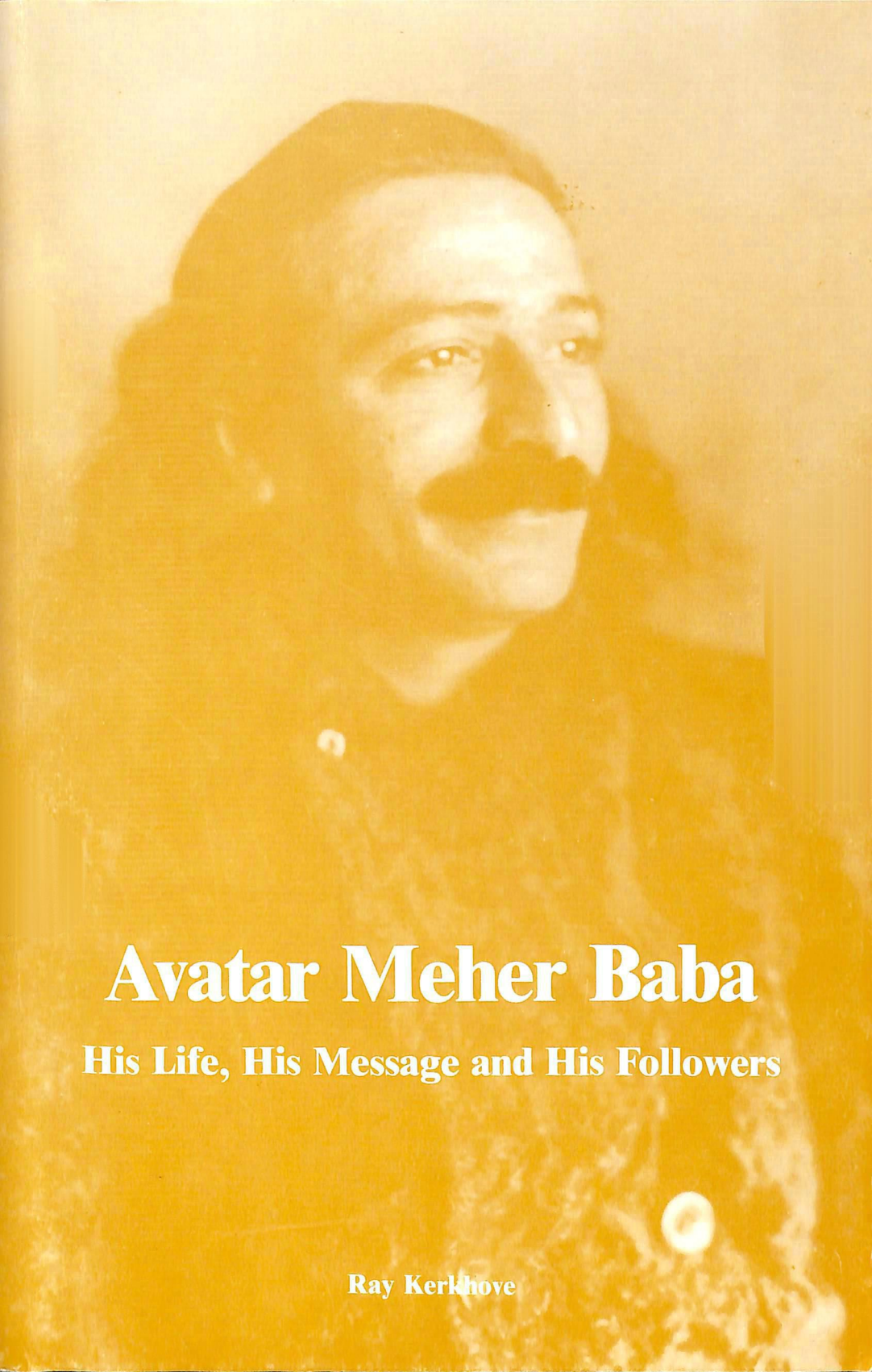




Avatar Meher Baba

His Life, His Message and His Followers

Ray Kerkhove

Meher Baba,
Delmonico Hotel,
New York, July 1956.



Avatar Meher Baba

**His Life
His Message
and His Followers**

Ray Kerkhove

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Published by
Meher Baba Foundation Australia
Avatar's Abode
Meher Road (PO Box 22)
Woombye Queensland 4559 Australia

First Published 1996
Second revised edition 1997
Third revised edition 2000

Printed by
Meher Mownavani Publications
Hyderabad Andhra Pradesh India

ISBN 0 646 28547 5

1-703312

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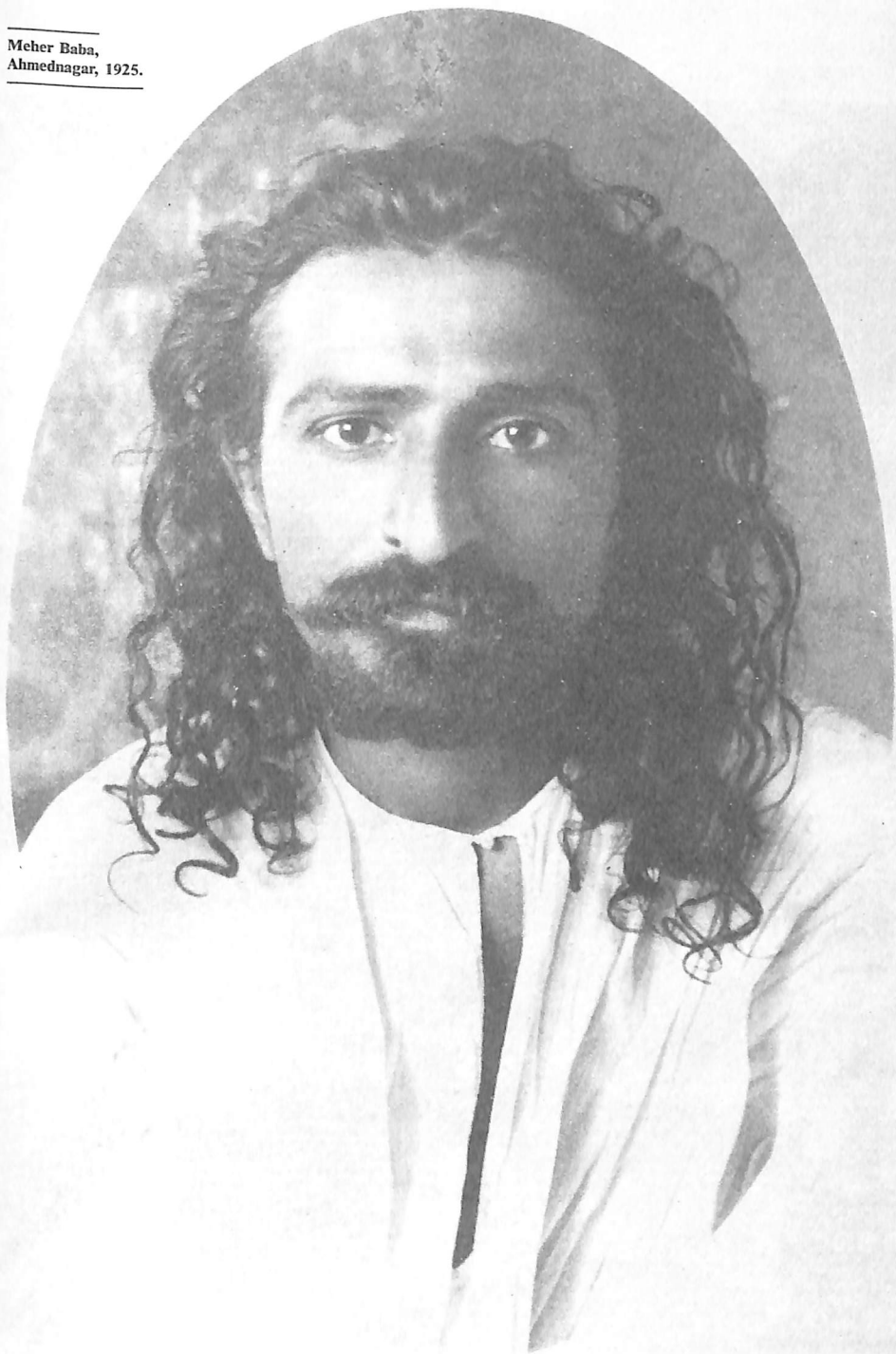
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Meher Baba,
Ahmednagar, 1925.



Meher Baba's Claims



Meher Baba's explanation of God-man and Avatar

"*Honesty demands*," explained Meher Baba, "*that what I am, I must express.*"¹ Baba repeatedly declared he is God in human form² — the Highest of the High,³ the Ancient One,⁴ the Avatar ('Descent of God') "*in every sense of the word.*"⁵

He claimed to be the same God-man who has appeared during tumultuous phases of human history⁶ as the Avatar, the Buddha, the Prophet, or the Messiah.⁷ According to Meher Baba, such universal figures are one and the same God-man, whose apparent differences are due to His adopting a form and approach best suited to the times.

He claimed that each Avataric Advent (roughly once every 700 or 1400 years) is a special springtide of creation when:

*"God becomes man for all mankind and simultaneously God also becomes a sparrow for all sparrows in creation, an ant for all ants in creation ... for each and everything that is in creation."*⁸

Why Meher Baba calls himself the Avatar

As Baba himself observed, many who hear his claim "*would take me for a hypocrite, a fraud, a supreme egotist — or just mad.*"⁹ He held that the Avatar is often not recognised "*because he covers himself under a veil for his own spiritual work.*"¹⁰ Nevertheless, Meher Baba stressed that he can not deny his status:

*"For a truly great man, who knows himself to be truly great, to deny his greatness would be to belittle what he indubitably is, for whereas modesty is the basis of guise, true greatness is free from camouflage ... When the Greatest of all says, 'I am the Greatest', it is a spontaneous expression of an infallible truth."*¹¹

*"When I say I am God it is not because I have thought about it and concluded that I am God — I know it to be so. Many consider it blasphemy for one to say he is God; but in truth it would be blasphemous for me to say I am not God."*¹²

He also asserted that from the perspective of God, each and every one is the Avatar:

"If I were to say every one of you is an Avatar, a few would be tickled, and many would consider it blasphemy or a joke. The

Meher Baba's Claims

fact that God — being One, Indivisible and equally in us all, we can be nought else but One, is too much for the duality-conscious mind to accept ... I tell you with my Divine authority, that you and I are not 'we', but One. I unconsciously feel in you what each of you feel. Thus everyone of you is Avatar, in the sense that everyone and everything is Everyone and Everything, at the same time, and for all times."¹³

Acceptance and rejection of Meher Baba's Avatarhood

According to Meher Baba, only *God-realised* (spiritually perfect) souls are in the position to verify a person's claim to Avatarhood. For this reason he cared little if his stance was ridiculed.

*"From the beginningless Beginning to the present day, I am what I am, irrespective of praise or universal opposition; and will remain so to the endless End."*¹⁴

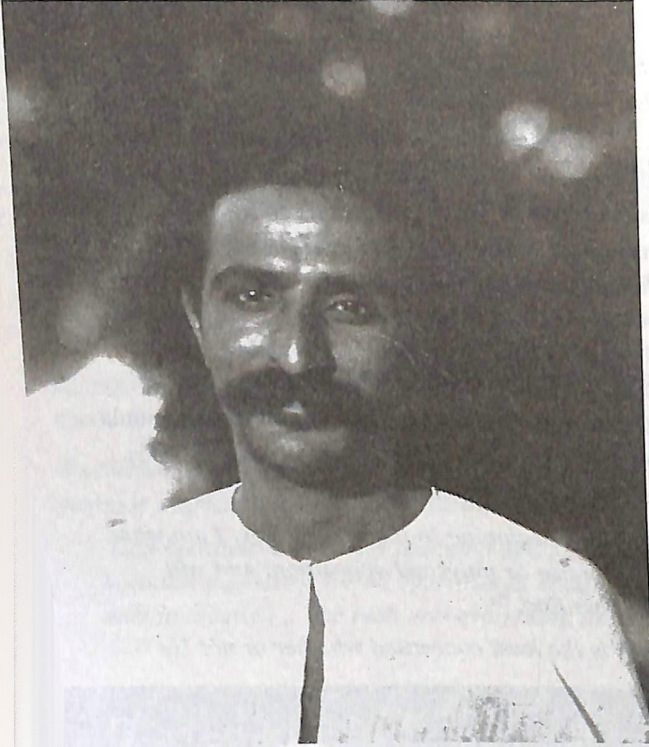
*"The Avatar Himself is the least concerned whether or not He comes to be regarded as the Avatar by large numbers."*¹⁵

Regardless of what anyone took Baba to be, he rendered love and assistance to all.



Meher Baba,
Ahmednagar, 1926.

Meher Baba's Claims



Meher Baba,
Prem Ashram,
Toka, 1928.

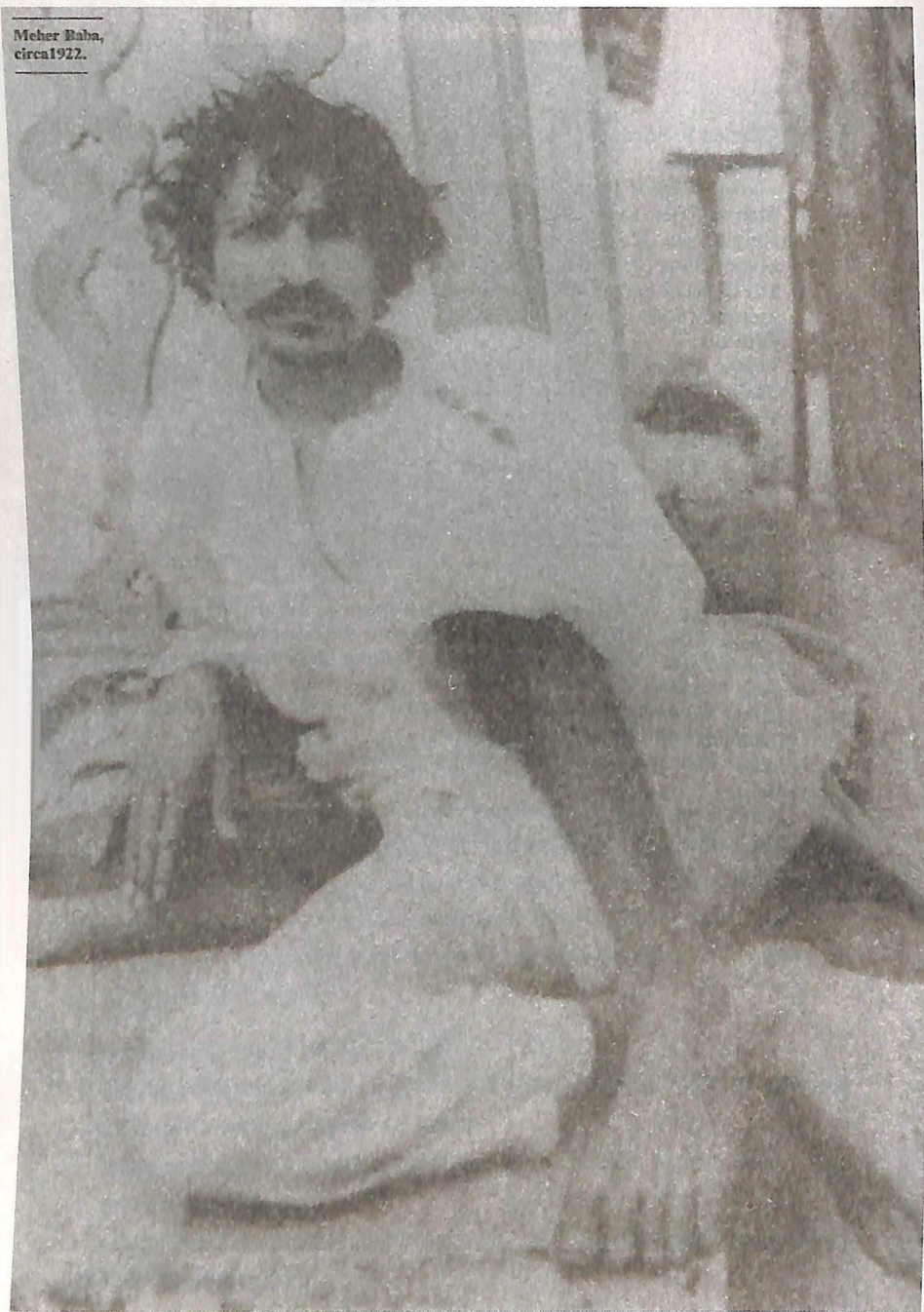
Meher Baba never expected people to mechanically accept his status. He considered it the right of persons serious about following any Master to rigorously test that Master's credentials.¹⁶ Consequently, those who regard Meher Baba as the Avatar do not do so as a matter of dogma, but on the grounds of either:

- having personally tested his powers or qualities;
- having been repeatedly struck by his apparent perfection (in meeting, living with, or hearing about him);
- having undergone profound emotional or mystical experiences concerning him; or
- having been deeply affected by a string of "coincidences" surrounding their interest in him.

Meher Baba's Claims

1. Charles B. Purdom, *The God-Man* Crescent Beach: Sheriar Press Inc. 1964: 260.
2. Manija Sheriar Irani, *Eighty-Two Family Letters* North Myrtle Beach: Sheriar Press 1969: 267. See also Avatar Meher Baba Poona Centre, *Revelations of Divinity by Avatar Meher Baba*: 6.
3. Meher Baba (ed. Jamshed B. Mistry & J. Flagg Kriss) *Meher Baba Calling* 4th Revised and Enlarged Edition, Woombye: Meher Baba Foundation Australia 1982: 14.
4. *ibid*: 80.
5. Avatar Meher Baba Poona Centre, *Revelations of Divinity by Avatar Meher Baba* 2nd Edition Poona: LoKasangnaha 1962: 7.
6. Meher Baba, *Discourses* (Section: The Avatar) 6th edition Ahmednagar: Sufism Reoriented 1967: 268-269.
7. Meher Baba, *Meher Baba Calling*: 77.
8. Meher Baba, *The Moving Finger Writes...* Pt.1 Karachi: Mr & Mrs. A.K. Arjani, c. 1963: 36.
9. Charles B. Purdom, *The God-Man*: 392.
10. Meher Baba, *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama* Connecticut: Sufism Reoriented 1958: 31: 32.
11. Meher Baba, 'Meher Baba's Call', in Naosherwan Anzar, *The Beloved: The Life and Work of Meher Baba* Ahmednagar: Sheriar Press 1974: 109-110.
12. Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing* Ahmednagar: Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Charitable Trust 1989: 48.
13. Meher Baba (ed. Don Stevens) *Listen Humanity* 3rd Edition Atlanta: In Company with Meher Baba 1985: 224.
14. Meher Baba (ed. Ivy O. Duce), *Life at Its Best* New York: Perennial 1957: 68.
15. Meher Baba, *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama*: 31-32.
16. Meher Baba, *Discourses* (Qualifications of the Aspirant IV): 367.

Meher Baba,
circa 1922.



Meher Baba's Life

Ancestry and Parents (1853 – 1894)

Iranian roots

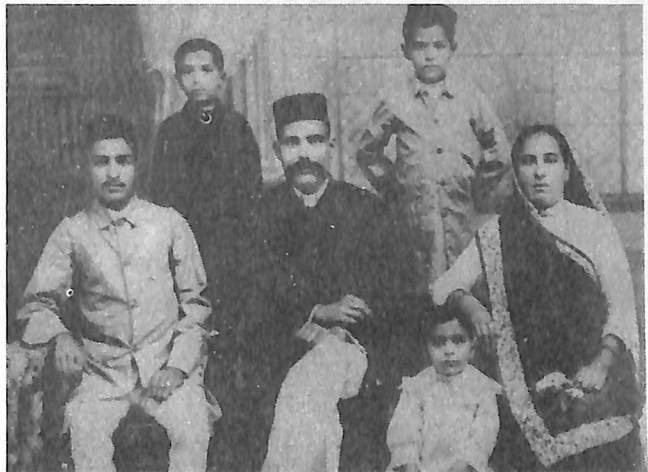
Iran — famed for poets, kings and mystics — was the homeland of Meher Baba's family. That family (the Iranis) were part of a religious minority which was being persecuted in Iran at the time: followers of a very ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism.¹

The quest of Meher Baba's father

Into this setting was born Meher Baba's father, Sheriar Mundegar Irani. Sheriar was a mystic of some renown.² As a boy, he worked with his father maintaining a Zoroastrian tower of silence (a type of cemetery) at Khooramshar in Iran.³ At the tender age of twelve, he was filled with a desire to experience God. This drove him to abandon his home. From that time on — and well into his thirties — Sheriar wandered around Iran and India in search of God.⁴

Chanting God's name wherever he travelled, Sheriar encountered numerous hardships and performed various austerities.⁵ He trudged alone through deserts, jungles and swamps, occasionally journeying with Sufi (Moslem mystic) renunciates.

In spite of such efforts and some remarkable spiritual experiences, Sheriar had little success in achieving his ultimate goal: God. He started to despair. After nearly completing a 40-day fast and vigil in the middle



Baba's family: Merwan (Meher Baba) far left; Sheriar (Baba's father) centre; Shireen (Baba's mother) far right.

Meher Baba's Life

of a forest, he sat by a river, despondent, when he felt he heard God speak to him, saying:

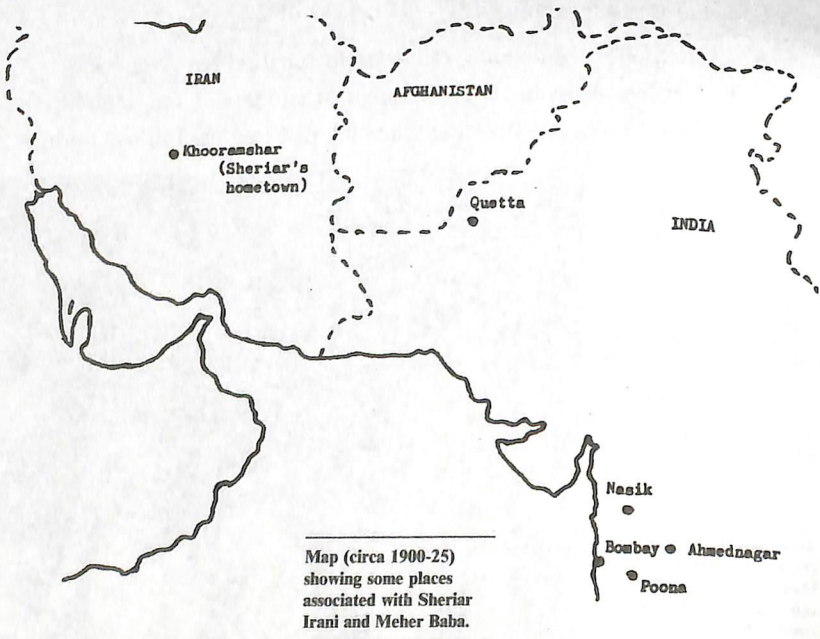
*"He Whom you seek, He Whom you wish to see, His attainment is not destined for you. Your son, it is your son who will attain it, and through your son — you!"*⁶

In response to this message, Sheriar travelled to his sister in India. He settled in Pune: taking up work, marrying a young woman called Shireen, and raising a family.

The prelude to Meher Baba's birth

Shireen was a very practical person, normally disinterested in spiritual phenomena. Nevertheless, as Baba's birth approached, and into his infancy, she is said to have had remarkable dreams and visions.

In one, a sun-like person was being led in procession in a chariot, riveting the attention of joyous crowds. In another a vast river of all humanity flowed past her, looking expectantly towards the babe (Merwan) in her arms. Shireen also dreamt that a goddess emerged from the family well, worshipping and demanding her infant son.⁷



Childhood and Youth (1894 – 1913)

Merwan's birth and childhood

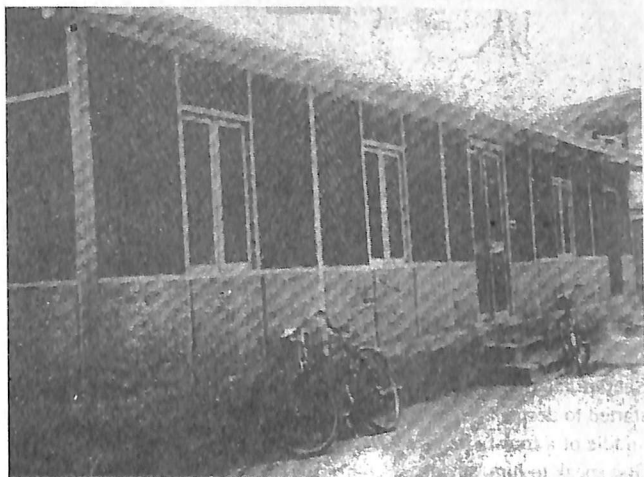
As dawn broke on 25 February 1894, Shireen painlessly gave birth to Merwan (Persian: "Sunlike") Irani — the future Meher Baba — in David Sassoon Hospital, Pune. Sheriar felt that this was the child of whom the voice had spoken.

The baby proved unusually attractive. Many people felt drawn to visit him often, sometimes going to great lengths to do so.

Extraordinary and seemingly miraculous incidents surround Merwan's childhood, but mostly he is remembered as a kind-hearted, devout boy — a natural leader who excelled in sports and literature.⁸

Teenage years

At sixteen, Merwan founded the Cosmopolitan Club in Pune. The Club's motto was "*love all and maintain brotherhood and unity.*"⁹ It raised money for the disadvantaged, blending castes and creeds in innocent pastimes and talks on philosophy and religion. Merwan was also winning acclaim through his spiritual poetry, some of which had been published in district newspapers such as Sanj Vartman and Bombay Samachar.¹⁰



Meher Baba's childhood home, Pune.

Meher Baba's Life

Merwan at age 13, Pune, 1907.

Transition to 'God-man' (1913 – 1921)

Babajan: the Sufi Master

An ancient Moslem lady called Babajan lived under a tree on Pune's streets. She was widely revered as a spiritual Master. The teenage Merwan was drawn to her. He sometimes ran errands for her.¹¹ Soon he began to neglect his studies at Deccan College to spend more time with Babajan.

One day in 1914, Merwan was taking leave of the old Sufi when she kissed him on the forehead. Merwan said this overwhelmed him with bliss.¹² On returning home he fell into an unusual state.

Spiritual 'coma'

For nine months he reportedly could neither eat nor sleep.¹³ His eyes stared vacantly into space. Merwan was unresponsive to everything around him — his body simply standing, sitting or walking in whatever posture it was placed. At best, he acted like an automaton.¹⁴

Deeply troubled by her son's condition, Shireen spent her time and money on having the best available doctors treat Merwan. No medication made the slightest difference to Merwan's state.¹⁵

Baba later told others that this peculiar state was due to his becoming unconscious of all material existence. He was "drowned" in the inconceivable bliss and peace of *God-Realisation* (permanent Oneness with God).



Babajan's
funeral in
Pune
(newsclipping),
1931.

Meher Baba's Life



Merwan, Pune, 1918.
He wore a turban to
disguise his head wound.

Painful return to human consciousness

It took seven years before Merwan returned completely to 'normal' human functioning.¹⁶ Friends and family thought Merwan had lost his mind. Particularly, they could not fathom the activities he now performed: sudden, long walks and runs; round-the-clock work; and secretly dashing his head against the floor or through windows.¹⁷

Merwan later explained that this behaviour eased the torment the Avatar experiences in returning to human consciousness and shouldering the universe's suffering.¹⁸

Despite such experiences pulsing through him, Merwan submitted to his mother's pleas for him to find work.

Thus these years (his twenties) saw him sporadically engaged as a tutor, running a theatre company, or serving in his father's shop.¹⁹

However, Merwan showed no interest in marrying or establishing a worldly career. He gave his earnings to passing beggars. He fed his meals to dogs. Sleep, food and dress apparently meant nothing to him.²⁰

Hindu and Muslim Masters

Merwan preferred to spend his days visiting renowned "holy persons": Tipoo Baba, Banemiyani Baba, Babajan, Upasni Maharaj, Narayan Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba and Sai Baba of Shirdi. The last five were well-known masters — each having a large following. Sai Baba of Shirdi is still revered all over India.²¹ Upasni, his acknowledged successor,²² revived ancient Vedic customs.

Meher Baba called the above his "*five Perfect Masters*" — God-realised souls who returned to ordinary consciousness to help humanity. He described them, but especially Babajan and Upasni,²³ as responsible for unveiling his Avatarhood. He said Babajan gave him Divine Bliss through her kiss and directed him to Sai.

Sai and Merwan prostrated to each other, Sai exclaiming "*Parvardigar!*" (God-Almighty!). Baba said that by this word, Sai bestowed Divine Power on him.²⁴

Directly after this, Merwan was impelled to go to Upasni, who he said awakened him to Divine Knowledge:

"Maharaj greeted me, so to speak, with a stone he threw



Top: Hazrat Babajan.
Below: Sai Baba of Shirdi.

Meher Baba's Life



*at me with great force. It struck me on my forehead exactly where Babajan had kissed me, hitting with such force that it drew blood ... But that blow from Maharaj was the stroke of dnyan (Divine Knowledge) ... with that stroke, Maharaj helped me return to ordinary consciousness."*²⁵

Each of the Masters certainly honoured Merwan. Narayan garlanded him and made him sit on his throne,²⁶ later telling people: "*He is Perfect man.*"²⁷ Tajuddin caressed Merwan's cheeks with roses, calling him "*My Rose, My heavenly Rose.*"²⁸ Both Upasni and Babajan worshipped Merwan's photograph. Also, Babajan repeatedly told visitors that "*My beloved son*" (Merwan) "*will shake the world.*"²⁹

For his part, Merwan proved an exceptional disciple. He was very dedicated to and dearly loved by Babajan and Upasni. Merwan spent much of his waking hours conducting or composing songs³⁰ and devotional programs in his Masters' honour, or serving them in some fashion.³¹ At night, he happily slept on the bare ground near them. Such was his enthusiasm that he reportedly



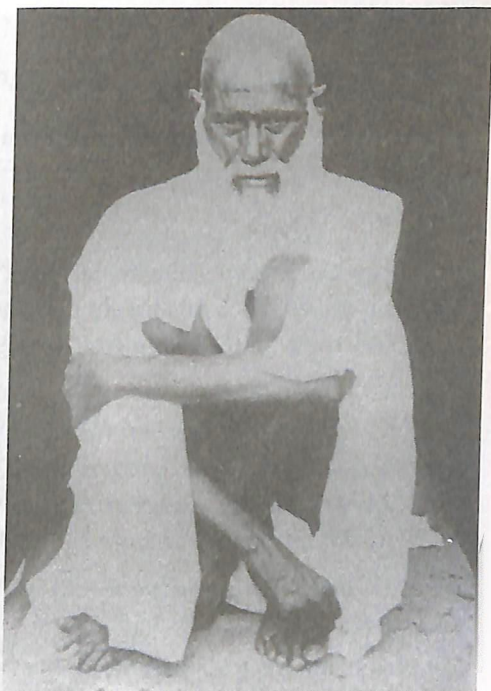
Top: Upasni Maharaj.
Below: Narayan Maharaj.

Meher Baba's Life

neglected his basic needs. Consequently, his clothes became vermin-ridden rags, and his body quite emaciated.³²

It was Merwan who later organised the publishing and distribution of Upasni's writings and it was he who built the first Upasni temple in India.³³ The funding and building of Babajan's tomb-shrine in Pune was also chiefly his work.³⁴

Right: Tajuddin Baba.
Below: Merwan (left foreground), performing Arti (prayers) at the Shrine Room he organised in Upasni Maharaj's honour. Pune, 1917-18.



Early Years: Service and Labour (1921 – 1931)

The first followers

Merwan had been residing closely with Upasni for six months when Upasni folded his hands before him and purportedly said: "*Merwan, you are the Avatar and I salute you.*"³⁵ Subsequently, Upasni advised Merwan's friends:

*"All of you take heed of what I tell you: Merwan is the Avatar. Now hold on to his feet, not with one hand but with both hands ... I have given my authority to Merwanji ... this boy will move the world. Humanity at large will be benefited at his hands."*³⁶

*"Your friend is now perfect. Always do what Merwan says and obey him implicitly."*³⁷

Upasni and other Masters began to turn over disciples to Merwan.³⁸

In this manner, in 1921, Merwan assumed his life's mission. He was

considerably younger than many of his followers (27 years old), but was already a spiritual authority. Local fishermen, athletes,³⁹ professional and business people were being drawn into his orbit. They decided to title him 'Meher Baba'



Meher Baba and early
followers on a trip
to Quetta, 1923.

Meher Baba's Life

Meher Baba at early
Meherabad, 1925.
Note the rough matting
buildings.



(Compassionate Father), or simply 'Baba'. From then on he was mainly known by these names.⁴⁰

Constant companionship

Initially, Baba established himself at a rough thatched hut on the road out of Pune.⁴¹ Thus was the first of many bases wherein Baba and his followers spent their days and nights singing devotional music; taking daunting walks; making pilgrimages; enjoying sports and holding spiritual discussions.⁴² Those followers who Baba allowed to reside with him had to abide by strict rules: abstaining from certain foods, intoxicants and sexual activity, and restricting their connections with others.⁴³

By these means, the early disciples were bound into constant companionship with their Master.⁴⁴ For decades to come, most of them continued living with him in complete obedience.

Early Meherabad: austerities and 'labour yoga'

Meher Baba constantly moved bases, but in May 1923, on a journey out of Bombay, he expressed particular delight over an area near Ahmednagar. By 1925, that spot was the main centre of his work: Meherabad.⁴⁵

Meher Baba's Life

Here, at an abandoned army barracks surrounded by thorny semi-desert, Baba initiated a stricter discipline he called '*Labour Yoga*': less sleep and food, and much clearing and building.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Meher Baba himself lived in austerity, such as, inside a man-made cave, or underground in his future crypt. Here he would usually fast — for months at a time on liquids alone.⁴⁷ He said he did this for the benefit of his disciples. He also daily concealed himself in a cramped, boxlike structure to write a book, unpublished to this day. If he slept, it was for no more than a couple of hours on the bare ground of a verandah, wrapped simply in a blanket.⁴⁸

Despite such austerities, extraordinary energy characterised Meher Baba's early years. Waking before anyone else, he sang and danced in the

dawn and roused the others to their duties.⁴⁹ He himself ground the group's daily grain and spent long hours roaming the surrounding hills, or tending to the poor and ill.

Free services

Through a spate of construction work, Baba and his companions built free facilities to serve the disadvantaged



Baba at Meherabad,
1927.

Meher Baba's Life

Meher Baba relaxing
with some of the boys he
taught at his schools,
1927.



populace. The services included lodgings for travellers, a home for lepers, a hospital, a dispensary and schools.⁵⁰ Soon Meherabad became a 'village' of some

500 workers, disciples and lodgers.⁵¹ Baba himself worked — regularly feeding and bathing residents.

Living conditions were basic, yet Baba sought to surrender essentials: rationing soap; stopping the use of tea. The money thus saved was used for various families or individuals whose plight had come to Baba's attention.

The drama of Meher Baba's schools

From time to time, Meher Baba entertained local 'untouchable' children with games. He taught them devotional songs and arranged for a temple to be built for their gods.⁵² This culminated in his opening a school which allowed children from all castes and faiths to study together.

Additionally, Baba began a boarding school at Arangaon and Toka where he taught teenage boys about spirituality: the Prem (Love) Ashram.

These schools excited interest and uproar. Various parents, objecting to the mixing of castes and creeds, withdrew their children. Some accused

Baba of "bewitching" the boys. Students and teachers reported mystical experiences. At times, entire classes broke into spontaneous weeping.⁵³

Lifelong silence

On July 10, 1925, Meher Baba came out of his hut but did not speak. For the rest of his life — another 44 years — he never uttered a word. After two years he also stopped writing, simply pointing to letters on an English alphabet board when he wished to communicate.

Meher Baba gave many reasons for this silence. He 'said' he 'speaks' and works⁵⁴ more eloquently through silence: "*Silent is love, and the lover loves my silence.*"⁵⁵ He also believed: "*Things that are real are always given and received in Silence.*"⁵⁶ And that:

*"Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past, in this present Avataric Form I observe Silence. You have asked for and been given enough words; it is now time to live them."*⁵⁷

“Love Calls Me to the West”: World Travels (1931 – 1937)

Mysterious traveller

During his late-thirties and mid-forties, Meher Baba's journeying became global: embracing the Middle East, Europe, the USA and the Far East. He brought his message to the West for the first time, but not in the manner of a typical Indian guru. Instead of giving public lectures or founding ashrams, he usually avoided publicity,⁵⁸ spending his time with small groups of interested people and quietly meeting families in their homes.

Sometimes he entered swirling city crowds, to stand there, anonymously. He donned local clothes, such as an Italian suit, or a French beret.

Baba visited great shrines and churches. He even took followers on outings to beaches, theatres, cafes, and galleries. Often he left such venues almost as soon as he arrived, explaining:

*“All this activity of mine, you observe outwardly, but what I do inwardly, you can never know.”*⁵⁹



Meher Baba's Life



Meher Baba in a Western suit, sitting in St. Mark's Square (Venice), with two Western followers, 1932.

Mixed response of the West

Baba's arrival in the West aroused considerable curiosity. There were write-ups in *Time* magazine (USA) and the

Daily Mirror (UK).⁶⁰ The British newspaper *Cinema* described him as "crash(ing) the front page headlines of every paper in the land".⁶¹

Pressmen speculated about Baba's role in Mahatma Gandhi's policies, because the two figures were meeting and corresponding at this time.⁶²

The media's usual attitude to Baba's presence was indifference and ridicule, although sympathetic articles also appeared. Some writers gave vent to slander and lewd insinuation.⁶³ Meher Baba refused to react to the publicity, whether good or bad. He forbade his followers to write in his defence.

Scholar Robert Ellwood aptly described Baba as "one of the enthusiasms of the '30s".⁶⁴ In this period, many Americans and Europeans had only to glance at Baba before they broke into tears and dedicated their lives to him. Celebrities such as Nadine Tolstoy, Princess Matchabelli, *Everyman* editor Charles Purdom and inventor Thomas Watson became followers upon first contact.⁶⁵

Thus a small party of Western disciples emerged who had joyous, close interactions with the controversial "*Indian Messiah*". Meher Baba treated them to picnics and innocent games — all of which flowed into

Meher Baba's Life

Hollywood, 1932.
Meher Baba with actress
Talullah Bankhead.



spiritual lessons. In 1937, he took a party of Westerners back to India and trained them at Nasik and Meherabad.

Film projects

During this phase, Meher Baba visited Hollywood. He personally met many celebrated actors, screen writers, producers and directors, and visited major studios. One reception given by Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks was attended by one thousand film celebrities.⁶⁶ Meher Baba believed that the film industry had great spiritual potential.⁶⁷ He initiated various film projects involving several script writers and directors.

'Agents' and 'cables'

Also during this phase, Baba's disciples observed occasions when some stranger would appear, make 'idle' conversation, or gaze into Baba's eyes. Immediately after this, the stranger would leave. These exchanges seemed intentional. Meher Baba explained them as contacts with his spiritual 'agents', who worked on other planes of consciousness.⁶⁸ Sometimes he would send a disciple off to Warsaw, Moscow or China — merely to give a coin to such an 'agent', or to visit a place and return. According to Meher Baba, this 'laid cables' for his work.⁶⁹

Indian Travels and Contacting the God-mad (1937 – 1949)

Indian focus

Turbulent times erupted at this point: India's independence struggle; World War II; the Indo-Pakistani War of Partition; the spread of totalitarian regimes. Meher Baba's trips to the West ceased.

Instead, Baba's activity turned homeward: to seclusions and relentless travel in his homeland. He said he thereby controlled developments both at home and abroad.

In five years alone (1941-1946), Meher Baba covered 75,000 miles and contacted over 20,000 people individually.⁷⁰ Meher Baba's pattern now was to arrive anywhere that anyone was secretly and earnestly seeking God or God's help — at places of pilgrimage, city slums, jungles, mountains, obscure villages. He would render the assistance that person had — unknown to

others — sought. After this, he left without revealing his identity. In this manner, he individually contacted and bowed to hundreds of thousands of spiritual seekers, sick, elderly and needy people.



Meher Baba on top of Seclusion Hill, Meherazad, December 1947. In the distance can be seen the tiny hut in which he did major seclusion work during this period.

Meher Baba's Life

The Cage Room, Meherabad, that Meher Baba used for seclusion work during the 1940s.



Harrowing journeys of loving service

Such excursions were no holiday. Although Meher Baba was entering his fifties, he journeyed in rough, cramped conditions, by any and every available means. Baba kept the pace so frantic that for days to weeks on end, he and his travelling party ate and slept very little. Baths and adequate clothes were a luxury. Baba's bed was merely the shade of a tree, or perhaps a railway platform. He weathered rain, mud, flood, snow and scorching sun often just to contact a single individual.⁷¹ Sometimes, for example, during the Calcutta famine of 1943, he also gave mass-feedings to hundreds or thousands of people.⁷²

Acknowledgement by yogis and holy men

Reportedly, as Meher Baba predicted, various 'holy men' became vocal about him. Although he passed by in disguise, they would point him out to surrounding crowds, proclaiming to all within hearing:

"No one fully knows the limits of your greatness ... You have the power to flood and destroy the whole world ... You are the spiritual authority of the time." (Piz Fazl Shah)⁷³

"Meher Baba has within him the whole world ... He is the Master of everyone ... He is in this world, that which is above it, and

Meher Baba's Life

below it ... He is in everyone ... in one glance He sees the entire continent of India." (Bhorwala Baba of Bhor)⁷⁴

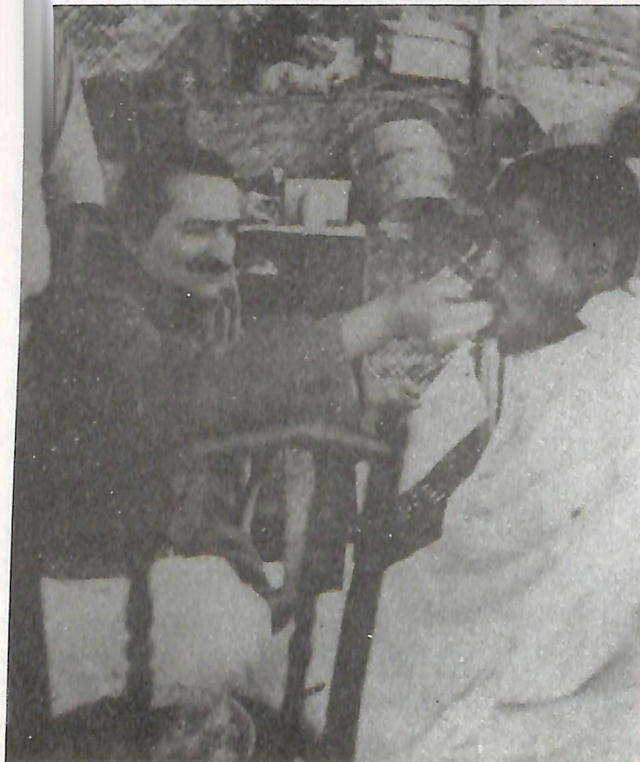
"Here no one knows you; I have seen you and recognized you as the true Avatar of Vishnu ... My life's desire is fulfilled ... Hail God Vishnu!" (A Panchgani adept)⁷⁵

Work with the God-intoxicated

Throughout the Indian sub-continent live a variety of humanity Meher Baba identified as "*masts*" (Persian for God-intoxicated or God-mad). These are persons purportedly so enraptured by spiritual experiences that they are unconscious of their bodies. Often they inhabit open fields or latrines — oblivious of discomfort.⁷⁶ Despite their abnormal mannerisms, the *masts* are revered for their unspoken love for God. Some have devotees and carers.

Baba's work with *masts* intensified between 1937 to 1949. In this time, Baba contacted thousands of *masts*. He went to great lengths to locate

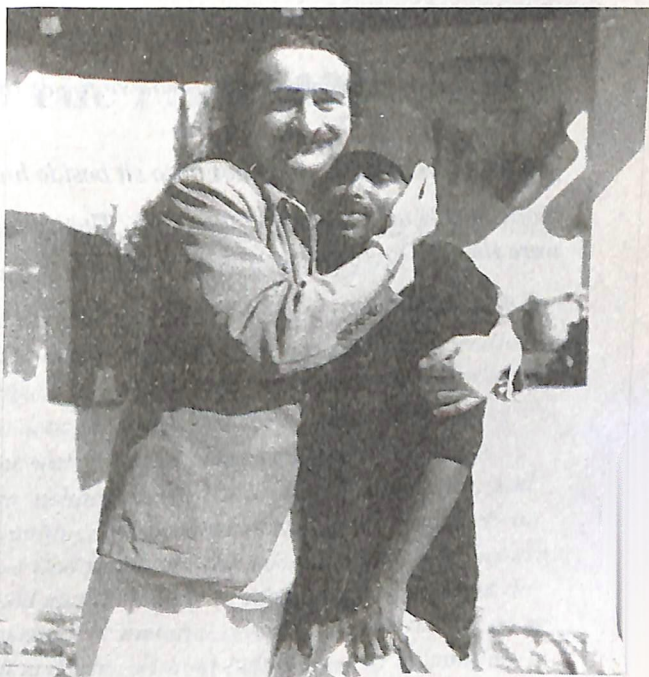
and care for these and ordinary mentally-ill persons, fulfilling their slightest whim. This was no mean feat, for many God-mad were by nature abusive and uncooperative. Yet Baba said: "*I work for the masts, and knowingly or unknowingly, they work for me.*"⁷⁷



Meher Baba feeding
one of the God-mad.

Meher Baba's Life

Bangalore, 1939.
Baba with *mast*
Shariat Khan.



Meher Baba established seven centres for the *masts* at Ajmer, Jabulpur, Bangalore, Ranchi, Mahabaleshwar, Satara and Meherabad.⁷⁸

Despite their general dissociation from mundane reality, many of the God-mad showed great respect for Meher Baba, saying:

*"You are Allah
(God); you
have brought
forth the
creation, and*

Washing a *mast*,
Bangalore Mast Ashram,
1940.



Meher Baba's Life

once in a thousand years you come down to see the play of what you have created."⁷⁹

*"He is God Himself ... I am not fit to sit beside him."*⁸⁰

*"Look at this man's face and forehead. They shine as if the sun were there. Can't you recognize who he is?"*⁸¹

The New Life Phase (1949 – 1952)

The New Life

Meher Baba's pace did not slacken as he entered his late fifties. Rather, he began a demanding lifestyle he called the "New Life".

"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, anger, greed and lust; and who, to accomplish this, do no lustful actions, do no harm to anyone, do no backbiting, do not seek material possessions or power, who accept no homage, neither covet honour 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; who believe in the lovers of God and the reality of Manifestation, and yet do not expect any spiritual or material reward; who do not let go of 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.

*"This New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is no one to live it."*⁸²

Establishments closed down

To accomplish this, in 1949 all establishments that had grown up around Meher Baba were closed down. Most belongings were given away or sold. Some close followers were instructed to find work elsewhere. Nevertheless, Baba ensured that everyone received new homes and alternative sources of income. New homes were also found for the vast 'zoo' of pets that had accrued.⁸³

The Companions' gypsy wanderings

Baba reduced his group to a score of "Companions". He and they now became homeless wanderers, travelling mostly on foot, visiting thousands of yogis, saints and seekers. Baba's movements and identity were kept



The New Life.
Baba with Adi K Irani
and Gustadji at Benares,
1949.

secret, and for a time, a colourful assortment of animals accompanied them, giving the effect of a small circus.

For nearly two and a half years the

Companions lived like this. Journeying widely, they depended on begging, and the receipt of spontaneous gifts. Strangers provided food and shelter, without knowing to whom they gave.⁸⁴

Living hopeless and helpless

The New Life meant being "hopeless and helpless".⁸⁵ Every day was a penniless fresh start, and money was surrendered to anyone who asked for it. The group had to subsist on one meal a day, and no food was to be kept from any previous day. Every Companion (including Baba) had to wash and clean their own utensils. No one could express negative moods or expect to depend on anyone or anything — including Baba himself. Baba was now but a fellow traveller: the group's elder brother. Now group meetings decided the course of action, although Baba's orders still had to be obeyed.

Meher Baba's Life

The New Life.
Dehra Dun, March 1,
1950. Keki Nalawala
gives food to Meher
Baba.



Apparent vagabonds

Difficulties were the flavour of the New Life, especially as Baba seemed intent on meandering through regions savaged by the violent Indo-Pakistani Partition. There were dramas, deprivations, and near-catastrophes. Baba was abused and elbowed. Part of the Companions' meagre belongings were stolen. More than once, the group was detained under suspicion of being a group of rebels.⁸⁶

Man-o-nash

In 1951, the New Life culminated in Meher Baba spending one hundred days in seclusion. At the end of this he entered a four-month phase he called "*Man-o-nash*". He said it represented the annihilation of the mind — the state of absolute helplessness.⁸⁷

The Free Life (1952 – 1959)

Merging all distinctions

At 58 years of age Meher Baba declared *Man-o-nash* complete. He now launched a sequence of short phases, such as the *Complicated Free Life*, the *Fiery Free Life* and the *Full Free Life*. Collectively, this new period is described as the *Free Life*.⁸⁸

Baba explained the Free Life as a complete “*merging of distinctions*”. The New Life and the Old Life, human-ness and Divinity,⁸⁹ — even ordinary life and spiritual life — would all be “*blended*”. Meher Baba said that through his Free Life people would understand how, “*everyone is One with God*”.⁹⁰

To demonstrate the merging of distinctions, Baba began to live more like an ordinary householder. He also shifted residence from Meherabad to Meherazad (north of Ahmednagar).



Declaration of Avatarhood

It was in 1954, at Hamirpur, that Meher Baba publicly declared that he is the Avatar.⁹¹

Thereafter, he elaborated and explained this claim again and again, especially through circulated

Meher Baba's Life

Meherabad, September 14, 1954, a few weeks before Meher Baba gave up the use of the alphabet board.



messages at this time: *The Highest of the High* (1953), *Final Declaration* (1954) and *Universal Message* (1958).

Growing acclaim

Previously, because Meher Baba worked incognito and travelled widely, it had been difficult to access him. Now Baba was publicly beseeching humanity to “*come all unto Me*”.⁹² He made himself available to anyone who wanted his love or blessing, even calling Westerners over for extended stays.⁹³

The response was overwhelming. 100,000 to 150,000 people came to see Baba at some places.⁹⁴ The entire populations of certain towns and villages became devotees.⁹⁵ Centres dedicated to Meher Baba arose both in India and the West.

Baba had to arrange special gatherings for these multitudes. Despite this, and the deluge of correspondence he now had to address, Meher Baba individually met, embraced and lovingly assisted his visitors. Additionally, he made surprise detours to visit those who had wanted to meet him but were unable.⁹⁶

Joking, teasing, caressing and encouraging, Baba mingled freely with the swelling crowds, abiding with them for days or weeks without a break. He would distribute food and gifts to all who came, or have programs of

Meher Baba's Life



Meher Baba serving
lunch, Meherabad,
September 30, 1954.

devotional music
staged for their
entertainment. He
sat amongst them,
ate with them, and
bowed to them,
explaining:

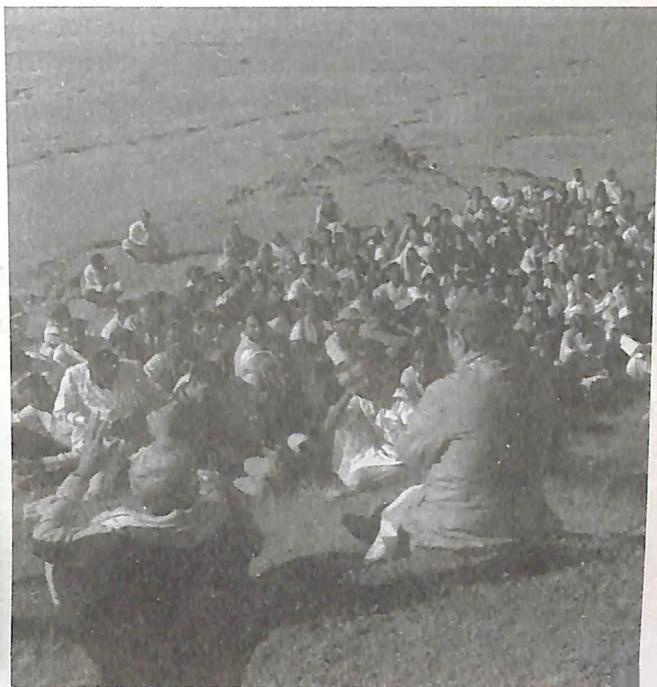
*"Not as man to
man, but as
God to God, I
bow down to
you so as to
save you the
trouble of
bowing down
to me."*⁹⁷



Pandharpur,
November 6, 1954.

Meher Baba's Life

Meher Baba with a group on Meherazad Hill (Seclusion Hill), November 12-17, 1955.



Silent gestures, silent books

Over decades, Baba's fingers had traced out sequences of letters — again and again, until the meaning was clear. Disciples transcribed these dictations during their rare free moments, often with just a suitcase for a desk, or typing on their laps during train trips! This is how Baba's books were written.⁹⁸

On October 7, 1954, Baba abandoned the alphabet board. Now the writing of Baba's books became even more arduous. Meher Baba communicated solely through gestures.

Despite this obstacle, Baba published his words more than ever. Indeed, the 1950s saw a flurry of publication: Meher Baba's *God Speaks* (1955), *Life at Its Best* (1957) and *Beams* (1958).

There were lengthy articles in Indian newspapers;⁹⁹ messages such as *The Meaning of Love*, *My Wish* and *On Obedience*; 'Life' circulars;¹⁰⁰ and books, reports and journals written under his direction: *The Awakener* journal (begun 1953), *Journey with God* (1954), *Listen Humanity* (1957), and *Stay with God* (1959).

Such writings by and about Baba attracted literary and scholarly interest. For example, Dr. Evan Wentz, a noted Buddhologist, was deeply impressed with *God Speaks*.¹⁰¹ He wrote the foreword for *Life at Its Best*.¹⁰²

Meher Baba's Life



Meher Baba gesturing.
Mahabaleshwar,
October 1950.



Ahmednagar,
September 26, 1954.

Sufism reoriented

Meher Baba's writings greatly excited one branch of the Western Sufi Order founded by Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882 - 1929).¹⁰³ American Sufi leader Rabia Martin was convinced of Baba's status and her Australian counterpart, Baron von Frankenburg, was using readings from Baba's *Discourses*. When the respective successors of these two, Ivy Duce and poet Francis Brabazon,¹⁰⁴ accepted Meher Baba as their Master, many Western Sufis followed suit.

On July 20, 1952, Meher Baba reoriented the Sufi Charter to focus on his message. He projected a similar reorienting of all the major religions.

Meher Baba's Life



Meher Baba's injuries made movement painful for him. Here he is being assisted into a vehicle at Bombay, December, 1957.

Accidents and ailments

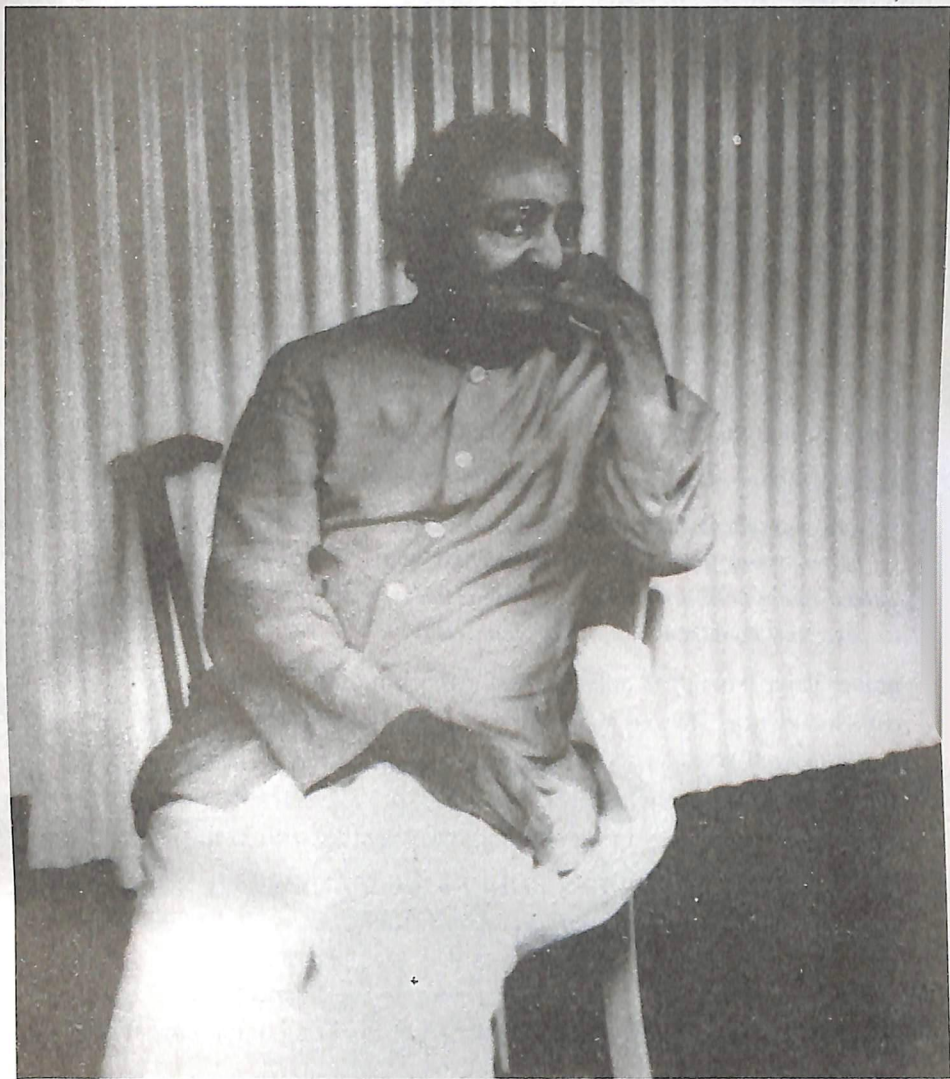
Throughout Baba's life, sudden, inexplicable illnesses afflicted him. From now on these became more prominent.

Baba was involved in two car accidents. One accident occurred near Prague (Oklahoma, USA) in May 1952. The other took place at Satara (India) in December 1956. In the first, Baba's left side was badly damaged from head to foot. In the second, Baba's right side was badly damaged from head to foot.¹⁰⁵

Physical complications followed, placing Meher Baba in pain for years. Often he was unable to walk without assistance, yet he never uttered so much as a groan.¹⁰⁶ Doctors were unable to remedy the problem. According to Baba, this was because the infirmities served a higher purpose: to "*break the backbone of the machine age.*"¹⁰⁷

Westward again

On crutches or in a carrying chair, Meher Baba nevertheless continued to respond to his followers' desire to see him. He made tours within India, again travelled to Europe and the United States, and journeyed twice to Australia — first in August 1956 and then in June 1958. Baba was especially intent upon visiting centres his followers had created for him.

Meher Baba's Life

Meher Baba during his visit
to Avatar's Abode,
Australia, in June 1958.
This was during a phase of
intense suffering for him.
Note walking sticks in
background.

The Long Seclusion (1959 – 1968)

Seclusion and inner contact

Meher Baba turned seventy years of age in 1964. Half a century of relentless activity had taken its toll on his body. He suffered increasing infirmity and long bouts of illnesses.¹⁰⁸

Baba withdrew into what has been called the long seclusion.¹⁰⁹ For the next decade — excepting occasional visits to some charitable institutes — Baba never left Meherazad and Guruprasad (the residence of the former Queen of Baroda, on the outskirts of Pune).

Earlier, Meher Baba explained his gradual withdrawal:

*"It is only to establish the internal connections that the external connections have been maintained till now. The time has come for being bound in the chain of internal connections. Hence external contact is no longer necessary."*¹¹⁰

Meher Baba generally stopped seeing visitors and answering correspondence. He told his followers to expect no further interviews, gatherings or discourses from him.¹¹¹ Instead he sent out messages on the importance of remembering him "*wherever you are staying*".¹¹² He began to stress the need for developing inner contact with him.

Meanwhile, Baba continued his life-long practice of financially supporting disadvantaged families and individuals. In 1959, he created a Perpetual Trust for the continued support of such persons; for the creation of services and facilities near his future tomb; and for the support of his close disciples. He further confirmed this in his *Last Will and Testament*.¹¹³

Messages of love

Despite ill health, Meher Baba directed the writing of more books, including *The Everything and the Nothing* (1963), and poems by Francis Brabazon. Baba himself continued dictating telegrams and cables — sending out detailed instructions and a stream of living words to followers — sometimes individually.¹¹⁴ Increasingly, his message was the importance of wholehearted reliance on him 'without expectations'.

Meher Baba's Life

Guruprasad, Pune,
May 16, 1961.



'Householder' lifestyle

The long seclusion expanded the 'ordinary householder' lifestyle of the Free Life. Baba now spent time enjoying the gardens at Meherazad and Guruprasad, walking pets, playing games, or listening to records and novels being read. He said he used such recreation to lighten his burden of universal suffering and to work on other levels of consciousness.

Occasionally groups of followers performed dramas to entertain him. Long Sunday sessions of devotional 'song feasts' became a feature of this period. Famous Indian singers took part and some visitors were allowed to attend these events.¹¹⁵



Meher Baba sitting in
the gardens at
Meherazad with his
close disciple, Mehera.
Late 1960s.



Looking out over the
East-West Gathering,
Guruprasad, Pune,
November 1962.

The last public viewings

Only a few times in the 1960s (1960, 1962 and 1965) did Baba permit crowds to see him.¹¹⁶ Consequently, each opportunity was greatly anticipated and cherished by his followers. Thousands travelled vast distances for a mere word, glance or touch.

Baba rarely allowed these visitors to bow to, garland, or offer him anything.¹¹⁷ He preferred to embrace or bow to people himself. However, his current infirmity made it difficult for him even to stand or walk for any length of time. Therefore, he told the crowds:

*"All these years I used to embrace you, my lovers, and bow down to your love for me. Now I cannot embrace you, so I allow you to bow down to my love for you"*¹¹⁸

Even casual observers who were not committed to Meher Baba were astounded by the attention and affection he showered on each who came — poor or rich, ugly or beautiful, vermin-ridden or clean.¹¹⁹

The East-West Gathering (1962) brought together over 3,100 people from many different countries.¹²⁰ It was one of the first occasions when such a large international group met before an Indian teacher in India.

Meher Baba's Life

East-West Gathering,
Guruprasad, Pune,
November 1962.



The anti-drug message and Western youth

During the 1960s, the West stirred with genuine interest in all things spiritual. This was accompanied by much experimental drug-use. Hallucinogenic drugs were being touted as a 'quick' path to spiritual insight.

In 1965, a few young Americans, in their passionate quest for spiritual truth, had hitch-hiked and wandered all the way to Baba's residence. Despite his seclusion, Baba met them and answered their questions, explaining the nature of drug experiences. He emphasised: "*If God can be found through the medium of any drug, God is not worthy of being God.*"¹²¹ Meher Baba requested the spreading of his accompanying message throughout the West.

Subsequently, Meher Baba became one of the most well-known and popular spiritual figures among Western

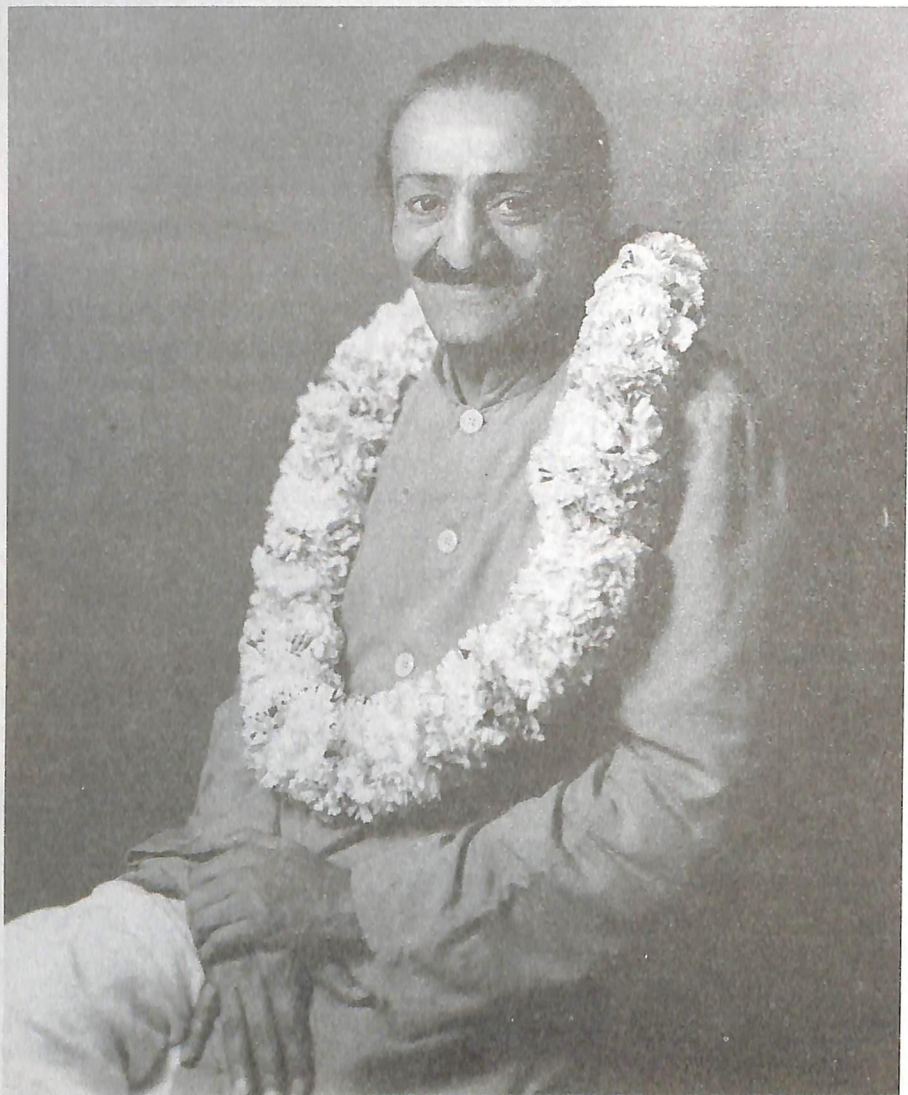


Meher Baba in his usual
seat at Meherazad,
1964.

Meher Baba's Life

youth of the 1960s and 1970s.¹²² Several prominent rock music celebrities, including Melanie Safka, songwriter Billy Nicholls,¹²³ Ronnie Lane of *The Faces*,¹²⁴ and Pete Townsend of *The Who*, referred to Meher Baba in their music,¹²⁵ which generated further interest. Thousands of young Westerners were inspired to abandon the use of psychedelic drugs and follow Meher Baba.¹²⁶

This picture of Baba was
popular in the 1960s — taken
in Washington DC, USA,
July 30, 1956.



The Final Year: Completion (1968 – 1969)

'Exclusion' work

From May 1968 onwards, Meher Baba deepened his seclusion until it became what he termed 'exclusion'. Even close disciples were excluded.¹²⁷ In fact, no one at all could enter Baba's room for several hours each day.¹²⁸ Daily activities ground to a halt.

Alone and drenched in perspiration, Meher Baba did what he termed his 'inner work'. To keep his link with the physical world, he said he had to hammer his thighs with his fist until they were stiff and bruised.¹²⁹

Baba believed that this final 'work' would render to humanity his greatest assistance of all:

*"None can have the least idea of the intensity of the work I am doing in this seclusion ... Although for me the burden of the work is crushing, the results will be intensely felt by all the people in the world."*¹³⁰

Certainly Meher Baba's message spread suddenly and rapidly throughout many lands after 1968. There was a swell of interest and respect amongst people who had never met Baba, especially in the West. Moreover, these newcomers displayed strong reverence for Baba's words and instructions, following them rigorously.¹³¹



Meher Baba's Life

Hints and failing health

Only a month into his 'exclusion seclusion', Meher Baba indicated that, *"My work is done. It is completed 100% to my satisfaction."*¹³²

Subsequently, he dropped cryptic remarks such as:

*"Everlasting, never ending, never dying, ever the same, and His Oneness in its fullness plays in manyness His game."*¹³³

Baba's health deteriorated further. He was diagnosed as suffering severe anaemia.

Physical passing

On January 30, 1969, only a month before Baba's 75th birthday, violent spasms shook his body, the cause of which could not be determined. He referred to this as his *"crucifixion"*¹³⁴ and signed: *"My time has come."*¹³⁵

Nevertheless, right up until his physical demise, Meher Baba remained fully lucid and in control. Earlier, he explained:

*"I am not this body. It is only a coat I put on when I visit you. I sit with you, play with you, and laugh with you, but simultaneously I am Infinite Consciousness, working on all planes of existence."*¹³⁶

The next day (January 31), the spasms intensified. Meher Baba called for a board on which was printed the following poem by Hafiz (a medieval Sufi Master). It was read to the disciples:



The bedroom in Meherabad: scene of Meher Baba's physical passing.

Meher Baba's Life

"Befitting a fortunate slave, carry out every command of the Master without any question of 'why' and 'what'.

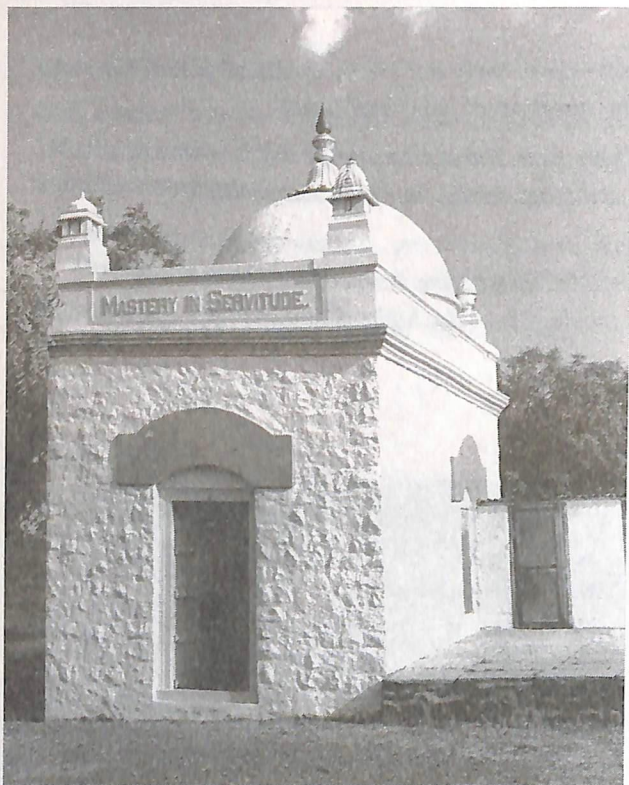
"About what you hear from the Master, never say it is wrong, because my dear, the fault lies in your own incapacity to understand him.

*"I am a slave of the Master who has released me from ignorance. Whatever my Master does is of the highest benefit to all concerned."*¹³⁷

Finally, Baba joked about all the medicines he was taking and told his doctor: *"Do not forget that I am God."*¹³⁸ In a final spasm, Meher Baba's body expired. Many followers reported unusual occurrences at the time of Baba's physical demise.¹³⁹



Meher Baba's body in his crypt.



Meher Baba's Samadhi
(tomb-shrine)
at Meherabad,
September 14, 1954.

Aftermath

"I never come, I never go;

*I am never born, I never die."*¹⁴⁰

Between May and June of 1969, several hundred devotees from many countries came to Pune to participate in the program Meher Baba had pre-planned for that time. They also visited Meherabad to pay homage to him at his modest tomb-shrine. Many reported an extraordinary acknowledgement of his personal, living presence.¹⁴¹

In the months, years, and decades that have followed, increasing numbers of people — especially Westerners — have been drawn to, and accept, Meher Baba as their Master, despite having had no physical contact with him. Several books have been written which collate remarkable tales of this phenomenon.¹⁴²

Meher Baba's Life

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Meher Baba's Life

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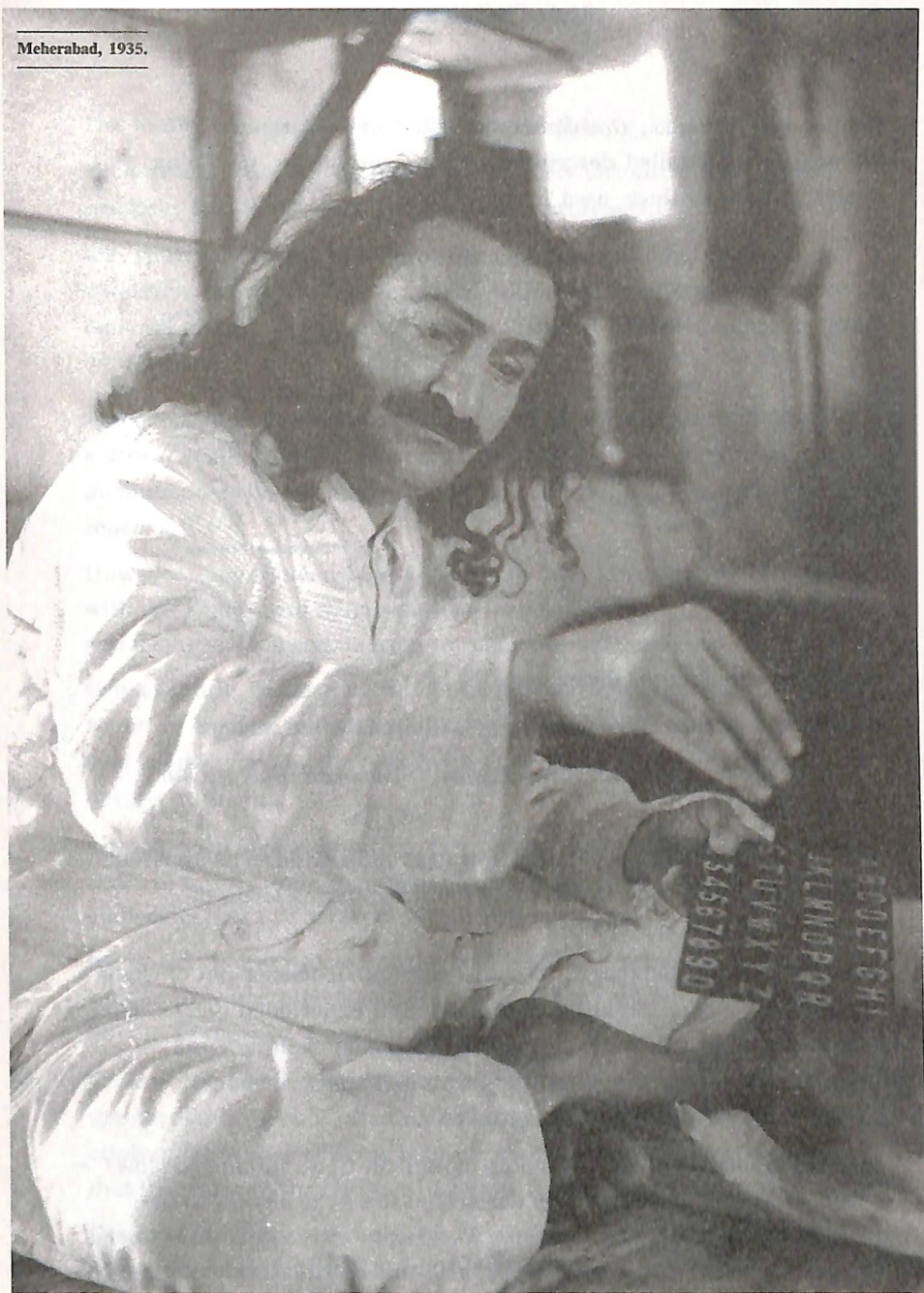
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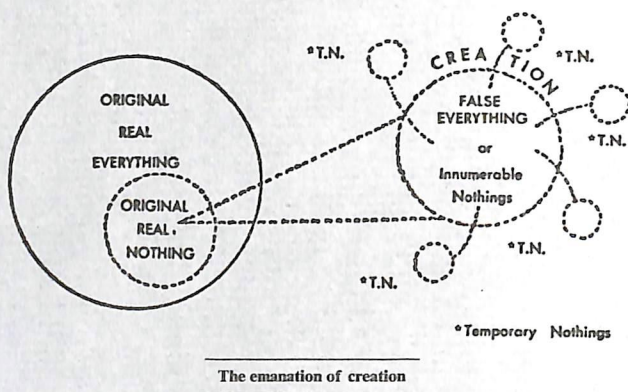
Meherabad, 1935.



Meher Baba's Concepts

Meher Baba's Concepts

[Meher Baba's books, *God Speaks* and *The Everything and the Nothing*, offer detailed descriptions of his cosmology, including diagrams such as those used here.]



Reality and illusion: the divine game

According to Meher Baba, everything is ultimately one reality:

*"Absolute Oneness prevails in Reality. Space and time are but illusory."*¹

All souls are One,² infinite, eternal, formless and Divine. The apparent difference between souls is due solely to their differing levels of consciousness and experience.³

Meher Baba explained that the cosmos burst into existence out of God's original whim⁴: the initial urge⁵ to know and experience itself.⁶ God found infinite ways to do this through the constant evolution and dissolution of worlds, universes, life-forms and spiritual states. Consequently, phenomena became infinite.

Thus everything is ultimately nothing more than God's infinite shadow⁷ — a play of forms or stages through which God seeks the answer to the question: 'Who am I?'⁸ In this sense, all sensory and mental phenomena (our body, planets, and even heavens, hells and spiritual states) are just illusory and passing. *"In reality, the soul is always God without beginning and without end."*⁹

Meher Baba's Concepts

The soul's journey: from evolution to involution

Meher Baba describes each soul as originally unconsciously God, gradually becoming more self-aware as it evolves.¹⁰

The spiritual evolution occurs over countless millions of years, on numerous planets.¹¹ The soul starts with a gas form and evolves through mineral, plant, invertebrate, bird and mammal forms, culminating in the human form.

According to Meher Baba, attaining human form completes the soul's journey to full, individualised consciousness. By this stage, subtle and mental bodies have entirely formed and the soul has a focus: a strong sense of 'I'.¹²

However, simultaneously, a false ego (a false identification of one's self with one's body and mind) has been created, through the impressions and desires which accrue from so many pre-human lives.¹³

Consequently, the soul is still not free. Instead, it is launched on a vast round of human reincarnations, which continue for as long as the soul is bewitched by the possibilities offered by these rebirths in the cosmic illusion.

The experience of alternating states of pain and pleasure, and a growing sense of futility and impermanence, eventually tires the soul of illusion's endless games. At this point, involution begins.

Involution is the process of the soul realising its Divinity, through sudden or sequential progress inwards. Baba says this occurs along Seven Planes of Consciousness.¹⁴

Each of the Seven Planes has many stages¹⁵ and specific, increasingly spectacular powers, enchantments, heavens and experiences.¹⁶ The attainment of each of these states is such an overwhelming experience that the aspirant may believe he or she is God.¹⁷

Consequently, Baba views involution as normally a slow, gradual process.¹⁸ A soul may reincarnate many lifetimes on one Plane alone.

According to Baba, involution ultimately culminates in an about-face he calls God-realisation. Meher Baba cautioned that although this is the Goal towards which all are destined, it is actually extremely difficult to achieve:

Meher Baba's Concepts

*"The term 'God-realisation' is used glibly by many people. As a matter of fact, God-realisation means actual Union with God. Those who say it is easy are either hopelessly ignorant or pitifully stupid."*¹⁹

He describes God-realisation as the "real death" — the final discarding of all separate consciousness.²⁰ The aspirant 'drowns' forever,²¹ completely merging with the Truth (God). Thereafter, the soul lives eternally as God in everything. The soul achieves the reparation of all wrongs, the unravelling of all enigmas,²² and discovers that it always has been the Infinite Reality:²³

*"... duality is transcended in the abiding knowledge of one's identity with the Infinite Reality. The world of shadows is at an end, and the curtain of illusion is forever drawn. The distress of limited consciousness is replaced by the tranquillity and bliss of truth-consciousness, and the restlessness of temporal existence is swallowed up in the peace of eternity."*²⁴

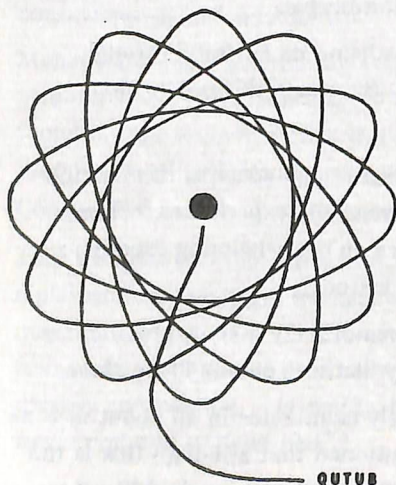
The spiritual hierarchy

According to Meher Baba, there exists a hierarchy in charge of the cosmos.²⁵ It is composed of several thousand advanced souls stationed

on various Planes.²⁶ Each one spiritually 'governs' particular cities, regions, nations, or planets.

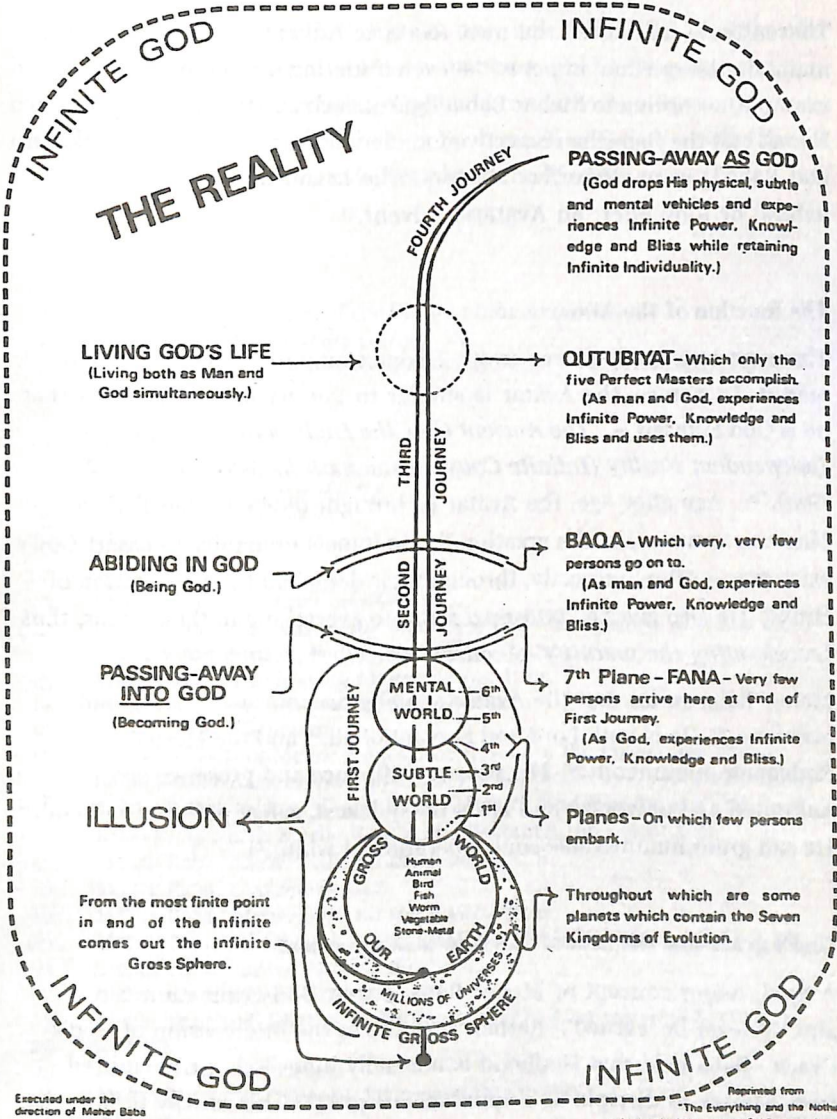
Above all this, at any particular time, there will be 56 God-realised souls.²⁷ Five of these head the cosmos.

These are the Five Perfect Masters: humans who have become God but have returned to full and perfect human consciousness in order to serve humanity.²⁸ They are the spiritual pivot of the universe.²⁹ 'Membership' of the Five Perfect Masters changes as various ones depart their bodies, but at any one time there are always only five.³⁰



The Qutub
(Perfect Master) as
pivot of the universe.

THE FOUR JOURNEYS



Meher Baba's Concepts

Meher Baba held that one or two centuries after the Avatar drops his physical body, Perfect Masters become known and prominent. Until that time the Avatar Himself is in direct control of the cosmos, and Perfect Masters keep their identities hidden.³¹

Thereafter — and until the next Avataric Advent — Perfect Masters maintain the spiritual impetus³² — even initiating new faiths. For example, according to Meher Baba, figures such as Mahavira, Lao Tzu, Nanak and the Bab (the respective founders of Jainism, Taoism, Sikhism and Baha'i) were all Perfect Masters, who began their movements just before, or long after, an Avataric Advent.³³

The function of the Avatar

The most important 'player' in the Divine Game is the Avatar or God-man.³⁴ In nature, the Avatar is similar to Perfect Masters, except that he is God Himself — *"The Ancient One, the Highest of the High, the Independent Reality (Infinite Consciousness of the Beyond state of God)."*³⁵ Age after age, the Avatar is 'brought down' by the Perfect Masters, to maintain His creation.³⁶ He impels humanity to assert God's existence — often indirectly, through their denial and condemnation of Him.³⁷ He also gives a *"universal push"* to everything in the cosmos, thus *"accelerating the maturity of consciousness"*.³⁸

Meher Baba states that the Avatar actually becomes everything and everyone.³⁹ He is both Lord and Servant of all,⁴⁰ and the eternal Redeemer of humanity.⁴¹ His powers, influence and presence are unlimited and universal, and He is the quickest, safest path to Godhood.⁴² He can grant innumerable souls liberation at whim.⁴³

God's grace and the hem of the God-man's garment

A final, major concept of Meher Baba is that God-realisation can almost never be 'earned'. Rather, it is due to the intercession of God's Grace. Baba held that Godhood is normally inherited:⁴⁴ transmitted from Master to disciple as a spontaneous gift.⁴⁵ This is why it is essential to 'hold fast to the hem of his garment' — i.e., maintain one's spiritual 'link' with Meher Baba through ever-increasing association with him, whether physical or mental.

Meher Baba's Concepts

*"If you want to see God and to become One with God, then the only solution is to catch hold of the hem of My garment. If you obey Me and hold on to My garment's hem, where I am, you will be."*⁴⁶

Meher Baba held that God's Grace can only descend on the disciple who has so fully surrendered to the Master that he or she is not even conscious of having surrendered. Godhood can only manifest in the disciple who no longer seeks anything for himself or herself — whether material or spiritual — save to better please the Master.

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Ahmednagar, 1952.



Meher Baba's Methods

Meher Baba's Methods

[Many of the spiritual methods Meher Baba emphasises are detailed in the book *Discourses*.]

Neither teaching nor practices

Those who follow Meher Baba do not normally engage in doctrinal study or disciplines such as chanting or meditation. Meher Baba generally ignored set techniques and fixed doctrines. He said:

*"I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand, therefore, that I lay down no precepts."*¹

Baba explained that "*approach to Truth is individual*".² Ultimately, each aspirant must work out his or her own salvation³ and:

*"... give up all forms of parrotry. Start practicing what you truly feel to be true and justly to be just."*⁴

According to Meher Baba, we should seek spiritual growth mostly through everyday living, because "*spirituality means meeting life fully and adequately, without being overpowered by the opposites*".⁵ Baba emphasised that God could not be found by "*running away from life*" but rather by "*establishing unity with the One in the many*".⁶ This can only be done when we start practicing — in every situation — "*the art of right adjustment to others ... (which) means self-forgetfulness and love*".⁷

However, there are certainly methods of everyday living which Meher Baba particularly encouraged. These are detailed below.

Love

*"There is no sadhana (discipline) greater than love, there is no law higher than love, and there is no goal that is beyond love — for love in its divine state becomes infinite. God and love are identical, and one who has divine love already has God."*⁸

"Divine love," Baba stressed, "*is the solution to our difficulties and problems*."⁹ He often spoke about love's transformative power:

*"Love is dynamic in action and contagious in effect. Pure love is matchless in majesty, it has no parallel in power and there is no darkness it cannot dispel."*¹⁰

Meher Baba's Methods

*"Love is essentially self-communicative: those who do not have it catch it from those who have it. Those who receive love from others cannot be its recipients without giving a response which, in itself, is the nature of love. True love is unconquerable and irresistible. It goes on gathering power and spreading until eventually it transforms everyone it touches."*¹¹

As this implies, Meher Baba viewed love as the best means for realising the Oneness underlying all phenomena:

*"To love one soul is like adding its life to your own; your life is, as it were, multiplied and you virtually live in two centres. If you love the whole world, you vicariously live in the whole world."*¹²

Within daily life, Baba wanted people to express such love as:

*"... a constant wish to love and be loving, and a non-calculating will to sacrifice in every walk of life, high and low, big and small, between home and office, states and cities, countries and continents."*¹³

Establishing a Lover-Beloved relationship with God, with its depth of longing for 'Union' with the Beloved, and its painful awareness of separation, is another theme of Meher Baba.¹⁴ He considered the quest for Union with the Beloved (God) as the beginnings of real ('Divine') love:

*"When you are prepared in your heart of hearts to gain Union with God at the cost of life itself and the ridicule of the whole world, then perhaps you may be said to have entered the lane of Divine Love."*¹⁵

Although Meher Baba viewed the soul as already being God, he believed that the process of the individual soul imagining and sensing its separation from God was essential for the cultivation of Divine Love:

*"God is Love. And love must love. And to love there must be a Beloved. But since God is existence infinite and eternal, there is no one for Him to love but Himself. And in order to love Himself He must imagine Himself as the Beloved whom He as the lover imagines He loves."*¹⁶

Ultimately it is through this 'game' — this great 'love story' — that the soul can attain the Divine:

*"The sojourn of the soul is a thrilling romance in which the lover — who in the beginning is conscious of nothing but emptiness, frustration, superficiality, and the gnawing chains of bondage — gradually attains an increasingly fuller and freer expression of love. And ultimately the lover disappears and merges in the divine Beloved to realise the unity of the lover and the Beloved in the supreme and eternal fact of God as infinite Love."*¹⁷

Surrender and obedience

Affirming most spiritual traditions, Meher Baba considered annihilation of egoism the greatest dilemma facing aspirants:

*"To get nearer and nearer to God, you have to get further and further from 'I', 'my', 'me' and 'mine'."*¹⁸

Nevertheless, he observed that aspirants' own efforts to terminate egoism were generally futile:

*"... attempts by the ego to secure its own extinction may be compared with the attempt of a man to stand on his own shoulders ... All that it does to bring about self-annihilation only adds to its existence, for it flourishes on the very efforts directed against it."*¹⁹

In Baba's view, reliance on one's own resources (through 'good' deeds, fasting, meditation) usually generates a host of vices that go unnoticed:

*"spiritual monomania ... spiritual pride, intolerance, prejudice, smugness, ambition and holier-than-thouness ... (because) 'good' deeds and experiences are also products of desire, and therefore karmically no less binding... the 'good' is generally robed in a garment of self-esteem and becomes a burr of righteousness that bores itself ever deeper into man's consciousness."*²⁰

His answer to this dilemma is for the aspirant to give up dependence on his or her self, and to surrender to the guidance of the God-man:

*"I know what has to be done. I know how it is to be done. It is for you to do what I say. Do not be concerned about anything else."*²¹

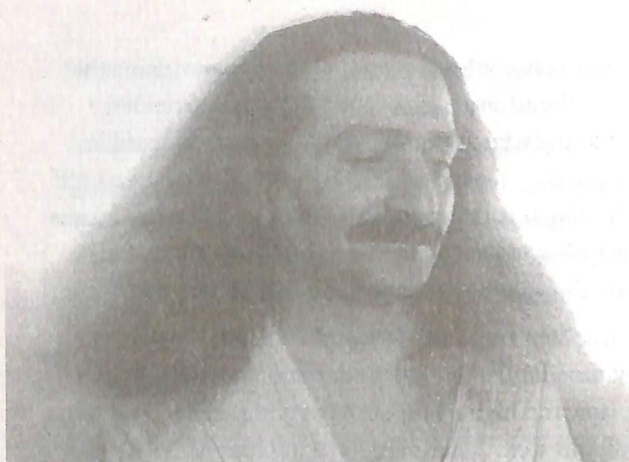
Baba recognised that this option is rarely welcomed by aspirants, except as a *"last and only resort"*.²² However, according to him, such surrender is *"more fruitful than all the other measures might have been"*.²³

This is because the Avatar constitutes a special case. Baba explains that the Avatar has the spiritual authority to accept aspirants' surrender,²⁴ because He is the most knowledgeable and experienced of all possible Guides, and is totally egoless — devoid of selfish motives. Having no self other than the real Self (which is the aspirant's real, inner being)²⁵ means that He is able to reflect back to aspirants their own ideal (Divine) Self, and to provide the exact discipline they require to realise that Self.²⁶

By doing what Baba says, "*the responsibility falls on Him, the one you obey, even if you obey unwillingly*".²⁷ Surrender and obedience to the God-man is in Baba's view the highest means of serving others, because the Avatar is universally present. Therefore, obeying him is "*serving the universe*".²⁸

In 1922 "*Mastery in Servitude*" was adopted by Meher Baba as his group's motto.²⁹ It epitomised the depth of surrender and obedience — akin to slavery — required of a true disciple. Baba often told stories illustrating ideal Master-disciple relations. He repeatedly stated that willing obedience to the God-man is the "*highest form of love*" and the quickest road to Godhood.³⁰





 Meher Baba, 1940s.

Remembrance

When a soul is absorbed in remembering the Avatar, Meher Baba assures us that the person's problems soon disappear:

*"Think of me more and more, and all your worries will disappear into the nothing they really are."*³¹

*"The best is just to remember me, and forget everything else, leaving everything to me."*³²

Meher Baba placed particular importance on remembering him at the time of one's death:

*"I say with my Divine Authority to each and all that whosoever takes my name at the time of breathing his last comes to me: so do not forget to remember me in your last moments."*³³

According to Meher Baba, remembrance can begin with repeating his name: gazing at his image; making pilgrimages to places associated with him; hearing or reading stories about him; and doing whatever else helps one focus on him (writing, painting, singing about him). By flooding mind and heart with associations of Meher Baba by such means, one soon reaches a point where remembrance is automatic and internal.³⁴

Thereafter, everything — no matter how trivial — will remind one of the God-man. This process dissolves the false ego. It can no longer find anything within or outside of itself which is not the Avatar:

*"Do not discard anything but think, it is Baba — Baba who enjoys, Baba who is eating. It is Baba sleeping soundly, and when you wake up, remember it is Baba getting up."*³⁵

Meher Baba's Methods

Meher Baba washing
the feet of the poor,
Wadia Park,
Ahmednagar,
December 9, 1954.



Selfless service

*"Think of others more than of yourselves; use up your bodies in service. This is absolutely necessary if you want to realise God."*³⁶

*"Real happiness lies in making others happy."*³⁷

Meher Baba emphasised that we can only begin to love God through loving those whom we *"cannot love"*.³⁸ However, service needs to be utterly selfless:³⁹

*"Always think of helping, and not of results. Never worry about results, because 'selfless service' means trying to help others, not even thinking 'I am doing this or that'. Always work with your heart for the best, and don't worry."*⁴⁰

For Meher Baba, 'service' can be almost anything. It simply means doing the same things differently⁴¹ — i.e., with greater care, empathy, forgiveness and awareness that he is in everyone and everything:

"To love God in the most practical way is to love our fellow beings."

"If we feel for others in the same way as we feel for our own dear ones, we are loving God."

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"If, instead of seeing faults in others, we look within ourselves, we are loving God.

"If, instead of robbing others to help ourselves, we rob ourselves to help others, we are loving God.

"If we suffer in the suffering of others and feel happy in the happiness of others, we are loving God.

"If, instead of worrying over our own misfortunes, we think ourselves more fortunate than many, many others, we are loving God.

"If we endure our lot with patience and contentment, accepting it as His will, we are loving God.

"If we understand and feel that the greatest act of devotion and worship to God is not to hurt or harm any of His beings, we are loving God."⁴²

Meher Baba nevertheless emphasised that service has various levels. Fulfilling people's material needs is good, but a higher service is the provision of creative and intellectual needs. Higher still is the provision of spiritual understanding: *"... because it includes the right perspective to*

all human problems and promotes their solution".⁴³



Meher Baba bowing
down to the poor, 1954.

Meher Baba's Methods

Meher Baba jubilant
after working with a
mast at Bangalore Mast
Ashram, 1940.



**“Don’t worry,
be happy!”**

This motto is now popular in general society. It was adopted from followers of Meher Baba,⁴⁴ being a common quote on

their posters and stickers during the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1930s, Meher Baba repeatedly told his disciples:

“Don’t worry. Be happy.”⁴⁵

“Do your best. Then, don’t worry: be happy in my love. I will help you.”⁴⁶

Baba regarded the tendency to worry as one of the great obstacles to spiritual progress:

“There are very few things in the mind that eat up as much energy as worry. It is one of the most difficult things not to worry about anything.”⁴⁷

By contrast, he considered being cheerful and uplifting under all circumstances a “Divine art”.⁴⁸ He said it greatly assisted others.

“A word that gives courage to a drooping heart, or a smile that gives hope and cheer in the midst of gloom, has as much a claim to be regarded as service as onerous sacrifices and heroic self-denials. A glance that wipes out bitterness in the heart and sets it

Meher Baba's Methods

throbbing with a new love is also service, although there may be no thought of service in it."⁴⁹

Cheerfulness, humour, and innocent merriment in the form of sports and games formed a significant part of Baba's life and work. He explained that, "*if understood, life is simply a jest*".⁵⁰ The universe itself is "*really a mighty joke*"⁵¹ — the "*jest on My chest*".⁵²

Therefore, followers of Meher Baba try not to take themselves and their predicaments too seriously. Games and light-hearted fun may feature at their gatherings.

Ethics: responsibility within flexibility

Although Meher Baba laid down no precepts, he did declare his "*wish*" for his followers to try to observe:

"Do not shirk your responsibilities.

"Attend faithfully to your worldly duties but always keep at the back of your mind that all this is Baba's.

"When you feel happy, think, 'Baba wants me to be happy'. When you suffer, think: 'Baba wants me to suffer'.

"Be resigned to every situation and think honestly and sincerely: 'Baba has placed me in this situation.'

*"With the understanding that Baba is in everyone, try to help and serve others."*⁵³

Many devotees of Meher Baba attempt to also follow other general guidelines Meher Baba gave over the years, concerning:

1. No drugs except under medical supervision.
2. No sexual relations outside marriage.
3. No involvement with other spiritual masters or gurus.
4. No dishonesty.⁵⁴

This is not to imply that Meher Baba formulated rigid, 'dry as dust' morals.⁵⁵ Rather, he himself stated:

"However wicked an action may seem to be, it should not be judged on the basis of the world's standards, but purely on the

underlying motives. This is the spiritual view ... however shocking or absurd it may seem to the worldly-minded."⁵⁶

Meher Baba points out that our standards of 'good' and 'evil' are not nearly as fixed as we like to believe. Rather, they shift constantly "*with the exigencies of time, clime and nationality*".⁵⁷ He held that spiritual progress consists not of merely accruing 'good deeds' but of awakening and transforming dormant negative traits and — finally — transcending both 'good' and 'evil'. Baba held that 'good' and 'evil' are only apparent opposites. They are not ultimately real, but merely seem to exist from the perspective of persons bound by illusion or ignorance.⁵⁸

Therefore, devotees of Meher Baba strive to display a tolerant, flexible approach towards others, in the spirit of Meher Baba's words: "*I am the Ocean. No one is debarred from coming to Me and helping himself to the endless expanse of Love.*"⁵⁹ They endeavour to read 'Baba's will' or 'lessons from Baba' into whatever transpires in life — 'good' or 'bad'.

Ordinary living

Meher Baba wanted people to lead a 'normal life'.⁶⁰

*"The best way to cleanse the heart and to prepare for the stilling of the mind is to lead a normal life in the world. Living in the midst of your day-to-day duties, responsibilities, likes and dislikes becomes the very means for the purification of your heart."*⁶¹

Additionally, Meher Baba preferred his followers to live unpretentiously, avoiding distinctive titles, dress or diet:

*"When you wear long hair or put on sadhu clothes (the garb of a spiritual seeker), indirectly you court respect. A false sense of advancement in spirituality is liable to be created when you try to lead a life in some other way than that of the common people."*⁶²

Meher Baba mostly wore Parsee Indian clothes, and lived and ate in simple Indian fashion. He liked people to:

*"Be pure and simple, and love all, because all are One. Live a sincere life; be natural and be honest with yourself."*⁶³

Meher Baba's Methods



Pune, Bindra House,
1954. Meher Baba
enjoying a joke. This
photo also shows the
usual Parsee clothes
worn by Meher Baba.

God, according to Meher Baba, wants nothing more than love and honesty. Hypocrisy — especially in the form of posing as a spiritual authority — is the one thing God can not forgive.⁶⁴ For Baba, the highest spiritual achievement is not in being demonstrative but in the ability to be ‘perfectly’ human, for: “*Spirituality must make a man more human.*”⁶⁵

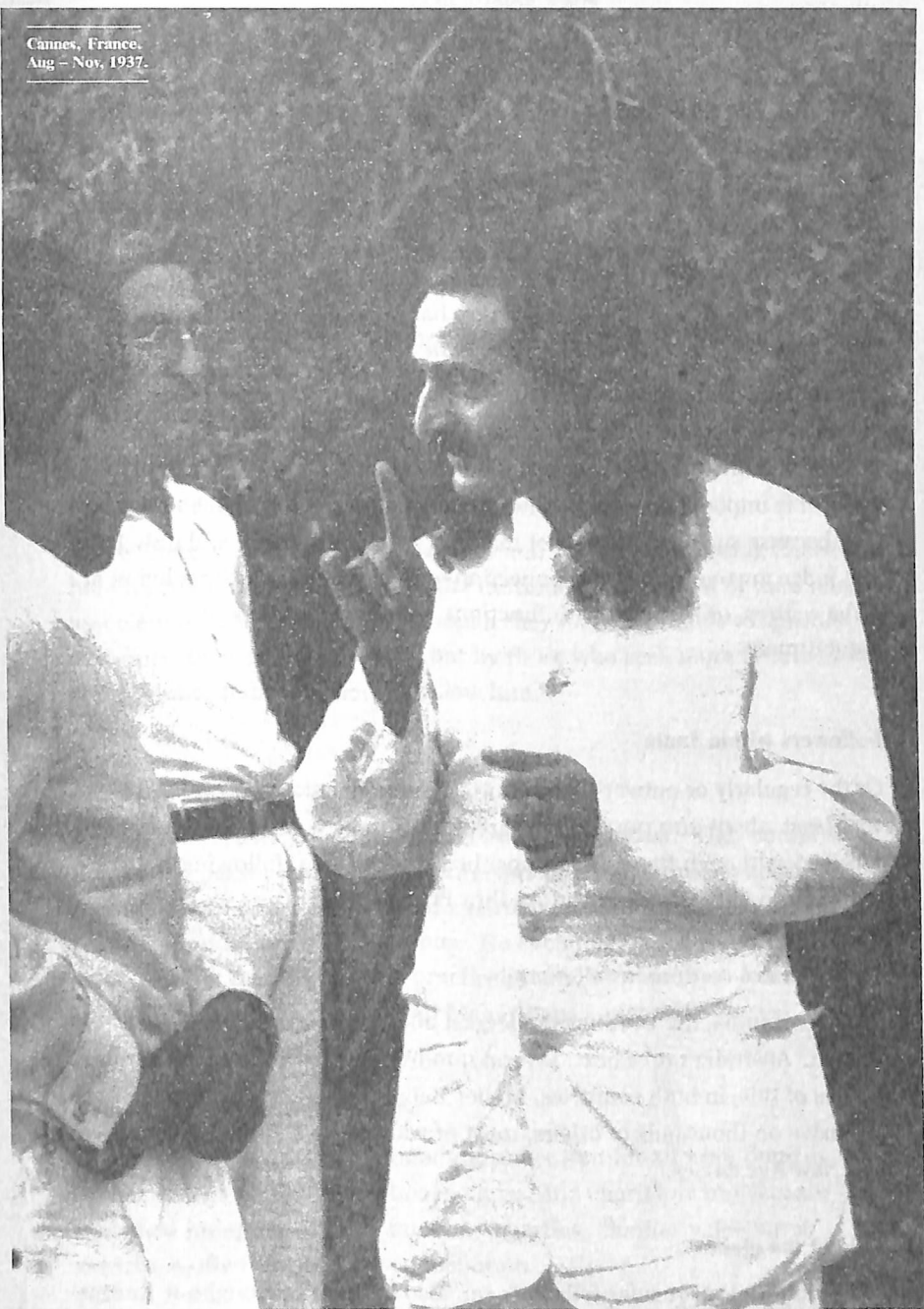
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Cannes, France.
Aug - Nov, 1937.



Followers of Meher Baba

Numbers and Distribution

The absence of tallies

The number of 'Baba lovers' (as some call themselves) is difficult to determine. Currently, the global figure has been placed at everything from "*hundreds of thousands*"¹ up to "*one million*".²

Meher Baba contacted large numbers of people, but they do not necessarily associate with each other. Neither do followers always recognise a dividing line between themselves and 'non-believers'.³ They claim it is impossible to know whether anyone is actually a Baba lover or not, because such love might not manifest outwardly at all, and only Baba can judge anyone's spiritual connection with him.⁴ Even people living at Baba centres, or assisting with functions, manifest a variety of commitment.

Followers within India

Of the regularly or outwardly committed, India has the majority. At the very least, about 200,000 Indians are known to view Meher Baba as their Master.⁵ Although there are groups throughout India, following is strongest in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

American and Australian followers

Outside of India, the USA has the largest allegiance: a core of at least 10,000.⁶ Australia ranks next: several hundred regular followers.⁷ On the fringes of this, in both countries, Meher Baba's influence has been extensive on thousands of others, most of whom move within 'alternative' and New Age circles.

Around the globe

Many hundreds of regular followers can also be found throughout Europe — especially in England and France. Finally, there is a scattering of Baba lovers around the globe, especially since the collapse of the Communist bloc.

Organisation of Followers

Absence of hierarchy

*"I have not come to establish any cult, society or organisation; nor even to establish a new religion."*⁸

Meher Baba stated that he did not come to establish a religion. Therefore, his followers have avoided organising structures, hierarchies or memberships.

Status of disciples and other close followers

Meher Baba's surviving close disciples and other long-standing followers hold a certain informal status in the movement on account of their long association with Meher Baba. Though they make no claims to spiritual authority, they are often sought out by those who seek more information about Meher Baba and how to follow him.⁹

Trusts and foundations

Meher Baba trusts, foundations and associations exist. They comprise nominated persons who meet at intervals to arrange the financing, maintenance or administering of a particular centre or activity. Each trust or foundation is autonomous. No such body has any authoritative or organising role beyond the practicalities of continuing the centre or activity in its care in the spirit of Meher Baba's wishes.

Projects in Meher Baba's name

By no means do trusts and foundations account for all work done in Meher Baba's name. Many books, tapes, and charitable projects are launched independently by interested parties. Similarly, labour at centres is often a voluntary contribution.

Groups and communities of followers

Most groups of people interested in Meher Baba are informal, unstructured and autonomous.¹⁰ Groups appear, dissolve and change

locality in accord with local interest or followers' changes of residence. Many 'Baba lovers' are never part of any group.

Meetings occur regularly or sporadically at any available home, hall or public place. From one function to the next, a group is led by anyone who cares to do so.

Meher Baba favoured community life and social interaction. Consequently, informal communities have sprung up around many Baba centres. These may include people who do not follow Meher Baba.

Practices and Lifestyle

No distinctive customs

Lovers of Meher Baba maintain no special customs, diets or lifestyles.¹¹ They come from all races, creeds and backgrounds, but — in accordance with Meher Baba's wish — follow the laws, traditions and, if required or inclined, the religion of their native land. Devotees' relationship with Meher Baba would be best described as personal.¹² The only distinguishing trait in their homes is perhaps the presence of photographs and books of Meher Baba.

Expressing Meher Baba in all facets of life

Formal proselytising is strongly de-emphasised by followers of Meher Baba.¹³ In accordance with Meher Baba's wishes, they strive to live his message rather than preach it, as he insisted:

*"Live such a life of love, sacrifice, forgiveness and tolerance that others will love Me. If, instead of doing the real work of love, you start organised propaganda for me, it is absurd. I need no propaganda or publicity. I do not want publicity or propaganda, but I do want love and honesty. If you cannot live the life of love and honesty, you should stop working for me."*¹⁴

Meher Baba wanted his followers to express him in all facets of life:

*"Spirituality is neither restricted to, nor can it be restricted by, anyone or anything, anywhere at any time. It covers all life for all time."*¹⁵

Consequently, many Baba lovers are active — and even quite prominent — in fields of the arts, therapies, business and charitable ventures.¹⁶ Numerous Baba lovers can be found building, writing, performing or in some other way creating. This reflects Baba's emphasis on creative, expressive work:

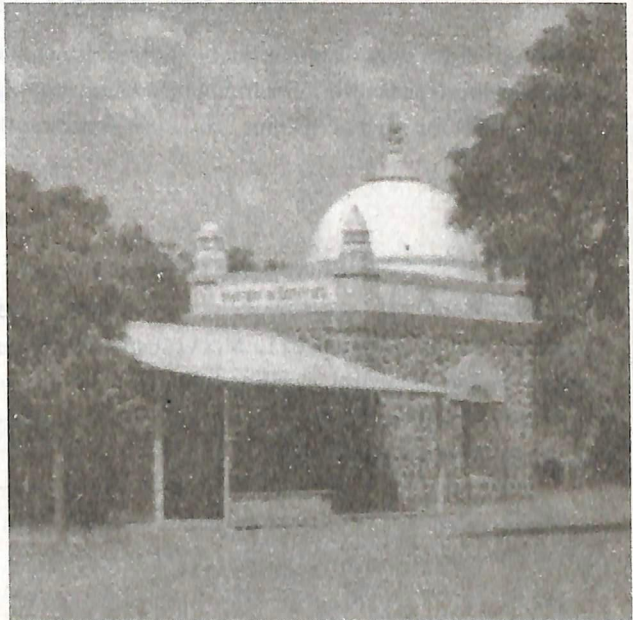
*"To penetrate into the essence of all being and significance and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the guidance and benefit of others, by expressing in the world of forms — truth, love, purity and beauty — this is the sole game which has any intrinsic and absolute worth."*¹⁷

Pilgrimage

Meher Baba did not prescribe pilgrimage. On the other hand, he did emphasise the usefulness of visiting places associated with him. He indicated that his

Samadhi (tomb-shrine) at Meherabad is of great spiritual benefit to all.

Many followers of Meher Baba try to visit this tomb-shrine as often as possible.¹⁸



The tomb-shrine of Meher Baba at Meherabad, near Ahmednagar, mid-1980s.



Inside Meher Baba's
Samadhi (tomb-shrine),
mid-1980s.

Group activities

Occasionally, those who feel inclined will meet for shared meals, discussion, readings, music, jokes, films, games, sports, outings, or skits — generally orientated around Baba topics or important days in Meher Baba's life. Individuals or groups might also recite prayers that were dictated by Meher Baba or sing devotional songs if they are interested.

Special Days

Although Baba lovers have no mandatory religious observances, many of them celebrate certain events in his life. They organise special functions or festivities for such occasions. The most common of these are listed here:

Amartithi (January 31)

Meaning 'Immortal Day', this is the date of Meher Baba's physical passing. Indian pilgrimages to Meherabad and Meherazad reach their zenith during Amartithi, swelling to many tens of thousands.²⁰ Hundreds also arrive from the West. Some people observe silence at noon to mark the time Baba physically died.

Followers of Meher Baba

Meher Baba celebrating
his birthday with
Mehera, Satara, 1956.



Baba's Birthday (February 25)

Meher Baba's birthday is celebrated by local gatherings at 5 am (Baba's hour of birth) and by joining in various forms of birthday entertainment. A birthday cake is often shared.

Silence Day (July 10)

During his lifetime, Meher Baba asked followers to observe silence for 24 hours to commemorate the day he stopped speaking. This practice continues.

Mehera's Birthday (December 22)

Some Baba lovers — especially women — like to gather on this day to share stories of the exemplary love Mehera had for Meher Baba. Mehera Jehangir Irani (1907 - 1989) was Baba's closest female disciple. He called her "*the purest soul in the universe*,"²¹ who "*loves Me as I ought to be loved*."²² Baba especially honoured her on this day.

Followers of Meher Baba



Local anniversaries

At some Baba centres, the grandest and longest festivities are held to celebrate the anniversary of Meher Baba's visit to the area. Large numbers attend the programs of music, drama, games, talks and films.



Top and left: June 1998
at Avatar's Abode,
showing Baba's flag
being raised to signal the
start of the annual
anniversary celebrating
Meher Baba's visit
in June 1958.

Centres Dedicated to Meher Baba

The heart as the only true centre

Meher Baba considered all religious buildings empty except for the love brought there. During Baba's lifetime and subsequently, many buildings were certainly used for his cause, but they are not temples or ashrams:

*"I have not come to establish retreats or ashrams. I create them for the purpose of my Universal Work, only to repeatedly dismantle them once their purpose has been served."*²³

Meher Baba always stressed that his only centre is within each individual:

*"If, instead of erecting churches ... temples and mosques, people were to establish a house for Beloved God in their hearts, my work will have been done."*²⁴

*"Those who truly love me are my 'centres' in the world. Let each 'Baba lover', wherever he or she may be, be a 'Baba centre' personified, radiating the eternal message of love divine, living a life of love, sacrifice and honesty."*²⁵

The nature and use of centres

Consequently, centres that exist are usually followers' homes kept in Baba's memory, or sets of buildings on a property (sometimes buildings he visited). In most of these, items Baba used are on display; literature and films on Meher Baba are available; and there is usually a room where visitors can sit to quietly focus on Meher Baba. Many centres also provide accommodation for followers and sincerely interested persons.

Such 'Baba centres' are pivotal to group projects, social activities and festivities.

Major 'Baba Centres'

Hundreds of centres dedicated to Meher Baba exist. They are especially numerous in India and the United States. Four of particular importance are listed here:

Meherabad

About five miles south of Ahmednagar (inland from Bombay), this place is the focus of international pilgrimage. It contains Meher Baba's tomb-shrine, a large number of buildings (mostly associated with the earlier decades of Baba's work), the graves of disciples, a museum, theatre and a range of pilgrim accommodation and charitable establishments. Major festivities are held here. Many Baba lovers work or live in the vicinity.

Meherazad

Nine miles north of Ahmednagar, Meherazad was Meher Baba's home for the last twenty years of his life, and is now the private residence of his close disciples. The complex features buildings, gardens and vehicles pertaining mostly to Baba's later phases. Of special interest is Baba's Room.

Seclusion Hill, where Baba did much work, rises behind Meherazad. Meherazad is the usual place for Baba lovers to meet Baba's disciples.



Meher Baba's residence
at Meherazad.

Followers of Meher Baba

Mehera embraces a young pilgrim on the porch at Meherazad, mid-1980s.



Meher Spiritual Center

Situated in Myrtle Beach (South Carolina, USA), Meher Baba described this as his “*home in the West*”.²⁶ The property comprises 500 acres of forests, lakes, beach, gardens and numerous cabins for pilgrims.

Founded in 1943, the center’s purpose — as designated by Baba — is “*rest, meditation and the renewal of spiritual life*”.²⁷ Meher Baba stayed at and visited various buildings and spots within the property several times during the 1950s.

Avatar’s Abode

On a sub-tropical hill in Woombye (Queensland, Australia), this 100-acre property was identified by Meher Baba as his other main centre and as a future “*place of world pilgrimage*.”²⁸ It has a few buildings and areas visited by Meher Baba during his 1958 stay, the focus of these being his room. The site features forest walks, gardens, a reception centre/library and some pilgrim accommodation.

Followers of Meher Baba

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Further information about Meher Baba may be obtained from:

Website

www.avatarmeherbaba.org

India

Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual
Public Charitable Trust
Post Bag No. 31
Kings Road
Ahmednagar (M.S.) 414 001
India

Avatar Meher Baba Poona Centre
441/1, Somwar Peth
Pune (M.S.) 411 011
India

Meher Baba Universal Spiritual
Centre
Byramangala – P.O. Itamadu
Dist: Bangalore (K.S.) 562 109
India

Avatar Meher Baba Delhi Centre
50-A Institutional Area
Tuglakabad – New Delhi 110 062
India

USA

Meher Spiritual Centre, Inc.
10200 Highway 17 North
Myrtle Beach
South Carolina 29572
USA

Meher Baba Information
Box 1101
Berkeley CA 94701
USA

Sheriar Press (Book Division)
3005 Highway 17 North By Pass
Myrtle Beach
South Carolina 29577
USA

England

Meher Baba Association
1/228 Hammersmith Grove
London W67 HG
England

Australia

Meher Baba Foundation Australia
Avatar's Abode, Meher Road
(P.O. Box 22)
Woombye, Queensland 4559
Australia

A special thanks to ...

Eruch Jessawala for reading the manuscript and his suggestions;
Peter Milne for funding;
Meher Baba Foundation Australia and Avatar's Abode Trust for use of the
library and photographic materials;
Bill Le Page for editing advice;
Grania Kelly and Alison Spark for proofreading; and
Liz Gaskin for design, layout, scanning, proofreading and DTP.

Meher Baba, 1920s.





Meher Baba,
California, USA, 1932.
