dijye,' than Baba would put forth his satchel and the brass container. They are all kept, by the way, in the museum.

The first few houses, as I said, were either indifferent to us or refused, and some said to inquire at their neighbors. Baba continued meticulously, asking for bhiksha from one door to another until we came to a certain house. If I were in Calcutta I might be able to point it out. Such a touching reception was given to Baba there, without their knowing anything about who Baba was.

While we were in front of that house and I was calling out loudly, a young girl came out to see what was going on. She ran inside and called some elderly ladies, who said to us. 'Please wait, here. Don't leave this place without taking some food. Please wait, we will prepare the food.'

Baba then gestured to me—his way of gesturing at such a time was to elbow me to draw my attention. I watched his hands with a side glance, and he was saying that there were about seven people in our party so I had to say to the ladies that if they were preparing food it should be for seven people. They said, 'Don't worry, we will prepare food for all of you, but please wait.' But, you

know, once Baba starts to want food or anything, he has no patience.

We waited five minutes. Again there was a call, ‘Ma, premsay, and so on.’ They came running. ‘Don’t go we are already preparing it!’ They had started to prepare something, but then they had decided they wanted to give us many other things, we don’t know why, Don this whole family—men, women and children—were so loving! I don’t know what really inspired them to cook food for all of us and to beg us to wait until it was ready. They were really blessed. They filled our satchels, they filled our brass pots to the brim, and Baba was pleased. Then he expressed his great pleasure to the family, we turned our backs, and Baba did not beg any further.

Don: End of the begging for everyone?

Eruch: No, for Baba. I remember Baba leaving that small home in Calcutta that day and going far, far away. Then, sitting under a tree, he distributed the food to us all.

It had been quite a sight, going from house to house with Baba begging in the front and just behind him money being distributed without discrimination. Whoever came and asked, Pendu was ordered to give to them. Each one must have received from five to ten rupees.

Don: Did Baba usually send you, Eruch, first to do the begging, or did he send different people?

Eruch: Different people. When we came to Benares I was not given the order to beg, but whenever we were on walking tours I was the first one to be sent out. When we stayed in or near cities, someone such as Ghani would go out, followed by others, each going in a different direction. Normally they didn’t go to the same locality, unless Baba sent them in pairs. But I was not given a pair—I had to go alone.

Don: And on the walking tours you were the first one he sent out?

Eruch: Yes, so, we went from place to place begging for our food. But as I told you, Don, this was not all that lay behind the New life. Traveling alone was not *that* life. During the New Life Baba also gave us glimpses of his authority.

Don: Even though you were not to think of him as the Avatar, but just as a companion?

Eruch: Yes, as a companion, but what a companion! Some companion!

Mani: You never forgot for a moment that Baba was master.

Don: I'm sure not, after all the training you'd been through.

Mani: No, because it just emanated from him—he couldn't hide it.

Don: The Avatar *must be* the Avatar.

Eruch: I'll give you some instances of how we had glimpses of his authority, where he would wield his authority without seeing people, or without trying to coax somebody into doing a certain thing.

Occasionally after some days of travel, when we approached a large town or city he would turn to us in the evening and say, 'How about taking a rest for a week or so? Here is a nice orchard, a big one—it's a practical location—so how about taking some rest for, say, seven days?

We would be overjoyed, but what about the food? The problem of begging in a city was much more difficult than in the villages because these so-called civilized people were a bit hard on mendicants and pilgrims. They didn't want to part with the bounties they had been given by God, or that they had earned. But the villagers were very innocent and they would give freely with great love.

Baba would simply sidestep the begging problem by saying, 'We'll see, but how do you like the idea?' We'd say, 'It's a good place—we'd like to stay here, but what about the food?'

He would say, 'Do one thing. Why don't you go out . . .'—he would pick somebody like Dr. Ghani and Adi, or Patel and Babadas, or Babadas and Adi, or Nilu and Kaka, some pair—'go out in the town and just tell them that we have a party of about twenty or twenty-five people and how about supplying us with food?'

Mani: They would go to a particular family, someone who could afford to do that.

Eruch: Yes. 'You will be inspired,' he would say. 'Just go. You'll know whom to approach. Just ask them, but don't disclose my name or anything about me. On no occasion should you do that.'

He reminded us of that constantly. We were to ask them for food on the condition that the host or hostess must never ask to come and see the party or the leader of the party. Another thing, we were not to go to their door to take the food. They should have their servants come and supply the food over here. We would always be camping on the outskirts of town.

Don: How did you make contact with these people?

Eruch: I am beginning to tell you this now. I am just trying to show you what authority Baba wielded in the New Life. As we went out in search of these people, Baba assured us that we would know who they were. So we looked, and the two companions would exchange views such as, 'How do you find this man on the street?' No, I don't think he'd be right.' Then we'd walk ahead. 'Well, how do you like this one? I think we should approach this man.' But perhaps the other would have some objection. Very soon, though, there would be some person who seemed right, and we would embolden ourselves and ask that person. He would stop, and first of all he usually wouldn't follow what we were asking. What is this? Out of the blue, two person come here and say, 'Sir, please stop and listen to our tale.' We'd tell the story, and he'd say, 'Well, so what? Where are you heading?'

'We are going on a pilgrimage,' we would say, 'and we are heading towards the North. We are very tired. The company is of about twenty persons, and the head of the company wanted us to approach somebody in the town and we felt that you were the right person. Will you be able to supply us with food for about seven days? We are very tired. We want to camp for some days, and our camp is on the outskirts.' Then we would give the address, which would be three to five miles away from the town.

'Oh, is that so? But where will you stay? Just in the open?' 'Yes, sir, we are in the open.' You have been staying all along in the open?' Yes, sir. Sometimes we might find some shelter.' 'Will you come with me to my house? I will show you the house.' So we would go with him to his house and note the address.

'How many person did you say?' 'About twenty.' Then come here and take food.'

'Sir, but we would like to have food twice a day, and in the evening when you send the food please be sure that there is

enough for breakfast.’ Baba’s instructions were that breakfast, lunch and supper must be supplied by the person.

‘Oh, is that so? You want three meals a day for twenty people for seven days? Yes, sir. But the condition is that you should not see the head of the company or the group. ‘Oh, is that so? I can’t visit your people?’ ‘No. If you can follow the instructions of the head of the group who sent us, he will be pleased.’

‘But, who are you all?’ ‘Oh, we are from different places,’ and so on, just anything, but without telling untruths. So he would say at once, ‘I agree. Make it a point to come at about, say, twelve o’clock noon, and at about five o’clock in the evening.’

‘But, Sir, there is another instruction that has been given by the head of our company, and that is that it is for you to supply this food.’ Yes, yes, I will be the one who is supplying.’ ‘No, but your man should come there and deliver the food. We won’t come—we will be occupied over there in our own work.’

‘Oh, so I must send it with my man. Right, I’ll make the arrangements. It will come in a tonga or a rickshaw or a taxicab or something like that. But where will you all be? ‘We will show the spot to your man.’ ‘I can come and see it.’ ‘No, sir, that is the condition, that you can’t come to the spot yourself.’

The man would be very intrigued. Each time we approached someone, and I think it was about half a dozen times we approached someone like this at different places, he would be very intrigued. Then he would order his man to go with us to see the spot, but before we left him we would extract a promise from him that he would send the food, otherwise the whole company might starve. He would say, ‘No fear, you will get it. Go.’ And then the food would come.

Mani: And not just food. Good, delicious food, and after our hungry days it was . . . ah . . .

Eruch: Despite being supplied with the food, Baba often wouldn’t accept what was sent. ‘You send word with this man that there was a lot of salt in the food today.’ And then Baba would add with a smile, ‘Can he not supply anything else? Nilkanth, who has a sweet tooth, must be wanting some sweets. Why can’t we ask the person to supply us with some sweet dish for supper? Go and tell him.’

Then the companions who had made the original arrangements would have to take upon themselves the responsibility to contact the man and tell him we would like some sweet dish for the supper or some good pickle chutney, and so on. Everything that we asked for was supplied.

Don: Eruch, did you ever have a single turndown, once you had decided upon the man to ask?

Eruch: Not once when I was there, and I have never heard that any of the others had a refusal. When such an arrangement was to be made, we just approached the right person and he did it.

Mani: I remember one place where you had to make the same sort of arrangements, and the people were instructed to deliver the food at some distance, so that they wouldn't see Baba. Then one of you had to go and collect the food. At Moradabad, for instance, I remember them standing like outcasts quite some distance away from our group, with huge aluminum kettles full of sugar cane juice, quietly, quietly waiting for word from you that the head of the group accepts it. They had probably come in cars and sneaked up to the edge of the circle, but still far enough away so they couldn't see Baba or any of us.

Baba told us, 'Look at them!' We said, 'But who are they?' Baba said, 'Just wait.' Then one of the mandali was sent, and he came back with those enormous bright kettles full of sugar cane juice. Baba picked up the kettles as lightly as if they were cups and poured the juice for all, and then the empty kettles were sent back. All the time that family just stood there, meekly, quietly, not daring to say anything that might cause offense or displeasure to the person, and so *happy* that it is was accepted.

Don: But they saw Baba?

Mani: Only at the end of our stay at the place. Before we left, Baba said, 'All right, they can see me once.' But that's different story and Eruch will tell you about it.

Eruch: The condition laid down was not to see Baba at all, not to contact him.

Don: Yes, but in the pouring of the sugar cane juice?

Eruch: No, that was from a long distance. They couldn't pick out Baba from the group.

Mani: We could see them, because they were standing isolated

quite some distance from us.

Don: And they couldn't see Baba?

Mani: No that's the point.

Eruch: There another story connected with all this. Once Baba wanted to tarry at a place, and the place chosen was Benares. Being a very sacred and renowned place of pilgrimage, Baba wanted his New Life companions to have a taste of it. He told us that we would have to stay there for about a month, or over a month. That was where Baba called for the caravan from Padri.

Don: Oh, the caravan had not reached you?

Eruch: No, Padri was constructing it. He was the one in charge, and he was told that he should bring it there to Benares. Baba selected Adi and another person called Babadas to go to Benares in advance to find out whether there might be someone who would be kind enough to allow us to stay in a good bungalow for forty days without paying rent of course, because we were beggars. Also, the same person was to be able to afford to supply food to the party for from a month to forty days. They were the usual stipulations not to see Baba, not to try to approach him or any of his group, and not be told who Baba was.

Don: A complete free-will love offering, without stings.

Eruch: No strings. Another stipulation was that the food should be supplied by them regardless of whether there might be a kitchen in our bungalow, and that they were not to cook the meals where we were staying. The bungalow should be completely at the disposal of Baba and his group and have nothing to do with preparing or serving food. The food was to be supplied at the gate of the place, and the hostess or host should not try to come and see Baba or the group. As usual they should furnish us breakfast, lunch and supper.

Mani: At that time the rule was that the food should consist of simple things, no luxury, just dal and rice and one vegetable, like spinach, for the evening, and a plain breakfast. This was not to be a time of feasting, and even if our hosts were tempted to send a sweet dish or green vegetable and chutney—in fact, anything in addition to the rice and dal—they were not to do so. There would be rice and dal for the afternoon, the one vegetable and potatoes for the evening, and breakfast.

Eruch: Bearing all this instruction in mind, Adi and Babadas

went in advance to Benares. With the inner help of Baba, they gathered their courage to speak to somebody who heard their story through and was much impressed. He lovingly agreed to make arrangements for a bungalow for the whole party to stay in and accepted all those requirements that there be a separate residence for the women in the same compound, a separate room for Baba, separate accommodation for the twenty-two men companions and all the other conditions Baba had made.

The man promised he would give a firm answer on the requirements the next day. He phoned to make inquiries through some friends and eventually was able to find a bungalow for the group. Then he had to find somebody who would cook for such a crowd.

The person selected by Adi and Babadas under Baba's guidance was one of the most famous eye surgeons of India, a Dr. Nath. As he worked at the arrangements that were required, he readily agreed to supply the food, but the stipulation not to use the kitchen in the bungalow was very difficult. While he was working out the details, Babadas left to meet Baba as had been arranged at Benares railway station.

When the main party arrived there in the early hours of the morning, we found Adi and Babadas waiting for us. As we stood together on the station platform, all of a sudden Baba spotted a couple in the distance on the overhead bridge. Baba turned to me and said, 'We are seen. Somebody's there.'

The bridge was far away from where Baba was on the platform, so I said, "Baba, they are just people who come and watch. Probably they are some passengers, or people who are here for a send-off or something.'

'No! Go and inquire who they are,' he insisted. Of course the New Life means obeying orders, so I had to go all that distance, climb the overhead bridge and go to the spot where they were. And what did I find? Dr. and Mrs. Nath. I didn't say anything because I didn't know what arrangements Adi and Babadas had made nor what directions might have been given to this couple from Baba. Knowing nothing about all this, I came back. My duty was to find out who they were, so I found out and came back to Baba.

Baba just snapped his fingers. 'Come on, pack up, pack your

luggage now. We can't stay here in this place—the host has not followed the instructions.' Baba called Adi and Babadas and they asked, 'What's the matter?' Baba asked, 'Why haven't you made the point very clear with the host that they were not to come to see the party or Baba himself?' But they have not come, Baba.' Baba said, 'How can you be sure about it? And they replied, 'How can they come at such an early hour in the morning? We made it very clear to them that they should not approach Baba or the party, '
Mani: They hadn't said 'Baba' to the Naths, of course.

Eruch: No, they didn't say 'Baba.' Baba then pointed to the far corner of the overhead bridge. 'Can you see that couple there? They are Dr. and Mrs. Nath.' So Adi and Babadas started wondering how Baba knew. Baba, being a companion, naturally could not even express foreknowledge. He was not *the God-Man* in the New Life, so Adi and Babadas wondered. Baba then told me to tell the story.

I said, 'Baba spotted them and sent me there to find out who they were.' Then they asked whether I was sure that the couple were Dr. and Mrs. Nath. I said, 'Yes, I am, because I asked them and they said so.' Baba then sent me back to tell them that Baba, that is, my elder brother—I would address him as my elder brother—was very happy with the provisions that Dr. and Mrs. Nath had made for the whole party to live there, but now regretted that the party could not stay because they had not adhered to his instructions not to see him and the group. Now the group would go away and would find other accommodations. Baba also told me to thank them profusely for their loving offer.

I went and told them and they were very pained, even frightened, to hear the message. They didn't know what to do. It was a great sin, they felt, for such a thing to have happened. Something in Baba made them feel this—what I don't know—but I could see it by the way they behaved.

They begged me not to return like that. They implored me to assure Baba that they had not come to see him or the party. They had just come to offer their conveyance because they had heard that there were four delicate women in the group, and the bungalow that had been taken was so far from the station that it wouldn't be possible for them to walk all that distance after the long journeys they had made.

For this reason they had come to offer their car, but as they had come in their own vehicle, they could not return yet to their home because in the early hours of the morning there was no public conveyance. Now it happens that they had been waiting far away on the overhead bridge without any thought of having a view of the party or the head of the party. 'Please assure your head man of this!' Promising them that I would do so, I went back. Mind you, going that distance and up and down the bridge took a lot of time, but we had nothing else to do but carry out Baba's command. That was our duty and work.

I came back to Baba, tried to assure him of their intentions and eventually Baba relented. He said, 'Go and tell them that your companion is extremely pleased with this, but he said he wouldn't want to accept their conveyance free of charge. He would offer one rupee, as he had no money, but at least he can offer one rupee as a token. If they accept this, only then can he accept the conveyance that is offered.'

I asked Baba, 'If they accept, should I say that you will use the car and that you will take the women with you to the place?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'So I need not go back to tell them anything more?' 'No.'

So I went, told them all I had been instructed to, thanked them, they accepted the one rupee and I returned to Baba. Then Baba and the women hurried to the car. The driver knew the place that had been selected and they were taken directly there. The rest of us went on foot, the little luggage we had being carried in a push cart until we reached the spot.

Now, the food arrangements. It so happened that Dr. Nath had an assistant in Benares at the university. Those were the days when Benares University was very famous for education. It was *the* place in India. He also was an eye surgeon who had studied under Dr. Nath and on whom he could rely for such practical details, because Dr. Nath was very busy person. So he decided to entrust some arrangement to his assistant, whose name was Dr. Khare.

Dr. Nath tells him that such and such a party has arrived, and that these are the stipulations and conditions laid down for their care. He feels intrigued by it all and has no heart to refuse this party anything that they ask. Will Dr. Khare be of help in making some of these arrangements for the food? Also, they need a very simple diet.

Through his father and mother from Rath, in Hamirpur district, Dr. Khare had heard a little of Baba and his party having set out on foot from Ahmednagar, but he couldn't be sure that this was Baba's party. He first asked whether the head of the group was observing silence, or had he heard anything like that? No, no mention was made about anyone observing silence.

Don: This is Dr. Nath talking to Dr. Khare?

Eruch: Yes, the two doctors were discussing this, which I came to know later on because I had to go very frequently to them during our stay of about forty days in Benares.

Don: You personally had to go to these two doctors?

Eruch: Yes. So, to continue, nobody in Dr. Nath's household knew whether there was anyone among us observing silence. Nobody had any clues about the nature of the party, except that there was a party.

Don: The driver?

Eruch: The driver did not know anything. He was not observant enough, and in any case the women would be carrying on the conversation, so naturally . . .

Don: So naturally 'the gentleman' had no opportunity to talk

Eruch: Right. Consequently, neither Dr. Nath nor Dr. Khare knew any details about us. But they wanted to know. And of course the food *was* supplied.

Don: By Dr. Khare?

Eruch: By Khare? No! By Dr. Nath. We did not know that Dr. Nath had had any conversation or had made any side arrangements with Dr. Khare. We came to know this only later, and how we came to know it is another story which you will hear later. So Dr. Nath was all set with his food and sent word that it was ready. Of course we had completely forgotten about breakfast that day, because it took us a long time to get to the place.

Mani: When we got there we found not a house, but a palace.

Eruch: Yes, it was like a palace. There was a separate guest house for Baba and the women and separate guest houses for all the twenty-two companions. Then there were outhouses for the servants, a kitchen, fountains, and gardens, and everything could be locked by one principle gate. A beautiful place.

As I said, we forgot breakfast, and when it was time for lunch

somebody knocked at the gate saying, ‘there is food ready if you want it.’ But Baba said that they should not send us anything now because he wanted to go and beg for the first food from the Naths in Benares. Until he begged for the food, therefore, they should send nothing for the rest of us. The Naths were very happy, but they did not know who would come to beg. They were told only that two of the companions would be coming.

Don: To the city?

Eruch: No, to their house. Baba would first beg there, but nobody would know it was Baba. Dr. Nath and Dr. Khare knew only that some from among the group were coming to beg, but they were very happy because they thought they might get some clues from the persons who were coming.

So it happened on the first day of our stay in Benares that Baba and I went to beg. Baba was in the New Life dress and carried a satchel and brass pot. When I spoke the words, ‘Premsay bhiksha dijye,’ Baba would extend his satchel on which the same words were written. I would speak out and Baba would act in such a way that the person who heard would think that the words had come from Baba.

When we arrived at Dr. Nath’s house all were waiting to see us. They were very intrigued by Baba’s green turban and New Life costume. When I cried out and Baba gestured, Dr. Nath and his wife offered the food, and Baba took it, thanked them and immediately turned away. They gave to me also. Both the satchels and the pots were filled and we left before the Naths knew what had happened or who we might be.

What happened next was that they sent word requesting us to come again the next day for bhiksha, because they wanted to have a photo of those who came to beg. I don’t know whether you remember, but there is a New Life photo of Baba and Adi begging at the gate of Dr. Nath. That’s from the second day in Benares. I was afraid Baba might refuse their request because of his objection to photos, but he wanted something done. So Baba said at once that the next day, at the same time, two of the companions would return again to beg.

The Naths made arrangements for a photographer, and they called Dr. Khare there also. The next day Baba went with Adi.

Don: You knew and Baba knew, that there was going to be a photograph taken? They had been quite frank about that?

Eruch: Oh, yes. So they went, and that day Baba didn't wear the turban. Dr. Nath knew nothing of Baba, but Dr. Khare, who was sitting there, had an inkling because his father was a devotee of Baba. The photo was taken, and they gave it to Dr. Khare's parents for verification. Then they knew with certainty that it was Meher Baba and his party who had come.

Prior to that, even before knowing for sure, Dr. Khare had called his parents from Hamirpur. It's not too far from Benares. They had come to Dr. Nath's place and opened a kitchen there. With their own hands they were preparing the food, without being certain at that time it was for Meher Baba and his group. But when they knew for sure from the photo, the parents, Dr. Khare and Dr. Nath tried to hide their knowledge from us, acting as if they did not know anything about us or Baba.

Mani: They thought that the moment Baba knew, it wouldn't be the same

Eruch: Yes, they thought we might leave the place. So this hide-and-seek game continued for days on end. In the meantime Baba would send some word such as, 'All these days now you have been supplying plain dal and rice. Why can't you give us a good curry one day? Why don't you change the diet?' And this and that, and it went on and on.

Sometimes Vishnumaster would be sent. He did not know, nor did we, who the persons doing the cooking were. We just thought they were some old lady and a man. We would go to the kitchen and complain about their cooking. We thought they were Dr. Nath's cooks—without knowing that they were the parents of Dr. Khare, come specially to cook food for Baba and us—so we started ordering them about because we wanted to please Baba.

Very lovingly, without a word or a sign of protest, they followed our instructions completely. Later on, when we learned that they were the parents of the doctor, we put our heads down in shame. It was not proper for some of us to have behaved rudely with them. But regardless, they had gone on lovingly supplying us with food until Baba stopped them from doing so it. It was the longest stay in the New Life.

Don: Forty days, was it?

Eruch: I don't remember the exact number of days. Let's see, it was a long stay of four weeks from 15 November, 1949, to 12 December, 1949, and that included our stay in Sarnath. This is a very sacred place near Benares where Buddha delivered his first sermon after his Realization, after being unveiled, so to speak, and being made aware of his responsibility in the world of Illusion. But now the story continues, and it's a very long story.

Don: Eruch, just one question before going on. You were talking earlier about the occasions when Baba would say, 'Why don't we stay in this lovely orchard for a week? And he would set down the conditions. You said he did this six or seven times, and yet never when you approached a person were you turned down. Do you suppose the specific, detailed and difficult conditions Baba told you to specify were recognized by these individuals as being a spiritual discipline, and that you must have come from a great spiritual master?

Eruch: I can't say that, but now that you bring up this point I begin to think in that light. They were definitely intrigued - from all outward appearances I can say that.

Mani: But the conditions laid down by Baba were not a pattern that would be expected from a spiritual person.

Don: Not that specific pattern

Mani: They would think normally that they would be allowed to see and bow down to the person.

Rano: I think the fact of the unusualness of the request

Don: You think that that intrigued them

Mani: It's just that Baba, the authority, the source, sent them. They were drawn. I don't think they knew who or what. It was simply something that Baba released to them that caused them to do it with love.

Don: But these were all cultured individuals.

Eruch: Oh, yes, cultured individuals.

Don: And cultured individuals know the pattern of spiritual discipline in India.

Mani: Cultured, educated and intellectual. It's not an easy thing for them to accept these little ways of Baba, but they did it, and they did it with love.

Eruch: All right, this idea crossed your mind. But when we've

finished with Benares and Sarnath, I'll cite a couple of other incidents, and then I would like to hear your comments on them. The persons in these stories were not even asked to bring anything, but how they followed an inner command! What happened within their hearts? Why did they come there? Why did they want to bring a caravan full of goods, why did they sacrifice their lives, and why then did the family open a free kitchen in the name of Baba? It's a long story. When I have told it to you, I would like to hear your comments on this particular point that you have raised.

Don: Well, it's fair to put me on the griddle, too.

Rano: It reminds me of a similar situation in a small way, our experiences in Bombay when Baba sent for Kitty and me. We had ticklish jobs teaching, and it was in the middle of the term when we asked the headmistress for a short leave. We had got a letter from Mani saying that if we could be sure that we could get our jobs back, we could come and see Baba. The headmistress said, 'Of course you can go—I know you wouldn't ask if it weren't important.' Kitty and I just clutched our chests, like that. She did that twice, and then the third time we left permanently to be with Baba. To me it was one of the most extraordinary things that happened to Kitty and me during the New Life period.

Eruch: Now let us go back and recall the incidents at Benares, our arrival in Benares, and the food that was offered by Dr. Nath with the help of Dr. Khare and his parents. After some days Baba asked me to take a message to Dr. Nath, saying that he and his companions were very happy to have a halt here, that it was a pleasant halt, and that everything had been made comfortable for his stay—but that there were certain further things to be fulfilled by Dr. Nath if it were convenient for him to do so. Would he be able to carry out the elder brother's wishes?

Then, Baba told me, after making this introduction, I should ask Dr. Nath for a white horse, in bhiksha, in the spirit of love. This white horse should be docile, grown up, without a speck of any other colors—absolutely white, even the eyelashes and tail, not a hair other than white. And then if Dr. Nath were to agree to this, the next wish of Baba was that I should put a word in for a camel.

Don: On the same occasion?

Eruch: The same occasion. Then, if Dr. Nath were to agree to a camel—one having certain qualities such as being docile, well-trained for a caravan, and a he-camel—then I had to put in another wish of Baba. Along with the camel, Dr Nath should see that we got a camel cart. You know, there are special camel carts used in India, double-deckers.

To all this, I was to add one more thing. On our travels we would need some milk, as the journey would be very strenuous, so he should supply us with a good cow. When he had agreed to all these things, then I was told to ask him to add one more gift in bhiksha, and that was two she-asses. If he was prepared to fulfill all Baba's wishes, then I had to confirm the order for these things and instruct him to get them within a stipulated time. The date was given by Baba.

Having received Baba's detailed instruction I went to Dr. Nath's place. I did not know what would happen, how this meeting would turn out. When I came to his home it turned out that he was engaged in surgery, so I went to the other side and found nobody there. At last a servant spotted me and asked, 'What's the matter?'

I said, 'I have a very important message from my elder brother and I want this to be conveyed to Dr. Nath, but he's not to be found. Has he gone out?' He said, 'No, he's busy with an operation. Today is operation day.' 'Oh', I said, 'then let it be.'

I went back to Baba because we were not supposed to while away our time. I told Baba about this and he said, 'Go again after awhile.' Then he asked me to add yet one more thing to the list, saying that if Dr. Nath were to agree to all the previous requests, then I should say that all these things would be accepted on one condition, that Dr. Nath accept all our used clothes in return. Everything that we had on our bodies we would give away the day that we departed from the place, to be accepted by him in return for the bhiksha that we would accept—the white horse, camel, cow, camel cart and two donkeys.

After some time I went again, but he was still busy with the operation. In the meantime, however, it seems that the servant had informed him about my visit, so when his assistant spotted me he whispered into Dr. Nath's ear. Don, you wouldn't believe it, but he left the surgery—left the patient there on the table—and came out and said to me, 'What's matter? Is there anything that I can do?'

I said, 'Yes, there is one thing, and Baba has enjoined me to inform you that this is a very important message and that your one-pointed attention is necessary for it.' Baba had instructed me that Dr. Nath should be free to give his entire attention to Baba's message.

He said, 'Yes, I'm ready. Go on, now.' I said, 'But, doctor, there is a patient over there, and you can't have your one-pointed attention on Baba's wishes.' So he went back and I waited on the verandah, and after a while he was free. We went to his sitting room and I told him the first thing, about the white horse.

He said, 'Well, it will be very difficult for us to find this white horse. It's not difficult to give it in bhiksha, but it's very difficult to spot one within the time limit of fifteen days your elder brother has set. I'll have to send out messengers, and if we can find one we will get it. Of course we'll do that. We'll do our best, but your elder brother should excuse us if we cannot find one within the time limit.'

I asked him next about the camel, and the camel cart, and then the cow. 'About the camel,' he said, 'that is easy. We have lots of camels. Cart supplying, however, is not done in Benares, but only from the adjacent districts. We can get one from there. A cow is very easy. All this can be had in one day.'

I said, 'Well, thank you, but will you please make the move for the white horse? That's the first thing, for without that we can't move on to these other things.' He said, 'I'll try my best.'

'Now there is another thing that you are to offer in bhiksha,' I added. I said, 'As you know, all these things are necessary for us to use on our way to the North on our pilgrimage. Now, my elder brother also wants two asses.' 'What! Asses for a pilgrimage? That's never heard of!' he cried. You see, that's not the proper animal for anybody to have on a pilgrimage. Hindsu don't like this. There's nothing sacred about an ass—in fact it's regarded as sacrilegious to take an ass with you on a pilgrimage.

Don: Just like the pig to Muslims?

Eruch: Yes. So that really nullified the whole effect. Whatever favorable psychological state might have been created by the first request, according to your trend of thinking, Don—that this is somebody great who is asking these exceptional things—within a flash the whole effect was nullified, destroyed. 'What! Asses on a

pilgrimage? Never heard of such a thing.’

‘But my companion wants it,’ I stated. ‘And this is not the only thing.’ I went on. ‘All this you should do only on one condition.’ He said, ‘And what is that? And he started laughing loudly, indicating that this was nothing new to him. I said, ‘The only condition is that, in return for all this, you will have to accept our dirty linen—from all the twenty-two companions who have been wearing their clothes for a long time. Now, when they leave here they will cast off their clothes and don something else.’ These new things, by the way, would be the robe and the turban which were meant for the New Life. We all started wearing these from Benares onward. All our old clothing, even including our wristwatches, was to be given up.

Dr. Nath said, ‘Tell your elder brother that everything is accepted, including all the gifts to be exchanged, on one condition on my own—that *his* dirty linen will be included.’ I was not sure about that, because Baba never parted with his clothes. That was Mehera’s privilege, you see, so I couldn’t give him an answer. I told Dr. Nath that I was not sure and that I would have to go and ask. Nath agreed. ‘You make sure, and if that condition is fulfilled I will then start the search immediately for the white horse.’

We shook hands and parted with great love. I admired his love. Then I went back and told Baba of the conversation and of Dr. Nath’s condition. Baba sent me back with the message that he was very happy and that of course *his* clothes would also be included among the clothes of the companions. Dr. Nath was very happy, and that was the end of the end of the meeting.

Don: Baba’s clothes would be bound up separately?

Eruch: Yes, in a separate bundle.

Don: But Dr. Nath didn’t have any way of knowing which bundle was the elder brother’s?

Eruch: No, no distinction was made. At any rate, days passed by and many messages were sent to Dr. Nath and the kitchen. Then, after we had been staying in Benares for about a week, Baba permitted the kitchen to be brought inside the premises where we stayed. It was very difficult for them to continue as they had been, as the cooking for our big group disturbed the hospital. And what did we find to our surprise? The parents of Dr. Khare were Baba lovers! Now, how were we to divulge this to Baba? But Baba, on

his own, asked, ‘How about these people who have come to the kitchen? How do they cook, and who are they? Are they from Benares? Are they old or young? Eventually we had to inform Baba about them. From that day Baba said that we should start our preparations to leave and go to another nearby place, which was Sarnath.

In the meantime Baba was sending message after message to Dr. Nath to hurry up with the gifts that he was to give in bhiksha. One day we heard the good news that the white horse had been found, and he was brought for Baba’s inspection. Baba was very happy to see it. All the other gifts were then rapidly collected. Dr. Donkin was given charge of the white horse; the camel and camel cart were put in Baidul’s care; and the cows were given to Patel, one of the oldest disciples of Baba who was among the very first group that Baba had collected around him from the locality of the fisher folk in Pooana. The donkeys were given to Gustadji, and the cows and calves were shared between Dr. Nilu and Pendu. So plans were being made for us to leave, because, as I said, now that Baba had come to know that the couple who were cooking for us were old lovers of Baba, he did not like the idea of staying on.

Don: They weren’t able to see Baba?

Eruch: Of course not. On the contrary, everything was made even more strict. Even Baba’s movements were restricted now, although he did his planning to avoid hurting the feeling of the people concerned. Baba now sent me with another message saying that he thought he should be moving to Sarnath. After Sarnath he wanted some place to rest and do his work, that being a very sacred place to Buddha.

Dr. Nath understood this—in fact he had a very good bungalow in mind which he would offer for Baba’s stay with the group. In the meantime Padri had brought the caravan to Benares by rail, the same caravan that is now in Meherazad. In the train were also the two bullocks—bullocks are castrated bulls and are used by farmers for field work. Bulls are used only for breeding. These were English bullocks. One of the original team had died, so another had been obtained to make a pair, plus two more bullocks,

and another bullock cart was called for.

As we unloaded all these animals and things from the train Baba allowed us to communicate with Padri for that short while. He was still in the old life, and normally we were not to communicate with anybody in the old life. When we had finished, we left Padri at the railway station and took all the things to our place. The camel and camel cart were also ready that day, and the whole procession, headed by Baidul and Pendu, was to move towards Benares and then on to Sarnath.

Now about the clothes. Baba had said that the clothes would be handed over the day we left. We were to leave the next morning, so all the preparations were made on the evening before our departure. Everything that we had on our bodies, including such things as gold watches, was to be surrendered to Baba and then given over to Dr. Nath in separate bundles. The bundles were made up, and I brought a pushcart, loaded the whole lot and took them to Dr. Nath. Baba's clothes were in a separate bundle which I carried slung on my shoulders. When I arrived I said to Dr. Nath, 'Here are all the bundles,' and I took the one from my shoulder and put that in too. 'You can do what you like with them, but see that they are not returned.'

They said, 'We won't return them.' But what they were trying to convey was that the clothes would not be returned as they were. They said, 'We'll wash them and return them to you, and we'll accept the clothes of the leader of the company as a token.'

I said, 'Don't do that, please, or else everything will be disturbed and there will be a lot of unpleasantness.'

Mani: But didn't they first make sure? Is that bundle there?

Eruch: Yes, that's right, Mani. Dr. Nath and his family asked me whether the bundle of the head man was there. I said, 'It's here.' They were satisfied with just my word. Then I told them it was not good for them to try to return the clothes, and we left for Sarnath and the spot that Dr. Nath had selected for us.

Don: One question. When you say that Baba wanted a place that was suitable for his work, I automatically think of the Avatar's work. Yet Baba said he would be a companion to you and live outside the Avataric function.

Eruch: His work there at Sarnath?

Don: It was not Avataric work, not universal work, was it? That's not what you implied?

Eruch: I don't know whether it was implied or not, but Baba never gave us to understand that he did any universal work during those days

Mani: He didn't say, but no doubt he did it.

Eruch: The whole of the New Life was nothing but universal work, if you take it in sense of setting an example to humanity. That and so many other things—I don't know what it all implies. That is my conjecture, that it was all in the plan for universal work

So, we reached Sarnath, and the woman were made to stay in a separate bungalow. Mani will now tell you what happened when the horse was taken to the women there.

Mani: When we were in Sarnath Baba, knowing how Mehera likes and can look after horses, had the horse brought into where the women were staying. It is was a nice biggish place with ample grounds and an orchard-like garden with lime and other trees and an old outhouse where an aged caretaker lived. That's a story in itself.

The back entrance was quite a bit away. Baba came and told us the horse was there. Actually, there were two horses, and Baba wanted to choose the one to take with us. We women were called to the back entrance where the horses were, and Mehera fondled them and Baba did also. She said the smaller horse would be nicer for riding, but Baba said no, no riding. Then Mehera and all of us felt that the bigger horse was preferable as it was spotless white and really beautiful to look at.

Eruch: The eyes were also pink.

Mani: Yes, it was most probably an albino. So the larger horse was agreed on, and it was decided that Mehera would take care of it while we were there. All this happened during the last couple of days in Sarnath before we started out on our walking tour with Baba. There was a whole gunnysack of grain to feed the horse, and as the men couldn't come in, we women carried the sack to where there was a sort of stable. We were quite excited. Then the horse was led in and Baba said, 'All right, Mehera, you take care of it now,' and he patted the horse. It was mild and meek, apparently the angel that it looked. Mehera bent down to get hay for it.

I didn't know anything about horses but I helped Mehera, doing whatever she said to do, as did Meheru also. Everything was done for the horse. Mehera handled it just like a pet.

But that horse! Overnight it turned, as it were, into a demon. That horse wouldn't let anybody go near him. He'd put his ears back and bare his teeth. After being fed that first time—he had such a lovely feed, all of the best that a horse could have—after that he seemed to realize his role, as it were, and he changed, changed completely. None of us even dared put anything warm over his back, though it was very, very cold.

Mehera was near the horse the next day when Baba came in, and she said, 'Stop, stop, Baba! Don't go near him! See his ears?' The horse was preparing to make another attack. Baba said, 'What? But he was so mild yesterday.' Nothing further.

That horse! Donkin was given charge of him. Donkin walked at the head of the procession with all the mandali in their robes and turbans, then came the camel cart, next we four women, then the bullock cart and the caravan. The whole procession started out that beautiful morning, headed by Don holding the reins and walking the white horse. When it was feeding time and he held the bag before it, the horse would eat until there was just a little left. When he knew there were only a few munches left, with his head still down in the food bag and eating the last remnant, he would start turning his behind towards Don, getting ready to kick. So that's the story of the white horse.

Rano: Mani, speaking about the procession, when Padri came back from Benares he told us about it. He came to see us in Bombay. Baba had given him strict orders not to use his camera, yet he mentioned how his hand had itched. He sat at a little corner cafe as the procession went out of Benares and he said that it was a most fascinating site to see them all walking dressed like that, with their turbans, their long kafnis and the animals, the camel and the horse. He said it would have been such a beautiful picture to have because there are virtually no pictures of the New Life. But he was under strict orders not to take any.

Eruch: The group made a stay of some days in Sarnath. Baba took us to some of the interesting places there, and he made the men sit with him in the old subterranean cells in Sarnath. We

don't know what work was done there, but we had to sit quietly near him. Then after some time spent roaming about the different points of interest, we returned to our stopping place.

Within a couple of days Baba began to prepare to leave Benares and Sarnath and journey towards the North. He sent word to Dr. Nath that he would permit him and his family and Dr. Khare and his parents to see him before he left Sarnath.

They were overjoyed and all came to have a parting glimpse of the head of the company and his group. Then they knew without further doubt who the head was.

At that time Dr. Nath tried to give back to Baba all the watches and personal possessions that had been given to him from all the companions. Baba told him not to return the gifts but, as a token, to give us just one wristwatch, any one. One was picked out and given to a companion to keep the time. Dr. Nath's family had brought with them all the laundry, washed and ironed, for all the companions, but Baba refused to accept it and we parted.

As we went north towards Moradabad, walking and begging, we came to place called Jaunpur, famous for its radishes. They are as big as your thighs, yet really very tender in spite of their size. They are white and longish, not round, so when you have one in your arms it looks as though you are carrying a giant's leg.

When we came to Jaunpur and our procession wound through the streets of that city, it happened unfortunately that the schools had just closed. All the students followed us and hooted at us, asking where we were going. We said, 'On a pilgrimage,' and they taunted, 'What type of people are these, taking donkeys with them?' And some said, 'They are just pulling our leg. They're a team of actors and actresses going out for some shooting.'

We proceeded to the outskirts and stayed there. By the time we had reached Jaunpur tempers were flaring up among the companions. What happened was that certain of the companions were doing very hard work and others were doing nothing but following the party. At the start Baba had said that when all set out on the New Life, each one would do his share. But Dr. Ghani

never expected that he would have to walk all that distance. Surely Baba would give him some favors—after all, he was his schoolmate, and Baba would allow for his age. And Gustadji was there, too an old man.

The first night after reaching Jaunpur we slept in the open and it was terribly cold. It was in the month of December. Gustadji, poor fellow, couldn't get up in spite of being awake. He couldn't move his body, he was so stiff.

In the morning Baba was ready to greet his companions. There were standing orders that they should expect his wish to see them and keep ready in a group. But there was Gustadji lying down, unable to get up, and other old people too who couldn't move. Dr. Ghani was one of them.

When I went round to bring them to Baba, they started shouting at me. 'Well, you have a fine time with the head of the group. All you do is just follow him. That's all! Do you know what work we have to do? Then each one started on me. My own companions were accusing me of having a good time with Baba. I didn't say anything as I knew that Baba was expecting the companions to come. I said, 'Well whatever it is, this is in our fate. We ought to accept it and the hardships.' 'Oh, you can accept it because you don't go through all these things.'

Then I began to find out what had brought all this to a head. Dr. Nilu was out of sorts and had completely lost control of his mood, the pleasant mood that all were enjoined to keep. The reason for this was that when we had passed through the city where we would spend the night, he had had to pass by the octroi booth where the city tax on entrants is collected. He was carrying the calf on his back because it wouldn't walk that long distance. Being a strong person it was easy at first for him to do this, but he got tired after carrying the calf for some miles. When he came to the octroi post he was stopped by the people and asked for some taxes.

We companions did not carry any money with us, so there was nothing for him to do but stop there as the collectors wouldn't let him go further without paying the tax. He could not leave the calf there, and besides there was also Patel and the cow in his charge. They explained the whole position to the tax collectors,

but you know how harsh and rude they can be. They wouldn't accept their explanations. It was a nominal tax of eight annas or so, but even that they didn't have. Finally somebody took pity on them and a paid the tax.

The long delay and humiliation were the cause of Dr. Nilkanth (Nilu) being out of sorts. He said, 'You don't know anything about our hardships. You go ahead with Baba—you stop when he stops and when the women want to stop. You and Baba and the women have a good time and here are we, left behind with all this zoo. You have no idea of our hardships.'

Then Patel started to flare up. He said, 'Do you know what has to be done when you want tea in the morning ? For that I have to get up early in the morning and milk the cow. It takes time, sir. How do you think you get milk? And so forth. All that was pent up in their hearts and that they wanted to complain about to Baba was blurted out to me.

Then Dr. Ghani came. He said, 'What do you think, Eruch? Being a sportsman, do you think it's fair for our companion (meaning Baba) to allow these old people to be dragged about like this? He says that he is our companion, and if he is shouldn't he make allowances for the old people? Shouldn't he walk shorter distance? Should he not allow us to sit in carts and tongas? This camel cart is going about empty, and the caravan is absolutely unused except to give the women a nice salon to rest in at night. And there's a tonga there that carries nothing but cooking utensils. So, a camel cart, another cart, a tonga, and all these just going to waste. Can't he allow us to sit in these carts and tongas? It would be so easy then for us all.'

All this time as they presented their grievances Baba was waiting for them to come. I tried to suggest that it was no help to have this mood now, and besides, I quite well understood their difficulties. But then they started talking about the problems of drawing water from the well. The whole party had to be supplied with water, including the camel, and the horse, the cow, the asses and the bullocks. Then every evening we also had to go out to find fodder for the animals. All this was a burden on these people, while I had only to be by Baba's side. Naturally, the brunt of their complaints fell on me.

Don: You were the alter-Baba.

Eruch: Yes. Finally I said, 'It's not good to talk about it now, we'll think over the matter later on. Come on.'

Then Donkin also flared up saying, 'Do you know how to handle this horse? He's not a horse, he's a devil!' And so on. 'All right,' I said, 'now let's go to Baba. It's time, so keep a cheerful face and let's go.' So we went, and everything was all right. Baba just made a little fun with us and that was all. Somehow that day passed off very well. In the presence of Baba nothing was expressed, nothing exposed. Baba said that we would make a halt for two or three days in Jaunpur and then proceed further. I don't know why he planned this and told us about it just then, maybe in order to help the companions, especially the older ones, or perhaps he was marking time for something that was to follow. In any case, when after some time Baba went back to the women's side for his lunch and while we were having our time off, I found Dr. Ghani trying to give a lecture to the companions.

'We find all sorts of parties giving lectures in *maidaan* (meaning 'open places'). Why can't our group here express their feelings? Baba says he is no longer the God-Man for us, no more the Master, he is just a companion. And cannot a companion express his difficulties to his fellow companions? Why not?' And the others said, 'Of course, why can't we do that? If the New Life means a life of companionship, why can't we express our difficulties?'

I said, 'Yes, you can very well express your difficulties, but the trouble is we can't put on a long face in his presence. That's the order that comes in our way if we want to express our displeasure.'

'Without breaking and order I know one way out,' Dr. Ghani said. 'That is to go on strike. The next morning when our boss comes we will go on strike.' He started calling Baba 'the boss.' He asked if everyone would do that.

Some hands were raised. 'Yes, we'll do that. Why not, because we are tired of this life, and how can we go on like this unless and until there is some help given to us? How long are we going to go on like this?' Baba had said in the beginning, you recall, that it was going to be a *new life without end*, and we had set

out in the conviction that we would not return to the old ways and places.

The next day came and it was all planned that nobody would approach Baba, nobody, even if he were to clap for someone to come they asked me what part I would play. I said . ‘All I can say is that I will have to be with Baba, and I don’t agree with you people because I have no such difficulties.’ They said, ‘You are a hypocrite,’ and again they started to flare up. It was all in good faith, mind you, with no hatred whatsoever. They were just giving vent to their feelings.

The funny part happened on that day. Baba came as usual, of course, giving no sign that he knew of anything in the air. He was bound to do that because he was only our companion in the New Life. He was in a jolly mood, but he didn’t approach the companions, keeping at a distance under the shade of a tree. ‘We’ll have a conference over here. Call all the companions,’ he told me. I went to them and they were watching me. You know how strikers are –you can visualize how they were. The boss had come, but they were determined not to go to him.

Baba sat while I went and said to them, ‘Look here, Baba has come and he wants you all because there is going to be a conference, a very important conference.’ They didn’t say anything to me—I was an outcast. I kept quiet for a bit and then I told them, ‘This is not good. This won’t look good. It is not the proper thing for us to do. Dr. Ghani can afford to do this because he is not only a companion of Baba but a schoolmate as well, and you know what latitude Baba gives him. But not to others.’ One person hesitated and looked up, then another.

I went to Baba, and he said, ‘What’s the matter? Aren’t they coming?’ I said, ‘Yes, they will be coming.’ Then Baba looked and said: ‘What’s the matter? Why are they standing there? Haven’t you given them the order?’ I said, ‘Yes, Baba, they are coming.’ Baba probably knew that something was brewing so he waited patiently. One after the other they started to come , but Dr. Ghani wouldn’t stir. How could he? He was the leader—he would lose face.

Baba then sent word through me to Dr. Ghani. ‘Whatever is in your mind? If you have got the daring’—he told me to press these points—‘if you have got the daring, you should come and face the

situation and open out your heart to your companion.’ These were the same words that Dr. Ghani had used to influence the others, and now Baba was using them against him.

Dr. Ghani flared up. ‘What! I haven’t got the daring? Of course I have the daring to come and speak these things to my companion. Why shouldn’t I do that? I have been telling just that to those people.’

So he came, and Baba said, ‘What’s the matter?’ Instead of saying what the matter was, he accused those sitting there by saying, ‘All these companions of ours are nothings but hypocrites, Baba.’ Baba said, ‘Why do you unilaterally describe them as hypocrites? What have they done?’ He said, ‘What have they done? They promised me that they would not approach you today, and they promised me they would abide by our decision that we would’ Baba cut him short and said, ‘But who are *you* to be promised anything by anybody?’ I was reading out Baba’s gestures, but this annoyed Dr. Ghani. He said to me, ‘You stop speaking now! I understand Baba’s gestures. Why do *you* have to say these things!’ And in the midst of all that flare-up of Dr. Ghani, while Baba remained quiet, all the thoughts and feelings that these companions had had were completely forgotten and Dr. Ghani, was made the scapegoat.

Then Baba said to Dr. Ghani, ‘Do you know that I am not only your companion, but I am also your schoolmate? Do you remember how we used to wrestle together? Would you want to wrestle now and settle the issue?’ That made Dr. Ghani laugh, and from then on it became a very friendly meeting and everything was forgotten. After that day a great change took place. Nobody harbored any ill feelings, grudges or anything of the sort. We were just as we had been at the start.

Don: So that was the high water mark, the crisis point?

Eruch: Yes, the crisis point. In Jaunpur.

Don: Now just a technicality, Eruch. Presumably Ghani was angry when he accused all the other companions of having betrayed him, so he broke the basic rule that Baba had laid down?

Eruch: No, there was no anger. He simply said what he had to say with great emphasis. There was no anger.

Don: So he couldn’t be accused of being in a mood? He was stating a fact without being moody, so he got under the wire?

Eruch: Yes, but we could feel that he was saying it with feeling.

He felt that they *were* hypocrites, but at the same time he didn't express any anger.

Don: So Baba couldn't say, 'Ghani, out!'

Eruch: No, no. They wanted a concession from Baba, and to do this they decided to go on strike. What was the strike intended to get from Baba? That they should be allowed to sit in the carts that were going empty all day. Also, animals were being fed—there was money for their fodder—but no money for food for the companions! That they thought was very improper, to look after the needs of animals and not the needs of human beings. Were human beings worse than animals in this New Life? So they built up a situation to convince Baba that he should be more generous in the care given to his companions than that given to the animals .

Don: Eruch, as far as you are aware did that type of resentment ever arise again?

Eruch: Non was ever evident.

Don: No flare-ups?

Eruch: No flare-ups after that great one that took place at Jaunpur. And that, too, only because it grew from a certain background of incidents. They were all fatigued after the long march from Sarnath to Jaunpur, the animals had started giving a lot of trouble, the people en route had been ridiculing the idea of going on a pilgrimage with two donkeys, and the horse had been giving a lot of trouble, as well as the camel.

Don: Strain in every direction.

Eruch: Strain in every direction, yes. And to top it all we had had no rest. Whenever we camped, someone had to go in search of fodder for the animals, others had to beg for food for the companions, and others have still further duties to tend to.

Don: Eruch, in the months that followed was there any flare-up between any of the companions, even outside of Baba's eyesight?

Eruch: Yes, there was. I should be very fair and frank—there was a flare up at the fag end of the New Life when some of the companions were told to earn their own livelihood and we entered into a business. Did you know of it?

Don: Yes, just a little about the background.

Eruch: It was in Delhi. We were sent to Delhi and told to set up a business in clarified butter, canning it and selling it in the market.

The flare-up was on one simple point. Some of the companions took on the easy side of the work while others had to do the harder, messy parts such as standing in front of the fire in the summertime, or going out into the market carrying the sealed cans on their heads.

The distribution of work was not even and the hardships were not shared equally. But that was the only further incident. It all happened in the absence of Baba and was amicably settled by agreeing that the duties would be changed and suited to the companion's ages.

After the 'conference' we left Jaunpur and headed towards Moradabad. When we arrived there, Baba said that after our long journey from Benares and Sarnath it would be better to take a week off and rest. We were in the open, of course, and near the railway station. It was a special area reserved for festivities like Divali and Ramlila. On those special days people would gather there and hold a sort of fair. As a consequence the place remained vacant most of the year, and we went there and camped.

I still remember that it was the month of December because Baba said, 'It's Mehera's birthday, so we'll take the week off from our tours and hazards and hardships. Let us rest, except we will still have to go out begging for our meals.'

By the way, I should tell you of one very funny incident which happened on our way to Moradabad. A wheel of one of the tongas broke, so Baba sent Adi and Don, who drove the tonga, and someone else, I think to the next village in another tonga to repair the broken wheel. This had to be done because there was no wheelwright anywhere close to where the break down occurred.

As soon as the party reached the next village and found a wheelwright, he agreed to do the whole thing. It was nighttime when the repairs were finished, and they still had to return to the camp to be ready for the next day's journey. They had money to repair the wheel and to feed the horse, but there was none provided for their own food—so they had to go out beg.

Adi said, 'It's too late. All the people must be asleep now. Where can we go to beg?' They were all hungry, but they couldn't ask the wheelwright to feed them because of Baba's instructions. So Adi, knowing very well that it would be five rupees for the wheel repairs, paid him ten rupees.

The wheelwright said, 'This is too much. Why do you pay me this?' 'No, no, accept it,' Adi insisted. You did the work, even into the night.' Then he continued, 'Well we'll have to go out now for our bhiksha. We'll have to find food. Please accept the ten rupees and don't trouble us with the change.' So the fellow took the hint and offered them food for their supper in bhiksha. In this way Adi and the others managed to have some food and then return to us. So, you see, a little discretion and a little intelligence were also used in the New Life to adjust our lives to the necessities of the occasion.

When we reached Moradabad in December it was bitterly cold, and we did not know how to manage with the meager clothing we had. We were out in the open and our nails actually turned blue. We did not know what to do. There was no work, no movement, nothing. Normally we had to walk considerable distances and were warmed by the exercise, but not now.

The first night passed, and a horrible night it was, all of us shivering constantly. We had no money to buy fuel for a fire. Each of us started to wonder how the days would pass in Moradabad. It is a very cold place and far up in the north of India.

Don: Eruch, when you did need some money, for instance for the repair of the tonga, where did it come from?

Eruch: Kaka was given a reserve fund to be spent only for the daily fodder of the animals and, in case of emergency, for repairs. In dire emergency only, if and when Baba ordered, it was used.

To go on with our stay in Moradabad, the next morning we noted someone coming towards the camp. It was the son of Harjivan Lal, an advocate (lawyer) from Delhi. The father is dead now, but the son is still alive. He went to England to study later on.

The son approached us, and when we asked him why he had come, he said it was to obey his father's instructions. These had been that he should carry cartloads of edibles and cloths to Baba and the companions.

Baba was nearby at the time so we went to tell him about this. But evidently Baba had already overheard the boy's conversation with us, as he came and at once asked the boy why his order had been broken. On hearing just this little admonition the boy was so affected that he fainted and fell down. We got busy trying to revive him immediately, as we were very much afraid that he might have

broken his skull, because we had heard a big thud when he fell

Don: You said once, I think, that the boy had seen Baba when he was very young, but not for some years at that time?

Eruch: Not for some years. When he revived he told us his story. His father had been following Baba's journey from the time we left Benares until we had reached Moradabad. He planned, knowing full well that Baba and the companions had insufficient clothing for the winter that was approaching, to supply woolen clothes to us. Also, knowing that we depended only on our begging for our food, he had arranged to supply us with loads of dried fruits, almonds and other things. There were blankets, gloves, socks, jerseys, mufflers and woolen caps—we call them 'monkey caps' here in India—because when we wear them we look like monkeys.

Don: Is that the sort that Kaikobad wears? They are very curious-looking.

Eruch: Yes. And apart from the woolies we also received cotton clothes from him. All this windfall was a surprise to us. Baba had never hinted anything to us, except to say that we should relax for a week here. Then suddenly that man in Delhi was inspired to make arrangements to send all we needed just at the right time, just when we were thinking that it was very dangerous to our lives to be in this climate without any protection, with not even the warmth of a fire.

When we received all these things Baba appeared absolutely indifferent and the boy was sent back. Baba accepted the gifts with love and sent a message with the boy for his father that the gifts were received, but that he should no longer attempt to follow the progress of the party.

Don: But Baba gave no indication of irritation?

Eruch: No, on the contrary he told the boy he was pleased with all he had brought, but one could see his sense of indifference. His expressions of pleasure were saved for later when he was alone with us. But while the boy was there Baba didn't show either pleasure or displeasure—he just gave the message for the father that he was happy with all that had been sent and that the father should not pursue the party further.

Mani: Not pursue on foot?

Eruch: No, by making similar plans, and that now he should not

concern himself with the party . Then the boy left the place and Baba distributed the gifts. Baba commented on how, in the nick of time, we had been given these things. We also expressed our surprise.

This is how we were saved in Moradabad by a windfall from someone inspired to send the necessary things to us at just the right moment.

Don: Presumably this is an example of what you mentioned earlier, that because of the force of Baba even in the New Life period, things happened at the right time?

Eruch: Yes, things happened. I wanted to give you examples of how his authority registered even while he moved about incognito, even without anyone mentioning his name or without his expressing any apparent wish to anyone to supply anything. Help would reach us just at the time when it was most needed. It did not happen under pressure or through external orders or . . .

Don: Intriguing commands?

Eruch: . . . Intriguing commands, as you say—that these things were offered to him. They were offered without any external command, but happened on their own.

To site another example of this kind of occurrence after Moradabad we went further on foot towards the Himalayas to Najibabad.

Don: In the coldest time of the year?

Eruch: Yes, in the coldest time of the year. There, unfortunately, or fortunately, it happened that for the first time Kaka had a heart attack. This was a calamity inasmuch as the whole party depended on Kaka to cook the food that we begged. Whatever we brought from our begging, he would collect and prepare.

Don: Kaka was chief cook within the camp?

Eruch: Yes, in addition to being the treasurer. Baba wanted to take particular care of Kaka, so he was put in Baba's own tent during the night after he had the attack. Baba said, 'It's no good proceeding like this with Kaka, so now we must go by train.' But we had no money. How to go by train? Again the same thing happened. Baba said to a couple of us, 'All right, you go out and get the train tickets from someone.' I think it was Adi and I who were sent to find a prospective helper.

We went into Najibabad to carry out Baba's wishes which, as

usual, were woven with conditions. Among these were that Baba and the four women companions should travel by first class to Dehra Dun, and the rest of the companion, all men, were to travel in third class. The task Adi and I had to carry out, then, was to go in search of a person who would give us five first-class tickets and about twenty third-class tickets from Najibabad to Dehra Dun.

In the city we finally decided upon a person whom we would approach with this request. He was a businessman. We had entered his office as if inspired to go there. We looked inside, knocked at the door, asked permission to approach the proprietor and told him what we wanted. Surprisingly, he didn't mind spending the money for this request.

He called his clerk and asked him to calculate the total of the fares. When this was done, at once he ordered his cashier to hand over the amount to us. But we said, 'Sir, we can't accept money.' He said, 'How will you go? How will you buy your tickets? We told him, 'We are camping at a certain spot on the outskirts of this town, and the head of the party has given us certain instructions. If you can follow them, he will be very pleased. The instructions are that we should not take any money that you might give us. On the contrary, you should instruct your own men to purchase the tickets, to delivered to us at the time we are to board the train.

He said, 'What time is the train? What time have you fixed?' We said, 'The train is tomorrow morning at four o'clock.' Early morning! The early hours! Oh, so the train you are taking is going to Dehra Dun? Right, right, I'll do that.' Then he called his man to acquaint us with one another so we should recognize each other the next morning. We then left the place happily and informed Baba that the work was done.

Baba was also very happy about this. Just imagine, approaching a person for not one or two tickets, but for twenty third-class tickets and five first-class tickets! And it didn't take much time. We only had to say what we wanted. It took hardly fifteen to twenty minutes. Of course the walking took a long time, but it required hardly twenty minutes with the person concerned to accomplish the whole project. Early the next morning we boarded the train and went to Dehra Dun.

Don: Eruch, what happened to all the animals, carts and tongas?

Eruch: I'll tell you. Some of them followed us to Dehra Dun, but the rest were disposed of en route. These were years of great disturbances in India—1947 to 1951, 1952. It was the time of partition, and there were many riots and disturbances taking place. The movement of the trains, and most especially of the goods trains—is that what you call them?

Don: We call them freight trains.

Eruch: We call them goods trains. Their movements were completely disorganized, and if anyone approached the railway authorities with private requests, they invariably threw up their hands and said that the priority had to be given to government movements. So you will be surprised when I tell you of the cooperation we got when Baba wanted those animals transported. We approached a station master nearby and said that we would like to have a number of goods wagons. He asked, 'For what purpose do you want them. Is it goods wagons you want, or do you just have some freight you want to be sent by a goods train?' We said, 'No, we would like to have some wagons. 'Wagons! For what purpose?' We said, 'We have some tongas to be hauled and some bullocks carts and a camel, a horse and a cow. . . ' 'What is this?' 'Well,' we started to explain, 'the thing is that. . .'

Of course the station master tried to ask the clerks, but we said, 'Look here, we are on a pilgrimage and these things must accompany us. We cannot go any further by foot, so we would like to haul them by train and we need your help.' He told us to come the next day and meanwhile he would consider the whole thing. Baba sent us again the next day, and we found that the station superintendent had arranged for three wagons for us. Thus, to our surprise, wagons were placed at our disposal, and we were able to carry the animals to the destination Baba wanted.

In short, whatever we tried to do in the New Life to carry out Baba's commands, our efforts were fulfilled without difficulty. Therefore I often say that in the midst of a life of helplessness and hopelessness, really speaking, the New Life *with* Baba was not a hardship.

But now we are traveling in a train from Najibabad to Dehra Dun. This is, I think, the destination we were heading towards when we started from Meherazad in October, 1949.

Don: You knew that that was where Baba intended to go?

Eruch: Not all knew. Only three or four of the companions knew about it because Baba wanted it to be kept a secret. Some of us knew about it because we handled the correspondence. We were the media through whom he sent out letters and messages. The father of the editor of the *The Glow*, Naosherwan Nalavala, was one who knew about our destination in the New Life, and he was ordered not to let this out to anybody.

Don: He was in Dehra Dun?

Eruch: Yes, he was in Dehra Dun towards which we were then heading and which we would reach within a few hours. He had been informed of this by letter and under Baba's instructions. Prior to our arrival he was to prepare food and keep it ready at the Dehra Dun railway station. Baba was to take food at the station and then leave for the place which had been fixed as our camping ground and destination.

Also at Baba's instruction, the place for which we were headed had been bought very cheaply, by Keki Nalavala, in the name of Eruch and Pendu jointly. It was a plot of land on the outskirts of Dehra Dun, and it was to be our home for some months during the New Life. That was all Baba had expressed to Keki Nalavala in the communication to him. There was to be water near the grounds, but we would arrange for our own meals. Nalavala had already purchased that plot of land there and—have you heard of Shatrugena Kumar?

Don: Yes, I've heard of Kumar.

Eruch: It was a portion of his property near Dehra Dun that was purchased by Nalavala. That's how Kumar and his whole family came into the picture. Kumar's daughter is now married to Dara, the son of Baba's younger brother, Adi.

Don: That was the original connection of that whole family to Baba? Before that they had not known him?

Eruch: No, they knew nothing of Baba. Kumar was a revolutionary. Did you know that?

Don: You mean a revolutionary against English rule?

Eruch: Yes, against the British. But that's a whole separate story which someone else will tell one day. To continue, though when we arrived at Dehra Dun station Keki Nalavala met us, and Baba

had no sooner gotten down from the train carriage than he signalled for the food. Keki told us the food was about to arrive as he had made all the arrangements—Kumar’s family was to supply the food from their home in Manjri Mafi, outside Dehra Dun. That was where we were to go to stay, on the plot purchased from their property.

Kumar’s wife, thinking of the fine party that was coming on a pilgrimage, decided to supply freshly prepared food. She didn’t want the party to feel that stale food was being offered to them. The location of the house, by the way, is near the railway, so the train always passes by their home. Therefore when she is to entertain somebody who is coming by train, she tries to put the rice on the fire just as the train passes. Then she can serve the rice hot!

No one had thought to tell her, however, that on this occasion the food was to be served at the railway station, six miles away. That’s why there was the delay. But this little delay brought one more family to Baba.

When Kumar finally arrived with the food and all the paraphernalia, he was in a disturbed mood and tried to apologize. Not knowing who the head was, as Nalavala had told him nothing about the party, he apologized to us all, saying he was sorry for the delay. Only later could he recognize the leader, because we all tried to serve Baba his food.

Baba was seated in the station waiting room with Nalavala, a plate for the food sitting before him, when Kumar was introduced to him. ‘Here is Mr. Shatrugena Kumar. He is the person who has parted with the plot of land that we have purchased for the New Life stay, and today’s food comes from his family.’ Baba signaled to him with gestures to say, ‘Very good, I am very happy about it all. But why this delay? Did you not know the time that the food was to be served?’ He said, ‘Yes, I was told the time.’ But Kumar, being a man of principle, was very hurt by just this little dig that Baba gave. Having been in command of troops, this also made him feel the prod. He was very apologetic and said that it was no fault of his, rather of his wife, but that the fault could be condoned because she had had good intentions in trying to serve the food fresh. Then he gave the whole story.

Baba was very happy and praised the wife. But Baba, being Baba,

whether in the New Life or the old life, said, 'Naturally you must have got very annoyed with your wife.' Baba had not touched the food yet, as this is a conversation that is taking place prior to and then during the serving of the food, Kumar said, 'Yes, I was a bit annoyed, naturally, because I know what time means. It is very important to us all. And Mr. Nalavala had emphasized that I must be prompt because you were very particular about time, so I was really very hurt to find that my wife had been delayed.'

Baba said, 'Well You shouldn't have been angry with your wife, or slapped her for that reason.' Kumar looked at Baba, wondering who is this man who is trying to probe into the private affairs of a family? Then he said, 'Yes, I had to slap her.'

Baba said, 'What! You slapped a woman, your own wife? A man raising his hands to a woman?' Baba was gesturing all this and I was the interpreter. Then he shoved the plate of rice and dal, his favorite dish, away from him, making a gesture that he wouldn't want to touch this food.

Kumar was very hurt by this, 'No, it was not my fault. She provoked me into this. I told her that she should not wait for the train, that there was no need for her to serve the food hot. After all, it had to be taken six miles. In spite of her cooking at the proper time, the food would still not be served hot.' And so she had learned of the distance it was to be taken, but too late for it to arrive on time.

You see, amongst Hindus there is a custom that as soon as a person sits at the table, it's the duty of the housewife to serve freshly cooked food. That's considered to be a mark of great hospitality. These are very important points in one's family life. So, for example, the housewife sits and prepares chapatis while the guest is having his vegetables served, so that they are brought right from the skillet onto his plate. The rice is also put on the stove at just the right moment. She knows the exact time that so much rice will take, and she cooks it accordingly. It's a mark of hospitality, of good management

When Baba shoved his plate aside, he ignored completely the presence of Kumar and told Mr. Nalavala to arrange to serve the food to the other companions. Kumar was very sorry about this. The head of the party didn't want to eat his food. Kumar started

murmuring his excuses until finally Baba looked at him and said, 'Are you sure you won't do it again? Can you give me your promise that you will never hit your wife again, never in your lifetime?' Kumar gave his solemn word to Baba that he would not. Baba put his hand forward to accept the promise from him.

After this Baba was happy and he pulled the plate towards him and started eating. Kumar too felt very happy, little knowing to what he had committed himself. Kumar is absolutely docile now. The tiger has become Baba's lamb. He leads the life of a hermit nowadays, but in those days he was a real revolutionary, not caring much for the laws of the land or for anybody. The plot of land where he lives now, by the way, as well as the parcel that he sold to us for the New Life, had been given to him for service rendered to the Indian government, and because he was a leader of a revolutionary party.

So that day passed and Kumar went back home. Nothing further had happened. Now another story starts. I will leave Kumar and the final episode in his story until I have told you what next happened as Baba sat in the railroad station of Dehra Dun with Keki Nalavala.

After the food was eaten Baba inquired of Mr. Nalavala whether there was any news worth reporting. He said, 'Yes, I have been waiting to tell you, Baba, but little did I know that there would be this confusion about food. I wanted to inform you of something as soon as you arrived. There is someone waiting here.' Baba asked him, 'What is the story? What is it? Who is waiting for whom?'

Nalavala said, 'Baba, he has been pestering me for the last three days and nights. He came three days ago about midnight, knocked at my door, made me get out of my bed and asked if this were the house of somebody who knows that a party is to arrive here? Now Nalavala had had strict orders not to disclose this fact. He had replied, 'What party? What do you mean, whose party?'

The stranger said, 'There is somebody heading towards this city from the South, and I have seen in a vision very, very clearly that someone who is very great is coming here, begging all the way. I have been directed by the head of the party to come here with all the necessary foodstuffs.'

Nalavala said, 'Who told you that? We don't know anything about

it. You must have imagined all these things.’ ‘No, I have been searching through all the houses. That’s why it took me so long. I wanted to find the exact place, and this is the place that I have seen in my vision. Please tell me if you are the person who knows anything about any party approaching this place.’

‘We know nothing about it. You are mistaken. You’d better go and ask some other person,’ Nalavala had insisted. But the stranger just waited there, and Nalavala did not know what to do. It was already midnight and he did not know what more to tell him. The man was from Aligarh, south of Delhi. You must have heard of Aligarh University. Aligarh was also one of the biggest centers for the manufacture of butter in the days of the British, and Keventer’s butter and cheese from Aligarh were considered especially pure and good. This man who had the vision was the sole supplier of cream to Keventer’s for their whole butter factory. His name was Todi Singh.

Mr. Nalavala gave Baba a description of the man, and Baba asked, ‘Well, what happened?’ Nalavala replied, ‘I tried to put him off for the night, Baba, because I was very tired, and told him to come the next day. But he pleaded, saying if he were to go, where would he keep all the stuff he had brought?’ Then Nalavala said he peeped out the window and saw a line of bullock carts standing there.

Don: With food?

Eruch: With food. Baba asked him what it was. He said, ‘Baba, there was one cartload of just butter cans filled with fresh table butter. You know those military cans they have, sealed over the top? These cans can be put in the deep freeze. All this butter he had brought because it was his! He was the sole supplier, of cream to Keventer’s. Another cartload was of dried fruits, almonds, pistachios, cashew nuts, and dried figs. In northern India there are plenty of dried fruits. Just imagine the things that were there. In another cart there was some tinned stuff. Another cart was loaded with sacks of rice, pulses, all sorts of condiments and tins of clarified butter. Still another cart was loaded with potatoes, onions, garlic and fresh vegetables, all spread out.’

Nalavala looked at this caravan of the kitchen department of the New Life, so to say, and wondered what to do. Being the guilty Person. . .

Don: Why guilty?

Eruch: Guilty of evading the truth. He knew for certain about the arrival of Baba and his party, but all the while he professed ignorance to Todi Singh, who was pressing him for information. This man was convinced about Baba's greatness from his vision Nalavala didn't have the heart to refuse him point blank—he knew that something had transpired with this man, and that that was why he had brought all these things. Nalavala did not know him, for he was a stranger, a complete stranger. On the other hand, Harjivan Lal, who sent his son to Moradabad with carts loaded with woolies and dried fruits and so on, was a Baba lover.

Don: An old devotee.

Eruch: Yes, an old devotee who had kept track of Baba's movements and who wanted to supply the necessary things to his beloved Master, the God-Man, somebody might say, well, that's all right, Harjivan was a Baba lover who wanted to help Baba and his party. But what do you say about this incident, when a man who had never seen or heard of Baba sees a clear vision in which he is commanded, so to speak, to supply certain things at such and such a spot? And he comes bringing those things!

Don: Was Nalavala at that time a long-time devotee of Baba?

Eruch: Yes.

Don: Did he recognize that this could be Baba internally instructing this man in some way?

Eruch: Oh, yes.

Don: Was the man who brought all these provisions an individual who had followed the spiritual path for some time?

Eruch: No, no. I'll tell you later on what sort of a life he had led, and how completely changed he became. But to go on with the scene in Dehra Dun, Nalavala was narrating all this to Baba at the station. He said he had not known what to do with the man, so he put him off for the night and then called him the next morning to discuss the matter. The unknown man pleaded with Nalavala. Where should he take these cartloads of foods and where could he place them for the night?

Nalavala said, 'You can do whatever you like,' and he gave him directions to an inn where no doubt he could store the things. With great reluctance the man left Nalavala's home, insisting that he would

come early the next morning and then Nalavala must tell him the true facts of the whole situation.

The next morning he arrived, and Nalavala said that he had had no heart to refuse him. Baba clapped Nalavala on the shoulder at this point and said, 'You did the right thing, It's good that you disclosed the facts.' He was very happy with Nalavala, patting him and saying, 'Well done. What happened then?' Nalavala said, 'Next morning when he came I disclosed the facts. The man is waiting at the inn now with all those foodstuffs. Naturally, the vegetables are spoiling, but every day he replenishes them with fresh vegetables. He has preserved all the butter by surrounding it with ice slabs. He has kept everything.' Then Nalavala started disclosing further facts to Baba. 'Baba, he seems to be a man of means. He seems to be very wealthy.' Baba expressed surprise. As a companion in the New Life he had a good excuse to do that! Baba then gave permission to Keki Nalavala to bring the man, without his stores, to Baba for an interview.

When the man arrived he fell flat at Baba's feet, immediately recognizing Baba as the one who had instructed him in the vision, the person whom he considered to be someone very, very great. With folded hands and real feeling from the heart, he begged Baba to accept the carts of provisions because it was at Baba's command that he had brought all these things. He implored Baba not to refuse—otherwise he felt it would spell his doom.

Baba was very happy with all his loving pleading. He said he would accept the gifts that the man had brought on the condition that *his* family should come and cook the food on the spot, but the family would be permitted to do this for not more than one month.

The man was overjoyed. He started jumping and dancing and saying that it was a great boon for him, even without knowing who Baba was, without it being disclosed to him that Baba was the Avatar of the Age, knowing nothing of Baba's now being a company-ion and having descended to be a man with men. None of this did he know.

The man went back to his home, and we went on to our destination near Kumar's place. Soon his entire family came—mother, wife, sister, daughter, and also a little adopted son of the sister. They came with

enormous pieces of luggage, and what was the luggage? Vessels in sewn-up gunny sacks, utensils in which they could cook for us, spices that would be used for our food—in fact anything and everything that would be needed. There was just one little bag for themselves in which one change of clothing was dumped.

When they arrived they were so happy to be there, and they wanted to start right away. Baba said, ‘No, tomorrow—you cook from tomorrow. But where are we to house them?’ he asked. The house we were in was very old-fashioned, but strong and solid with dark rooms and tiny windows high up in the walls.

Don: Were all the companions in that house?

Mani: The women were there.

Don: And the men were camping outside?

Eruch: Some of them were outside, in the shed, and some were allowed to stay in the adjoining rooms. It was a huge place. There was a terrace from which you had the most heavenly view you can imagine. You could see all the Himalayan mountain peaks with perpetual snow on top.

Mani: We showed the family the kitchen, which was what they were most interested in. They said, ‘We want to see the kitchen first, not the bedroom.’ It was quite a big room with a fireplace, a tap and a sink. They said, ‘This is wonderful. This is where we will live.’

They all opened up their little beddings and lived in the kitchen, even having their baths there. All they did was to live and cook in that room, except in the evening when they would come out and sit with us. But they were called for the cooking, and they were going to do that a hundred percent.

Every day—morning, afternoon and evening—there was a feast spread out as if for a royal family. We could hardly eat it all, and frankly after awhile we hankered for something very plain! We could not digest all those almonds, pistachios, butter, ghee and so on.

In the mornings you would see Todi Singh going out to market. He would go in a tonga, and we would see him when he came back, the carriage loaded with vegetables. In Dehra Dun vegetables grow profusely. It’s nothing like Ahmednagar. The peas, to exaggerate a little, are like marbles, and a cauliflower would be like a great

ball of popcorn. Beautiful vegetables really. All that would go into the kitchen. Just to see that greenery delighted us because we had had such restricted food when we were walking. Many flowers grow readily there, too.

One day Baba came in, and he had something in his hand. Mehera asked, ‘What is this, a plate, Baba?’ It was a plate of ice that had formed from some water left outside. It was very cold at that time, but despite this the family of Todi Singh would get up very early in the morning. Baba would get up very early, too, and so would we, but those women outdid us. They would get up at four o’clock to have their baths, and then they would start cooking. We had that sweet dish in the morning—rava, we call it—and we had all sorts of food in the afternoon, all vegetarian of course, and some more variety in the evening.

Don: Excuse me, Mani, you say, ‘vegetarian, of course.’ Was it a stipulation of the New Life that one eat only vegetarian food?

Mani: Not pronounced, but it tended to be.

Don: And this family presumably were vegetarian?

Mani: Yes, but all during the New Life we ate mostly vegetables because we were getting our food in bhiksha. What we cooked was mostly rice and dal.

Don: But there was no prohibition against meat?

Mani: No. As I say, it was not declared that we would be vegetarian, but it was understood. Baba would allow us treats, however, if somebody came and brought some dish of pilau with meat, or sometimes fried pomfret, or something like that. These Baba would allow us to have.

Eruch: Now that our destination in the New Life had been reached, Baba didn’t mind being loved and revered by this family. I don’t know why *this* family was made an exception. They recognized in Baba the Lord Krishna come again with his gopis and gopalas to their country.

Mani: So, there we were, having a really restful time and good meals. Then Baba must have decided that his companions were having it too good. Instead of a month, in little more than a week Baba said, ‘That’s enough now. I’m very, very pleased with all you’ve done. Your love has touched me very much, but now

you must all go back.’ Very reluctantly they left, and we resumed our cooking in the kitchen with all the stores of food they left behind. Because we got up so early, Baba would want his lunch about half-past nine. This was quite a good lunchtime for Baba, you know, so by that time our cooking had to be done.

Eruch: You remember I told you that the husband was the sole cream supplier for Keventer’s? On his return he left his work there and resigned his post. Because of this Keventer’s eventually had to stop manufacturing butter. There was not sufficient supply of cream for the factory.

Todi Singh and his whole family then opened a kitchen in Aligarh hoping that a day would come when Baba, in some guise, would visit their house. They ran the kitchen from the day that Baba sent them back from Dehra Dun till Todi Singh died. He was in Baba’s service all that time, doing nothing but feeding the people, whoever came.

He has become really blessed. In the circle of Baba lovers he is well known as ‘Baba janaye.’ *Janaye* means ‘knows.’ To anything you asked him, he inevitably replied, ‘Baba janaye.’ Meaning ‘Baba knows.’ ‘Todi Singh, why do you behave like a mad man?’ ‘Baba janaye.’ ‘Todi Singh, why do you behave like a mast? You should be a practical man.’ ‘Baba janaye,’ would always be his answer. In later years whenever he said this he would give a turn, dancing all the way round, like a dancing dervish, saying, ‘Baba janaye, Baba janaye.’

Eventually he died, immersed in thoughts of Baba. Originally his was one of the richest families, but they became paupers before Todi Singh died. Then the daughters married, by Baba’s grace, and the son got married too and they had their separate families. But the father died a complete pauper, highly respected in the whole of Aligarh in spite of his poverty.

Mani: Am I to tell that little thing about the white horse?

Eruch: Yes, tell it.

Mani: I commented earlier on the white horse, that angelic, majestic-looking animal.

Don: Who turned into a regular devil.

Mani: Absolutely. All during the New Life while we were walking on the road, the procession was headed by the white horse with Don

(Donkin) leading him. It was like the taming of the shrew. When we got to Moradabad where we halted for some time, it was Mehera's birthday. New Year was also celebrated there, New Year of 1950. That morning Baba gave a bit of cake to each in turn and wished each one a Happy New Life. Not Happy New Year, but Happy New Life. While we were staying at Moradabad something else was added to our. . .

Don: Retinue?

Mani: Menagerie. Actually that horse was to draw a tonga.

Don: Good heavens!

Mani: Yes, the white horse was to be harnessed to the tonga.

Don: Despite its bad temper?

Mani: Yes, and that's why I said it was like the taming of the shrew. That majestic animal! The discipline it went through. A horse trainer was called in, and it took him about five days to get that horse trained to accept the fact it would be harnessed to a tonga and have to pull it with people in it. The horse trainer was a tiny little fellow, so ordinary-looking that if you saw him in a bus or passed him on the road you wouldn't give him a second glance. But, Don, he was a master of horses! The way he trained that white horse! Mehera and I would sit out in the mornings and just watch. He did a beautiful job. Baba said, 'You've got to do it. That horse has got to be harnessed to a tonga.'

The horse expert tried all sorts of tricks on the horse and told us, 'You wouldn't believe it, but I tell you this horse has once been harnessed to a tonga and he knows all the tricks. But he's such a clever fellow that he's trying to pretend to me that he doesn't know what I mean.' The trainer would catch the horse unawares in certain things, and slowly he was able to tame him.

From that time the horse served us by pulling the tonga. That was the period when Kaka would go ahead of us in the tonga while we walked. He would get down at the town where Baba wanted next to halt and get out the things to have them ready when we arrived.

Don: What eventually happened to the white horse?

Eruch: I completely forget now what happened to it. Was it sold?

Mani: I think it was. Nobody seems to remember. It's extraordinary, nobody seems to remember the end of the white horse.

Eruch: We must know it. We know what happened to the bullocks later on. Baba gave them away to an institution called the Nanee-Dodniya.

Mani: It means ‘Small World,’ the world of the little ones.

Don: There’s one thing I wanted to ask you about Dehra Dun. When Baba invited Francis Brabazon and me to the 1955 Sahavas for the four language groups, the first one which I went to had quite a number of people from Hamirpur and Dehra Dun in it. There was one little boy who, at the end, sobbed his heart out to Baba, ‘because,’ he said, ‘Baba, we remember when you were in Dehra Dun and we were so happy with you, but now you are here.’ These are not his exact words, but I was impressed by the depth of feeling this little boy expressed. Now, had there been a stay or a series of stays by Baba in Dehra Dun even before the New Life?

Eruch: Oh, yes.

Don: So Dehra Dun is associated with Baba back through the decades, then?

Eruch: Before the New Life as well as after the New Life, Dehra Dun is associated with Baba’s work. Dehra Dun, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Mussourie, Delhi.

Mani: We were there a number of times with Baba. When Norina and Elizabeth and Nadine were with us, they were there too. We stayed long periods, not just for a visit. We stayed weeks and months.

Don: Do you want to carry on with the story from Dehra Dun, then? I think you said it was four or five weeks that Baba stayed there before you went on. You just finished telling about Todi Singh going back to his home and giving away food for the rest of his life.

Eruch: Yes. Now let us talk about this place where we camped near Dehra Dun. It’s a plot of land which, as I say, we had purchased through Mr. Nalavala, and which Mr. Nalavala had obtained from Shatrugena Kumar. That place, which was known as Manjri Mafi, is now called Meher Mafi. The name has been officially changed on the records of the government in honor of Baba’s stay. Baba helped the villagers to have a well, as there had been none before our arrival. The well is widely known for its sweet water and people get much benefit from it, apart from all other spiritual benefits, of course, that accrued to the people in the village from Baba’s stay

there, of which they were quite ignorant at the time

I must now go back the final incident concerning the family of Shatrugena Kumar. We must now try to know more about him, the one who profited most from Baba's stay there—not financially, but spiritually. Although we were in the New Life and therefore I should not refer to spirituality, yet I must say that Baba's stay at Manjri Mafi was most probably for Kumar and his family.

During the time that we stayed there Kumar and his family came very close to Baba and to all the mandali. The children would come and play where the women stayed, and Kumar too would come every day to the mandali to inquire how he might be of help to us. Baba also gave him some work.

After that stay in Manjri Mafi, some months passed by, spent in other work and other phases. Baba went to Haridwar, and to Motichur, and stayed there, and Kumar was the one who helped us to get there. I think all these different stays and phases have been noted somewhere in the book, *The Wayfarers*, or some other book. Am I right in this?

Don: I'm not sure, Eruch. It's been some years since I read *The Wayfarers*.

Eruch: Or the supplement in *The Wayfarers*. Well wherever it may be, what we are concerned with now is to tell you what eventually happened to Kumar.

Don: His wife and the children all got to know Baba?

Eruch: Yes, and they were of help to us and we were of help to them. Apart from that, nothing of importance happened externally. Then Baba traveled from place to place, like Motichur and Haridwar and Rishikesh, and then returned to the South, to Andhra, and at Hyderabad as I told you he started his Manonash phase. Finally he came back to Meherazad and stayed on Seclusion Hill—then he again went to Satara, and so forth. I think there was a gap of about a year between the Manjri Mafi stay and the next meeting with Shatrugena Kumar.

One day Baba was in Satara, and Shatrugena Kumar was escorting Baba from one bungalow to another, holding the umbrella over him to protect him from the sun.

Don: Still in the New Life series at this point?

Eruch: No, after that period. This took place after Baba's return from the States, after his first accident. Baba had called to him some

close ones and those had been of help to him the New Life. Kumar was invited and had come, but he had overstayed. Baba permitted him to attend to him. There were quite a few bungalows engaged in Satara by Baba for the group, so Baba was going from one bungalow to another, visiting. Norina and Elizabeth had come at that time and were in a separate bungalow. Dr. Donkin and Dr. Ghani were working on their books and they were in another separate bungalow. The other mandali were in still another, some of them looking after the masts. The women were in a separate house and so fourth.

Baba made his daily rounds to all these, and on this day Shatrugena Kumar was holding the umbrella over Baba while they were walking. All of a sudden Baba stopped in the road and asked Shatrugena Kumar whether he had remembered the promise. Kumar didn't know what Baba meant by this. What promise? Which promise? Baba simply looked at him, and all of a sudden he remembered that first day when Baba had just arrived at Dehra Dun and was about to eat the food when he heard that Kumar had given a slap to his wife. Kumar remembered this and replied to Baba saying, 'Yes, Baba. I remember the promise.' Baba gestured, 'Did you touch her, hit her, again?' He said, 'No, Baba, not once.' Baba was very happy, and Kumar must have thought that he had kept his promise.

Baba started to move again, but before he took the first step he gestured to say, 'Well, I too have kept my promise.' This little hint was a revelation to Kumar, and for the first time after his release from prison he understood what Baba meant. I don't know, Don, whether you know the story of Kumar being in prison?

Don: You said that he had been a revolutionary.

Eruch: Yes. By now this man was closely associated with Baba and spirituality and wanting to do Baba's work. He was a free person. Before, he hadn't cared for anybody and quite often had been in jail as a political prisoner. During that period he had married, but soon after his marriage he was again taken to prison and so did not know what was happening to his wife.

Somehow, after he got married his views had changed, and he came to feel that all the years he had spent as a political worker and leader had not been profitable. They had brought him no value, so to speak, even though they were in the service of humanity. But something was wrong, he felt.

He himself had said in his early manhood that he was an atheist. Later on he said he was an agnostic. Well, whatever he truly was, during this long prison term after his marriage he one day had a thought and he addressed God, like this: ‘Mr. God, if you are indeed God, you can release me before dawn tomorrow morning, and if you do so I will dedicate my life to your cause.’

Kumar said that this prayer was an exception to his previous belief, but he did in fact prepare himself in all faith and with conviction for his release. The majority of people in the world believe that there is a God, he said to himself, and therefore God must exist. So he prepared himself, having full faith that God would work the miracle.

God does exist, and Kumar did receive the release order before dawn. A man opened the door of the cell, told him to leave the prison, opened the gate and shoved him out. Kumar said, ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Orders have been received to release you immediately before dawn. That’s the order.’ Kumar was astonished—never had such a thing happened in the life of a political prisoner.

After he was set free he completely forgot about the incident for years together, maybe fifteen, twenty or thirty years. But on that day at Satara it was revealed to him again that it was God who had kept His promise. The whole circumstance then came back to him, and after he had left Baba at his quarters he narrated it to us that day in Satara. That’s how we know it. Baba gave him just that little hint—‘I, too, kept my promise’—and the whole incident was revealed to him.

Kumar still lives at Meher Mafi. He has a house there and leads the life of a mendicant—a jolly good mendicant, and not one who is moody or always in meditation. He goes from place to place telling stories of Baba and making others happy in their love for Baba.

You remember earlier in our talks I referred to our visit to Calcutta during the days of the famine? Baba wanted us to help him try to find the really needy people there. After completing that work, which is well known to Baba followers, Baba took us back south.

We came down from Bengal towards the states of Andhra and Madras. Baba said that the work that we had just completed in Bengal was of a quite different nature from that we were to do now.

Don: Was the Bengal famine related to the problem of refugees from partition?

Eruch: No, it was not due to refugees. Some people at the top had somehow or other cornered all the rice. That's the political side. I don't want to go into the details, but the fact was that there was a terrible famine in Bengal and people were dying. Relief camps were set up by the government and by philanthropic groups. Our going there to try to do something while all that aid was being given to a starving humanity would therefore appear to be of no use. But in spite of it, Baba went from place to place—still in his New Life, by the way—and from all outward appearances tried to help poor, hungry people by feeding, tending and trying to help them in all respects. We few who were with him as his companions helped him to do this.

Baba commented to us on this work during the Bengal famine, 'Well, all this is just a trifle and most insignificant from all outward appearance.' But he asked us to do it, nevertheless. That much and no more could he say in the New Life about his Godhood.

After he finished that work, as I said, he brought us towards the South of India. There, he said, it would be quite a different type of work that we could do. Instead of contacting masses of people, we would now be contacting needy families, he said, and the most difficult job would now be to find a person or a family really in need of help. Those who are in real need refuse to accept assistance—that's what we found during our travels—and it was only with the greatest difficulty that we could induce or beg of the truly needy to accept help from us. They were not of the regular beggar class, you see. The families we were now to search out were those that were formerly rich but, due to some misfortune in the family or in business, had now been reduced to poverty.

These were the ones who would not even put forth their hand to beg. They wouldn't want anybody to know about their plight. When we found these people, they would wonder how we had come to know about them when others didn't. But we did find them, not all, certainly, but in one way and another we found quite a few. Baba was very happy with that phase of his work. Would you like to hear some very touching incidents that occurred?

Don: Absolutely. Eruch, where did the money to help these people

come from? Was that from Kaka's emergency fund?

Eruch: No. After completing one full year of the New Life, Baba went back to the old life in Mahabaleshwar for one day. When he stepped back into that old life, he gave a sermon. Do you remember that sermon given by Baba on the 16th October, 1950? I think it was one year after Baba had set out on the New Life. On this day Baba called his close ones to him and told them that he wanted money to do a certain type of work that he had in mind. He told them that he would go to Bengal, as he had to do some work there – 'famine work,' as he called it – and then he would go down south. He collected some thousands of rupees that very day.

Don: Entirely from his old followers?

Eruch: Entirely from his old followers, yes. A funny incident occurred when Baba permitted me to go to a barber shop for a haircut when the meeting was over. We were to be only one day back in our old life, mind you.

Don: So, you could have a haircut

Eruch: Yes, he permitted me to go to the barber shop, and I still remember the barber's caustic comments on Baba's having collected all that money in one day. Before I knew the sum that had been collected, the barber in the market place knew it.

Don: Typical grapevine.

Eruch: Yes. When I was sitting in the chair the barber said, 'Well, you must have had a good day today.' I asked, 'Why? What do you mean by that?' He said, 'Well, Baba people from different parts of India were called today.' 'How do you know that?' 'Well, they passed by this shop and there was a good collection. That's what heard today.'

I said, 'Yes, there was, but what does that mean? It was meant only for Baba's work.' He said, 'Well, whatever it was, I think that some thirty thousand rupees were collected.' That was the information he gave me. That's how barbers are helpful, you see, in spreading the gossip.

So, Baba then selected, after the Bengal famine work, four or five of the mandali, and we started traveling towards the South. I will tell you some of the most touching incident of Baba's work with some of the really needy families.

We were very tired by our search for really needy persons, and I must tell you that. . . .

Don: Eruch, I think that statement will destroy everybody's ideas about the economics of India. However, before going into this matter of your searching for some poor people for Baba to help, have we finished the material you feel is pertinent to moods, because this was so important in the New Life?

Eruch: All right, let us go back for a moment to finish that off. There is one instance I would like to refer to regarding a Baba lover, because it is associated, though remotely, with moods. It's a very good example of how Baba handles his lovers. Do you remember the *sahavas* when there were four language groups called in?

Don: Yes, in 1955.

Eruch: The link language with each of these groups was English. At that time Baba kept himself very busy with his lovers, giving them a lot of time and companionship (*sahavas*). Baba was staying then in Meherazad, and every morning he was driven by car to Meherabad where he would spend the whole day and then return to Meherazad late in the evening. His lovers who congregated there were from different parts of India, and also some from abroad.

Don: Two from abroad Eruch. To be specific, Francis Brabazon and myself.

Eruch: Right. Well, two means a lot because of the weight of love that each one carried in his heart

Don: Ah, yes.

Eruch: Pendu was in charge of arrangements. He had deputized one young man to take after Baba's needs for breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea. He was the person who would wait at the table and serve Baba. I was there, of course, but he was the one who brought things from the kitchen and placed them on the table

Each morning as soon as Baba arrived at the cabin, he would give private interviews to certain lovers whom he selected. Before all that started, Baba's breakfast tray would be brought and placed on the table. With a broad smile the young man would greet Baba, feeling happy that he had been given this task. In this way, at least, he could see Baba everyday for some minutes in the cabin.

From the very first day that the boy began his duties Baba found fault with him—the way he served, the milk was not pure, the teapot was not clean, the tray was not put in good order, the napkin had a stain, anything, any excuse to contradict the spirit of the young

man who would come beaming with a cheerful smile to greet Baba. As a result he felt very sad that, in spite of his labor of love, the Beloved was not pleased with him.

After some days he began to break into tears, but Baba would remain absolutely indifferent. This was quite contrary to Baba's basic nature because Baba is really compassionate, very compassionate, very kind, very loving—but towards this boy Baba was absolutely indifferent, even callous.

Every evening when the sahas was over I had to drive Baba back to Meherazad, and on the way he would ask me about the day, and had I liked the program? As usual, he chatted through gestures. I would say, 'Yes, it was a beautiful day, wonderful discourses were heard, and many things that pleased our hearts. We were all happy.' After some days of this daily reporting I dared to tell Baba, 'Everything is all right Baba. You make many people happy—you make them laugh and return to their places with cheer in their hearts. But there is one sad sight in the whole thing, and that is the one who serves you your breakfast and lunch. He is the one whom you make weep almost every day.' As if he had not heard this remark Baba jumped immediately to another topic. After four or five days I again made this comment, but he didn't care for it. He wouldn't answer directly. Later on I gave still another try. I think I must have brought this up three or four times.

Don: Very brave.

Eruch: Yes, but he paid no heed to it. Of course the whole sahas came off very well and everybody was very happy. I was happy, and Baba was happy of course. It all ended very well.

Don: For everybody but the meal-server.

Eruch: All but the meal-server. But on the last day after all the sahassees had left Meherabad Baba called all the workers to him. Out of all of them, he paid most attention to the meal-server. He fondled him, caressed him, patted him, kissed him and said what wonderful service he had rendered, how punctual he was, what care he took, what an important part he had played and so on. I was thunderstruck. I did not know what was going on.

Later on in the evening it was time for me to drive Baba back home to Meherazad. On his own he broached this topic to me and said, 'Well, how was the day today?' 'Wonderful day,' I replied.

‘Everybody satisfied?’ Baba put this question to me—he used the word ‘satisfied.’ I said, ‘Yes, Baba, all are satisfied.’ ‘Including the youngster?’ Baba asked. I said, ‘Yes, he was very happy.’ ‘Today he didn’t weep, most probably?’ I said, ‘No, Baba.’ ‘Do you know why?’ I knew that he was doing all that he did because of his love for me. I knew that he wanted to please me, but had I been pleased from the very beginning, by now he would have had a swollen head. He couldn’t have contained my love. He wouldn’t have contained my words of praise, and that would have gone against him. So, because of my love for him, I had to do that.’ That was the end of it.

Don: Eruch, is there anything else to tell on the subject of moods before we go on to your search for the poor people for Baba to help in the New Life?

Eruch: Yes, there is one more incident to describe. I had normally to attend to Baba’s needs such as his bath, keeping his room clean and also sweeping the floors, sweeping the compound, cleaning the latrines and so on. All those sorts of things I used to do for several years. Then Baba began to use me in trying to find masts. While on tours with the men and women disciples, besides helping out in the search for masts, or the poor or the mad, or the ideal boy, he would also send me to the bazaar. Often I had to drive the car, and to keep the cars clean. While I drove one car or a bus, I had to look after the other cars, keep them clean and see that they were filled with gas and oil.

I was robust, healthy and very strong. I had a lot of energy and no worries whatsoever, being with the God-Man, So I was able to do a lot of work. However, a limit was finally reached, and I thought, well, he’s a very tough task-master.

I still remember an incident from about that period when I decided it was useless to return from an errand early. No sooner would I return to Baba than there was always something else to do such as cycling ten to fifteen miles more after a tiring day. On the day in question I still remember that I was very tired. Of course that was a blow to my ego, because I felt that as I had good health I could do many things for Baba, that I could survive all hardships.

But my body couldn’t withstand any more and I thought, it’s useless to finish the task appointed and return early. No sooner will I have done this than there will be another task for me. I completed

going round the market and buying things for the group, and when I returned I was very fatigued. Then somebody came and told Baba, 'At a distance of about fifteen miles there is a temple where it is said a tiger comes and sweeps the floor with his tail in reverence to the deity there. The tiger is reputed to be a mast who changes his form.'

The fellow who told this tale was Elcha, Baba's court jester as we called him. He's from the North of India. He used to tell these yarns to make Baba laugh, but Baba took this yarn seriously for my sake, so that Eruch should have some occupation, so that Eruch should no longer boast of his physical endurance but have the chance to forget himself completely and have no thought of himself.

Baba looked at me and said, 'Why don't you go and find out about this?' I shuddered when Baba looked at me—to cycle fifteen miles on that bad road, up onto the hill and then return, and already it was late afternoon. I said, 'Baba, you know Elcha's jokes. He is here. Shall I ask him more about this?' He said, 'Yes, I know Elcha's humor. But there are many people who believe this story in the town. Every little child knows it.'

Of course, I went. To carry out Baba's every command—one has to do that. I had chosen the path of freedom in coming to Baba. I wanted to be free to try to obey him, and so I was absolutely free in this bondage. In such a case I exercise my freedom, and in doing so I must exercise it fully, so of course I obeyed his command and went.

Naturally the story was all a fake. There was no such thing as a man turned into a tiger. I knew the results before I left so naturally my mind was in revolt all the while I was cycling there. After confirming that there was nothing in the story, I thought, of what use is it for me to return now? Even if I return late in the evening Baba will send me out on another errand. So I said to myself yes, I agree with the promptings of my mind. Eruch, it is really true, even if you go back now and report to him, there will be some other work waiting, so the best things for you to do is relax and give some real rest to your body.

There were a lot of culverts on the road, and I selected one parapet that was a bit broader than the others. I said, this is a nice place where I can have a good nap. But I was concerned about the cycle lest

somebody steal it. I was on a jungle track used by the local inhabitants who occasionally went out to chop wood, and one couldn't be sure of these people.

I thought of a plan. I took my handkerchief and tied it round the spokes and to my wrist and then went to sleep. After a couple of hours I woke up. It was very late, so I returned and Baba was waiting for me. I knew he would ask me what had happened, why I had not turned up, because usually I am very punctual. I never lost a single minute. That was the first such incident in my life.

When I returned there was the message for me that Baba wanted me to go to him immediately. I went and Baba asked me, 'Well, what's the result of your search?' I said, 'It's all fake and bunkum.' I was a bit upset, you see, irritated. 'There's no truth whatsoever in all that Elcha said, and I knew that,' I added. Baba said, "But why are you late? You had to go out most probably in search of people who could tell you?" I said, 'I didn't have to go out anywhere because the local people informed me that it's all just a story. . . .' 'Well then, why are you late?' I kept quiet. Again he insisted on an answer, and then I had to report to him what I had done. When I had given him the story, he pinched my ear lobe and said, 'Eruch, you should never do this again.' That's all

Don: Just that simple.

Eruch: Just that simple. That doesn't mean, though, that there were no other moods in our life with Baba.

Don: Did it have any immediate impact on you, Eruch?

Eruch: Immediately I felt as if I'd had a dip in a very refreshing cool fountain. I was still, and felt very happy about it.

Don: After Baba had pinched your ear?

Eruch: Yes, completely forgiven and absolutely forgotten.

Don: Eruch, do you remember the story you told me years ago about Mehera's birthday, and how you thought it would be a good occasion to get Baba to agree to have a nice pilau?

Eruch: Yes, I had forgotten that. We hardly used to have time to eat. With Baba we often had stale bread, and at the same time—we must say the facts—we had feasts, too. People would bring food, and sometimes he would accept it and allow us to partake. He would be the one most interested in our having a good meal at such a time. If ever we were invited to stay in a hotel by Baba lover, Baba

would insist that we must enjoy the meal. ‘The money is paid by these people and it shouldn’t go to waste. Have a good meal, enjoy it.’ He would be concerned to such an extent!

And yet at Meherabad or Meherazad, or wherever the mandali sat down for a feast, he would send us frequent messages, ‘Go and tell that person such-and-such.’ No sooner would we come back and take another mouthful when, ‘Oh, this has been forgotten. Bring paper and pencil and jot down a few points.’ We would do that and then have another morsel. ‘Will you please bring some drinking water?’ So we had to get up and do that. Thus whatever we ate we did not relish because we did not even taste the things at the table.

Don: Even if it was a feast?

Eruch: Yes, even if it was a feast. He completely detached us from it. Of course, such things affected our moods, but immediately Baba would turn the topic in such a way that we would completely forget even our mood. Baba’s presence itself was forgetfulness of our beings. That’s a fact. Almost immediately after giving expression to a certain mood, you would forget it. The same would happen to visitors. I have heard them express these same thoughts: How is it possible that we just forget things?’ One incident concerns Kirpal Singh. Do you know him?

Don: I’ve never met him, but I know who he is.

Eruch: Kirpal Singh once came for Baba’s darshan and completely forgot to offer flowers and fruit to Baba, so he had to come back after leaving the place. He said the same thing, that one forgets in Baba’s presence. What can we say then about our moods? Just that we get over them immediately in his presence. We did have moods, but Baba’s used to make us forget all about them. Just a little twinkle in his eyes, or a smile, or some humor, drowned the whole of our nasty moods.

Don: Do you remember, Eruch—I think it was in 1962—when Baba had been in seclusion for some time, and I came to visit at the end of his seclusion? He broke it by having the *qawalli* singers from the Ahmednagar group come to Meherazad. He said to us, ‘Now you must be here at ten o’ clock because the *qawalli* singers will be here, and don’t be late.’

About nine-thirty I said to you, ‘Eruch, shall we have our usual morning walk out to the gate?’ I think you said, ‘Well, why not?’

There's time enough still.' But at a quarter to ten as we were walking some distance from the compound, the singers came early. You said, 'Ah well, I can see what's going to happen, but it's too late. We might as well enjoy the rest of our walk.' When we returned it was still before ten o'clock, but there was Baba waiting for us with lighting flashing from his eyes.

He said, 'You've spoiled my whole day!' He said several things like that. I have never felt so bad in all of my life. I felt as though my heart had smashed into a thousand pieces. I wanted to go jump off a cliff. I'd never had Baba angry with me before and it destroyed me completely. But just when I was one hundred per cent destroyed, all those words that Baba had been saying were suddenly shut off. He looked at me and said, 'Forget it.' Immediately he put on a smile—he was jovial. Within ten seconds I had forgotten the episode, and yet I'd never felt worse in all my life.

Eruch: It's so true. You have depicted the picture completely. That's the way—it happened just like that. There is no doubt about it.

Don: Apparently he prods us to a high point of emotional crisis and then completely wipes it all out.

Eruch: Apart from dealing with our individual moods, when Baba felt the atmosphere around him was not jovial or active, or if he couldn't find any excuse to give us some more work to do, he would incite one of the mandali against another. He never used falsehood, but did it by pointing out differences of opinion or habit, or by recalling what the mandali had said some years ago about him.

He would start the conversation in the beginning, and then it would flare up between the rest of us with a loud exchange of words. It would go on and on, no end it, and we would forget Baba's presence. Baba would enjoy it, and sometimes I have seen him when he could hardly contain his laughter. He would put both hands on his mouth and laugh and laugh and turn completely pink. Then there would be a clap of his hands as the signal for us to be silent. 'That's all—that's finished.' When we were our angriest and wanted to start exchanging blows, there would be the clap and the whole thing would subside. Within seconds everything was forgotten.

Don: Not just suppressed, but actually forgotten.

Eruch: Forgotten. Forgotten.

Don: To me this is the extraordinary thing. You know, in usual

human conditions you're able to suppress something if you have to because there's an authority who says, 'shut up,' to you. But you still sit and glower for hours or even days or even months over it. With Baba, though, there was never any continuing reaction.

Eruch: Some days prior to your arrival I flared up at Pendu, and with what loud reports! In the early hours of the morning something happened. He thought this and he thought that, and whenever I wanted to make a move he would put a spoke in the wheel, so I started at him.

Don: You let him have it.

Eruch: Yes. I spoke my mind to him. But then, immediately, I felt a bit uneasy. This feeling is a blessing and I am really proud of myself for it. Why should I have said those things? What's the reason? After all, what is all this? Is there any reality in all this? So immediately I went to him, kissed him, embraced him, and we both wept with love and forgot the incident.

Don: Completely washed out.

Eruch: Just now Pendu passed by the door and it reminded me of that mood. Now it is forgotten, as if it had not happened.

Don: Did Baba ever elucidate what he was working on through such situations? Presumably this has to do with our sanskaras that are being worked over by him.

Eruch: Yes, that's true. Without sanskaras there is no movement, nothing. There's no life at all. Existence is there, but life is because of sanskaras. Sanskaras, of course, are the root cause of all this. Nothing can happen without sanskaras, except by the will of the Master. Of our own, nothing can happen. It's only sanskaras that can make us do things. Our sitting here now, this tape recorder, the very thought of your having a tape recorder here, my sitting here, all the things that come up—all this is because of sanskaras.

Don: The only thing we can hope is that under Baba's guidance the sanskaras are in an unwinding state rather than a winding state.

Eruch: Ah, yes that's true. This reminds me of a very good story, Don. Naturally, our stories always revolve around the Perfect Masters because, being with Baba, the God-Man, we have to have stories about Perfect Masters. Nothing less than perfect.

Don: Yes, you only have time for Perfection. What a rarified atmosphere!

Eruch: It happened in an ashram of a Perfect Master, but instead of using the words ‘Perfect Master,’ I’ll use ‘Baba.’ It’s a story that was prompted by Baba, so why shouldn’t we give due respect and take Baba’s name in the story?

So we were with Baba, a lot of men mandali. One day it happened that for some reason all the mandali began to feel dejected and frustrated with their long years of stay near Baba, and each one began to wonder whether his stay with Baba had done him any good. One after another the mandali checked among themselves and found there was no obvious change. Everything was just the same. The only thing they found was that they had passed many years at one place.

Don: A feat of sheer endurance, but aside from that, no progress. What a pessimistic summary. This was the mandali’s conclusion?

Eruch: Yes. So what use was it? The attitude of the mandali was completely spoiled when they came to this conclusion among themselves, and all became moody. Naturally it reflected in their manners, and the next day when Baba came to the mandali hall and sat there he found each one of them to be out of sorts. As was his custom in such a case, Baba expressed his ignorance of what was happening within us. He looked at us and said, ‘Well, what’s the matter? Is the weather not good today?’ He began to look outside the hall. ‘Very dull weather, most probably.’ We said, ‘Mm, mm.’ We were not in a mood to reply to him. ‘Sometimes moods are affected by weather,’ Baba again started the thought. Then, naturally, after a few words the conversation gradually started. After all he is the Master.

Don: He finally got the pump primed.

Eruch: Then he told the mandali that many, many years have passed together. ‘It is just a routine thing that you have been doing all the time, just sitting with me, and we haven’t even had an outing. People in the world have their outing, their distractions. You have kept one-pointed attention on me, and all you do is to obey my orders and commands. Day after day and night after night you have to be with me. It’s only natural for human beings like you to have some sort of an outing, some sort of a day off.’ With these words he completely changed the mood of the mandali, because for Baba to recognize their moods was something great for them. ‘Why not fix a day?’ Baba said. ‘Don’t you all like the idea?’

We said, 'Yes, we'd like to have that day.' 'Then have a complete day off. What you should do apart from having a day off is to enjoy it. You should order some good dishes of your choice, and I wouldn't mind serving you wine, too. Have that. What harm is there in it?' Naturally, whatever comes from the master is good. Who wouldn't want wine, who wouldn't want to relish good dishes? And to top it all, to be in the presence of the Perfect Master.

So all the mandali were focusing on that day fixed by the Master, and it happened that it was at a time of the full moon. The Master said, 'We'll spend the whole day as well as the whole night making merry and forgetting everything, including God.' So the mandali completely forgot their moods, their bickering and all the negative thoughts that had accumulated over the years they had spent with the Master. Everything was completely forgotten through just these few sentences given out by him. Naturally Baba was very happy to see the reaction.

In the meantime, of course, the mandali had to make all the necessary preparations and order the foodstuffs. Finally the day came. Baba called it a holiday and he gave us really good company. He fed us and he distributed the wine. We were all in the company of Baba, the Perfect Master, the comforter, the companion, the friend, and we had a really good day. For long hours on end we ate, drank and sang songs in praise of Baba, in praise of the Perfect One, in praise of past Masters and so on.

Then it began to get dark. Of course there had been some restraint when Baba served us with wine. Then, as it became dark Baba started serving us with a little more wine and we enjoyed it. Finally Baba said, 'It's now a moonlit night, so why don't we go out boating? We have a good boat here.' The ashram, you see was situated on the bank of a river. We agreed, and Baba said he wanted to go with us. The mandali thought it was a very good idea so they carried with them a gramophone, the food and the bottles of wine.

We made Baba comfortable and he said, 'Start rowing and we'll go out into the river.' So we started. Some of us were to see to the boat, some were to attend Baba, others were to distribute food and the rest were to sing and dance.

We enjoyed the night. Finally it was time for the dawn. The clap from the Master was heard. 'Now it's time to return,' he said, and

with that clap came the awakening, that all that time we hadn't made 'any progress' whatsoever. We were just where we had been. Being tipsy, those who were in charge of the boat had not unhooked the boat from the anchorage, so we were just where we had started.

But Baba had been with us all along. He was the Perfect Master, the companion, the Beloved. He said, 'Sit down. This is the hour when you should all know what has happened to you. You remember that day when you were all moody and I said that the weather was not good? You didn't even think fit to answer me that day. Now you have enjoyed the day and night with me. All this is good. I am with you all the time. I cannot be separated from you. But do you realize that your being with me doesn't count at all, for you have not been with me in the real sense? Just as I ordered you to go out and have good day together. It's because you haven't unhooked yourselves from worldly affairs that, in spite of being with me, you forget to unhook your boat.'

Do you follow this story, Don?

Don: Yes, it has quite a punch line, Eruch.

Eruch: We returned with Baba to our place, much more sober in spite of the wine we had had, and wiser. So this is another story of moods.

Don: But Baba himself had moods, too?

Eruch: Yes, Baba himself had moods, too.

Don: Often when I arrived you'd say, 'Baba has been in a very poor mood for days and we're so happy you came because he always brightens his mood for a visitor.'

Eruch: That's true. We don't know the reason for his moods, and when *he* got into a mood, oh, it was something, Don, unless and until there was something or somebody who came from outside.

Don: To break it.

Rano: You feel you haven't done anything really to upset him, but you get upset yourself because you think, well why is Baba upset with me? Then you realize that Baba has some reason for wanting to use you as the instrument on which to vent his mood. Then you try to be happy in reflecting that, in a way, you are helping Baba. You got to take it without being upset, realizing that it is not really you that he is angry with, but that he has to let it out. As I say, Baba has to let steam out on somebody, so

you say to yourself, 'All right, he lets it out on me.' But sometimes if your mood wasn't right you'd get upset.

Don: You'd fight back.

Rano: Yes, and then afterwards realize, 'No, I should think how free Baba felt with me that he could do that.'

Don: It's not easy though. What about the poor people now, Eruch?

Eruch: As I said, it was a great task set for us by Baba to find the people who were really poor, the needy ones who wouldn't put out their hand to beg. They were people who had formerly been rich but who, due to circumstances, had lost their wealth and position.

Don: It was this specific type of poor person that Baba wanted you to find, not just somebody who was begging at the corner of a building.

Eruch: Yes, there are plenty of those here in India.

Rano: The ones Baba wanted to find were too proud to beg.

Eruch: I shouldn't call them too proud. Modest, rather. They wouldn't want. . .

Rano: Proud in the sense that they wouldn't want you to *know*.

Eruch: Ah, yes. So it was very difficult for us, but Baba took great pains to find them. To say that Baba took great pains to find them though is not true either. We know that Baba is all-knowing. If he had wanted, he could have approached the person without searching, but as I have been harping all the time, there is one little factor of his grace, his infinite compassion. He permitted us to share in this work of his and made us feel that we were the ones to spot the person, and then to have the delight of participating in the event. However, we always knew that Baba was with us in our search. Well, that's how we live, now that Baba has dropped the body—on past memories.

I'll cite one or two examples of our search for the truly needy ones. We were in South India after the Bengal famine. After serving those who were starving in the famine, we had traveled towards the South.

Don: Always in the New life now?

Eruch: Yes, this was towards the end of it. Oh, I'll be frank with you, Don, don't ask me about the year or dates or anything of this

sort. I'm a bit confused at times whether it is the New Life or at the end of the New life. It's just one life for me with Baba. I can't differentiate. I think, though, that it was in the New Life.

It was because of that money Baba had collected when he stepped out of the New Life for one day that we could do this work—otherwise it could not have been done. We never used to pluck coins from trees. It was an offering given by Baba lovers to Baba, and Baba spent it like this, on people.

We were in Madras and Baba was thirsty, so we had to find some good water for him. Although we were used to travel and Baba never cared for comfort or special food, nevertheless those who traveled with him had the responsibility of seeing to his needs. We thought that was a great privilege, so we tried our best to get the best that was available and that we could afford. The best drinking water we could get was fresh coconut milk and he liked that, so we went to a shop and Baba stood outside with the other companions while I bargained for a coconut.

When I struck the bargain we had to dress the coconut and then bore a hole through it so Baba could drink from it. While one of us was doing this, another customer was conversing with the shopkeeper about a very well-to-do man who had lost all his wealth and was now leading a very miserable life of poverty with his grown-up daughter.

I was very intrigued by all this, but Baba was thirsty and waiting for me to bring the coconut milk. While Baba was having his drink he gestured to me, 'Go back and hear what the shopkeeper is saying.' Baba had overheard the first part of the conversation as Indians always talk loudly, almost shouting at one another.

I went back. 'Excuse me, sir,' I said. 'May I know the name of the person concerned?' 'Why? What have you to do with it?' he asked. 'I'd just like to know,' I replied. So he gave me the name and address and directions to get there. You wouldn't believe it, but no sooner had Baba had that drink than he told us to board the train and go there. I think it was seventy-five or a hundred miles. We went with Baba, and by the time we arrived it was dusk. Because of the touching experiences I had there I still remember the circumstances. It was Divali holiday, the Festival of Lights. As it was late I told Baba to rest on the station platform. I didn't like the

idea of his going out in that town, so he rested with the other companions while I went alone and tried to locate the address.

When I found the place, I discovered a big well-furnished building. I knocked at the door, and when someone answered I gave the name of the person that had been given to me.

The man in the doorway said, 'Yes, this is the house.' I was embarrassed by the whole situation and I didn't know what to say. This was clearly not the home of a person in need of help! 'whom do you want?' 'I want the man I asked for.' 'I am that person!' I couldn't say anything, so the man continued, 'Well, what do you want?' 'Excuse me, sir, I am mistaken. The fact is that there is somebody by this name who is in great need of help.' 'No, I am the person. There's nobody else here. As you see, by God's grace I have everything that I want and my needs are looked after by him. There's nothing wrong. There is some mistake on your part.'

I was about to return, completely frustrated and disappointed. I didn't know what to do or what to tell Baba. We had come all that long distance and now I didn't know what to do. But a child came to my rescue. He came out from the man's drawing room, speaking good English. They speak a different language there in the South, and I had to speak in English as I did not know their language.

The child said, 'I know that man. I know the house where he lives.' He came out to me, and the owner of the place admonished him, but the child wouldn't listen. The problem, you see, was that among South Indians many have similar family names but with different first names. The child knew this particular person because his father, being a contractor, had originally built this very house for that man. When he was reduced to poverty he couldn't pay the contractor, so the contractor had completed the house and went to live in it himself. In this way the child knew the man who had been reduced to poverty, and he led me to his house.

It was a very poor locality, very poor indeed, but in spite of the poverty I saw in the street that there were lights lit for the Divali celebration. As it was the Festival of Light, all were to have lights that night in their houses. Even a lamp is all right if one is very, very poor. But there was one house that had not even a single lamp placed outside, no light whatsoever. The child pointed it out from a distance, saluted me and returned.

I approached the door. It was open and through it I could see just a single room. I knocked at the door. A single oil lamp was burning dimly inside a room with no furniture whatsoever, but which contained a life-size statue of Lord Krishna. Before it was a young lady, worshipping Krishna.

I stood there, dumbfounded. No furniture, and only this life-size statue of Lord Krishna. Most probably, of all the belongings they had had, this they had not been able to part with and so had brought it with them.

I had no heart to disturb the lady in her devotion, but at the same time I was duty-bound. Baba was waiting at the station platform, and I couldn't afford to waste my time here, because he was the Lord.

I knocked at the door, and the young woman turned and looked at me. She came towards me and said, 'What do you want?' She spoke very good English. I said, 'I am sent by my elder brother. He is waiting at the station, and he would like to meet this gentleman. Is he here?' I spoke out the name again.

She said, 'Yes, he is here.' She invited me inside the room. I went in, and it was dark except for that tiny little flickering lamp. I could barely see a man lying on the floor. On one side of the room I made out a lady, also sick. She was the mother. The young lady pointed to both of them. 'They are my parents,' she said. She was apologetic, saying that, but she never mentioned anything about her poverty although she couldn't offer me a chair to sit down on.

I comforted her. She asked me the purpose of my visit. I said, 'My elder brother has come from Bombay, and he is waiting at the railway station platform. He has some work to do with your father, and he has in mind to render some help.' She said, 'But how is it that he knows my father?' I said, 'Will you please give me one promise? Within an hour's time I will bring my elder brother here and everything will be made very clear to you. You should not worry about anything. We are not strangers. We know your people. Please do one thing—don't leave the house before I bring my brother here.' She promised me this and I wished her goodby and left the house.

I went straight to Baba and brought him back in a tonga. On our way I told Baba the whole story, and he was really very happy. Within an hour's time we were at the house. In those days we had

to carry with us all the things that were required for this particular type of work. We need water and a bucket and basin to wash the feet of the needy person to whom the love offering was to be made. Then we used a brand new towel to dry the feet that had been washed by Baba. The money that was to be given had to be at hand. Then there was other paraphernalia that was also needed by Baba.

Before entering the house, knowing the situation, I half-filled the bucket with water. We also had to carry a small basin for the feet of the needy to be washed, otherwise the water would flow out on the floor. Then we went inside and I introduced my elder brother to the lady. Both parents were so sick that they couldn't acknowledge the visitor. Baba stooped down and gestured that I should start pouring water on one foot and then another, holding the basin under the husband's feet. Then Baba sat down and washed his feet, after which we removed the basin and threw the water out.

The young lady didn't know what was happening, because without any further introduction or explanation Baba started his ministration. After the feet were dried by Baba, the towel was handed over to the lady, and Baba bent down further and put his forehead on the feet of the sick. Then he offered a large sum of money in an envelope to the man. He couldn't even move, so it was placed on his chest, under his hand.

The daughter was told to take care of the sum that was placed there, and I said to her for Baba, as was customary, 'Please accept this amount as a gift from God and oblige us.' Those words were always said at the time of such an offering. After having said this, Baba would never tarry for a moment.

We left the house, but before we could step outside the daughter started wailing and fell at the feet of Lord Krishna. In a very glowing voice she said, 'Oh, Lord, I never knew that you were so compassionate, so kind and merciful. No sooner do I implore you for help than within a few minutes you send me the help.' Little did she know that the statue that she worshipped in the form of Lord Krishna had come in man-form as Meher Baba. It was a most touching sight—Baba's visit had been made at just the right moment. Baba was very happy with us there, and of course when Baba is happy we are all happy too.

Then there is another story that I think has been printed somewhere, I don't know. We went from Gudur to Hyderabad. Of course,

on the way there were many incidents, but they were not as touching as the next one I am going to tell you.

We came to know that there was a prince who had lost all his wealth, becoming so poor that he had not a house or even a room to live in. He was reduced to living on someone's verandah, in the open. For his livelihood he would sell matchboxes and beedies on a soap box. It was said that he had been so wealthy once that there were elephants tied at his gate. That was a mark of great wealth in those days in India. He would even travel in special rail cars, so we were told by the people in Hyderabad when we started to inquire after his whereabouts. They told us, 'Yes, the man is here. He was so wealthy that he had a special carriage for himself and elephants were tied at his gate.'

When we eventually spotted the place the old man was lying, very sick, on one corner of the verandah. No one was looking after him. We approached him, but again we started making inquiries before we came to the decision that he was the right one. As usual we had our bucket of water and basin with us. Baba helped the man sit up on the floor of the verandah, with his legs dangling over the side. We were around him. Baba washed his feet, dried them, bowed down and put his head on the feet. While he was doing that the man collapsed right into the lap of one of the mandali standing behind him. We made him lie down. You would not believe the uproar this caused among the bystanders. We were strangers who had 'come and killed him.' We were really very frightened, but as usual Baba continued his routine, mentioning that we couldn't give the packet of money to anybody there who was not responsible. We asked, 'Is there anybody related to this man, any acquaintance?'

'Yes, his wife has gone to the hospital for medicine for him, and if she were to know that he is dead she would take your life because they are a very devoted couple.' All these statements came from the women there who continued to carry on as if we had committed a murder.

We all tried to be calm, although we were a bit upset about the incident ourselves. We lifted the man, and how fortunate and blessed he must have been because Baba himself gave a hand. We took him to a neighboring room, made him lie on a bed there and fanned him and sprinkled water on his face. After some time he revived. No

sooner had he come to, of course, than all the shouting subsided around us.

In the meantime the wife came, and the women started telling her that such-and-such a thing had happened. She asked, 'What did they do?' Then she came to us and said, 'What do you want with this man? Why do you harass him? He's a sick man. We have been so much harassed and neglected by the whole world.'

We comforted her and asked her to quiet down. I introduced my elder brother to her, saying that he had come specially from Bombay and that he had come with a little gift to be offered to them.

'Is that so? Did God give pity on your hearts for him after all?' We said, 'Well, it is a gift.' Then Baba acted immediately, offering the gift packet to her. I, of course, had to give out the words—'This is offered as a gift from God, and you'll oblige us by receiving it.' She didn't know what was happening around her. 'What is this windfall? Who is there to give, and what is it?' I said, 'Don't worry,' and again Baba gestured that she should make use of this for herself and for the man, and then we left the place immediately.

You should have been there to hear all the things that were said by the people there in praise of God, glorifying God, and that gave us great happiness. God the absolute is praised when God in human form acts.

Don: Had she recovered enough by the time you left for you to get any reaction from her?

Eruch: No, nothing. We left. There's another very touching story about the needy, but it has no bearing on this tour. There was a certain Irani who had come to Baba in Meherabad and brought five hundred rupees to offer at his feet. I was present there as the interpreter. Baba didn't take the packet. He just pointed to it and told me to tell the man to pick it up. He did, and then Baba told him to put it in his pocket and take it back because Baba didn't want to accept it.

The Irani was very pained and he begged Baba to accept it. He again placed it at Baba's feet. Baba enjoined that he should obey his instruction, but the man was adamant. Baba then told me to pick up the packet and keep it constantly with me to give to a needy family when we found one. It was a responsibility for me to keep in mind to find such a family. But Baba told me, 'You

will come to know to whom to give it.’ That was the only comforting word from Baba. I kept the money with me for a long time, and then one day Baba sent me to Poona on an errand. It was a summer month, so I stopped for a cool drink of sugar cane juice in a shop. While I was having the glass I overheard a conversation between the shop owner and another visitor who knew each other. Their talk revolved around a certain family in which the husband worked in a municipal office, and how honesty never paid. That was the theme.

I was very much interested to overhear this, and as I listened I became intrigued. It seemed that by adhering to a policy of honesty the man had been demoted and was not liked by his superiors. He still worked in the municipality, but now as a peon on the outskirts of the town. There he had to stop the carts that brought vegetables, milk and other produce, find out how much tax was to be collected and report to the clerk on duty. We call it *octroi-naka*. There are cabins put up on the outskirts of towns and cities to collect these taxes.

Don: Like the one that stopped Nilu when he had the calf over his shoulder.

Eruch: Yes. I took the family’s address and immediately went there, a distance of about thirty miles from Poona. I found the house, and two very fair and beautiful women were living there, but in tattered clothes. I’d never seen such beauty in that locality or in such a town in Maharashtra. They belonged to some other area, most probably the North. I was wonderstruck.

When they saw me they said, ‘What the matter? Whom do you want?’ I told them that I was in search of the person whose name was such-and-such. ‘Yes, he is on duty now, but please tell us the reason why you want to see him.’

I said, ‘There is no reason except that my elder brother has sent me with a certain gift to be offered to him.’ ‘Please don’t do that. We won’t be in position to repay anything to you. We are already hard-pressed. We do not want any debts on our heads, and we do not want any help from anybody. We can never repay anything.’ I said, ‘It’s not meant for you to repay anything. My brother has sent me with definite instructions that the gift is a *gift*, without any strings attached, and it’s not to be returned at all. You must use it for your needs.’ I comforted the family and said, ‘Look here, we are from

the same family (of God). My elder brother has been prompted to send this gift, and he wants it to reach you people. But I am not offering it you—I want to offer it to the head of the family.’

They said, For that you all have to come next day.’ I said, ‘Well, I’ll come the next day.’ ‘From where will you come?’ I said, ‘I’ll be coming from Poona, so tell your father, your husband.’ I addressed both of them, the daughter and the wife. ‘Be sure that he remains here and doesn’t go to his job.’ They promised me that.

On the next day I went on the first bus that I could take from Poona, and when I reached the place I was introduced to the man. I did as Baba would want me to do, bowing down to the man in proxy. When Meher Baba was unable to be present somewhere for his work, he would send anyone of us as proxy, but before sending us out he would bow down to us and then send us on the errand. We then would go and repeat the same act when contacting the person.

So I bowed down to this man and put my forehead on his feet. Of course, I did not wash his feet because I was not told to do that. Then I offered the packet to him, saying, ‘This is a gift from God and you will oblige us by accepting it.’ The man burst into tears and started to shout and pull his hair. He said, ‘Can God be merciful? Does he really watch us all the time?’ I said, ‘Yes, all the time. ‘Are you sure?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Now I’m sure, too,’ he said. ‘Do you know what my story is?’ ‘No but I have heard of certain things,’ I said. ‘No, that’s all past, but do you know what was to happen today to me? I was not going to work today. I was determined to commit suicide. You wouldn’t have seen me tomorrow.’ I said, ‘God be praised, have faith in God,’ and I left. It was a very touching sight. Such things are always remembered.

Don: Just in the nick of time.

Eruch: I was so happy. I told Baba. Baba said, ‘Well done!’ As if I’d done anything!

Don: Eruch, you wanted to be sure to talk about ‘identifications.’

Eruch: There are a couple of stories about identifications. Even during the old life we used to go about India with Baba and search for masts. When we reached the general area, we would leave Baba and continue alone, searching out the mast we had heard about and then report back to Baba. When we set out on such mast trips we would really neglect ourselves.

Don: Neglect your health?

Eruch: Neglect our health as well as appearance. We would become dirty and look like ruffians with unshaven beards and unkempt hair. The police suspected us sometimes and would pester us, sometimes even taking us to the police station and asking us for our identifications.

Don: Eruch, when you went together on these long journey, was Baba particular about appearances, how your clothing was maintained, shaving and such things?

Eruch: Nothing of the sort. We had no time for such things. That's why we were suspected by the police. They suspected us to be thieves or toughs because we were all very healthy and strong people around Baba. Baidul, Kaka and I looked strong, and we *were* strong. Because we were dirty and had not shaved in weeks, we had to bear the interrogations of the police.

At that time, however, there were certain Baba disciples who were in a position to identify us, to give us identity cards, to write good words about us, that we were not people wanted by the police but really respectable followers of Meher Baba. You must have heard of Jal Kerawalla—Baba nicknamed him 'the magistrate.' He was a first class magistrate and became a commissioner before he died. He died in service, but that's another story. One day you should hear that story, too, how he served Baba's cause in spite of holding such a responsible position. Even the government servants and ministers of state respected and revered him for his honesty and integrity. He was the one who gave us these identity cards. He also gave means of identification for Baba. We have a record of all these.

Don: They're kept at Meherazad?

Eruch: At Meherazad, yes. Of course Sarosh was also helpful. He was the mayor of Ahmednagar and so naturally had a hand in all this. The Collectors, known as the heads of the districts, also gave us identity papers, and that's how our tours were made easy. When we were dragged to police stations for interrogation, we showed these identifications to the responsible authorities and they were very apologetic. They didn't stand in our way or hinder us after seeing them.

When we first set out on the New Life it happened one morning that Baba wanted to go to the toilet. I tried to find a good place

for him in a secluded spot. Some minutes before, a jeep had come up behind us and passed by. Meantime Baba went to the secluded spot I had selected, and while I was standing waiting for him to come out I saw the car returning. It stopped at some distance and two people got out. They walked up to me and started asking me questions. 'Where is that person who was with you?' 'What do you mean by that?' I asked. 'Well, we passed you a couple of minutes ago and there were two people here on the road. Where is the other one?' 'What business have you to ask such questions?' 'It is our business. That's why was ask. We are police.' 'Oh, that's different,' I said. 'You have every right to ask, then. Well, he has gone to the toilet. What more do you want now?' 'We would like to see him,' they insisted. 'Well, see him when he comes back. Wait.'

In few minutes Baba joined me, and I introduced him as my elder brother. 'Well, he doesn't speak?' 'What do you want to ask?' 'He'll answer you,' I replied. They asked him several questions, 'What's your name?' was first. Baba said, 'M.S. Irani,' through gestures which I interpreted. 'Where are you going?' We said we were going on a pilgrimage, and thus various formalities were exchanged. 'He keeps silence?' they asked. 'Yes. We are on a pilgrimage. That's all.' They understood that, but in turn this gave me a thought—we should have our identification. But that would lead to disclosing Baba's identity, and Baba wouldn't like that, so I didn't know what to do. I said to Baba, 'Something must be done about this, Baba. I think that police should be informed about it.'

The local police in Ahmednagar had been given information about our setting out on the New Life, but because we had changed districts and then states they didn't know about us here. Baba didn't pay any attention to such things in the New Life phase, but all the time I had been wondering what would happen if we arrived in a state in the South of India where there was a lot of disturbance at that time. In fact, however, it all passed off well and happily without such papers.

Now I'll go back to the phase prior to the New Life, in 1947. Baba traveled in the South a great deal at the time of the partition of India, and it is from that period that the story about identifications comes which I will tell you now.

While we were in the South of India we were being harassed like anything by the police. There were a lot of disturbances, especially in certain pockets called the 'princely states.' You must have heard of Hyderabad, one of the biggest states of India?

Don: It never came directly under British rule, as I recall.

Eruch: No, that pocket was left and after partition it had to be taken up by the Indian government. There would have been a real war had not the statesmen used their statesmanship in the proper way.

We were traveling at the time in that very state. There were a lot of riots and ill treatment of the civilians, and we were in the midst of the disturbances. I thought it was not safe to travel without better references for the state of Hyderabad, in spite of all the identifications we held for the state of Bombay and for other areas in Central India. We were very careful only because of Baba's presence. We didn't want any interrogation because we wanted to protect Baba's person from any humiliation or insult.

I made up my mind and went to the office of the police commissioner, who is the head of the police department in the state. He said, 'Well, what do you want?' I said, 'We are travelers in this state from Bombay.' 'What do you want?' he asked. 'We want help from you. You see, I have my elder brother traveling with me who is going from place to place helping the poor and the needy. He has his own way of doing things, and the police here suspect us for nothing. We have been harassed a lot by them in the past few days and nobody takes into account what we say, so I thought it best to approach you, inform you about it and seek your protection.'

'So what so you want?' the commissioner asked. I said, 'I want one thing from you. Could you pass an order to all the police stations saying that so-and-so will pass through the state and that they should not be harassed?' 'Who are you? Who is your elder brother?' 'Well, sir, he has been doing some spiritual work and he has told us not to disclose his identity, but as you are the head of the police and as I have come to seek your help, I don't think he would mind my disclosing his identity to you.' 'So who is he?' 'He is known as Meher Baba.' 'He is here in the state?' I said, 'Yes.'

The commissioner called one of his assistants and said, 'Look here, I am going to my home. I am taking this man there and I'll be back.'

So he drove me to his home and I was surprised, wondering what was going to happen next.

Don: This makes me remember that the very best man in a business negotiation is the one who puts out the most fantastic part of his demands immediately, as if it were the most normal thing to request.

Eruch: That's what we found worked, too. When he took me to his house he made me sit in the sitting room and left. After about five minutes he came back with a picture of Baba. Do you know which picture it was? It was the one of Baba among a group of students, when he was given a medal for cricket. All the students were in the picture, and one of them was the commissioner himself.

'He was my schoolmate,' he said. 'Is this the one, Meher Baba?' I said, 'Yes, he is known as M.S. Irani.'

Don: Was this the first time the commissioner had had contact with someone close to Baba since schooldays?

Eruch: Yes, but he had heard that M.S. Irani was very well known as Meher Baba. I still remember his name—Commissioner Reddi.

Don: 'Reddi' is as common as 'Smith' in Hyderabad, which is called Andhra Pradesh now, isn't it?

Eruch: Hyderabad is now the capital of Andhra Pradesh. We exchanged some thoughts about Baba, and he asked me where he was, how he travelled, what we were doing. He was very, very happy to see me. I don't remember whether he offered me a cup of tea or not, but that's insignificant because I had gone for something very important, a free pass through all the state.

Finally he said, 'Come back to my office and don't worry. Tell Baba that no police constable in this state will ever harass him or hinder his work.' That was the first time in Baba's ministry that somebody in a high position gave instructions to every little police booth in the state that if every they heard of Meher Baba, no one should hinder his work or interrogate him or his party. Later he sent us a copy of the circular that he had sent out.

But all these things work out. How did we dare ask such things of highly placed individuals? Because we knew that we were with the Emperor. And who were these other people? They held high posts only because of him. We had that conviction, you see, whether we approached Perfect Masters, saints, yogis or those high in public

office. Always we had the same conviction in the backs of our minds. ‘Well, we are only approaching someone who serves our Master and who has been appointed him.’

Don: Whether they knew it or not.

Eruch: Yes, we had our conviction, you see.

Don: Eruch, were there any unusual characteristics of Baba’s personal life at that time in the way of diet, whether he slept more or less in the New Life than during other periods, or anything different about the mandali’s diet or prayers or observances?

Eruch: There was no particular difference except that Baba took the same diet as the companions. He remained a true companion to his companions in the New Life. He shared the work, he shared the food that was begged, he shared the hardships. He remained the leader, there’s no doubt of that. He gave the orders and we had to carry out those commands happily, without putting on a long face. But I do remember one funny thing about the prayer side of it. Every evening when we would part company with Baba, the companions and Baba would join in this little prayer, composed by Baba:

Today has passed as it had to pass,

Yesterday passed off somehow,

And who cares for the future, for tomorrow too will pass.

Don: This was the way you parted each evening?

Eruch: Yes. It was a life of complete helplessness and hopelessness, without caring for what would happen.

Yesterday passed off somehow,

Today passed off as it already has,

And who cares for tomorrow?

Who cares for the future? That’s how we parted at night, and it gave us a feeling of great and real freedom.

Don: Living entirely in the present.

Eruch: Yes, living entirely in the present. And to be true to the facts, nobody fell ill during that period of hardship, not even the four women who were with Baba. There was not even a cold or cough, although we felt the sting of the bitterly cold winter days and our nails turned blue and our fingers became stiff.

Don: And Gustadji was so cold that he couldn’t move.

Eruch: Yes, that’s all. Other than that we were not affected by flu, coughs, congested chests or pneumonia—nothing—not even

fever or headaches. We lived in the open—nothing affected us.

Don: Eruch, you tell me these are the highlights as you remember them from the New Life, and now we have finished them off. Can we go back for a few minutes and digest some of the things you set out to show me, and discuss also another question which I would like to raise with you?

One of the first points that you made, to my astonishment, was that it was not a hardship living the New Life with Baba. Then you described many incidents along the way illustrating the great pleasure that it was to be with Baba, how you had the food served piping hot from the peasants' ovens early in the morning, and all the personal joys of being with Baba. Then there were your stories, sometimes astonishing, of how Baba let his Avatarhood, despite his being a companion, leak around the barriers that he had imposed in the New Life, and the extraordinary events that resulted. That it was an extremely pleasurable life, you have certainly established with me.

Eruch: The New Life *with* Baba was pleasurable, despite all hardships. The New Life *without* Baba was a terrible hardship, as in the case of Dr. Daulat Singh.

Don: Another phase which you brought up, and which I had never heard about before, was typified by three extraordinary stories of your searching for every poor individual who had fallen from a position of considerable wealth. They are three of the most beautiful stories of God in human form that I have ever heard.

There are two matters that still rest in my mind, and the prayer that you just recited is a good jumping-off point for one of them. On occasion one runs into a young rebel, the 'hippie' of the sixties, for example, who expresses his opinion that the New Life as lived by Baba and the mandali is the prototype of the life of the hippie as he feels inclined to lead it—wandering around the world, not worrying where the next mouthful is to come from, nor whether he is dressed in rags or can take a bath or even wash. Many of them feel the great mistake of our society has been to become so absorbed in externals that it forgets the inner man. What is your reaction to such a comparison between the wandering life that many of the young people lead and the New Life that Baba and the companion led?

Eruch: It does appear that the life that some young people live nowadays is close to the New Life that was led by Baba and his companions, but the most important difference that I find is that these people are led to live that life because of some sort of dissatisfaction in their lives.

Don: Yes, it is frequently a reaction, without question. It is a rebellion or dissatisfaction with the life they had been leading. . .

Eruch: Whereas the New Life with Baba was the living of a higher life, without having been dissatisfied with the former old life.

Don: A higher life in what sense, Eruch? A higher life aimed at some particular goal?

Eruch: Not aimed at anything. It was aimed at complete freedom, to live life in the most natural circumstances and surroundings, but a life of helplessness and hopelessness. In spite of all this, however, we were living as companions. We were assured of having the company of Baba himself, the head of the company, and we were leading that life under the direct guidance of Baba.

Don: Yes, now this is an important point, Eruch. You were under strict discipline and supervision all of the time.

Eruch: Yes, whereas many who adopt the external appearance of a 'free life' usually do not have such a discipline in their lives. We were disciplined. We looked like hippies outwardly, but we were well disciplined. We felt our responsibility, which was to obey Baba.

Don: You were also living among twenty-some-odd other persons, leading a complex life among yourselves, so you also accepted the obligation of social responsibility.

Eruch: There was discipline in the camp. Although I was leading a life of helplessness and hopelessness and not caring for anybody, that didn't give me the license to go about naked, to kick out, to behave rudely or recklessly or do whatever I wanted. No, we did whatever we wanted as a company headed by our companion Baba.

Don: You are still very much involved in this profound challenge of living closely among other very different and strong personalities, and if you got mad at somebody, as happened in one or two of your stories, you couldn't just kick over the traces and go to another country or a different group environment.

Eruch: No, we had to rectify the problem then and there.

Don: You were constrained, as in a marriage, to live the problem through, and under the extraordinary constraint of not showing a mood.

Eruch: Quite right. This reminds me of another instance of how Baba would try to solve certain social problems within the camp. Rather than not caring about them, he cared very much about them. He always aimed towards a solution which wouldn't harm society nor damage the life we were living together. Not that the result was a compromise, for he had nothing to do with the world when he set out on the New Life with the companions, and he made us see that. At the same time he wanted to see that we lived in a society without harming or going against the principles of that society, while yet living our own life which he called the New Life.

A good example of this comes to my mind. We were heading towards the North where there is a lot of differentiation between upper caste and lower caste, and at that time there were also strong differences between Hindus and Muslims. There were two Muslims among the companions of the New Life, Dr. Abdul Ghani and Ali Akbar Shahapur Zaman.

As we approached the northern territories of India this distinction between Muslim and Hindus became stronger. The Hindus didn't like any non-Hindus, Muslims or lower caste persons to approach their wells and draw water from them. Wells would be considered defiled if this were permitted. There were frequent communal riots over such problems.

As we headed towards one of these districts, Baba stopped us and said that we would have to be very careful not to upset any communal feelings. The only precaution Baba asked us to take, however, was to call Dr. Abdul Ghani Munsiff 'Ghanoba' instead of 'Ghani,' which wouldn't be any change at all. It would be of great help to us, though, in living in the midst of those people who abhorred the very idea of having a Muslim in the countryside. He also changed the name of Ali Akbar Shahapur Zaman from 'Ali' to 'Aloba.' Then even 'Aloba' and 'Ghanoba' could go to the wells of the Hindus and draw water without incident. It was a very happy arrangement and the result was we didn't antagonize the society.

Don: You observed their rules.

Eruch: Yes, we observed their rules and yet did what we wanted.

We lived our own New Life in the midst of society but without antagonizing anyone. We wanted to carry out our actions in accordance with what Baba had laid down for us for the New Life. We had our rules, regulations and disciplines and special dress. We had a special begging program and other discipline, but that didn't mean that we could lead a heedless life. No, it was a disciplined life as set by Baba.

Don: There is another question that comes to mind at that point, Eruch. What would happen if a large proportion of humanity decided to lead a free, wandering life without detracting in any way from the lives that others in cities and towns wanted to lead, but not producing their own subsistence? Baba and the companions of the New Life did not produce their own clothing or food. If I understand correctly, they were living an example for the future, but if a large percentage of people did that there would be great difficulty to produce the necessities for society, as we know it, to continue.

Eruch: I understand your point, Don.

Don: Perhaps, I'm being too delicate.

Eruch: No, not too delicate. It is my shortcoming in not having given you a complete picture of the New Life. The complete picture of the New Life can never be given, because we were living the New Life in such intense absorption and focusing all our attention on the point of obedience. It was and is a life dedicated to obedience, and all the details were insignificant to us. Now that you remind me, it was not just a life of begging and not producing anything. You may have read somewhere that Baba harnessed this manpower of his companions into many things. Dr. Donkin was told to open a clinic. We were sent out

Don: The New Life ghee business?

Eruch: Yes, the New Life ghee business was set up. Prior to that he told us to go out in the town and collect dirty clothes from house to house and wash and earn our livelihood. So we were harnessed.

The New Life had a definite pattern, you may call it. Whatever it was, for two and a half years it was a new life that we led with Baba. Baba then brought us back to Meherazad in the Manonash phase. Whatever pattern he set, we started it with that training camp at Belgaum, as I told you. Then we started regularly a

wandering life in which we wandered from place to place without caring for shelter or food or anything of the sort. At the same time there was strict adherence to discipline, mind you. Then we were made to reach Dehra Dun, the destination as I told you. I always call that the destination. Baba had a destination in mind, so this very fact shows that it was not just a matter of wandering aimlessly. We were not merely wanderers. We ‘wandered’ to our destination. There was a setting out and a destination. Those who want to lead this New Life must bear all these principles in mind.

After the destination was reached Baba divided all the companions into different group which were given definite duties. One companion was to do gardening. Another was to open a clinic. Another was to be a night watchman because he was very healthy. Another group was sent out to Delhi to establish a business called the New Life ghee business, and in this Baba utilized the services of that very person who had brought all the provisions to us at Dehra Dun and was a cream contractor.

Don: There is no question about the spiritual aspect of the New Life, Eruch. This is not the question at all, but even in the material aspect, then, during the New Life there was input to society and outtake from society which ended overall in a pretty balanced position.

Eruch: Yes, Yes, and without interfering with the code set by that society. Although we had very little to do with society, at the same time we took great pains to see that their codes were not disturbed. We didn’t just live on the mercies of society.

Don: Yes, now I do remember those various stories of the clinic and the ghee business and so on, but they had been overshadowed in my mind by the miraculous fashion in which food was provided, and by how one went to beg from the local housewife and she gave the entire day’s food. But yes, I do see the balancing factor, Eruch, and I’m glad that it has been clarified

Eruch: You have seen this point, but do you realize the reactions that must have taken place in the person who went out to beg and do all the rest? Can you sense the changes that occurred in one’s mind and heart when one set out on a begging tour? Just imagine a person who was not accustomed to begging, a person who had fed many others from his table, going out

a-begging and the reactions that occurred in his heart and his mind.

Don: Well, Eruch, you asked me a question and I want to respond to it. I first became deeply involved with Baba just before you started out on the New Life , and I can remember my own reactions when I heard some of the sorties that began to come back about the rules for the New Life and the begging that you were to do. One of the things that really frightened me in those early days was the thought ‘Good heavens! Suppose one of these days I’m under Baba’s thumb and I’ve got to put on a robe and go out and beg?’ It was a great crisis even to think about it, So, yes, I do know a very little part of that inner reaction.

Eruch: While we were discussing the matter of our leading the New Life and the instructions we were given on begging, I was reminded of Baba’s incarnation as Buddha when he also begged for some time.

The story runs like this. When Buddha started to beg for his food after he had collected his close ones, he took some of his disciples with him. In one of the districts he approached a very wealthy farmer who had huge barns full of grain. He knocked at the farm door and shouted out loudly, ‘Sir, give me something in bhiksha.’ The man came out of his house , looked at Buddha’s very strong figure and expressed surprise, saying, ‘You, you come to beg? Can’t you work? You are a strong man! And why do you bring so many other companions to beg food? Do you think that God showers all the grains that I’ve got in my barn from the skies? Remember one thing, sir, we have to toil, and toil very hard. We have to sweat in order to fill our barns. You come here very graciously with all your companions trying to hustle some food from us, but remember, we toil in order to give something to you beggars.’ The wealthy farmer said many more things to Buddha, continuing to admonish him for coming like that with his men and begging for food at his door.

Buddha heard him out for awhile, and when the man had no more to say, Buddha smiled at him and said, ‘Sir, I agree with all that you have said. All you said is one hundred percent true, but now I will put forth my case. I agree with you that you do not get anything without having to sweat. You have to sweat in

order to earn your livelihood. There is no doubt about it. But do you know how I sweat together my fruits into my barn? You sow a seed in your field and with the help and the grace of God you are able to harvest the crops within a year and fill your barns with them. But I sow a seed and have to nurture it and wait for it patiently for generations to come. When I harvest one crop of mine, it has taken many incarnations. I have to wait patiently and labor and toil for many incarnations before I can put the fruit into my barn. Therefore I need some help from you as a gift for my job.’

Don: A much easier job, the farmer’s

Eruch: Yes. Just by hearing this little discourse from Buddha, the whole family became his devout disciples, and all the grain was available for him to have, whatever he wanted. But does that mean that Buddha and his companions led a life of sponging on society? No. Of course not. Buddha owned the Creation, and the companions also owned what they had gathered from their Lord and they were ‘paid’ for what they deserved. Likewise in our New Life, we begged for food, and we were offered what we deserved and had earned. We never sponged on society, no.

Don: Well, this becomes an important point because it reads on the practice of so many people who lead a footloose life nowadays. I often wonder what will eventually happen if an appreciable percentage of humanity starts to leads a wandering existence. What happens if an appreciable percentage of mankind does not put back into society what it extracts from it?

Eruch: Well, many young people are leading a life which I don’t really know anything about. It does seem that they also live a life as we lived, but I don’t know the reactions that are taking place in their hearts and minds, and this is the most important thing. There is no question that in the New Life we had to overcome certain personal reactions, and I would call it a life of great daring. The New Life is not just a reaction because one doesn’t like the codes or culture of society, and so one leaves society to go wandering from place to place, not caring whether one is given food or not. That’s a different thing. In the New Life we were trained and molded into a certain pattern and discipline.

Don: That brings up the second major point in my mind as we come to the end of your tales of the New Life. If I were to put

it—probably too bluntly, but I will with Baba’s forgiveness—I would say that Baba’s statement to you of Baba putting aside Avatarhood and leading a life of helplessness as an equal is a lot of baloney. He remained the Avatar and he continued to do his universal work. He was just as busy doing it with you people as he was before the New Life, and I can’t help but ask myself, why label a continuation of Baba’s previous life as the New Life? Why did he say he was just going to be a helpless companion with you? I’ve overstated the case, but you see the point.

Eruch: Yes, I see the point, of course, but now take the past advent of Lord Krishna. He is recognized now as the Avatar, and we hear that the western world too has accepted the Gita and knows who Lord Krishna is.

Even during his advent, Lord Krishna played many roles and became a companion to the Gopas and Gopis. He helped them and became their friend, and in the later ministerial period of his advent he even became the charioteer of Arjuna. He didn’t even wish Arjuna to recognize him in spite of the profound knowledge that he gave Arjuna and to humanity in the shape of the Gita. He assumed the simple role of charioteer and remained as charioteer throughout the war. He enjoined Arjuna to accept his services as charioteer and forget that he was the Lord of the Universe. It is said that Arjuna had to treat him as if he were a real charioteer, even to the point of putting his toes on Krishna’s temples.

Do you know how the chariots were guided in those days? They used a different method. Arjuna was the master archer, and he had to fight the battle as the commander-in-chief of the whole forces. To do this he could not divert his attention to guide the chariot. Instead he had to handle the situation in such a way that he could direct the horses without using his hands, leaving them free to signal his instructions to the whole army. To do this he would take his seat on a specially built chariot with Krishna’s head placed between his two legs. Krishna’s temples were then turned with the help of Arjuna’s big toes. When Arjuna pressed his toe on Krishna’s left temple, Krishna would direct the chariot to the left, and similarly with right.

The lord of the Universe, the God-Man, condescending to come down as a charioteer! But does that mean that therefore he was

not God in human form? That was his role in that particular advent. So, one of the phases in this particular advent of Baba was to condescend to become the companion of his followers.

Don: But even then he certainly continued to exercise the Avatic power, and he certainly continued, it appears, to put you, the close companions, through the same type of learning disciplines that you had gone through previously.

Eruch: I can't say that, you see. He continued to be the Avatar, I know we knew that, in our hearts. He told us that. We said to him it was impossible for us to forget or weed out from our hearts our conviction of his Avatarhood. 'Well,' he said, 'then don't start putting on appearances like that. Don't start gazing and adoring me during the New Life.' That's what he told us—that grace he gave us. 'Do one thing,' he said, 'what you are to do is to focus your attention on obeying me, and obeying me *not* because I am the God-Man, but as the head of the group. I am your head as a companion, remember that. Whatever be your feelings in your heart, that's your own personal lookout, but outwardly you must take me as your companion and try to follow my orders as a companion without seeking any personal, spiritual or material rewards from me for living the New Life, because I have now come down to your level as a companion.' So we had to accept these things. Of course, he being God and God in human form, he is everything.

Don: Both God and man.

Eruch: Both God and man.

Don: Could one say possibly, and correct me, Eruch, that the balance in Baba between God and man is tipped more towards man in the New Life and less towards God?

Eruch: Very well put, sir, very well put.

Don: If you don't mind chatting just a few minutes more, under what circumstances does Baba exercise the Godly function? We were talking the other day, for instance, about things that he seemed to know ahead of time, and yet at other times he asked questions as if he didn't know anything about a certain situation. These are things that often puzzle us when we sit down and talk about Baba.

Eruch: On occasion in Baba's presence when this topic was discussed, Baba very lovingly confirmed to us that although he knows everything, yet he appears as if he knows nothing of the facts around him and around us.

Baba gave us an explanation for this. If he expressed his all-knowingness about us we would not want to be in his presence for long. It would be like being totally naked in the presence of one before whom we would like to be fully dressed. We wouldn't feel at home and we couldn't feel close to him.

Don: It would seem so strange to us that we could not have a human relationship with him?

Eruch: No human relationship could go on if we were constantly aware of his all-knowingness through our own experience. We are convinced, however, of his all-knowingness from what he has told us, and through little glimpses that we have had.

Don: So, of the qualities of all-knowledge, all-power, all-bliss, the Avatar does have constantly accessible to him and does use the all-knowing?

Eruch: He has said that everything is accessible to him, every aspect of God. All-bliss is the nature of God—it is his nature because he is God infinite. But he does not use the all-bliss attribute. If he were to use it, then the purpose of his having 'come' on earth in human form would be nullified. (I use the word 'come' in quotes because he doesn't come, nor descend. For the purpose of our understanding we can say he 'comes down,' so to say, in human form, communing with humanity.) One of the main purposes of his advent is to take upon himself human suffering, and he would not be able to do justice to that aspect of his mission in Creation if he were to remain constantly drenched or drowned in his infinite bliss.

Don: I see. In other words he has to suffer as you and I suffer.

Eruch: Exactly, as a man.

Don: So he must do it as we do it—otherwise you might say the game would not be fair if he were to expiate our sins and relieve our suffering in a way that was not meaningful in our terms.

Eruch: About being fair. Who is there to question him and know these things? He is the only Being, after all. But he has to take upon himself the suffering of his playthings. Let's say you are burdened with fifty pounds of burden. How would he relieve you of the burden?

Don: He would lift it off my shoulders and carry it himself.

Eruch: Yes. Quite right.

Don: Or else wave the magic wand and levitate it. From one city to another.

Eruch: That is also possible.

Don: I would be amazed if I saw Baba do it in that way. I wouldn't feel that he had helped me as a friend would help me.

Eruch: True, but he can do it that way also. And you need not be amazed, because this has happened. Baba can do anything he wants to. But, unless he takes the suffering upon himself and takes the burden from your shoulders, it is not possible for him to relieve mankind of suffering.

Don: Do you mean by all this that at no time during his Avataric incarnation in human form did Baba experience divine bliss?

Eruch: No, he cannot. He keeps it away all the time.

Don: What about all-power?

Eruch: Baba has said that sometimes he uses all-power, but rarely and only in exceptional cases. If he were to use his attribute of all-power, he could do anything. He could even undo the things for which he has come. But he doesn't use it often. He uses it only at the time of the great miracles—when he wants to give a push to the whole world, then he exercises all-power. Otherwise he never uses it. But he always exercises all-knowingness.

Don: Always all-knowing, once in a while all-power, but never all-bliss.

Eruch: He never experiences all-bliss while he is in human form. Then when does he experience bliss? When he 'goes back,' when he drops or sheds his man-form, when he becomes God again.

Don: Without that admixture of human form?

Eruch: Quite true. The very act of his taking on human form is to disassociate himself from infinite bliss. Do you know the lines that Baba gave me just a few days before he dropped his body? In English it states that he becomes ignorant but he knows everything. He remains ignorant to us, knowing fully well everything.

Don: Yes, I see, the same thing we were just discussing.

Eruch: These two lines are now written here on the wall of my room. Baba gave these two lines. They are taken from a couplet by a poet describing Baba's state—that is, the God-Man state. Baba wanted to remind us of his state. Knowing everything, he lives as man who knows nothing. Would you like to hear a couple of instances of his knowing everything?

Don: Yes, I think it would be very interesting.

Eruch: By the way , when we talk of someone knowing everything, we always assume that he is fully awake. But Baba's awake state is continuous. How can he be in sound sleep? It is impossible for him. He is God. And he is aware of himself as God all during the time that he is giving forth Creation, until one day he becomes tired. This is the time, then, of *Mahapralaya*, when the 'breathing in' takes place and everything in Creation is absorbed within Himself. Then he remains in the 'GOD IS' state of God.

But now for the stories of his all-knowing quality. One day after a very long and tiresome journey we reached a big town. I still remember its name—Junagadh. We wanted to stop, and Baba said, 'Let's go and find a rest house.' At such times Baba wanted complete quiet around him, and that couldn't be found in hotels or other recognized rest houses. What we often did then, when it was possible, was to search for cemeteries, or shrines, or mosques, or temples. Often associated with these sacred places are little rest houses for pilgrims. It is only once in a blue moon that someone wants to stay there. So these rooms are almost always vacant and we could take advantage of their quiet. In Junagadh we found rooms and we hired them. It was already ten o'clock at night , and we didn't even know where the bathroom was nor the men's toilet. Why I say this will come out in the story.

We made the arrangements for Baba to rest for the night in one of the rooms, and as customary I swept his room clean and made it 'comfortable' for him. The first watch duty was given to me, as I looked after Baba's personal needs and then sat outside his door while he started his rest . My turn would come again in the early hours of the morning before I woke him up from his 'sleep.' After my first turn would come Gustadji. That was decided by Baba. Now and then the order of duties would change, but mine remained fixed.

After Baba retired, Gustadji, Pendu, Kaka and the others lay down to rest also. And where would they sleep? Not in comfortable rooms or beds! They just lay down on a verandah in front of Baba's room and slept. They could go to sleep anywhere because their bodies were so tired. They were so exhausted that they didn't even go to the toilet or change their clothes. Nothing of the sort—they just slept in their boots.

When it was Gustadji's turn for the night watch I had to wake him up. Then I took his place and went to sleep for two to three hours while he kept watch. After some time Gustadji had a very strong urge to urinate. He did not know where to go, and as the place was so sacred it was not possible to piddle just anywhere. We can't do that. It is sacrilegious to do so. So Gustadji, knowing the instruction that he couldn't leave Baba alone while he was on watch-duty, and yet having this strong urge, did not know what to do. The only thing he could do was try to separate the sacred place from a not-so-sacred place. At the time he was sitting on a parapet, a sort of unending long bench made of concrete. He thought that that was the boundary of the shrine, and that if he were to jump behind the bench, there would be a safe place for him to piddle. It would not be sacrilegious, and at the same time he wouldn't be too far away from Baba to hear the clapping if Baba might call him.

He first went near Baba's door to make sure Baba was fast asleep, which was quite easy to do as he could hear him snoring. Remember, Baba never snored softly. He snored like one of us, but on the louder side. Gustadji stopped and listened again, making quite sure that Baba was indeed sound asleep and that there was no harm in leaving for a minute or two. It was not too far, just behind the bench where he was sitting.

So he stood up on the bench, put one of his legs over and tried to feel the ground. He couldn't, but just as he was about to jump and was bringing the other leg over the bench, he heard Baba clapping insistently. That it was the sign that we had to run to Baba immediately. Gustadji, lost in the urgent thought of relieving himself, nevertheless completely forgot his need and ran to Baba's room. He opened the door and with the help of a flashlight read Baba's gestures. It is to be remembered, by the way, that Gustadji, under instructions from Baba, was also observing silence, which he maintained the remainder of his life. Baba admonished him, saying, 'Where were you when I clapped? You should attend to my call immediately.' Gustadji said that he was just outside on the bench. It had taken no time to reach Baba in spite of where he had been sitting. Baba admonished him again, however, and said, 'Remember without fail to sit where you are supposed to without moving about.'

But that was the usual order that Baba always gave: ‘Remember, you sit still and don’t budge, and don’t make any noise,’ Gustadji of course nodded in obedience and went back to his seat. As you know, when one is disturbed in the middle of a great urge to piddle, for a time one forgets about it, but later it again surges up. When Gustadji had first wanted to go, it had been a very dark, cloudy night and he couldn’t see exactly where he was. Now, as the urge began to rise again, he couldn’t control himself.

Again he looked back and forth, and he looked up and he found the stars there. Then he peered over the back of the parapet to find out how far down it was for his jump. And what does he see to his surprise? He sees the reflection of the stars down behind the bench. He was at the edge of a huge lake that supplied water to the town. Had not Baba clapped, right in the midst of his snoring, and had Gustadji stepped down, he would have jumped straight into the lake.

Don: How far down was the lake?

Eruch: Very deep, forty feet to the surface of the water. The next day Gustadji laughed and told us the story. He held my hand, took me to the bench and showed me the lake, and then he told it all to Baba. Baba just nodded his head as if nothing had happened.

Don: It was natural.

Eruch: I will tell you another incident which will give you a glimpse of Baba’s all-knowingness. It is also another incident involving his ‘deep sleep.’ It occurred in Bombay at Nariman’s place. Baba had told Arnavaz, Nariman’s wife, who had a very nasty headache, that before she retired at night she should take one tablet of aspirin. We call it ‘aspro’ here in India. He did not want her to take it immediately, but at bedtime. During the course of the day he must have reminded her half a dozen times, and she promised that she would definitely take it.

At about 10 o’clock at night suddenly she remembered that she had completely forgotten to take the aspro. As Baba had reminded her often to take the tablet, she became very worried about what she should do. Even the shops were closed so she couldn’t buy any.

Someone asked her, ‘But haven’t you got an aspro here in the house?’ ‘Yes, but it is in the same room where Baba is resting, and it is not possible for anybody to disturb him.’ I said, ‘Don’t worry about it.’ Then I waited and listened until I heard that familiar

snoring, and assured myself that Baba was in deep sleep. I said, 'Don't worry, I know where the pills are.' There was a medicine chest in that room. 'I'll go there and take one pill out of it and give it to you. Why do you worry about it?' She said, 'You'll disturb Baba.' I said, 'No, we know when we can go there when Baba has retired. We have been doing that for years. We know the art. I can do it without disturbing Baba.'

So I entered the room, and Bhau was on duty inside at the time. As I softly opened the door, Baba continued to snore. I tiptoed to the chest. I opened the chest. Baba continued to snore. He was in a sound sleep. I got the aspro pill out. He continued to snore. I tiptoed back to the door. He continued to snore loudly.

Just as I started to put my foot across the threshold I got the thought, Eruch, how clever you are that you can even come into the God-Man's room while he rests. With that thought—you know how thoughts are, they flash, like lightning—I put my first foot outside the door. Baba was still snoring. As I put my second foot through I heard the clap. I gave the pill to Arnavaz, and she was very frightened to hear the clapping, fearing that I had disturbed Baba. But he was snoring all the time. Naturally, Bhau came out to call me inside. Baba asked me why I had visited the room. I said, 'I had to get the pill to give it to Arnavaz.' He said, 'Go, give it to her and tell her not worry and take it, that's all.' Baba didn't say anything more. But Baba wanted me to know that he *knows*, despite his deep sleep and snoring!

Don: That he knows what you are thinking.

Eruch: Yes, just that. My mind had prompted me to think that I could enter into Baba's room while he snored and could take away the aspro pill without his knowledge—without disturbing him. My ego was tickled that I had entered the room without allowing the all-knowing Baba to know I had done so! It was all right for me to enter the room, as I was given permission to do so at any time. In fact I used to do so quite often. But that part of my ego which insisted on challenging the faculty of Baba's all-knowingness when he is in sound sleep—when in fact he is aware, fully alert, even while I heard him snoring loudly—has helped to produce one more provocative experience in our life with Meher Baba.

Don: With Baba, apparently consciousness is not in abeyance.

while he sleeps. But nevertheless his body sleeps.

Eruch: Yes, his body sleeps the sleeps of man , but Baba's all-knowingness functions continuously.

* * * * *

Don: Meherazad. Mehera and Meheru are sitting on the porch of the bungalow to tell some of the tales from the New Life from the women's viewpoint.

Meheru: Jai Baba. We are going to recount a few things that we remember from the New Life. It was in 1949 when we were gathered in Upper Meherabad that we had the first intimation of the New Life. The bell had rung for everybody, and the women all gathered in the east room. Baba was seated on Mehera's cot taking note of all the various ones of the ashram as they entered the room. Those from Meherazad had come to Meherabad that day with Baba. Norina and Elizabeth had left for the U.S. with instructions for starting the Meher Universal Spiritual Center. All details for the center had been discussed with Baba, and Baba had said that he would come to America with some of the mandali for the opening at a future time.

Don: Meheru, had the site at Myrtle Beach been selected at that time?

Meheru: I think that Elizabeth already had this property and that she had it in mind for this purpose and had discussed it with Baba. To continue, Baba smiled at us as we entered, yet we felt that there was seriousness in his expression. He told us all to be seated. Everyone came with their small stools and found room for themselves where they could see Baba. Mehera was seated close by him. Beloved Baba told us on the alphabet board, with Mani reading out, what wonderful jewels we were and how faithfully we had obeyed him through the years, and how fortunate we were to have been in his ashram and in such close proximity. He told us that now also he expected obedience from us, and that when he had finished, each of us was to come to him in turn and state whether we would obey him and go where he had decided we should go.

Don: Meheru, at this point was it only the women who were meeting with Baba, or were the men mandali there also?

Meheru: This meeting took place at Upper Meherabad with just the women. What happened down below with the men mandali we don't know. At any rate, Baba said to us that he might ask some to stay in Meherabad, others to go to Bombay or Poona or elsewhere, or even to get married. Baba himself, he said, would be leaving Ahmednagar with a few men mandali and a few women mandali. This would be decided later on. Each of us then came

in turn to Baba and was asked if she was prepared to obey Baba, no matter what his decision. Some without hesitation said yes, and others with a little thought also said yes. The atmosphere was tense and solemn. But after everyone had given an affirmative answer Baba said he was very happy with us all.

Accompanying Baba from Meherazad were Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru and Valu. At Meherabad already were Kitty, Naja, Rano, Katy, Soonamasi, Korshed, Mansari, Jaremai and her three daughters Meheru, Jalu and Guloo. Saultun and Daulat, Baidul's wife and daughter, were also there.

Don: I hadn't realized that some of the women mandali were living at Upper Meherabad at that point, whereas others of you were living at Meherazad. Is this correct?

Meheru: Well, yes. But you see Baba had made this separation many years ago, even at the time we were in Lahore in '43. Half of the women stayed close to Baba in one bungalow and the others in another a short distance away. Then when we returned to Meherabad in December of that year, Baba came to Meherazad to be in seclusion. It was then known as Pimpalgaon. We learned later through Padri that the Meherazad property had been acquired much earlier, in the 1930's. Which year it was he does not remember. Vishnu had read in a local Maharati paper that this government property was up for auction and told Baba about it. Baba told Vishnu to acquire it, so Vishnu and Padri went to the auction together and bought it. Padri said Baba had previously visited the place quite often. Baba would come with one or two mandali, stay for a few hours or a day or two and then leave.

Mehera: In 1943, after our return from Lahore, Baba was staying in seclusion at Meherazad for his work and fasting. Gustadji and one or two mandali were with Baba. After some time Baba came out of seclusion and came back to Meherabad. We had not known where he was staying.

The next day when Mani, Meheru and I were in our room, Baba turned to me, because I was near him, and said, 'There is a very nice place that is very near a lake, and there's a nice house there. You will like it very much. I will take you all to see it one day.' Of course we were very happy about it because we would be going out with Baba. It was quite exciting for us. Two days later Baba

told us to get ready, and Mani and I went to Meherazad with Baba and we saw the place, with lovely tall trees and a shady compound. There was no garden, but the atmosphere was very beautiful.

Baba told us to look around to see how nice it was, and he pointed out the room where he had been staying in seclusion. Where the new bungalow stands now, there was once a building with three rooms, but it was quite in ruins. The other cottage was well-built. It had strong walls but the roof must have been damaged and not restored.

Baba showed us all about the place and we liked it very much. Baba said, 'We'll have all this repaired and a little cottage built on this old foundation, and we will come to stay here.' We were so happy with the thought of staying here with Baba.

Don: Is the part that was then built this two-story building in which we are sitting now?

Mehera: Yes, this was the old house, but it was not enough for us because there was just the one room and a tiny bedroom at the side. Baba wanted Margaret and Naja to stay with us. Margaret loved to stay in Pimpalgaon, but in that tiny room there was just enough space for two little beds and a small table. The other room was just large enough for us three: Mani, Meheru and myself. We were very happy here because Baba was with us.

Meheru: Often after we came to Meherazad Baba would travel to outstations from here with a few of the men and women mandali, and on returning to 'Nagar (Ahmednagar) we'd stay a few days in Meherabad and then come to Meherazad for some months. In the early period Margaret stayed with us. Baba would also sometimes ask Kitty or Rano to come, or Naja. Along with Mehera, Mani and Meheru, Valu also stayed at Meherazad. So that's how we first saw Meherazad and came to stay here.

To continue with the New Life, Baba said that the ashram of Meherabad, both Upper and Lower, would be disbanded. But no matter where anyone was sent, their connection with Baba would continue because they were obeying Baba. Baba said that the decision regarding everyone's future would be announced some time later.

It was a very busy period and very tense for Baba and all of us during those days before the New Life began. Many arrangements

had to be made. There were families whose fathers or brothers were working for Baba and who were solely dependent on him. Baba had to arrange that they should not be left stranded. Jobs had to be found for them. Certain sums of money had to be paid to the ‘arrangement-wallahs’ for the work and responsibilities that were given to them. There were so many things to be done which Baba alone had to decide. The pressure on him and those working for him was very great.

Finally Baba gave his decision. Of the women at the Meherabad and Meherazad ashrams, Baba said that Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru would accompany him on the New Life. Rano, Kitty, Korshed and Soonmasi should stay at Meherjee’s place in Bombay and help in the household or get jobs—anything they could. Kitty and Rano should try to find jobs. Katy and Naja were also to go to Bombay and stay at Nariman’s house, and Katy should try to find a job. Baba would jokingly warn Katy from time to time to take care or a Chinaman might run off with her.

Don: Why a Chinaman, Meheru?

Meheru: Well, that we found out later

Mehera: No, Baba meant a Japanese. A Japanese has a nose like this? (And Mehera gestured, touching her nose with her finger as Baba did.)

Don: Yes, Japanese have rather flat noses.

Mehera: Yes, so that is why Baba would put his finger on his nose and tease Katy that she’d working for the Chinese or the Japanese, whichever he meant. We thought it was Chinese.

Don: You thought it was Chinese at first because of the flat nose?

Mehera: Yes but it was the Japanese. It turned out that when Katy went to Bombay she got a job in the Japanese Consulate.

Meheru: Rano, Kitty and Naja were told that they might be called to join in the New Life at any time in the future. Soultun, Daulat and Valu were to go to Poona and stay with Gaimai, Eruch’s mother. Jaremai and family were to stay at Meherabad, and Mansari (Mansari is Mani Desai) was told to go to Bombay to her brother’s house, or to Navsari to her sisters. She was to decide which she preferred. She asked, however, if she could remain at Meherabad with the Jaremai family. After some hesitation and thought, Baba agreed.

To carry out these arrangements Baba needed money immediately. Everything in Meherabad which had not personally been used by Baba would have to be sold. All the things from the tin shed store-room were brought out: brass pots and pans, kettles, tea sets, cutlery, glassware, carpets, things that had been brought by western disciples or given by eastern devotees. There were many beautifully embroidered cushions, carpets, and tapestries. All these were brought out and packed to be sent to Bombay by truck. Many had not even been used.

Naja or someone else might mumble, ‘You’ll not be able to get another kettle like this one. . .or knives like that,’ but would then be hushed by the others. ‘It doesn’t matter,’ someone would say, ‘we never used them anyway. They were all so well tucked away they were not meant for our use,’ or words to that effect.

Mehera and others gave some of their costly silk saris and jewelry to be sold to help Baba. Furniture, beds, cupboards—everything went into the jackpot. From Meherazad, also, articles were sent: a brand new refrigerator that Elizabeth had specially ordered from America, two De Soto cars which she had given to Baba, and another small car which Nariman had given. All were new.

Don: Meheru, could I ask you and Mehera a little more of the story of those two De Soto cars? I’ve heard that Elizabeth had given Baba a car, apparently a De Soto, and that Baba had immediately said, ‘This is marvelous—I went a second one.’ Is there any truth in this?

Meheru: We don’t remember that detail, but we do know that when Elizabeth came she brought one car, and she said that another was on the way.

Don: I see. Well, it made such a charming story that I’ve always hoped that that was the correct version of it. Just Baba’s whimsy. ‘All right, I like that one, so I want a second one.’

Meheru: I don’t think so. At least we don’t know the story. I suppose Elizabeth would know about that.

Mehera: Baba has used both cars. The green De Soto was the one more often used. Both were comfortable and readily accommodated nine persons or even twelve if need be.

Don: Twelve people? God heavens!

Meheru: It was like a station wagon, but shaped like a car.

Mehera: Like a station wagon, but a very large one. Both the cars were very beautiful.

Meheru: Before October 16, 1949, those who were to go to Bombay and Poona had left. On October 16th the New Life began. Baba had said that those who were to share it with him were always to be cheerful and not give way to anger or moodiness, no matter what the circumstance. We were to obey Baba implicitly, without hesitation. We should be very careful never to disturb Baba's mood. Those who were not prepared to do this should not go into the New Life with Baba. Early on October 16th, while it was still dark, a car driven by Sarosh came to fetch us at Meherazad. The men mandali were picked up, I believe, at Meherabad by a bus.

Don: Meheru, may I ask you a little more about showing any moods during the New Life? Eruch told two or three stories about the complications experienced in this regard, especially one about Daulat Singh. He was sent home by Baba because one day he gave way to tears in front of Baba. His daughter was getting married and he was swept up by emotion. Because of this Baba made him go back to his family, but he was to live the New Life there. It was an interesting story. Were there any similar flare-ups of moods or of strong emotions amongst the women which had to be dealt with in the New Life.

Meheru: No, not that I remember. But when Naja and others had to come and stay with Baba, they weren't to mention anything about what the others were doing in the old life.

Don: Oh, so Naja and perhaps one or two others who were not accompanying Baba were allowed to come?

Meheru: Naja came, and later Rano and Kitty.

Don: For visits?

Meheru: For a period Baba kept Naja, and then she was sent back and Kitty and Rano came for a period. Naja was a little upset that she might be sent away, and she said, 'Oh, Kitty and Rano have jobs.' Baba was very disturbed and he said, 'You've broken my order by even mentioning this.' But then Baba forgave her and said, 'It's not to happen again.'

Don: In domestic life during the New Life, were there problems when you were carrying out your duties? Suddenly you might become annoyed with Mani, or Mani might become annoyed with

Goher? Were there little problems like that where you had to be careful they didn't come to Baba's attention?

Meheru: Well, little irritations. There was nothing serious.

Don: But little irritations? They did not disturb Baba?

Meheru: No, nothing really. We tried to do our best.

Don: Provided you got anything out of your systems before he came back, it was all right?

Meheru: No, It was not at all like that.

Don: But you could be angry with each other away from Baba?

Meheru: No. It was not so. We always had to watch our mood. It was Baba's order. We avoided disagreement. We tried to obey Baba one hundred per cent.

Don: So there were no big problems that cropped up amongst the women in their daily life?

Meheru: We were always very united and loving towards each other. It was the New Life, and we had promised Baba, so if by mistake things started to go badly, we would remind each other.

Don: Even when you were terribly tired, still you had a sense of unity?

Meheru: Always, because in the New Life, when we stopped we were very tired from walking along the road. You see, when we were on the way we would long for a place to camp, and it would still be miles away. We'd be walking and walking, and at last we would get to the place. It was usually a nice orchard with a well and water. As soon as we camped our caravan was brought to us. It was meant for us women, and all our belongings were inside with Baba's things and the household utensils—they had to be enamel and tin so they would not break, not glass or crockery. Anyway, we were happy to get to our destination, relax and wash our feet and hands. By that time, before we realized it, invariably there was a crowd of people around us, so we could not relax. We were like a circus come to town.

Don: People from the neighborhood would come around through curiosity?

Meheru: Yes. Though we might be far from the nearest village, somehow these people would get the news and nearly the whole village would come and crowd around. You can imagine it! How can you relax or feel at home, yet you must not get angry with

them. We were tired. We wanted to relax, to wash our feet. We wanted to attend to nature. We wanted to put the mats on the ground for resting. We wanted to draw water for our needs. There was much to do and yet here was this crowd watching us. We felt like saying, now go away. But all the people were smiling, and we had to smile.

They would want to see the caravan. ‘What new kind of carriage is this? It looks like a bus and the wheels are like a motor car, and yet bullocks are drawing it, not even horses.’ They were very surprised. They had never seen anything like that. They would all bend down and look at the wheels, here and there, inspecting everything. Then they would stand round smiling very happily. They had never seen people like us in that part of India. They were all Hindus.

Don: Yes, probably very few Parsis in those areas.

Mehera: None at all. And we were wearing a new kind of attire. The mandali were all in white robes with green turbans looking like some sort of regimen. The villagers couldn’t make out who we were, so they would ask, and we would tell them we were going to Haridwar. Then they would feel very happy. ‘Oh, you are going on a pilgrimage to Haridwar?’ And they were greatly impressed.

Don: Baba had already told you that Haridwar would be the destination?

Mehera: Yes. And Baba did take us to Haridwar.

Don: You were saying that when you would come to the orchard with the well and you would want to rest and do the things that were necessary, the people would come crowding round. What was Baba doing then?

Mehera: Baba always kept more to the area with the men mandali, because all the important activity was taking place there, such as feeding the animals and so on.

Don: And the men were away from the crowd?

Mehera: You see, the orchard would be very big. We would be in one part of the orchard and the bullock carts and the camel cart and the white horse and the two little donkeys and all that retinue was taken to the other side with the men mandali. Before they could relax they had to prepare a meal for the animals. If there wasn’t the right kind of fodder to be had, they had to chop something up.

Meheru: They cared for the animals before themselves. But the crowd would usually divide, some going there first, and after they'd seen enough, they'd come and watch what we were doing. They tried to make out who were.

Mehera: Baidul and others—I don't know who they were, because we couldn't see them—would chop up the sugar cane tops. After they had given the food to the animals, they had to bring them drinking water and make them comfortable. Only then could the mandali attend to themselves. It was very hard on them.

Don: So Baba would be with the men while they were tending the animals, and meanwhile all those curious people were about. Wasn't Baba irritated with them, didn't he try to shoo them away?

Mehera: No, no. And Kakaji would be cooking for us, and Baba would watch Kakaji—Baba was interested in all our activities.

Don: So all the cooking was done in the men's camp by Kaka, and the food would be brought over to you?

Mehera: Yes. There was a large quantity of food to be cooked. Baba gave it to the men to do because there were many men mandali but just four of us women. There was never running water. It had to be brought from a well. The men would bring it for us halfway to Goher, and Goher would bring it on in two little pails and put it in the samovar. Then we would all wash our faces and hands and make ready for Baba's tea, but there was always the crowd standing about, men and women, young and old, all standing about in a big circle watching us. We didn't know what to do. We couldn't feel at home because there were so many people watching us. What to do? We would say to them, 'Now we are going to have tea. Our tea is going to come.' 'Oh yes, oh good, yes, have tea,' they would reply, and they would remain standing there to watch us drink our tea. When the tea came we would think, if Baba comes, how uncomfortable he will feel with such a crowd watching.

Then Goher would say to them, but without getting angry or irritated or speaking tersely, 'Namaste, namaste,' just as we would say, 'Jai Baba.' It means 'greetings.' So she would say, 'Namaste, now you must go. Our men mandali are there. All the men should go to the men. It's all right if the women stay. We are all women here. What is there for the men to stand around here for?'

So the men would agree, 'Ah yes, that is true', and they would

all walk off. It was good that we thought of that idea. After that, whenever the village men came round, we let them stay for a few minutes to see the caravan and then told them to go to the men mandali's side. The women stayed around us, wanting to talk to us about this and that. Of course we were not in the mood to talk. We wanted to rest and have tea because we'd been walking since morning. It was very funny, I can tell you, with so many people coming and going. It was very inconvenient not to have a private place, even to do one's private business. It was very uncomfortable, but we could not get upset with them, you know.

Don: Mehera, did this last during all of the New Life, all these people crowding around whenever you stopped?

Mehera: As long as we were walking, yes, till Najibabad, which is not very far from Dehra Dun. It was so cold for us, too. We had never had to tolerate so much cold in winter. Going towards the north is going towards the Himalayas, and the Himalayas then were covered with snow. You could see the snowcapped mountains from certain points as we went further north. It was so cold that Baba gave us women the caravan to sleep in. There were three benches in it, like three seats, and we longed to go inside because it was so cold outside. As it grew dusk there were stars in the sky and the outlines of the trees, but no roof over our heads. We would wait out in the open until it was dark and time to go to bed, then when we got inside the caravan we would shut the windows and pull the curtains down, leaving a slight crack for fresh air, and settle down for the night.

When Goher came she was the fourth, and as she had no seat to sleep on she had to lie on the floor. But she was quite happy as long as she was under a roof and warm. The mandali were not warm. Many of them could not sleep at all because it was so cold under the stars. It rained sometimes. When they could not get warm some would stand and stamp their feet or try to get a fire going. But you see, it was Baba who gave them the strength and also the help to go through with the New Life. He sustained us all.

Meheru: Back to the very first day of the New Life, early on October 16th, while it was still dark, the car driven by Sarosh came to fetch us. Baba and the women companions drove in the car. It was raining. I well remember what a rainy day it was. At

the railway crossing near the station, the bus with the twenty men companions and all the luggage was waiting.

Don: Meheru, isn't it very unusual to have heavy rain that late in the year? Usually your monsoon is almost finished in September, isn't it?

Meheru: It was an unusually good monsoon that year and it continued until the month of November, which is most unusual.

Don: One often used to hear Baba say that whenever he started an important spiritual work there was a storm and rain.

Mehera: Yes, that's true, I have often noticed this.

Don: Did he make any comment about this when you started the New Life?

Meheru: No, not to my knowledge. Baba had said that no one was to see us off. I believe that the villagers of Arangaon decided that if they'd all come in a body to the station and in their love weep at Baba's leaving and ask him not to go, Baba would listen to them. But Baba found out about this beforehand and said that they should not do this, that no one should come at the time of departure.

When we came to the level crossing Baba told us to get down from the car and start walking, but almost immediately it started to rain again so we got back into the car. We drove then to Supa, to the P.W.D. bungalow where we arrived in the early morning. Mehera, do you remember anything about Supa?

Mehera: We probably stayed two nights there. We had started very early. We got up at half past three or a quarter to four. Baba always wanted us to get up very early.

Don: Every day in the New Life?

Mehera: Yes, every day in the New Life, and even before the New Life. Five o'clock or five-thirty was the usual time.

Don: But in the New Life you rose even earlier?

Meheru: Yes, the colder it got the earlier we rose, or so it seemed to us.

Don: Well, you probably couldn't sleep anyway, it was so cold.

Meheru: Early on the morning of the eighteenth before five A.M., we started on our walk to Sirur. It is a town about halfway between 'Nagar and Poona. Near Sirur passes the river Ghornadi, so sometimes the town is called Ghornadi after the river.

Already it could be seen that the tension of the past days had

lessened, and Baba was looking more relaxed. The first day of walking was a long trek of over eighteen miles and was tiring for all, especially for elder ones, such as Dr. Ghani who had led a sedentary life. The men companions walked in front, and after some distance Baba and we girls followed. It was easy going at first, as it was very early in the morning and it was very pleasant walking in the cool air.

Don: The sun was not bothersome to you?

Meheru: We remember very well there was a bright moon.

Mehera: The sun was not yet up.

Don: But what about the middle of the day when it became quite hot? Did you pull over to the side of the road and sit in the shade for awhile?

Meheru: No, Baba wanted us to continue the journey.

Don: Even in the heat of the day, you went on?

Mehera: We had to reach the destination as soon as possible. Only once we rested under a tree to have a cup of tea. Halfway between Supa and Ghornadi there was a nice place with some farmers' huts and fields and lovely big trees, so Baba told us we could rest there awhile and he would see that we all had tea. Baba told the Mandali to go and ask a farmer if he would make some. He did and it was very good. It had a little ginger in it and we were very thankful for it—it was very refreshing. Baba asked us, 'Did you like the tea?' He came from the mandali—I think Baba had tea with the mandali, didn't he?

Meheru: He did.

Mehera: The details we don't remember. Anyway, Baba said the tea was nice, and did we all like it? Then he said we must start as soon as possible because we must get to our destination before the sun became too hot. We started walking again without stopping. We just walked and walked, even though the sun was quite hot from ten onwards. Dr. Ghani got very tired although at first he walked very jauntily with a walking stick. Later it became very useful to push himself forward and that amused Baba very much. But Baba saw that he reached the destination safe and sound. Dr. Ghani didn't have a strong constitution, but he wanted to be a companion in Baba's New Life.

Don: Were you usually trying to reach your destination for the day before the sun got too high and too hot?

Mehera: It was not always possible, but we always made a very early start.

Don: And then in the afternoon you would rest normally.

Meheru: No it wasn't always so. We usually waked till evening.

Don: Even if you set out early in the morning?

Meheru: Yes, although sometimes Baba would stop on the way. You see, sometimes Baba would stop in an orchard, Eruch with Baba, and we girls a few paces behind. Then came the companions leading the animals with the carts. Naturally, we in front would walk quickly, so Baba would stop awhile to see how far behind the rest of the party was. Sometimes we'd wait, but sometimes we would go on till the end of the journey and they'd come on later. On occasion Baba would allow a break in the journey, but only for about ten or fifteen minutes to cool off.

On the first day when we started from Supa it had been decided that the companions would walk ahead. There were no animals at that time. From Supa to Sirur the companions walked ahead and Baba walked a short distance behind us. After awhile the mandali were far ahead and Baba said, 'Now stop them, I want to say something to the mandali.

Goher was sent ahead to try to stop them—they didn't know that they were being called and so they didn't hear. Goher blew the whistle she carried, she blew and blew, trying to draw attention, but no one heard. Then suddenly instead of whistling she bent down and started hitting the whistle on the road. Very surprised and amused we said, 'What's come over Goher? Is she angry with the whistle for not blowing or what?' She said, 'No, the ball was stuck and it won't blow anymore.' Baba started clapping his hands—he was disturbed because the mandali didn't hear. He said this shouldn't happen again because it would spoil his mood, and then everything would go in the water. You see, that was Baba's way of saying it.

Don: Go in the water? That's how he would say that his mood would be destroyed, then?

Meheru: No, the work that was being done would go to waste, be spoilt. It would 'go in the water'—it's a Gujarati idiom.

Don: What happened about trying to catch the mandali?

Meheru: Eventually we did, but Baba said it shouldn't happen

again, so in the end it was decided that some of the companions would go before, then Baba would come walking with some of the mandali and we women would follow a short way behind. Then if Baba wanted to talk to us he could turn round or stop for us. That was a better method of communicating.

Don: How did you finally catch the mandali's attention?

Meheru: Baba was clapping and Mani and Goher also were calling out loudly. We tried to make as much noise as possible to draw their attention, because they weren't looking around. They were going on and on, forward.

Mehera: They were not supposed to look around unless Baba clapped. Then they could stop and look. But finally they heard us and stopped.

Meheru: About halfway to Sirur on the first day of walking Baba's feet hurt very much because the sandals were new, but luckily Mehera's sandals were loose and they fitted Baba quite comfortably, so she was able to offer them to Baba at the time.

Don: And what did Mehera wear then?

Mehera: Another pair. I had taken two pairs. Baba wanted a loose pair like that. You know when you wear sandals a certain part rubs on the same spot, so a change of the shoe, the pattern maybe, helped Baba. Baba wore mine, but we had to apply adhesive tape around his toes.

Don: Did he continue to wear those sandals? Did they wear out?

Mehera: Only that first day. yes, they wore out, but we don't know which sandals they were. We should have labeled them—they got mixed up with others.

Meheru: Seeing our type of people walking on the Poona-'Nagar road was very unusual, and the villagers would stop us on the way and say, 'Why are you walking? There's a perfectly good bus service. Why don't you take a bus?'

Mehera: 'You always go in a car, you people,' they would say. 'Why are you walking so in the sun? Aren't you uncomfortable? You are not used to walking. Where are you all going?' We said, 'No, we wanted to do a walking tour. We'd like to walk today,' and so on.

Meheru: Just outside Sirur, I think, Dr. Ghani was over-exhausted and got a pain in his chest.

Don: Had he had such an attack before that?

Meheru: No, I don't think so. Whatever medicines or first aid we had were given, but the rest of the luggage had gone by bus. But to go back to before Dr. Ghani's attack, the dak bungalow where we were to stay in Sirur was occupied by the military. Just before we reached Sirur, near the dak bungalow, the whole party stopped in the shade of some tall trees. Baba had told us to halt and rest. Everyone was hot and tired as the sun had been very strong and the road very dusty. For the last few miles we could see that Dr. Ghani used his stick like a prop to push him forward. By this time the journey had been too much for Dr. Ghani and he collapsed. Baba was immediately by his side and Dr. Nilu and Dr. Donkin attended to him. Goher also came with the first aid kit and they gave him what treatment they could. As the government dak bungalow where we were to spend the night was occupied by government servants, a merchant of Sirur who loved Baba offered us accommodation at, of all places, his cinema which was closed down and was vacant. This was in a congested area in the heart of the city. After the crisis had passed and Dr. Ghani was better, we continued on our way. This led us right through the crowded city, and our path was thronged by children and grown-ups looking at us with frank curiosity.

Don: Where was Ghani at this point? What happened to him?

Meheru: I think they had to find a conveyance to carry him, perhaps in the luggage bus. I am not sure.

Having lived a secluded life in Baba's ashram, we minded the crowds in Sirur gazing at us very much, so we kept our eyes down. We were all very thankful to come to our destination and to refresh ourselves with a wash and a cool drink of water. Baba and the ladies occupied the stage, behind the screen, and the companions settled down in the auditorium. It was a strange place to be resting in. Everyone's muscles felt stiff and we could hear one another groaning as we sat down or tried to get up. We partook of our evening meal early so that we could rest early, as we'd be starting by bus very early the next morning for Belgaum.

Don: Kaka was doing the cooking?

Meheru: No, our food had been ordered from a hotel.

Don: Your host took care of that, then?

Meheru: I think it had been arranged beforehand—I don't think the host did. Maybe Eruch would know?

Don: But that was rare, to have the food brought in?

Meheru: It had been prearranged, you see. This was just the beginning part, the training part of the New Life. This was a trial of the walking journey, and we didn't do cooking till we reached Belgaum.

It was nearing Divali time—the Hindu festival of the New Year, the Festival of Lights—when children enjoy fireworks, and the sound of bursting firecrackers was deafening. Although we retried early, no one could sleep and Baba was very disturbed, so finally Baba decided that it was better to be on our way.

Don: The Divali celebration goes on far into the night?

Mehera: Yes, quite late—one o'clock even. We thought it would stop by eleven but it didn't. Then towards twelve, Baba clapped his hands and said, 'What is this? I can't rest. This is very disturbing' The mandali went out to try to stop it, but whom to tell? There were so many houses, and you couldn't stop them from lighting fireworks because it was Divali time and it is traditional to celebrate it so.

When it was midnight Baba said, 'Now get up and all pack.' There we were, tired after walking the whole day, in hopes of resting, but no rest. We had to get up and pack our bedding and bags. No cup of tea or anything. Baba told us to board the bus. We thought now it is the middle of the night so we'll quietly steal into the bus and be seated and nobody will be there to trouble Baba to give darshan or to disturb him. But somehow word got round of our departure and people thronged through the lane to see Baba.

When Baba was told the crowd would not disperse, he said it was all right to let them stay as long as no one bowed down to him or tried to take his darshan. Quietly and solemnly the people stood as Baba and the rest of us walked down the narrow aisle they made leading to the bus. Soon we were on our way to Belgaum. Baba and we four women were in the front part of the bus behind the driver. A curtain hung across the front divided us from the companions who occupied the back.

The seats were very narrow, not permitting us to sit comfortably,

but what with fatigue from the previous journey and lack of sleep we found ourselves nodding and swaying with the motion of the bus. Goher, I remember, was seated behind the driver and had a full view of the back of his cap. In the semi-darkness it looked like a very tempting round cushion, and Baba half-jokingly warned her not to fall forward or she might find herself resting on this enticing pillow.

We had tea in Poona in the early morning and finally after a tiring drive reached Belgaum late in the evening. There too it had been raining and was very chilly. Baba was to stay in a temporary structure with cement flooring and walls of bamboo matting. The floor was not yet dry as it had all been built specially for Baba's stay there.

Don: You were to remain some days, as it were, in training?

Meheru: Six weeks. I think Mehera and Meheru looked after Baba's room and tried to do what they could to make it warm and comfortable.

Mehera: During the monsoon it is very cold and windy in Belgaum because it rains very hard there. When we arrived it was raining steadily, and our house was located out in field that had been ploughed frequently. To reach it we had to walk thorough thick slush.

Don: I would think that about then, Mehera, it would have been almost impossible to resist having a bad mood.

Mehera: Yes, exactly. But Baba being with us, you know. . . often the difficult becomes surprisingly easy.

Don: You were still in a good mood.

Mehera: We liked it. The mandali stayed in one large common room erected for their stay. There was a tile roof and the walls were of *tatta*—that means, made of bamboo matting.

Meheru: It wasn't at all warm and it was damp underfoot. We had very limited luggage, as Baba had allowed us only a certain amount of clothing and bedding, which was very meager in the circumstances, especially when you had to lie on a damp floor. Here the training period began and everyone was allotted duties. Some of the mandali, for instance, were given the task of drawing water from the well, but they were not used to this work and the rope was rough on their hands, it being a very deep well. Goher helped fetch the water inside to us. Mani was in charge of the cooking under Mehera's

guidance and the rest of us gave a hand helping. None of us had ever cooked such large quantities as were needed for all the companions, so it was difficult for us.

Don: This is the women mandali, not Kaka, doing the cooking in Belgaum?

Meheru: Yes, this is the women mandali.

Don: Later on in the New Life Kaka did the cooking?

Meheru: Yes, At Belgaum the four women mandali cooked for all the companions, for Baba, and for ourselves. The tea, however, came from the men's side.

Don: Kaka did that, did he?

Meheru: I think Baidul made the tea. The two meals we cooked, and the tea they made. Baba took much interest in all out activities. The food was vegetarian, and Baba would come back and forth and ask what was being cooked. Sometimes if he thought that a dish lacked something he would advise us what to do.

Don: Meheru, you say that the food was all vegetarian? I asked Mani earlier whether Baba had laid down any rule that the food was to be vegetarian, and her best recollection was no, there was no rule about it. Mostly you ate vegetarian food just because it was available?

Meheru: For a certain period in the very early days, Baba and all those who followed him were strict vegetarians and did not even eat eggs. Later on eggs were permitted. But all that was in the early days.

Don: Before the New Life.

Mehera: Yes, at Meherabad. When we first came to the ashram we were always vegetarian, and Baba was also vegetarian. But if somebody's health was not good Baba allowed other food. For instance, Elizabeth needed and was allowed eggs.

Meheru: Later on when we had chickens at Meherabad we had eggs but no meat. But to go on with the stay at Belgaum. The Song of the New Life was written there with Baba's help by Dr. Ghani. It used to be sung every day by Adi in Baba's presence, and I think Baba used to accompany him on the drum. Other qawali songs were also sung, with Baba accompanying on the drum. It was actually a *dholak*, I think. Often in the evening Baba would play the dholak for us in our quarters. We would sit and listen,

entranced by the beautiful rhythm and sound, watching Baba's slender graceful fingers as he played and the expression of intense absorption in his eyes, as though he were one with the music.

Mehera: The dholak he used in the New Life is in the museum.

Don: The kind he played when we took the motion pictures of him in the living room at Meherazad in February of 1962?

Meheru: Yes, that's it. The place where we stayed near Belgaum was a brick house with a tiled roof but no ceiling. The area was divided into three tiny rooms by single brick partitions. Almost every time it rained the main room became flooded, and then the mandali would come along with ladders and try to patch up the leaks. Also, every night the mice were busy gnawing away at the walls, and in the morning before Baba came for tea we would sweep up the rubble.

One night Mani woke up, startled, asking what it was that had bitten her on the finger. Mehera was nearby and Goher and I were in the other room. All of us woke up and learned that her finger had been bitten by a mouse. Her hand must have been sticking out of the mosquito curtain, and the mouse had nibbled on it. It was bleeding a bit and Goher attended to it.

After our stay in Belgaum we traveled by train to Benares. Just before leaving, Baba gave us each a *ghongari*—a rough blanket which the shepherds and villagers use. To us, rough as they were, they seemed very pleasant, as they meant added warmth for our trip north where we knew it would be getting cold. Two of the companions were sent ahead of the party to procure accommodations in Benares in bhiksha, that is in charity, although they were strangers to the city.

Don: These were the ones who found Dr. Nath, the eye doctor?

Meheru: Yes, and you see it wasn't easy for them, because among other things they weren't to spend any money on transportation. They had to walk from place to place to try to contact people, and in a region where they weren't known. It was only with Baba's help that they were finally able to arrange for the place where we then stayed.

After two days' journey by train, changing at Bombay and Moghul-serai, the rest of us arrived in Benares. Baba had said that none of the people from the old life were to come to see him when

we changed at Bombay. It was a very strict order.

Don: Did any of the old life followers know that he would be in Bombay, or was this kept secret as were most of Baba's moves?

Meheru: I don't know the exact details, but I think one or two people knew about it, maybe Nariman and Meherjee.

Don: They obeyed Baba's instructions?

Meheru: Yes. When we arrived at Benares station it was about two or three in the morning, and we were bitterly cold as we waited for a conveyance. Finally we arrived at the house where we were to stay at about four o'clock. As we stopped at the gate before we entered, through the iron gates we saw two sentinels standing half asleep beside the staircase. We wondered what sort of house we were coming to, but when we came inside we saw they were only statues of guards. Inside the house we found it quite comfortable. One room we entered was very large, like a hall I think, and full of chairs.

Don: This was the arrangements made by Dr. Nath?

Meheru: Yes, this was the place that was arranged by Dr. Nath for our use. We passed first through one room, and the next was one which looked like a lecture room and was full of chairs. We all felt we couldn't possibly stay there, so we went to another one beyond which was luckily empty except for a cushion on the carpeted floor. We all gravitated to it, groggy with sleep and chilled by the cold. The cushion was one of those big thick bolsters, and the four of us promptly rested our heads on it, clinging to it for warmth. In the morning when we woke up and saw our headrest in the light of day, we saw that it was not all clean and we wondered how we could have rested against it for comfort!!

Mehera: That morning we were very, very cold and hungry, so although it was still very early we said, 'Now it's morning and we'll have nice hot tea with some bread and butter,' and we were up and quickly washed and waiting.

Baba was arranging for our needs so he came and asked us if we wanted tea. We said, 'Yes, Baba,' and he went to the mandali telling them to hurry up. Then he came back to tell us, 'It won't take long, you know just fifteen minutes.' 'Yes, Baba,' we answered, and we got busy preparing our cups and saucers. So Baba went back and forth—he loved to walk up and down like that, you know. When

breakfast came, what do you think it was? We wanted just bread and butter with tea, but no, it was hot spinach with pepper and other spices in it, and chapatis. Such a meal in the early morning! I said, 'What kind of breakfast. . .?' And Goher said, 'Probably this is the kind of breakfast they have here—that's why they've sent it. We'd better eat it and be grateful for it.' I never liked spinach.

Don: Spinach for breakfast! Oh, that's something to take!

Mehera: I don't like to eat spinach. This was the first time I had ever had spinach in the morning for breakfast. Yet odd to say, we all enjoyed it, cold and hungry as we were, and the hot tea afterwards was very welcome.

Don: So you spent your first morning in Benares.

Mehera: Yes, our first morning. But then to arrange where Baba would stay. The room had a few sofas and tables in one part, and as Meheru said, the rest was full of chairs piled on top of one another so no one could move in there. We wondered how we could stay in such a room because the other was to be Baba's. We told Baba about all this and he said, 'Nobody must sit on chairs or sofas. You must not use the chairs. You mustn't use the furniture.' Then we said to Baba, 'But the room is full of furniture. What should we do?' Baba said he would have it all removed, and meanwhile we were all to wait in the room where we had slept. Then the mandali came and they all helped to put the furniture out on the terrace. Finally the room was empty and the terrace was full of furniture.

Meheru: We stayed about one month in Benares. What Baba planned with the mandali there we did not know, but each went to procure bhiksha in the city. It was a training period. Pendu, Eruch and the other companions would know about this. Two companions would go together one day, another two the next and so on. They had to accept whatever they were given and bring it to Baba, and he divided it amongst all. If they were given dry material like chapati or flour, it was to be placed in a *jholi* (cloth sack) which was strung from the shoulder, and if a vegetable was given it was placed in a brass bowl which each carried. Baba also went one time with two companions, On his *jholi*, written in Hindi by Mehera, were these words: 'Give bhiksha with love.' They wore the white kafni and green turban which was their dress. Baba

looked very beautiful in his kafni and turban.

Only once did the women go out with Baba. He took us walking through the city to some of the *ghats* that have steps leading down to the river. We could feel the atmosphere of piety which emanated from the people there, for the devout Hindus would go down to the river to bathe in the sacred Ganges to be purified. Benares, now called Varanasi, is one of the holy cities of the Hindus.

Mehera: From Benares we went four miles to Sarnath, which is very closely connected with Lord Buddha. Baba took us to see the caves which had been used by Buddha's disciples for meditation and also to the Buddhist temple nearby. It was very beautiful inside and had a very high ceiling. On the walls were murals in color done by a Japanese artist depicting incidents from the life of Buddha. Baba walked slowly along with us as we looked at the murals and explained some of the scenes. At the end of the room there was an altar with a statue of Buddha, and Baba told us to bow down to it. It is a very beautiful, large statue of Buddha, and we all bowed down in turn and then moved away. Baba himself stood in front of the statue for a few seconds before coming away.

The house where we stayed in Sarnath had a large rambling garden with fruit trees. One day Goher started talking to the old *mali* (gardener) and discovered that he had lost his wife. Since that time he had become a sadhu but without wearing the usual ochre-colored clothes. Baba said he was a real sadhu and did not need to wear ochre-colored clothes because inwardly he was detached from everything .

He did his gardening duty, but all the time Ram's name was on his lips. In the morning he would have his bath near the well even though it was very cold! It was so cold that we were all wearing warm clothes, and whenever we could we would sit in the sun. We were not used to such cold. But this mali had only something around his waist and a cotton cloth around his shoulders. He came to the well, put his pail down and drew up water. Then he would pour the cold water over himself and rub, going through the same procedure again and again. I don't know how he did it—even looking at him made us feel colder. Then he would go into his house and cook his food, just simple rice to sustain him.

Baba told Goher to find out if he needed anything. His reply

was that he had everything he needed. Again sent by Baba, Goher pressed the question, 'Do you need clothes or anything ? He said, 'Thakurji gives me clothes.' But then you must be needing firewood or something.' 'Oh, no, even that Thakurji gives me.' From this Goher got the idea that the owner of the bungalow was Thakurji, so generous and kind-hearted that he gave everything that was need to this old mali. All that he had was given to him by the landlord.

As we talked it over I wondered what actually did the old caretaker possess? Nothing, except the bare sustenance for life. And then when Goher mentioned the name Thakurji again, something clicked in my mind. 'Thakurji. Yes, Thakurji is one of the many names given to Lord Krishna. In north India Krishna is often known as Thakurji, and that fitted into the pattern of this mali's simple life. God, Krishna, gave him everything—he lacked for nothing.'

Then Baba said, 'Now you must go and tell him that a friend wants to give him something, and ask what he needs most.' Now it so happened that at night when we were shivering under woolen blankets this mali, instead of sleeping in his own warm room, slept outside in the garden despite the severe cold. We couldn't believe it. He used just an ordinary string cot, homemade and very rickety, with straw on it and a dhoti, and he covered himself with a cotton sheet. He was always up by four o'clock and he would chant, 'Ram, Ram, Sita, Ram.' Baba, hearing him, said, 'Do you hear? He is a real sadhu. He truly loves God.'

The next day Baba told Goher to approach him and say, 'Our friend wants to give you something. Ask for something—you must ask for something.' But he said, 'What should I ask for?'

Meheru: Baba told Goher to go again and ask once more. Surely there's something he needs

Mehera: Goher returned and pressed him for an answer.

Meheru: To try to persuade him she kept repeating her query.

Mehera: What do you want ? Ask for something.' The man thought very hard and then what do you think he said? He said, 'I want a matchbox.' It was very funny when Goher told Baba. And he would have gotten anything he asked for. So Baba said, 'All right, we must call him. I want to give him a blanket.' Goher called the mali. Goher, Mani, Meheru and I were all on the verandah. The folded blanket

was in Goher hand. When the mali came up to us Baba told him that he wanted to give him a present but, ‘Why only a matchbox?’ he asked. ‘You must ask for something more.’ He said, ‘But sahib, I don’t need anything more. Thakurji gives me everything.’ He had so much love for Krishna-God—that Baba himself was standing in front of him giving him darshan. Of all the house in Sarnath, Baba came to stay in this house.

Then Baba said, ‘I want to give you prasad, a gift from me. Take this blanket.’ Baba also gave the matchbox to him, but first he gave him the nice, thick, warm blanket. The mali was very happy that Baba of his own accord had given it to him. He said, ‘Oh, this is a gift from Bhagwan,’ meaning, ‘God has given me this gift.’

Meheru: He was not looking at what he received. He kept looking at Baba.

Mehera: You see, he meant it was God’s grace that had given it to him, but he did not know that Baba was God himself, standing in front of him. It was so beautiful. Then he bowed to Baba very respectfully and lovingly, and he was very happy when he left. At last he had received prasad from Baba. Baba wanted to give it to him. Here was a man who had no worldly possessions, yet he had everything because he had contentment and love for God.

Meheru: While we were still staying in Benares, preparations for our journey on foot had been in progress. Arrangements were made to get various animals and carts. The caravan for the women had been made in Ahmednager, and Padri was responsible for bringing it to Benares by rail along with two bullocks from Meherabad. One of the bulls was Raja, an English bull which Baba himself had fed from a bottle when it was a tiny calf. The other animals were acquired in Benares area. Dr. Nath was very helpful in every way, even though he had not seen Baba and there were strict instructions that no one should be told who Baba was. When the time came to choose a horse, Baba said there was a choice between two animals and as Mehera knew so much about horses, she would be the best judge .

Mehera: One day the groom brought a horse—medium sized, quiet—a nice horse. We all looked at it. It was in the women’s compound and the men were in a different bungalow. I gave it a few pats on the neck and the flanks, then I picked up the foreleg,

as he was quiet and allowed me to, and then the hind leg also. I patted him on the back and said, 'Baba, he is a very nice, quiet horse.' Baba said, 'All right, we'll see, but tomorrow there will be another to inspect and then you can choose between them.'

The next day the other horse came, and it was a handsome animal, pure snowy white rather than creamy white. He was rather tall, his ears up straight, and I saw that he didn't look like a quiet horse. Now, because his owner was holding him, he was quiet. Again I examined him. He let me pick up his leg, but from something about his ears and the bearing of his neck and head I knew he was rather spirited.

I said, 'This horse looks very nice, Baba. He allows us to touch him so he is used to people and not shy. This horse is nice also.' Then they took away the horse and we went in and talked it over with Baba. I said, 'Baba I think the first horse is better. He's smaller in size, so one can control him if he's ever mischievous. But the second horse, is rather big, and the mandali don't know how to handle horses and it's quite a problem if a horse is spirited. That's why I like the first horse. But it's up to you—whichever you like.' Baba said, 'No, everyone likes the second horse which is snow white and handsome.'

Don: A showy one.

Mehera: Yes. I said, 'Yes, Baba, I liked it also, but it's a bit spirited, that's all.' Baba said, 'Dr. Donkin can handle him. He seemed quiet enough. He allowed you to touch him and handle him so he will be all right.' I said, 'All right, Baba.' Baba said, 'The mandali also like that horse.' So we chose the second horse, and Donkin took charge of him and managed very beautifully. Shall I tell you the details?

Don: Yes, please.

Mehera: Two or three days later when the horse was brought to us, we took him near the stables and tied him to a tree. Then Baba told me I must see to his needs as I know how to handle him. I gave him his feed. We were to start on our travels again in a few days and meanwhile we were to take care of the horse. There was a garden servant who was to clean up the stable, but I had to see to the grain, grass, drinking water, and so on.

When we had tied the horse, Baba told us about feeding him—

how much grain to take, mixed with oats and bran, then placed in a bag and put around the horse's head. He was quite happy eating it. Mani and I were both in the garden watching him and when he had finished I was supposed to remove the bag. Finally I went near him and took the bag off his head. He let me take it off very nicely.

Then I said, 'Now it's evening and we'll put him in the stable early.' Mani agreed. She didn't know much about handling him so she let me do it. I undid the rope and led the horse inside the stable. He let me lead him in very quietly. Then I tied him in the stable. There was a peg on the wall which I used to tie him for the night, on a longish rope so that he could lie down. The horse was standing and I was sitting down, although it was very risky. Even then the horse didn't do anything to me. A new horse, when he sees a stranger, might react, but he didn't.

I said, 'Oh, my, he's a nice, quiet horse.' After a time I got up and said to Mani, 'Now I need the hay that is outside and a lot of green grass for the night for the horse.' Mani passed it in from the outside, and I took it from her and put it in front of the horse. As soon as I put it there the horse quickly came and started to eat. The second time I took a load from Mani and was approaching the horse, he put his ears back and started to act in an unfriendly manner, so I quickly threw down the grass. He was backing the way horses do when they are not friendly, their necks turned and ears back. 'Ah,' I said, 'he has had the grain and oats in the bag, and now the grass is there and he says he's got everything he wants.'

Meheru: Now he'd had his fill, he had no reason to be friendly.

Mehera: I said, 'This is not a good sign. What shall we do?' The mandali had preferred him and Baba had acquiesced, and now we couldn't exchange him for the smaller animal that we could have handled. This was a tall horse, and I was not able to handle him because I haven't the strength of a man. So I let him be.

Later Baba came and asked, 'How is everything? Is it all right?' and he came near the stable. I said, 'Yes, Baba, he behaved very well at first, but he is not friendly now.' Baba said, 'No? What is this? He was quiet all right when he was brought to the mandali, and I patted him.' Baba started to come near the horse, but before he could come too close I quickly stood in front of Baba so that if the horse became mischievous Baba would not be hurt. The

horse put ears back and started to wheel his back legs and his rump around as if he were going to kick.

‘Oh,’ I said, ‘Baba, we’d better move quickly, he’s turning.’ Baba started to move and we quickly ran out of the stable. Baba said, ‘Now why is he like that?’ I said, ‘I don’t know, Baba, he was very quiet at first but now he’s acting like this.’ Baba said, ‘Never mind, he’ll walk with the mandali. The men will manage him.’ I said, ‘I felt that because of his ears he was a mischievous horse. The small horse would have been better to handle.’ Baba said, ‘Never mind, they are all like this. Let it be.’ So we kept the horse and Donkin managed him very well. However, when we got to Dehra Dun later on the horse was finally sold.

He was a spirited horse and during the walking tour he was not given any work to do. He didn’t have to carry any weight or draw a tonga—he did nothing. He went bareback, with only a bridle and Donkin leading him. In this way the horse got into the habit of not working. When we came to Moradabad it was decided that he should do some useful work hitched to a tonga. The tonga was brought and the horse was harnessed to it, but he would not budge.

Meheru: He resisted and tried to kick himself free.

Mehera: Then a person who could train him was hired, and he had to be trained for a tonga like a new horse since he was not used to working now. He resented all this as if to say, ‘Why should I draw a tonga?’ With great difficulty the trainer made him draw the tonga. Baba said, ‘Now it will be all right, and Kakaji can travel ahead of us and reach our destination early.’

Don: Kaka had had a heart attack, hadn’t he, so you wanted to take him in the tonga? Was that the purpose?

Mehera: No, not then, though he wasn’t feeling well. Baba said he could go ahead in the tonga to prepare the meal because Kakaji had to do the cooking.

Don: I see, and what about Dr. Ghani who had not been well?

Mehera: He was in the other tonga.

Meheru: When we started out from Sarnath we had a camel drawing a camel cart, two donkeys, the caravan drawn by two bullocks, and the white horse. In Jaunpur the camel and cart were sold, and in Moradabad we acquired instead two tongas and a filly for one of the tongas and one bullock and a cart. Dr. Ghani said

that he was not able walk, so he was given the job of getting the bhiksha since he had a very persuasive way of talking.

Don: He was a good beggar.

Meheru: He went in one of the tongas with Adi driving, and Kakaji and Baidul went in the other. He really did his part but was so persuasive that the people wanted to join the party and go to Haridwar too! Then he had to persuade them not to join since Baba would not want that. But certainly at that time he was successful in getting bhiksha.

Once he got so much bhiksha that Baba said, ‘Now today you’re going to have a good change from that everyday thing of pressed parched rice that has been cooked.’ The usual rice was so sandy that every time you took some you got grit in your mouth. When Mehera was serving it to Baba she’d look it over to remove the grit before giving it to Baba.

That day Dr. Ghani had gotten flour chapatis, and other things, but when the time came for our meal it was the same fare. We learned that the monkeys had stolen the bhiksha. It had been hung in the trees out of the way of dogs, but the monkeys got at it, and the mandali had to try to shoo them away without getting angry or excited with them. So, the monkeys had taken it all!

Mehera: Baba was always up very early. At four o’clock he would knock on the door of the caravan, and we all had to tumble out of our nice warm blankets. It would be icy cold when we went outside under the sky and the stars, with no roof over our heads.

Don: Was this Sarnath?

Mehera: No, now we have started on the road from Sarnath. We would have a very meager breakfast—just a piece of bread that was left over, with no butter or tea. Meheru and I had to roll up Baba’s bedding. Baba slept under a tent, a very small tent meant only for one or two people. It had belonged to Norina and Elizabeth. They had left it behind in Meherabad. It wasn’t a well insulated tent, so it was just as cold inside the tent as outside. Baba must have wanted it for privacy only.

In the morning it would be so cold that our fingers were blue. They felt stiff and numb with cold. We would quickly tie up Baba’s bedding, somehow, while the mandali folded the tent. Eruch had to do this. Then we would do our own bedding and tidy up everything

quickly before breakfast. It was still dark at this time and we would be doing all this with one hurricane lamp. Then we would start walking on our way by half past five.

On this particular morning we walked and walked for many miles, and finally it was nine o'clock. Not having had much breakfast and having walked so much, we were feeling empty and hungry. Baba was walking with the mandali. He was leading the way some distance ahead and we were at the back talking to each other. Baba halted and said something to Eruch. Then Baba turned towards us, came back and asked, 'Are you feeling hungry?' We were so happy that Baba asked this question because we were really very hungry that morning. Baba said, 'All right, let us see,' and he looked around and saw some huts in a field far away. There were nice green fields around them and smoke coming out as though someone were cooking. Baba called Eruch. 'See that hut? Go and ask there for bhiksha.'

The woman who was cooking in the mud-and-thatch hut said, 'Oh, yes, I've one bhakri (bread) ready and one is on the fire. I'll quickly make it. I want to give you two bhakri.' This is millet bread, big, fat and circular. Eruch waited for two or three minutes, and in that time she prepared the bread and put a lot of lovely freshly cooked spinach on it.

Don: Oh, I see suddenly you've taken to liking spinach!

Mehera: Baba made me like it, I think. I was so hungry that I liked it. It was fresh cooked.

Meheru: We were cold and hungry so that spinach and bread were very welcome. It was piping hot. Baba took a little piece, and the rest he said we must not eat, but put it in his brass bowl. 'That is for the companions. I will give it as Prasad to them.' How thankful and appreciative we were to have that food.

Meheru: To this day we still remember how good it tasted.

Don: These can be some of the sharpest and longest-lived of memories.

Mehera: How fortunate was this woman who, cooking for her family, had happily given it in bhiksha and Baba had accepted it. She will never know how fortunate she was.

Meheru: Our destination was now set as Dehra Dun. In Dehra Dun a new phase of the New Life began. As Mehera mentioned, the time for the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar was approaching, and

sadhus from all over India were converging on the cities of Haridwar and Rishikesh.

Mehera: The Kumbh Mela, you know, is a great pilgrimage. It's not an ordinary thing. All the sadhu in India have to come there, some in rich attire. Thousands come, some even on elephants. It's a tremendous gathering. There are many different sects, and there are processions.

Don: It's a fair for the sadhus?

Mehera: You call it a Mela. Mela means a gathering.

Meheru: Devoted Hindus from everywhere come for the pilgrimage. They come to dip themselves in the Ganges at an auspicious time of year.

Mehera: It is a very sacred spot and they all take a dip in the Ganges and pray to God. Washing away their sins. Baba, with a few of the mandali, was then staying at Motichur, which is about four miles from Rishikesh. Early every morning they walked to Rishikesh where Baba contacted sadhus at the different *mutts*. In the evening they would return home very tired.

Don: Baba wanted to be there in time for that Mela?

Mehera: Yes, Baba had his reasons for being there. There are thousands of sadhus—real ascetics with long beards and nails—who for years have meditated on God and repeated God's name, fasting and undergoing great austerities. There are many different kinds and sects of sadhus. On one occasion Baba let us come with him, but not to mix with crowds.

Don: You were in the distance? You said Baba didn't allow you to come close?

Meheru: We were on the terrace of a hotel. It was impossible to go into the crowd, as you could easily get lost.

Don: I see. Did Baba go down and mix in amongst them?

Mehera: We were on the terrace and right below us was the river. Along the river was the dirt road along which the sadhus were going. Baba said we couldn't go near, that we must see from the terrace because of the great crowd. He said we could get carried away.

Meheru: Most of the time we stayed in Dehra Dun where Baba told us women to do the cooking and in our spare time sew or knit articles that could be sold to help towards the household

budget. We tried to live as frugally as possible and to make a little go a long way. Even the outer leaves of the cabbages and cauliflower, as well as the leaves from the *kholkol* and beetroot which ordinarily were thrown away, were used to make a spinach.

Don: Ah, the spinach that Mehera had grown to love so much. She looks a little pained when I say that.

Meheru: Even Dr. Nilu, who had been a vegetarian all his life and knew all the spinaches, couldn't determine what was being cooked by Naja. Naja had been called from Bombay at that time. Dr. Nilu would ask Vishnu, who used to do the bazaar, and Vishnu would say, 'I didn't buy any spinach.' And one time later on, when Goher and Nilu had to go to Dehra Dun, he asked Goher about it. He said, 'We just don't know what spinaches Naja has been cooking. Vishnu doesn't know. He hasn't bought it.' Then Goher explained to him and he understood. Nilu used to wait for Baba's return not only because he liked being in Baba's company but also for the better fare that was served when Baba was there.

Mehera: Yes, he would wait for Baba, asking, 'When will Baba come? Then Naja will feed us well and we'll have a proper meal.' Naja would serve us a lot of gravy and very few bits of potato, so he would wait for Baba. 'When Baba comes we will have better meals,' he would say continually.

Meheru: Talking about food, one time Goher was directing where the Caravan should be placed, because it had to be located near the women's area. She was giving directions and standing under a papaya tree, and because the caravan was quite high it shook the branches of the tree and a shower of green papayas fell on her head. We didn't know what was happening when suddenly Goher let out a yell and shortly afterwards came running to the kitchen, looking happy with her load of papayas and saying, 'Naja, Naja, this is something you can cook.'

Don: A gift from heaven. Would you cook papaya also?

Mehera: Yes, it's a very good vegetable.

Meheru: The green papaya.

Don: It must be very starchy then, I suppose, like a potato?

Meheru: No, it tastes different. It was quite good the way Naja cooked it.

Mehera: Some were half-ripe, and those are very good to cook.

Meheru: So I think Dr. Nilu was wondering what vegetable he was receiving that day also.

Don: Just one thing about Naja. How long did she stay with you then?

Meheru: When we arrived in Dehra Dun, shortly before Baba's birthday on February 25th, Dr. Donkin was sent to Bombay to fetch her. When we went from Dehra Dun to Satara she was still with us. Then for a short period she was sent back, and Kitty and Rano came to be with us for a month or so when we were in Mahabaleshwar.

Don: So the people alternated back and forth during the New Life?

Meheru: I think they alternated once, but after that Naja was with us till the end of the New Life. She wasn't there during the first phase when we were on the road.

Don: I see, but when you stayed stationary she was with you.

Meheru: Till we returned to Meherazad. From Satara we went to Mahabaleshwar, then to Hyderabad, and next to Meherazad.

Mehera: It was very cold in Dehra Dun while we were there. Baba was up by four o'clock and would knock on our door. He used to sleep upstairs, and when he came we all had to come out of the room and wash quickly in cold water. There were no regular bathrooms so we washed on the verandah, feeling very cold, and Meheru quickly got the fire going to heat water for Baba. After Baba had washed he would come inside and have breakfast with us. The tea would come from the mandali's side. After breakfast Baba would go to the mandali, while we would go do the cooking.

We had a very big kitchen, but it was rather far from our room. We used to go there with umbrellas, because it was the month of January, I think, and the mountains around us had snow on them. When it snowed in the Himalayas and the hills around us, it would rain in Dehra Dun. Mani did not know how to cook so I used to supervise and show her how the curry was made with all the spices. Of course, I ground the spice on the stone as finely as I could to make good curry for Baba.

When our cooking was halfway done, Baba would come in by eight o'clock and ask, 'Is the food ready?' We'd say, 'Oh, no, Baba, another hour yet. The rice is not yet ready.' Baba would

say, ‘All right, I’ll come back later.’ But after half an hour or so Baba would again come into the kitchen. One morning it was very cold outside, and Baba came into the kitchen with a sliver of ice in his hand. I said, ‘Oh, Baba, you brought ice! We are already feeling cold and frozen, and looking at the ice makes us feel even colder.’ Baba said, ‘By this you can see how very cold it is—freezing. A pail of water was forgotten outside and this ice had formed on the surface of it. That shows how cold it is.’

From that time on we had the idea that it was freezing cold. That’s why we couldn’t get our hands and feet warm, and all the time we were cooking we wanted to be near the fire. Mani would say, ‘No, I’m cooking, I’m supposed to be near the fire,’ and she would warm her toes near the fire.

Don: That’s why she wanted to be the cook.

Mehera: Yes, exactly.

Meheru: And Mehera did the most difficult part, which was to grind the masala (spices). Everything was so cold, the coconut and all ingredients, that it was more difficult than usual to grind them. She’d wash the stone with hot water, and by the time she had put the ingredients on it to grind, everything would be cold again.

Mehera: Ice cold. Even the coconut was so frozen that when you ground it, it got stuck to the stone. It was with great difficulty that we made curry for Baba, but it was so cold and Baba and we were so hungry that everything tasted delicious.

Don: Did the cold affect Baba’s health at all?

Mehera: No. . .not in itself.

Don: He always stayed in good health?

Mehera: No. When Baba went to Motichur later and did his work contacting sadhus, he caught a serious infection. Motichur is some miles away from where we stayed, which was not in Dehra Dun proper, but about five miles out of Dehra Dun. Every morning Baba would get up and get ready to contact the sadhus in Motichur, and perhaps through Baba’s working he caught an infection and got congestion of the eyes. Baba was in great discomfort then.

Meheru: It was conjunctivitis.

Mehera: It was very serious. Baba’s eyes were very red. Goher took Baba to a doctor, but he gave Baba some kind of medicine which made his eyes worse.

Meheru: Penicillin ointment. Baba got a very bad reaction from that, making his eyes even worse than they had been. It was really . . . you couldn't see Baba without tears coming to your eyes, just seeing the state that his eyes were in at that time.

Don: Perhaps he was allergic to penicillin.

Meheru: Well, he was to the ointment.

Mehera: With great difficulty his eyes got well. That was in Dehra Dun. Then just two days before we left Dehra Dun, Mani got very bad food poisoning. She nearly passed out it was so bad. Goher and all of us were up all night. Goher gave her injections, and with a lot of nursing and taking great care of her we brought her around. Then Mrs. Nalavala told us of a very effective Indian medicine, a home remedy, and with it all Mani got well. Of course, it must have been by Baba's grace that Mani got well.

We had been going to leave earlier, but we had to delay a day or two till Mani felt strong enough. She was quit all right when we went to Satara. We stayed there for some time, and Rano and Kitty were called.

Meheru: From Mahabaleshwar they went back to Bombay, finished the term and then gave up their jobs completely and came back to stay with us in Hyderabad. Baba was not with us when we made our last journey from Hyderabad to Meherazad.

Mehera: Yes. He told us that all the women were to go together by car with Adi, who would bring us to Meherazad. Baba was going to stay for awhile in seclusion outside Hyderabad. He had found a very nice place suitable for the work he wanted to do in seclusion. It was on a hill—there was the resting place of a saint there, and rooms. Baba liked the atmosphere and stayed there. After that Baba started on his walking tour from Hyderabad to Meherazad.

Don: He had just a few of the men mandali with him that time, three or four of them.

Mehera: Yes, but we don't know how many.

Don: Eruch has recounted that part of what went on with Baba. But what happened to the women at that time? You came directly?

Mehera: Yes, directly in the two cars with Adi driving one and Vaman the other, stopping one night at Sholapur and reaching here the next day. After his seclusion outside Hyderabad Baba and the

mandali who were with him came by foot to Imampur, a few miles away from here, and there Baba stayed in a mosque. Do you know about that? That was the last stop before Baba came to Seclusion Hill.

Don: Yes, Eruch told us of that mosque.

Mehera: After that, when Baba was coming here he sent a message to say that Mehera and Mani should come to see him at the foot of the hill. Mani and I were so happy and excited, and both of us went and stood by the foot of Baba's Hill. We saw Baba approaching. Baba looked very beautiful in his white robes and the green turban. He had something in his hand, I think the johli, the bag for bhiksha, a cotton bag. It is in the museum and written on it is 'premsay bhiksha dijye'—'Give bhiksha with love.'

Baba came towards us, greeted us and embraced me. He asked Mani how she was, how we all were, had the journey been easy, was it comfortable and so on. Then Baba told us what to send up to the hill—warm water for the morning and weak tea without milk, etcetera. Baba gave us instructions for all that he wanted and then he said goodbye to us and started to climb the hill. We watched Baba for a little while, then he turned towards us and held up his hand like this to say, all right, now you must return home. So Mani and I came away.

Later on the mandali followed Baba. They were not in sight when we were talking with Baba. Baba was all alone, walking up the hill. It was so beautiful, like Jesus. Very beautiful, Baba was. His hair was loose over his shoulders with the white robe. Baba looked very lovely.

Meheru: The seclusion work that Baba intended to do on Seclusion Hill could not be completed there because it was so terribly windy that it interfered with his plans. So the two asbestos cabins were brought down. Baba stayed in the men's compound for a few days while the cabins were being moved, and then he continued his seclusion work through the Manonash period. It was only after that that Baba came out of seclusion and that we saw him.

Don: Mehera, what was your personal feeling about the hardships, the difficulties and the cold of the New Life?

Mehera: It was a bit uncomfortable, but we were quite happy about it because Baba was with us and that was what was most

important to us. That was just what we wanted. We didn't mind going through all the difficulties because Baba was with us all the time. There were various difficulties, you know, little discomforts, this and that, but we enjoyed it. You see, we didn't feel the discomforts. There *were* discomforts, but we didn't take them to heart. We felt happy going through it for Baba, being with Baba, walking with Baba.

Now I will tell you about the part that followed. After some time at Meherazad we left for Mahabaleshwar. It was all a continuation of the New Life. Baba stayed for just a few days with us at that time. His bedroom was upstairs. It was a nice bungalow. Most of the time he was with the mandali. But he came to eat with us and relax a little. Mani would read to Baba, and then Baba would again go to the mandali. But after a few days Baba went into seclusion again to do his universal work.

He stayed in a separate cottage a little way from our bungalow. It overlooked the valley and its lovely trees. It was a very nice, quiet cottage with just one or two rooms. He did not want to be in seclusion in the larger room because it was not properly secluded. Inside the other room Baba had a grass partition built with a little door in it because the room had big glass windows. When his work was finished Baba would come out into the larger room.

When he came out he would call Mani and me to come see him each day. That went on for some time—I don't remember how many days—till Baba's seclusion was over. Being in seclusion, shut up in the room doing intensive universal work and fasting, told on Baba's health, and Baba's body suffered like any human body. Many times we have seen that Baba took on physical suffering for the sake of his work. Goher, Dr. Donkin and Nilu were there giving Baba treatment.

When Baba was better and the period of seclusion ended we came to Poona for a short stay. The first bungalow we went to was not at all suitable. It was a huge, rambling, unfurnished house in Wanori and to top it all, it was near a tannery. Baba did not like it one bit and immediately went out with the men mandali to find another house. That was the first time Baba came to Gurusprasad and he liked the place immediately. It was possible to stay there through permission from Chimnabai, the dowager Maharani of

Baroda. Baba returned to Wanori, had lunch, and we set off at once with him for Guruprasad. We were happy to get away from our house.

Don: The smell must have been intense from a tannery

Mehera: Yes, it was so awful that I don't know how we would have lived there. We were on the opposite side of Poona from Guruprasad. We crossed the city of Poona, and as we came towards the Bundgarden we said, 'My, we are coming towards a very nice locality. The house must be nice.' How nice we did not know. Then our car turned in at entrance with its huge iron gates, all painted and everything looking nice. We were quite surprised as we looked around. 'What kind of a place is this?' There was a spacious garden, although not full of flowers, and a long drive up to the bungalow. It looked very beautiful to us.

As our car came into the portico we found that it was cool and shady with a beautiful big porch. We, couldn't believe our eyes. As Baba had said, it was really a big surprise. We were so happy, feeling we had come to a palace. As we climbed the steps we saw statues and other lovely things and we just stared around us.

'Are we going to stay here?' we asked. Baba said, 'Go inside quickly and get unpacked and settle down.' Of course, as usual, Baba was very busy going back and forth. 'I've sent for tea you'll have tea and then you'll feel fresh and nice.'

After having tea we did Baba's bed and Baba's room for the night. But that night when we were resting there was something going on outside the compound, next door, and there were drums beating. It was on our side of the house. Baba's room was in the front and ours was at the back. The drums kept beating and did not stop even at twelve o'clock, one o'clock, two o'clock. . . till five o'clock. We couldn't imagine what kind of music this was.

In the morning we were very worried because we knew Baba could not have slept at all. When the mandali had left we went to Baba's room on tip-toe thinking that Baba had not been comfortable all night and had not slept. When we saw Baba we asked him, 'Baba, did you rest well?' Baba said, 'Very well indeed.' Then we were happy and we remembered that his room was at the front of the house so Baba didn't get the direct noise of the drums beating

Don: I'm amazed that he didn't, though, because he was so sensitive to noise

Mehera: Yes. But we were very happy that Baba had rested well and everything was fine. Of course, Guruprasad had a very beautiful atmosphere.

Don: Yes, lovely. You must have loved it very much.

Mehera: Yes, it's a real pity it has been torn down, but the house was not so new that it would last long. It was very beautiful, as though it were built for Baba. The darshan hall and everything were perfect. The grounds at the back of the house, such a beautiful big space. You were there in 1962?

Don: Yes, it was perfect for 1962.

Mehera: Perfect for darshan with the huge tent and all, enough space for the East-West Gathering. It was just meant for Baba. So after Baba's work was done. . . .

Don: It collapsed

Mehera: There was no further use for it. Baba's work was done. Now we are trying for a little room in the same compound.

Don: That would be lovely.

Mehera: So we say Jai Baba. Love to you each, dear ones, of Baba's family. Jai Baba. Jai Baba.

* * * * *

Don: It is Meherazad in October, 1972. Mani is going to continue the narration of various accounts of the New Life with Baba.

Mani: Well, Don, I don't think there is much to say about the New Life. . .

Don: Not much! We've only talked about it for fourteen hours so far!

Mani: In fact I think there is nothing one can say about the New Life. You know, the New Life can't be talked about—it is to be lived. We can talk only about the outward things—the activities that took place—things that you can put down in a diary or in a notebook. But the New Life is limitless, a timeless thing. Baba said, 'The New Life will go on living by itself even when there is nobody to live it.' So the New Life lives forever. That is because it was given life by Baba the God-Man himself treading it, making a way for all in the timeless time to come.

Don: Making a living blueprint. Is that your interpretation of what Baba did in the New Life?

Mani: Perhaps 'footprint' is the word. You see, God himself walked the New Life, and *that* has given life to the New Life. The New Life is already lived because Baba has lived it on behalf of all who will follow it. When Perfection performs an act in Illusion it is perfect. We can never equal even a mite of what *he* can do. As Baba once said, 'If all of you had kept silence all of your lives it wouldn't equal one hour of my silence. And if all of you fasted all of your lives it wouldn't equal one day of my fasting.'

Don: Thank goodness for that. I don't like fasting.

Mani: I don't either! Baba being universal, when he does a thing, it is on behalf of us all. When he used to recite the Repentance Prayer by participating in it, that is, standing with hands joined among us while one of us read out the prayer at his command, he, on our behalf, repented for all that we had done. Had we repented all our lives we could not have made up for the wrongs we had done. But he, by participating in our repentance in that prayer of Repentance, did for us what we can never do for ourselves. God offered the Repentance Prayer on behalf of his creatures. The Perfect, doing it on behalf of the imperfect, makes each act fruitful, alive, real, by the seal of his Reality.

Don: Mani, I ask your impressions, or perhaps your knowledge

through conversations with Baba, of what is the New Life? Is it a way of feeling? Is it a way of wandering? Or it a combination of action and feeling? What are the characteristics of the New Life?

Mani: Well, what I express can only be from my own viewpoint, which of course is limited to the external. As Dr. Donkin says in *The Wayfarers*, we can only see the tip of the iceberg of what Baba is accomplishing. The rest is hidden from our view, submerged in the ocean. While Baba said, ‘I am working on all planes at the same time,’ we can only see the work he does on the physical. Nevertheless we can sense the unseen, as you can sense the depth of the ocean even though you’re standing on the beach and have not plunged into it. We know that whatever Baba did, even his most casual action served manifold purposes and bore manifold fruits.

One of the New Life purposes was to give us, individually and collectively, training and discipline, and in turn he used us in whatever ways we might serve his work. But that is not all. The New Life was for you, and all his close one, and all his lovers and all the universe, in varying degrees.

It’s like when you drop a pebble into a lake—after the splash there are the encircling ripples. Circle after circle follows, bigger in size and lesser in intensity till in the end the lake is covered. This was true of whatever Baba did. We learned this from situations in which we had thought a plan or action was directed to a particular situation or person, but later on some causal remark from Baba would make it clear to us that it was not just for this one or that thing, rather it was for his work which was of universal proportion.

That is why I say that, when we talk of the New Life, we can give only a limited picture of what we observed and describe only in words that ‘we walked from here to there’ and ‘we did this, and he said that.’ As I say, by the God-Man walking the New Life, I feel it is already lived.

Don: And we, the rest of humanity, will gradually and inevitably experience that pattern that he set.

Mani: Automatically! We see some signs of it already, many changes from the old patterns and values which we had thought were set for all time. We look at the young people now who struggle to be free of the old bonds of materialism, who are beginning to feel the thirst for God, seeking something beyond what

they see! This surge of the young awakening we would never have dreamed of years ago.

Don: Even ten years ago?

Mani: Even ten years ago. So, Don, all I can do now is to add a few bits to the New Life narrative. Eruch of course has given you a very comprehensive picture of it, and Mehera has described what was observed as far as it can be remembered from the women's point of view. I can only pick up some interesting notes from my diary which she may not have included.

But before I go on, I should say I feel that while we have been asked about the New Life and have talked about the New Life, one aspect of it has not been brought out as it should be. That concerns those who did not accompany Baba in the New Life: those who had lived with Baba as we did, but were left to stay in places like Bombay or Poona or Meherabad or were sent to the West; and those who had lived away from him but were constantly under his direction and visited him whenever called or allowed. All those individuals, those warm hearts that loved him so, had the biggest challenge because they had to face what they believed to be permanent separation. Baba had said, 'You must believe it when I say that when I go into the New Life, I and the companions with me, you will have no further contact or communication with us. You must not even attempt to do so. I will not come back and you will not see us again.'

Don: What a separation! Eruch said you all believed completely that you would never again see these people, that they would never see Baba again.

Mani: It was a complete uprooting. We thought we would never see Meherazad again. Much of our domestic stuff—furniture and whatnot, as well as our personal belongings—were given away or sold. Later, on our eventful return, we couldn't help thinking, 'Oh, if only we had kept that kettle which Elizabeth had brought us in nineteen so-and-so! Such a beautiful enamel kettle, one can't get anything like it now, And that breadknife,' and so on and on, Just like women!

Don: Elizabeth must have been the packhorse. Everything that everybody talks about is, 'Elizabeth brought this, Elizabeth gave that,' and so on.

Mani: Yes, indeed! But Arnavaz and Nariman, who had the responsibility of being nursemaids to Meherazad, kept whatever they took over, for Baba to do with as he liked if and when he had the divine whim to come back. This they did without reasoning over the matter. Even the things that had been given away or sold, they went out and bought back as far as possible.

For those who let Baba go, believing they would never see him again, it was very hard. But for us who traveled with Baba, no matter what we went through in the New Life, we had Baba with us. Looking back, we could have all those difficulties a million times over and still choose again to accompany Baba in the New Life. But for those who patiently stayed behind, their part in the New Life was no less.

I know what a deep shock it was to a number of the close ones. Some people's health suffered very much as a consequence. Take the case of Vishnu's mother, Kaku. She was very close to us, especially to Mehera and myself. She saw Baba leaving—the best, the biggest, the everything in her life—plus her son Vishnu, plus Mehera, plus Mani, She was broken-hearted. She died before we came back. The shock was great for others, too. They felt this was the end. But they carried on, and Baba put everything right, as he always does.

Now, having talked too much even before coming to the actual New Life, I repeat that I haven't much to tell about the New Life because you have already been very nicely told all that. But here are some notes from my diary that I thought might not have been included in the narration by Eruch and by Mehera and Meheru. When we started out on the New Life, 16th October, 1969. . . .

Don: We're very close to it, aren't we?

Mani: Absolutely, today's the 14th. It says in my diary: 16th October, 1969. When we started out on our New Life it was amidst torrential rain, thunder and lightning.

Don: Typical Baba weather.

Mani: That's right.

Another voice: 1969? I kept hearing '69.

Mani: Yes, I did say that, I'm sorry.

Don: Oh, you wrote it, too.

Mani: Yes, I'll correct it. 16th October, 1949. When we started

out on our New Life—just as we were walking out—it was amidst rain and thunder and lighting.

Don: Did you feel sad?

Mani: No, not one bit. You see, as always with Baba we had been kept very busy before we started out.

Don: No time to think.

Mani: No, with Baba there's no lolling about and chewing over things. You just do your part because Baba is conducting the whole affair like a symphony orchestra and each one is busy with his own instrument. We cannot see it as a whole, but each of us is busy making that whole.

Our first real halt was in Belgaum where we settled down for some time. It was a sort of training time for us, the pre-period of the real New Life as Baba called it. My diary says we reached there on 20th October. It was very cold and damp and we were quite unequipped for it. In fact it was so cold that Adi, as I was later told, would get up at about two o'clock in the morning, go out, and run around and around the place to warm himself up.

That is where Baba gave each of us a blanket, which is called a *kamli*. It is a coarse, hand-woven village blanket made from lamb's wool. Incidentally, it was from one just like this that Baba's coat of long ago was made—the 'kamli coat' which he wore constantly for years.

Don: Is it that old patched one you have in the museum room at Meherabad.

Mani: Yes. Originally it was made from a kamli blanket. It was made by Yashwantrao, one of the old devotees with Upasni Maharaj. It was given to Baba by Yashwantrao at the time when Baba left Upasni Maharaj.

But, to come back to the New Life—at Belgaum Baba gave each one of us a kamli blanket, which ordinarily we would have found to be terribly coarse, but it was so cold and the blanket was so welcome we couldn't think of anything nicer or lovelier to have!

Don: Mani, how did Baba sleep during the New Life? Did he have a sleeping bag or a roll-up and blanket? How did he sleep?

Mani: Well, you see, the caravan was there (just for us four women to sleep in at nights), and next to the caravan was put up a sort of awning for Baba, a semi-tent which Eruch used to stake

to the ground every night. Once during our travels up in the North it rained so hard during the night that the rain came right through the little tent.

Eruch kept watch outside, sitting under an umbrella. The men who were sleeping in the open, of course, were drenched through. The men always slept in the open, under the trees, and Baba had just that semi-protection over him.

While in Belgaum we realized that Baba was really being the companion that he said he was, in the sense that Baba labored along with the other men companions. My diary says: 'They put up tents and Baba helped draw water from the well and carried vegetables over to the men's side.' Remember, whatever happened, wherever we halted, wherever we stayed, in the New Life and before and after, the women were accommodated quite separately and some distance away from the men, and Baba would go back and forth from one side to the other. At the time when the cooking was done on the men's side by Kaka, Baba carried the vegetables over from the women's side, sometimes in a basket on his head. Baba not only carried vegetables and helped the men draw water from the well but he joined in all the other work as well.

From the first of November we women took over the cooking, and Baba helped us in the kitchen. I remember one day we made a stew, putting all the vegetables we had into it, and then something went wrong! It was a dreadful mess and we didn't know what to do with it, and the men's share had to be sent over to them! I wrote in my diary: 'Baba saves it by directing all sorts of things to be put in it. It turned out to be most delicious. All like and praise it very much, including the men.'

Don: Pretty good cook!

Mani: Oh, Yes! He could transform it with just that little twist, that touch, which made the whole difference.

Don: He's cooked up quite a few stews in life when I stop to think of it.

Mani: As for potato patties—when Baba would make these they were simply superb. We'd never eaten anything like them before!

The next note in my diary is: 'Every evening we sing the New Life song. Baba makes it clear he wants immediate obedience to his orders'

Don: Who composed the New Life song? Was it Baba himself?

Mani: Baba gave the material and Ghani shaped it into verse. Finally Baba added lines, took out some and added some more. Like my stew. That beautiful touch of his made it what it is.

Later in our travels, when we were in Benares, we had an unexpected order from Baba: make puppets! You see, I had made some puppets long ago when we were at Meherazad and had put on a puppet show for Baba. I remember Norina saying after the show, ‘If sometime you need to get a job, Mani—if Baba tells you to go out and get a job, what you should do is puppets.’ We had laughed over it at the time, but when we were in Benares in the New Life, in that huge palatial house that Eruch and Mehera must have told you about, Baba said to us, ‘You will make puppets, because after we leave here and take to the road you have to begin to earn. You can do it by giving puppet shows. Whenever we halt, people can come around and see it. They will like it and be pleased to pay their mite for the show. That too will be a form of bhiksha.’

So we started making puppets. I made the faces and hands (out of paper and glue), while Mehera and the others made the clothes and jewelry.

Don: Were they hand puppets or string puppets?

Mani: Hand puppets. One little puppet was Lord Krishna and Mehera made all the jewelry and the crown for him and Meheru and Goher helped stitch the clothes. We did that much, and we were going to do much more when suddenly Baba dropped the idea.

As you know, Baba proposes and Baba disposes.

Don: That’s what God’s supposed to do, they say.

Another voice: Man proposes and God disposes.

Mani: Yes, but this is God proposes and God disposes. Anyway, on December first we were in Sarnath, which is just a few miles from Benares. I know Mehera has told you about our stay there. Sarnath is the place where Buddha gave his first sermon to his disciples.

Don: Is there still much Buddhist activity there?

Mani: There is a beautiful stupa. Baba took us to see the stupa and the ruins and monastery, and a temple with very beautiful paintings depicting the life of the Buddha. One morning Baba asked

me to write on a piece of paper all the known Avataric names: Zoroaster, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed and Meher Baba—all of them—and he put the paper in his pocket. I don't know what happened to it afterwards, but after putting it in his pocket he walked in the underground passages of the ruins, the same where Baba later sat with the men companions. Eruch has told you about that.

While we were in Sarnath, preparations were afoot for the walking 'fakiri' (poverty) as Baba called it. The men had their white kafnis and green turbans which they had begun wearing in Benares, but since the women had none, Baba had us make light blue woolen kafnis for ourselves and got us pieces of grey cotton material for our turbans. Then to demonstrate how a turban should be tied on, Baba tied the turban round my head. But later Baba dropped the idea and we women never actually wore the turban or kafni in our travels. Instead he decided that on the first day when we started out the walking fakiri we should wear saris. So, light blue cotton saris were obtained, and we wore them on that first day, the 12th of December, when we started out at 7:30 in the morning.

Here's what my diary says: 'Mad rush and hurry as ever. Drs. Nath and Khare and others were standing at a distance. Our long procession started, first the white horse (led by Dr. Donkin), followed by the camel cart (driven by Baidul), bullock cart (driven by Vishnu), a white cow, two calves (one of them quite small, and often carried by Dr. Nilu round his shoulders), the caravan drawn by bullocks (driven by Pendu), two obstinate donkeys, and then came some of the men companions who were followed some distance away by Baba and Eruch (all of them in white kafni and green turban), and again some distance away we four women in blue cotton saris (which we wore only for that first day).'

We must have made a beautiful picture, and apart from people like Drs. Nath and Khare (who had given us all those animals) who were allowed to stand at a distance, only Padri was there as the unique procession went by. Padri had come from Ahmednagar by Baba's order to deliver the caravan, without meeting Baba. Padri was told not to take a picture, not to talk, just to be at a distance while the procession went by.

Later Padri told us it was indelibly imprinted on his mind, that unforgettable scene. He said. ‘You could not have known it because you were in it. But it was really out of this world, a most wondrous sight that greeted my eyes as I silently watched that long procession passing by while the dawn was still young.’

Our camel of the New Life had a lovely Persian silver bell round its neck—that same big bell Aloba now rings in the evening to remind you it’s nearing six o’clock, which is the time for leaving Meherazad. The bell of the camel is mentioned in the verses of Hafiz, the Perfect Master whose poetry Baba loved so much. The bell worn by the leading camel of a caravan is symbolic of progress. It tolls to remind a caravan which has halted at an oasis and is unwilling to move on in the desert again, ‘Move on. This is not your destination. Forward, forward!’

Our camel cart carried food for the animals—hay, fodder and whatever. The men would get up before three o’clock in the morning and first attend to the animals. We would see the companions from far away by the light of their kerosene lanterns, chopping fodder and feeding the bullocks, the cows, the donkeys and the camel before they could make tea for themselves. Sometimes they would have just enough time to do so before the trek began, and so they would have to begin their journey without their cup of tea.

One day when our procession stopped somewhere by the roadside, Baidul left the camel cart and walked over to talk with some of the other companions. Before you knew it there was a crowd of delighted children round the cart, admiring the camel. What happened next we don’t know, but the camel took fright and ran. He was running along the street, his bell clanging away, the cart hurtling behind, Baidul shouting and running after, and the children racing in the rear. The townspeople, wondering what the tumult was about, joined in the chase. Everybody was running and shouting, and somehow at last Baidul managed to catch up with the camel and coaxed him back to where Baba and we were waiting.

This sort of thing we experienced throughout our trek in the New Life. Wherever we stopped for the night, often on the outskirts of a village or small town, usually in a mango grove, or sometimes under a dilapidated shelter or even out in the open in the fields

by a well, word would fly to the village about this peculiar party of pilgrims camping nearby. Then even before we could settle after our exhausting all-day trek, just about the whole village would turn out to see us. The women would gather around the site where we women were and the men would surround the men companions. They had never seen such a sight before. Such an odd retinue of men, women and vehicles: a camel cart, different in shape from what is usually seen there; a bullock cart drawn by an English bull and an Indian bull; a caravan that looked like a bus but was drawn by bullocks; men and women who looked very different from the kind who normally make a pilgrimage on foot; and most of all, Baba. It was clear that he was the leader of the party and quite above the rest .

When we were on the road walking, mile after weary mile, sometimes passing through village and towns on the way, or walking on lonely stretches of country roads, passers-by would somehow not be unduly distracted by the rest of the party in robes and turbans (Indians are tolerant of people's mode of dress), but when their eyes fell on Baba they would stop their chatting and stand quite still, just looking at Baba as he went by, then turn round and follow him with their eyes till he was out of sight.

Don: Baba was always the focus of attention?

Mani: Yes, of course Baba. We have known that to happen even in the earlier years when traveling by train—Baba in dark glasses and head covered so as not to be recognized. There on an incredibly crowded railway platform, where everyone was rushing to get into the train which had just arrived, pushing and shouting and loaded with bundles and babies, some of these people would catch sight of Baba and be transfixed momentarily, making a perfect tableau. Then after Baba had swiftly passed them by their mad rush would start again.

Let me describe a funny incident to illustrate how easily we could slip up on our egos. Once during our trek in the New Life, up in northern India, the caravan was going along and we women were walking a little distance behind it. You see, the caravan was used only for the four of us to sleep in when we stopped for the night. On this occasion an empty bullock cart passed us by with just a man driving it. Seeing the four of us walking along he said

to Meheru and myself, ‘Why don’t you sit in my cart?’ We said, rather virtuously I think, ‘Oh, no thank you very much, but we cannot accept the lift. You see, we’re on a walking pilgrimage to Haridwar and we have to walk, so we can’t take a bullock cart or anything. We have to walk on foot.’ The man was obviously impressed—he bowed reverently to us and we bowed back.

The man and his cart hadn’t been gone for more than five minutes when there was a clap from Baba and instructions given that we women should get into the caravan. Get into the caravan? We were surprised, but that’s what Baba told us to do so we did and it was very exciting. Meheru and I sat on the seat and opened the curtain of the little windows to put our heads out. It was fun to be able to see everything without having to walk!

After awhile the caravan passed a bullock cart. The man driving it happened to turn and look at us and I thought, ‘His face seems familiar.’ He had a very hurt, reproachful look in his eyes, as of someone who had been deceived. Then we suddenly remembered—it was our well-wisher who had offered us a lift in his cart a few minutes before. Too late, Meheru and I ducked our heads in, feeling quite ashamed.

Well, Baba deflated our egos just like that. Only a few minutes after this incident Baba sent word, ‘Women, get out of the caravan. Walk.’ We walked, but we didn’t show off any more.

We were in Moradabad, North India, on the first of January, 1950. My diary for that day says: ‘From today, every morning, the companions are to say the prayers in four languages: Zoroastrian, Hindu, Christian and Mohammedan. These selected four to symbolize all religions.’ This too lasted for a certain period and was then discontinued.

The village of Manjri Mafi, just outside of Dehra Dun, now officially known as Meher Mafi because Baba stayed there during the New Life, was the base for some time for Baba’s trips with some of the men to contact sadhus and seekers. My diary page 3rd April (1950) says, ‘Baba finished his work with sadhus today, contacting them by bending down and touching the feet of each one of them. He thus bowed down to three thousand in one day, taking about eleven hours to do so.’

Don: Baba bowed down to three thousand? That many?

Mani: Yes, three thousand in one day, bending down to touch

the feet of each one, touching their feet with his hands and then touching his fingers to his forehead.

Don: Mani, what's the name of the wonderful doctor in Bombay who tended Baba's neck and latter part of Baba's life—the nerve specialist?

Mani: Ginde. Dr. Ram Ginde.

Don: I remember talking with Dr. Ginde while Baba was still in the body. I was very concerned about the pain in Baba's neck and wondered if it might not be something of a gouty problem. It bears on what you've just read there, about Baba bowing down three thousand times in one day. Ram Ginde said, 'No, Don. I've looked at Baba's x-rays very carefully, and I can see that it is actually due to wear on two of the vertebrae in his neck which has resulted in a narrowing of the channel through which the spinal cord passes.' And he said, 'This type of wear I can only account for by Baba's having bowed down for so many years to so many people's feet that it actually wore those bones out, and therefore narrowed the channel through which the spinal cord passes.' But I've never heard a figure like this, three thousand, before. It's no wonder. It's extraordinary.

Mani: It was the time of the great Kumbh Mela held in Haridwar, when sadhus in large numbers were flowing in to congregate on the banks of the Ganges for the great day. Baba went with the men companions from Manjri Mafi to the place called Motichur that Eruch told you about, staying there for a number of days. It was cold and very windy at Motichur. Every morning at four o'clock Baba would walk from Motichur to Haridwar to contact the sadhus at their *akhadas*, that is, the camps of the sadhus. Eruch used to go out with him. Baba told us that, while he bowed down to thousands, there were a few that he was really pleased with, and he would tell us about them.

The third of April was the last day of this particular work with the sadhus. My diary notes, 'He walked back to Motichur, dead tired.' On fourth April Baba returned to Manjri Mafi. I wrote in my diary: 'Baba is utterly exhausted—his whole body is aching and feverish. He has completed his work there, in all contacting (bowing down to) over ten thousand sadhus.'

The twelfth of April was the day of the great Kumbh Mela, and

Baba took all with him to Haridwar to witness it. It's impossible to describe what we saw—the unbelievable mass of humanity, millions of devoted Hindus from all over India, congregated at the banks of the river Ganges, bathing in the sacred waters to wash away their sins, praying, ringing bells, chanting, singing. —

We women watched with Baba from the terrace of a hotel—Goel's Hotel. The proprietor gave us the use of his terrace to watch from, but he was not allowed to see Baba. He was asked only to see that Baba and we might stay on the terrace and watch the occasion undisturbed. The river was just before us with all the people around it, an absolutely solid mass, and floating down the river were tiny leaf-boats carrying flowers and oil-lamps. It was all very colorful and noisy, and yet very simple and exciting at the same time. We were disappointed, however, that we could see very little of the magnificent procession of sadhus and elephants and so on going by a short distance from where we were.

The poor men companions had a hard time below us amidst the crowds and were disgusted with it all. Baba sent down messages to them whenever anything needed to be attended to. Baba was displeased with some arrangement on the terrace which was not to his satisfaction. I don't remember exactly what the cause was, but Baba was angry. He sent messages to tell Goel, the proprietor of the hotel, that he was displeased. This meant that something had happened which made the work he was doing at the time unsatisfactory. But in a short while, as usual, the whole matter evaporated and all was serene. Only Baba can do that.

Don: He wipes out the mood.

Mani: Yes, the whole thing was over. But as we were leaving the place, Baba walking with us women, we saw the proprietor standing silently some distance away. Baba told me to go and tell him that Baba was greatly pleased with him and the service he had rendered, and that Baba asked his forgiveness for having been angry with him.

I went to give the message. To carry an apology from Baba is in itself difficult, to say the least, but when I looked at the proprietor's face it became tremendously more difficult. He stood there, hands joined, eager for Baba's message. I quickly started what I had to say, but when I came to the apology the poor man just bowed his

head and did not look up. He could not. He was obviously so humble and ashamed I'm sure he could have wished for the earth to open and swallow him up.

Don: Mani, a mechanical detail. When Baba would be walking along with you like this and suddenly want to give a message to the hotel proprietor, would he do this by gesticulating or did he always carry an alphabet board?

Mani: I think at that time Baba used an alphabet board.

Don: For instance, when he was walking out of the hotel and gave you this message, did he stop and take out his alphabet board?

Mani: Usually we would carry the alphabet board for him, although after using the board he would sometimes keep it with him for awhile.

Don: And so he'd quickly have it made available?

Mani: Yes. He would communicate either through the alphabet board or, if the message was short or someone was good at interpretation, he would do it with gestures.

Don: So the roots of his later complete communication by gesticulation were already developing in that period?

Mani: Yes, he would use both methods. Getting back to my diary, it says, 'On first May Baba goes with the men in kafni and turban for bhiksha from three lover's homes in Dehra Dun. From today it's the New Plan, all are in B Group.' That is, all had to work and earn, such as making ghee (clarified butter) to sell.

Don: Sounds like a football team with various different coded plays that you're going to carry through.

Mani: 'To celebrate the inauguration of the New Plan a sweet dish is served *and* the men have their hair cut at last. Then, on 22nd May, Baba went to Delhi for a week to work out new plans for the poor mandali who are making ghee there, doing so in boiling temperature and on a starvation diet.'

Don: Donkin was involved in that too, wasn't he?

Mani: Yes, he was! During Baba's absence we women sewed and made a number of things to sell as, our part of earning and doing constructive work. We did appliqué work and lovely bedspreads. We got two hundred rupees profit for two month's work. The things we did turned out beautiful, but we had to sell them.

The 25th of July finds us in Satara. 'Baba says it is the most

eventful day of the New Life. Baba sends personal messages and salutations to all disciples and devotees in the East and West. He fasts all day, talking only water. In the morning there is a program of prayers and reading from an English translation of the Bhagavad Gita, and the Song of the New Life is sung by a *qawwal* from Bombay. In the afternoon Baba works with mad and the masts who were sought and brought to Baba. Shaving and bathing and clothing them.'

Don: Did Baba say why he chose the 25th of July? It had a particular significance?

Mani: Not as far as I know. But now it is certainly significant. Then, 'On 27th July, Baba begged for bhiksha twice, once at the home of a Hindu and once at the home of a Mohammedan.'

Well, Don, I don't have any further notes, but there are observations I can make, such as Baba's way of working about the animals. All during our life with Baba it was clear that Baba not only worked on all levels, but worked with and through all of creation, all creatures. Think of all those pets that Baba kept, all the birds and animals that we have had and looked after during our many years with Baba. In my 1938 diary it is noted, 'In the evening before retiring to his room Baba would go round with us to each of the pets, to every cage, every pen, every place where the pets were kept.' Imagine, the last thing he did before retiring for the night was to visit each of the pets! This was when we were living in Meherabad, up on the hill. And when we were traveling with Baba in the blue bus all over India our 'sightseeing' with Baba invariably included a visit to the local zoo. It was Baba's way of contacting the animal world through the collective specimens in the zoo.

There was no doubt that these outings were not just for the sake of our enjoyment but for his work. Baba would hardly give us time to enjoy looking at the animals. Often he would walk so fast that we had to trot to catch up with him. In this way, too, our attention was never allowed to wander from him.

My point is that he was here in human form not only for us but also for the animals and the birds and all creatures. Similarly, in the New Life, along with the men and the women were included the animals in the company of Baba. When that phase was wound

up, some of those animals were given away, some were sold, some auctioned and some kept for while.

Don: It sounds almost like a walking Noah's ark.

Mani: Doesn't it?

Don: Mani, what was the reaction of the animals and birds to Baba?

Mani: You mean in the New Life?

Don: No, just in general.

Mani: Well, they were very receptive to the love that Baba showered on them. Baba was very particular about the pets' care, and we were reprimanded if anything happened to them. Baba loved to feed the birds and the animals—in fact, to overfeed them. Even after we had fed them they would cry or beg for food the moment they saw Baba. Then he would reproach us, 'You are not looking after the pets. Look, they are hungry. They must be fed well. Get some more.' Then he would give them more and they would gobble it all up as if they had been starving!

Don: Mani, what was your overall feeling about the New Life? Was it a tough time?

Mani: Well, it was not just physically tough. There was that. It was a rough life, and there was the strict obedience part of it, too. We had to be constantly alert not to slip up on any of the conditions Baba had laid down for the New Life.

Don: Baba demanded a great deal of attention from you, did he?

Mani: That's right, not so much *personal* attention as *complete* attention in carrying out what Baba wanted us to do. Sometimes we would slip up and not even be aware that we were doing so. But Baba would be there to know and to catch us up on it.

Don: He insisted even more than in the pre-New Life on strict obedience in minute detail?

Mani: Yes, it was a speeding up, an amplification of that. When we were in Belgaum, for instance, Baba ordered, 'No reading of any kind.' Well, that didn't mean that we simply did not read books or detective stories—it meant that we could not read anything, not even a newspaper lying about. As you know, a newspaper is very much used in an Indian home as a handy wrapper for all sorts of things. To help avoid inadvertently reading newspapers which we needed for wrapping and lighting the fire, Vishnu would get us old

newspapers from some junk shop printed in foreign languages, extraordinary languages that we didn't even know were available in print in India! I think they were Bulgarian or Hungarian or Czechoslovakian or something like that. In this way we were at ease, knowing we didn't have to strain to avoid glancing at our wrapping papers.

Don: Yes, but even if a truck went by with a sign on it, you'd have to keep yourself from reading it.

Mani: Right, it was like walking a tightrope.

Don: I would think it would be a tremendous strain on one. Did nerves get frazzled?

Mani: Yes, but that could happen over anything at any time. On the other hand, because of Baba being with us, Baba's presence, that made the whole difference .

Don: So he gives you a tremendous challenge, but he sustains you to meet the challenge?

Mani: That's right. As I say, if with one hand Baba hits with a hammer, with the other hand he sustains you. He's not leaving you unsupported while he works on you. If the nut is to be cracked, he's holding the nut in his hand.

Don: You know, this comes as quite a shock to many young people, because after a certain period of just being wildly in love with Baba, an individual will suddenly start encountering not only some of the old problems in his life, but even some new and more complicated ones as well. At that point many feel, 'Oh, I must have lost my grip on Baba. How can this happen to me? Something must be wrong with my attitude.' They get terribly distressed.

Mani: No, Baba's only just begun working then. The 'honeymoon' is over and work begins in earnest.

Don: The real work beginning and the important point, as you brought out, is that Baba is sustaining the individual if he'll only have faith and hold onto the daaman (trusting and obeying him implicitly).

Mani: There's no doubt about that. Do you think we could go through what we do and surrender to him by any merit of our own? It is our effort, yes, but it is not by any merit of our own that we can completely surrender to Baba. No, it is *he* who helps and sustains. It is *his* love—it all comes down to that—it is Baba's love and

compassion which makes it all possible, makes even our love for him possible. He allows us to feel that we are giving, that we are serving, that we are loving. He will even appear weak so that we can feel we are supporting him.

An example: in that last month (January, '69) when Baba was sitting in that chair (in mandali hall at Meherazad), he was looking weary and weak. When he indicated it was time to go back to his room Eruch and Francis jumped up, each giving Baba a hand to help him up from the chair. I was there at the time. Baba was holding their hands, and they were ready to pull him up when he gave the slightest little tug, pulling them towards him. Instantly they started to tumble forward, doing all they could to keep from falling on Baba. And yet a second before Baba had looked so weak! Recovering, Francis exclaimed, 'Baba, you are strong!' With a twinkle in his eyes Baba nodded and said, 'But never mind, help me up,' again being weak.

That, as everything he did, is an expression of his compassion, giving us an opportunity to express our love in our little ways. All the time it is Baba who supports us and holds us to him, he who loves us, he who tolerates us. I can talk like this now, but to begin with we too have been raw and hard material. Now we wish we could have been more pliable. We have learned, we have grown—to some extent—but one can never grow enough to meet Baba's love, never.

Don: So the real challenge to the individual is to persist during the tough times. The real challenge is to look for and find that, in fact, Baba's love is there to sustain one, and to work through the necessary problems involved in dissolving one's sanskaras, with Baba's love,

Mani: There's no other way. Baba won't let you avoid experiencing that, once you're in his net. Some may feel afraid that that they're lost, but we must remember that while we are holding onto Baba's daaman, he is holding our hand. Baba never makes it easy, but he always makes it possible. He makes it beautifully possible when we rely completely on him. It comes about at that point when you are no longer for your self, but are for Baba. His love equips you to meet life's challenges as you would want to in order to please him.

Don: So you find a new depth of strength to do it?

Mani: Yes. For us to see that Baba was pleased with something we did was absolute paradise. And when we had displeased him in some way. . . .

Don: Absolute hell. Mani, what was hardest for you in the New Life? Eruch said being cheerful at all times was the hardest thing for him.

Mani: Yes, of course, being cheerful meant we had not to complain, we had not to be sad or look glum. The impact was hardest on the men. We had to do it, too, but the brunt was more on the men. I remember once when we had stopped for the night in a little cinema house, of all places. We women were to sleep on the stage, just behind the cinema screen. A light was on and I was throwing shadow on the screen with my fingers, making rabbits and so on. Baba was with the men, hidden from our view, but we could hear Eruch's voice as he was interpreting what Baba was telling them.

One of the things we heard Baba tell was, 'You have to be lords and masters of your faces during the New Life, no matter what happens,' which meant never letting one's face betray any unhappy emotion one might feel. But simply masking your face was not much of a solution either, because Baba could draw out the tiniest waver of emotion that might rise within you. He would detect it and bring it out.

Another voice: You had to be cheerful even if you didn't feel cheerful?

Mani: Cheerful did not mean you had to go about smiling. If you did that at the wrong time it was just as bad, and Baba would reprimand, 'Why are you grinning like that?' We still don't really understand the meaning of the words cheerful, happy. Cheer can be silent—cheer can be absolute silence itself. Happiness is a stillness, not just dancing and singing. It is all something which has still not been developed, which Baba perhaps was molding into us.

Another voice: Like Eruch said, there were moments when you would feel anger. But how can you feel cheerful if Baba is confronting you at that moment, and you're angry at the same time?

Mani: You ask Baba how one can do it!

Don: Pull a curtain down on the anger. Leave it. Pass it by. There's a part in the appendix of Baba's *God Speaks* on forgetfulness.

In it he describes the absolute necessity for the spiritual aspirant to develop a technique for the practice of forgetfulness .

Mani: Forgetfulness of yourself. Or control. When we were with Baba in Bangalore in 1940 Baba referred to that. Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, Kitty, Margaret and all of the western women were there, too. Something had come up—someone was contrite at having felt angry—and Baba said, ‘What’s the good if you did not feel angry? I don’t want *stones* around me—how would that help my work? But, to control your anger when you feel it—that’s the thing!’

Another voice: It sounds like Baba opens up this new faculty of cheerfulness, and then the energy that was in the anger is directed into the cheerfulness. Is it something like that?

Mani: I don’t know, but there were times when Baba would not want us to seem cheerful, times when Baba would say to one or the other of us, ‘I am not well, and here you are being so cheerful!’ We had to learn to develop that sensitivity to Baba’s pleasure at all times. It is not something that one can give a label to, or cut up in squares like taffy. It is something very subtle, like flowing water, and you have to learn the feel of it and hold it in your hand without letting it run through your fingers—and blessed are you if you can do it.

One thing is certain. With Baba there is no compromise. You may do something which you know will displease him and justify yourself as to why you did it. A thousand reasons come and stand before you, putting out their hands to help you. But that does no good—you would only be fooling yourself. As Baba said, what’s important is not whether you’re good or bad , but that you are his, that you have surrendered yourself to him. ‘Give your all to me. Then it’s mine, it’s no longer yours.’ It was beautiful to watch Baba work on and with our weaknesses, turning our debits into credits.

Don: Mani, you have mentioned, and I think Eruch also mentioned, that right up to the last days before Baba dropped his body, even in his very poor state of health, he still came down to mandali hall at least once a day to sit with them as he had for so many years.

Mani: He came to the mandali hall until about mid-January.

Don: Mid-January? But that’s just two weeks before he dropped his body!

Mani: We figure it was up to the 13th—that's right, almost up to your birthday, 14th January.

Don: Yes, and he sent me a birthday telegram. It was wonderful. Think of doing that at such a time. But his continuing to go to mandali hall impressed me very much. Many people feel that a routine or pattern is completely phony, but here is a pattern, a routine, that Baba insisted on up to the last moments that his body could still hold out, coming to be with the mandali every day and sitting with them.

Mani: It is amazing how much his humanness revealed his Godness. It didn't make him less God, it made him more God. One had to be with him to know this.

While sitting here in mandali hall telling you all this, I can't help recalling how Baba used to come here every morning, and before sitting down in that chair, he would take a little walk inside the hall. Up and down, up and down he would go, one hand resting on Kaka's arm and one on Francis' or Eruch's. Baidul would be sitting among the other mandali, perhaps feeling a little envious of Kaka and the others whose arms were supporting Baba while he walked, longing for a little personal attention from Baba, and then suddenly Baba would stop in front of Baidul and caress him under the chin. Even though Baidul did not say a word you could see him blossoming at that gracious touch, that timely gesture of love. Even though Baba was and is for all, in a hundred little ways he could make each one feel he was for that one. In India, whenever we call on Baba, customarily we exclaim 'Oh, my Baba!' And in real truth, each one can say 'My Baba,' and each one can be perfectly right.

Register of Editorial Alterations for the Online Edition of <i>Tales From the New Life with Meher Baba</i>				
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