

Oneness in the World

Craig Ian Ruff

Booklet V

**The Community:
Living in the Truth of the Unity of All Life**

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Dear Reader, Again I wish to express to you my genuine appreciation and love for my editor, Mr. Steve Klein. He takes the journey with me as I think deeply about Baba's words, how they apply to my life, and how they could apply to yours. Every time, we both learn quite a bit about ourselves and our relationship with Baba. And, as always, I wish to express to you my genuine appreciation and love for my editor, Laurel Magrini, who reviews the manuscript when Steve and I feel we have done all we can with it. As we would say when she worked at the Trust Office, she "laurelizes it." Both Steve and Laurel are lifelong friends. I am grateful to Beloved Baba for both of them. My sincere thanks and love also go to Karen and Alan Talbot and Kebi and Ralph Brown who through their interest and generosity made it possible for me to hand this book to you. Special thanks to Tian Gunther who proof read the manuscript.

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PREFACE

Occasionally, on mentioning to Baba-lovers that I had finished Booklet IV, they'd ask what the title was. I told them it was, "The Awareness: Spiritual Understanding Not Intellectual Information." They were intrigued with the title and said they were looking forward to reading it.

But when they asked me what the subject was for Booklet V, and I told them it was on community life, they looked at me with wry astonishment, uttering such things as, "Oh, good luck with that!" "Now that is difficult." "Oh, wow, that's something!!" Why does the subject of community life in our Baba world bring such instant apprehension? What has happened to us that by even mentioning the word "community" the reaction is trepidation? Well, that is why I want to write a booklet on it. Community life is very important to us all.

Before we proceed, let me be clear about my use of the term "community life." I am referring to our interactions in our family life, work life, social life, and organizational life, and not necessarily living together on a commune or in an ashram or some kind of organized communal setting. The fact is that in our daily life, we all live or work in "communities" of some kind.

There is a reason why I am especially concerned about this subject. For years in the Trust Office, I used to read out the correspondence to Eruch. The overriding issue that came up in the correspondence with him, and the other Trust Office mandali, concerned community life or getting along with others, particularly other Baba-lovers.

As I read out the correspondence, it finally came

to me that we assumed and expected that we all spoke the same language because we all acknowledged Meher Baba as the Avatar. That is, that we all understood and loved Meher Baba with the same understanding. However, as I could see from the correspondence, this was not the case at all! Letter after letter informed the mandali that "others" were causing friction in the Baba group because the others' understanding of how to love and serve Baba was wrong. As I could see, establishing a common emotional language was not so simple.

Although we all try to follow Meher Baba's message according to our individual temperaments, when it comes to uniting these temperaments into a beautiful portrait of Meher Baba, that image often gets distorted. We may be able to celebrate Meher Baba's life and love during a gathering, but when it comes to our interactions in community settings, we falter. Why are we failing? Oh excuse me, why is the other guy failing so miserably, when we are trying so hard? Yes, it is this kind of thought that makes us all fail.

It seems we need to deeply consider what is required to make community life succeed. As I said, letters on this subject were daily read out to Eruch. Also residents and visiting Baba-lovers came to the Trust Office asking similar questions about community life. In hearing all of this, on occasion, I would also lament to Eruch that all the misunderstandings between various people kept us apart.

I think what Eruch said on this subject, is going to surprise you. His response was so important to me that I wrote it in my diary. He said that regardless of how anybody feels about us, as long as we know in our hearts that what we have done is true, then it does not matter.

(2)

When Eruch said this, I disagreed with him. I felt if we didn't concern ourselves with others' opinions, and didn't try to explain ourselves and reach a common understanding, then the trust and faith which I felt were necessary for community life would not be developed.

But Eruch was firm on what he said, and emphasized that "we should only be concerned with holding on to Baba, and that it is very simple." In addition to this, Eruch would say to me on occasion, "Each one on his own." And perhaps, to add further confusion on community relations, both Eruch and Bhau would tell me from time to time, "There is no such thing as friendship on the spiritual path."

The remarkable thing about these statements is that they come from the man who emphasized harmony between us all the time. So what do you make of his words? How can we approach community life when we hear such things? The fact is that spiritual community life is very different from the way we ordinarily think of it.

Eruch was trying to tell me that if I, and we, kept our focus on Baba, then out of that focus would come community life. As I say, Eruch emphasized harmony to the residents and to Baba-lovers who would visit. But it is a harmony based on the truth, a spiritual truth--the unity of all life. I gradually came to the conclusion that community life cannot be established without basing it on this truth.

I also answered my own concern about what friendship means in spiritual life. If we are all One, then how can there be friends, as the world understands it, in spiritual life? Worldly friendship usually involves bias: liking some and rejecting others.

(3)

But if we have the perspective of spiritual oneness, then everyone is perceived as part of the whole and no one can be excluded. In this way we begin to have an all-inclusive attitude in our life. I think a story here may help clarify what I am trying to say. It comes from Eruch's life with Baba.

Eruch was raised to be forthright and he even took a little pride in his honesty. So when Meher Baba would ask him questions, he would always tell the truth. But sometimes this brought him into conflict with the other men mandali. For if he felt they were not being similarly forthright, he would correct them, and say, "No Baba, that isn't true. He says that he was in his room after nine but I happened to see him walking across the compound at 9:30." If the other mandali tried to object or argue or persist in their earlier statement, Eruch would very bluntly contradict them and insist on his version of the facts.

Meher Baba didn't say anything for a while and let this situation continue, but after a certain time, He brought up to Eruch the fact that he seemed to be causing a lot of disharmony amongst the mandali. Eruch conceded that, but in his defense replied that he was only telling the truth. Baba then asked him, "But what is the truth?" And Baba went on to explain that the truth did not mean speaking out objective facts. The truth is that which upholds and uplifts the spirit of another person. Therefore, anything which crushes the spirit of another person can never be true, no matter what the "facts" are.

This made a very deep impression on Eruch, and he always thereafter took great care to say things in such a way that the other person's heart would not be hurt. Honesty, for him, became upholding the truth as Meher Baba had explained it.

This story is such a wonderful example for us all. If we could take Meher Baba's words as a guiding light for interacting with each other, many of the problems that arise in our interactions would disappear. Another way of saying it may be like this. Just as we take great pains not to hurt the hearts of those who are near and dear to us, so too should we extend similar concern to everyone we interact with. I feel there would be a blossoming of community life under such conditions.

I think you will find it interesting that Eruch had once stated that there are different kinds of isolation and community. They are:

- 1) Inner isolation--outer community
- 2) Inner communion--outer isolation
- 3) Inner communion--outer community

These three types are very revealing. Briefly what they mean to me is that: 1) When we feel empty inside, we may seek some kind of outer community to fill the gap. 2) When we are drawn to live in our private world of inner communion with God, sometimes we isolate ourselves from others. 3) As inner communion grows, it also brings outer community. On another occasion, Eruch commented, "Communing with Him also means communal life."

So here Eruch confirmed that through our inner communion (that is, through our focus on Meher Baba) outer community is possible. The reason for this is simple. Inner communion with God, as it develops, results in a feeling of oneness, not just with God but with humanity as well. This is so because He is the One residing in every heart. And if we feel oneness with humanity, outer community will automatically be a by-product. Thus once more we come back to the unity of

all life, or Oneness. Each of my booklets, The Relationship--Booklet I, The Transformation--Booklet II, The Service--Booklet III, and The Awareness--Booklet IV all come down to the same foundation, the Truth of Oneness, although each looks at it from a slightly different perspective. Now in Booklet V, we will look at how conviction in the Truth of Oneness is necessary to establish community life.

Even if this Oneness is not apparent to us, Meher Baba gives us an explanation of how it operates in the world. Baba tells us that the oneness of Reality is revealed by how we are all connected in illusion. This connection is brought about through “the structure and laws of the inner spheres of existence.”

In the discourse, “The Place of Occultism in Spiritual Life,” Meher Baba explains how this is the case. Baba says that no matter how disconnected we may be from one another physically, all of humanity is interacting in the mental world. Thus we affect each other, whether it be in our family life, social life, work life, organizational life, national well-being, or even with the world at large. All of humanity, throughout the world, affects each other with our “...good thoughts as well as evil thoughts, cheerful moods as well as gloomy moods, noble and expansive feelings as well as petty and narrow emotions, unselfish aspirations as well as selfish ambitions--all these have a tendency to spread out and influence others, even when they are not expressed in words or deeds.”

In fact, Meher Baba says, “There are no limits to the spreading of the influence of the individual. The magnetic influence of the subtle spheres knows no barriers of national frontiers or any other conventional limitations...The world of mental life is as much a unified system as the world of gross matter.”

Yes, we all are interconnected. And this interconnectedness is the shadow of the oneness of reality. And because we are all interconnected, there is this thing called karma which upholds the truth of oneness in Creation or Illusion.

Meher Baba explains in the discourse, “Reincarnation and Karma,” that because all of us “seek self-expression in a common world” we are continuously adjusting to each other, which creates karma. These transactions of give-and-take are binding. But they “need not be purely on a material plane in the form of exchange of goods or money, nor in the performing of some physical tasks. It could consist of the exchange of views or feelings.” And in today's world, it is these exchanges of views or feelings which so often get us hopelessly entangled with one another.

Meher Baba gives us a very insightful explanation of what happens when we create karma between ourselves and also how we can overcome the entanglements we have created. He says,

The rhythm in which two souls start their relationship tends to perpetuate itself unless the souls, through fresh intelligent karma, change the rhythm and raise it to a higher quality. As a rule, accumulated karma has a certain inertia of its own. It does not change the nature of its momentum unless there is a special reason for it. Before karma is created, the individual has a sort of freedom to choose what it shall be. But after it has been delineated, it becomes a factor that cannot be ignored and that either has to be expended through the results it invites or counteracted by fresh and appropriate karma.

Meher Baba's words here explain so very much to us. It explains a lot of the head-banging phenomenon that we all go through on occasion with each other. We all start out relating to each other according to what is natural for us. In the course of action we create bindings with each other. At some point, we feel we are stuck. That is the inertia that Baba speaks of above. The only way out is for us to reassess the situation and discover the action that can intelligently replace the previous action that got us into the mess we are in.

In this booklet, I want to look at how understanding the Truth of Oneness can help us replace our habitual patterns (karma) of separative behavior with each other. Through intelligent action, as Meher Baba says above, we can then raise our life to a higher quality by living in the truth of the unity of all life. Living in this belief will create fresh opportunities for us to make real community life possible.

LIVING FOR YOURSELF OR LIVING FOR THE SELF

In the supplement of "God Speaks," there is a very practical differentiation between the first and second stage of spiritual development. The first stage is called "Verbal Unity of God." This is where we verbally acknowledge the unity of God and leave it at that. The second stage is called "Active Unity of God." This is where we take our belief that God is One and do something about it. We actively maintain that truth in our lives, so much so that it becomes the paramount goal of our lives.

This is the challenge for all of us to move from the comfortable truth of talking about the unity of God

to making our acts dedicated to that truth at the expense of our separative self. For years, I heard the mandali talking about Oneness. Doesn't every Baba lover know the quote, "You and I are not we, but one?" So I tried to be "spiritual" in my own way, by thinking about Baba, by remembering Him and by doing "Baba work." What I found was that while all of these things were worthy, I still felt no sense of oneness with others.

I began rereading the "Discourses" as practical guidelines that Meher Baba was giving for all of us, no matter how undeveloped our spiritual life might be. I found that Baba in almost every discourse emphasizes the unity of life in one way or another. And one of the ways He stressed how we can attain oneness is the way in which we approach happiness.

We all are familiar with the statement, "Love and happiness are the only important things in life." This seems like a straightforward thought which does not seem to require much pondering. And, as such, we could easily dismiss Meher Baba's statement as obvious. Worse, because we all try to find love and happiness in our lives, we can easily lull ourselves into believing that we are following Baba as we do so. But when we look at how Meher Baba describes happiness in the discourse, "Conditions of Happiness," we see that there are deeper implications that can totally alter the way we perceive our life and the lives of others. He says, "True happiness begins when one learns the art of right adjustment to other persons, and right adjustment involves self-forgetfulness and love."

When we confront what happiness is according to Meher Baba, we may admit that we don't often consider our pursuit of happiness and love in this way because it seems too idealistic. After all, we just want a little happiness and love in our lives. In thinking about

it, we may wonder how finding a little love and happiness for ourselves evolves into forgetting ourselves and adjusting with others? How is that going to make us happy? But maybe if we are honest enough we can confess, as the song goes, that too often we have been looking for love and happiness in all the wrong places. Somehow or another, in our search for love and happiness in our daily lives, we often end up with one dry day after another. We chase love and happiness as rainbows and find, as we approach them, they disappear before our eyes.

Where oh where then is real happiness to be found in the little and big moments of our lives? This question brings us back to Meher Baba's statement on happiness. The One, Avatar Meher Baba, who created this game of life, tells us in that statement where the pot of golden happiness lies. He identifies it on the map of our psyche. It is where "...one learns the art of right adjustment to other persons."

And thankfully, Baba does not leave it to us to figure out what right adjustment means, for He explains, "Right adjustment involves self-forgetfulness and love." Such an attitude brings a sense of oneness. When we look at Meher Baba's explanation for how to achieve happiness in this way, it may lead us to question the very idea of what exactly happiness is.

It is so natural for us to think of happiness and love in terms of our own selves, and thus where can the sense of oneness exist! Ordinarily, whenever we feel satisfied or gratified, whether it's a small moment or a large event, we tend to say we are happy. We often define happiness by achieving some temporary victory--we have accomplished something, we have convinced someone else to agree with us, we have secured some advantage for our self, we have satisfied

some desire. Whether we experience pleasure or merely the absence of some unwanted circumstance in our life, the avoidance or mitigation of some suffering we feared, we think we have achieved happiness. However, in looking at Meher Baba's guiding explanations on happiness and love, we may not have defined happiness correctly.

Let's examine this a bit further by looking at what Meher Baba says about the converse of happiness--and what we are all too familiar with--suffering. Did you know that Baba says that "...ninety-nine percent of human suffering is not necessary?" So if 99% of our suffering is not necessary, then what are we doing to ourselves to make ourselves, if not miserable at times, at least discontented from time to time?

Meher Baba even asks the question on our behalf, "Why should we suffer?" And He answers it by telling us that as long as we think only of our own happiness, we do not find it. That is a staggering thought! He further explains that when we pursue our own "individual happiness," we make matters worse because "the limited self becomes accentuated and burdensome." Under such conditions and living in such a way, no wonder there is no feeling of oneness and, as such, any community.

So even when we are looking for one of the key elements in life, which is happiness, it may result in only increasing our ego and oppressing our very selves. And without even realizing it because of our determination to seek our own personal happiness, it can even make us "utterly callous and cruel to others." Thus He tells us that "through obstinate ignorance" in the way we seek happiness, we inflict suffering upon ourselves and our fellow beings, ultimately leaving us

forlorn and wondering, "Why should we suffer?"

I am sure that we do not see ourselves as obstinately ignorant when we are seeking happiness. We justify our actions by saying, "Isn't it natural to seek happiness?" Yes, it is. But from everything we are hearing from Meher Baba, we are ignorant about how to seek happiness. We try to find happiness by gratifying our limited self. But the more our limited (or false) self is accentuated, the more we come into conflict with others and the more we become unhappy and end up suffering.

I believe what often makes us obstinate in our approach to happiness is the survival techniques we employ during the day. As we face each circumstance, we react in whatever way that is necessary in order to survive--mentally, emotionally or physically. And thus we spend a good part of our day merely reinforcing our own well-being.

It seems to me our survival techniques are based on the instinct for self-preservation. This is understandable. After all, from the beginning of the soul's journey through all the physical forms, self-preservation is the innate, foremost driving force of consciousness. This "accumulated karma," unfortunately, camouflages what true happiness is!

Although human consciousness may be plagued by the instinct of self-preservation, it also allows for this instinct to be refined into the potential for true happiness. In order to start this refining process, let us return to Meher Baba's words in "Conditions of Happiness."

Meher Baba tells us, "True happiness begins when one learns the art of right adjustment to other

persons, and right adjustment involves self-forgetfulness and love." Baba's statement about attaining real happiness suggests that it involves putting together several building blocks, the first of which is other people.

So why do others become such an important part for finding true happiness when we usually look upon happiness as our own personal affair? The very reason is that the "others" we are daily interacting with are part of the One Universal Life. So how we look upon other people becomes key to happiness. When we look upon others as separative selves, we operate against the truth of the unity of all life and we may suffer for it. And when we look upon them as part and parcel of the One Universal Life, which includes everyone, real happiness may enter our lives by our upholding this truth.

Once we take this big step forward of perceiving other people as part of the One Life, we can start to put into place the other building blocks of real happiness. Meher Baba implies that the other building blocks have to do with adjusting to others in the light of the truth of one life. Thankfully, Baba explains to us that we make this adjustment through two actions: self-forgetfulness and love.

Eruch used to tell a story in Mandali Hall which, I think, illustrates a paradoxical truth. We suffer when we seek happiness for ourselves, yet start to realize real happiness when we forget ourselves and treat others with love, naturally bringing about a feeling of community and oneness. I shared this story in Booklet II, but it seems so relevant that I would like to present it, amended slightly, once again.

The story is about a dream. You find yourself in

a fantastic mansion, walking down a vast hallway with numberless doors. There is no one else but you. Your eye catches a word written over one set of magnificently carved double-doors. The word is a warning; the word is HELL. Without giving it any thought however, you open the door, discovering a beautifully appointed dining room, lavish in all respects: well-crafted furniture, exquisite chandeliers shedding quiet light, magnificently woven tapestries and, on a long dining room table, a bountiful feast.

After breathlessly encountering this regal scene, you see many dignified people, dressed in formal attire, walk into the dining room. Without noticing you, they take their seats on handsomely carved chairs. A moment later, they begin to partake of the feast.

However, every one of these well-dressed, well-mannered people has very long arms. Their arms are so long, in fact, that although they can easily reach the food, when they try to feed themselves you see that their arms become entangled with one another. You watch them as they struggle to feed themselves. The more they struggle to do so, the more a frenzy is created by arms flailing food in the air as everyone remains unfed. The scene becomes so offensive and revolting that you rush out of the room and return to the long corridor of the mansion.

You continue to walk down the hallway, passing one doorway after another, until you finally notice another sign written over another set of double-doorways. It says HEAVEN. You open the doors, and to your surprise, walk into what seems to be the same resplendent room you entered earlier. Your disquiet grows as a group of people, similar in all ways to the

others, serenely walk into the dining room and sit themselves in their chairs.

Once again, to your alarm, you watch their long arms extend themselves over the bountifully prepared table. You are reeling and ready to exit. But just before you do, you notice the first set of arms that reaches for the food does not try to feed himself; he is trying to feed his neighbors. His two neighbors are uncertain about his intention and his misshapen arms. Maybe he will throw the food at them! So they do not accept the food. The neighbor withdraws his arms. After a while, our brave misshapen man tries once more to feed his neighbors. This second time, his neighbors sense his good intentions but still they just don't trust him. And once more after a while his arms withdraw and rest at the table. But on the third time, our brave pioneer makes a herculean effort and for the longest time with his arms holding the food to their mouths, his neighbors, although greatly uncertain, accept the food.

Now because of this person, a few others at the table begin to get confidence and they too decide to try to feed their neighbors. And they make similar efforts, with their neighbors hesitatingly accepting the food. Ultimately, what you witness is that the people have become very graceful with their arms stretching forth beautifully to feed their neighbor.

The banquet continues in this heartwarming manner, in this attractive room, in this beautiful dream. You view with joy how the guests feed each other regardless of their long misshapen arms. You leave the room and walk back into the hall and look up above the doorway where you see the words, "New Humanity." Then you wake up!

Yes, to me this dream not only illustrates the hell of maintaining the attitudes of the “Old Humanity” but also illustrates what may be the heaven of the “New Humanity.” Now in either case, humanity has misshapen arms. We could call these misshapen arms our weaknesses; in fact, we can call them our impressions. After all, our impressions, no matter what they are, keep us limited and therefore bind the limitless spirit.

Every day all of us are brought to the feast of life. The question is how do we feed ourselves? When we act like “poor ol' humanity,” we can't help but get into a food fight. This is because we use our impressions for self-interest. However, the New Humanity will use their impressions to act on the truth of oneness, feeding others, and in doing so, spiritually feed their own hearts by standing up for the Truth.

This is what Baba means by the “Active Unity of God”--the attempt to not merely accept the Truth of unity as a fact, but to try to live out our lives based on that fact. However, even with this there is a sweet qualification. Meher Baba told His dear sister Mani that human nature wouldn't change in the New Humanity. There still would be fights, but it would be done differently. Instead of fighting for “gimme gimme”, it will be replaced by “you please take this.” Mani told the following story to illustrate Baba's words.

One day, as a child, she was sitting on the front stoop of their house and witnessed the following scene. There were two drunks standing under the lamppost. But they were so benevolent. One of the drunks said to the other, "You're just like my father." In India, this is the highest tribute you can pay another person. "Yeah, you're so noble and great." The drunk became maudlin and there were tears in his eyes.

The other drunk said, "Oh no. I'm not fit to lick your boots. YOU are *my* father."

The first one said, "No no no, you're my father. That's how great you are. I'm nothing. You're great. You're my father."

And the second one said, "I tell you, you're my father. I'm not fit to wipe your shoes."

Now the first one started getting mad. "If you say I'm your father one more time, I'm gonna sock you!"

And the second one said, "Oh yeah? You *are* my father. And if you say I'm great again, I'm going to give it to you!!"

And the two started fighting. It was a full-fledged fistfight. The neighbors came to break them up, but they couldn't because they were too weak from laughing at this scene. From this incident Mani could understand Baba's words about the New Humanity. Eruch liked this story very much, and would request Mani to tell it in Mandali Hall from time to time.

We all have a reflex to fight--to fight for what we believe in. I assume this comes from the instinctual fight for survival that is innate in us since time began. So we have to make use of this “fight.” The critical thing is how we do so.

We have to put “the fight” in our life for the fight for Truth and not for our ephemeral viewpoints which often enhance the separative self. Doing so will significantly change our life. It will bring us to the threshold of the New Humanity. Our exchanges will be based on the truth of oneness and carry with them the spontaneous possibility for real community life.

So now let us go back to the same table in the dream. Well, not quite the same table. Let it be any table in our lives where we are with friends, family, co-workers, at staff meetings, etc., any setting where group or even community life takes place.

As we seat ourselves at this metaphorical table, each of us brings a very different mental, emotional, and even physical perspective. However, our perspective is limited. Even if we are all looking at the same goal, we see it from a different angle, just as each individual degree on a circle faces the center but sees it from a different perspective.

Usually when we come to the table, it is in order to achieve something we want. It could be anything from a small consideration to a big endeavor. And we feel if we achieve our aim we will become nourished in some way. We will receive some mental or emotional satisfaction. So in a sense, we all come to the table looking for nourishment of some kind.

The question is how do we keep our misshapen arms from knocking into each other when each of us is looking for nourishment? Well, on every occasion when we are sitting together, no matter what the context may be, we have a choice to make. Do we maintain a sense of oneness or not? Naturally, we will say oneness. But it is not so easy to do. As we proceed in this booklet, we will see how we can begin to choose oneness with the help of Meher Baba's guidance in the "Discourses".

Only by choosing to maintain a sense of oneness, each and every time, will our arms not knock into anyone else's arms. Our arms will try to reach out to others because we are promoting a feeling of

oneness; we are promoting the ideas of feeding each other regardless of our misshapen arms. Such actions feed our hearts because they promote the truth.

However, and this is critical, no matter in what way we justify our actions, when we do not maintain oneness, all we are doing is trying to feed ourselves (that is, our egotistical impulses), and inevitably our arms will become entangled. Although in real life it is possible to get what we want at the table, ultimately we will find that we can't feed ourselves. Yes, we may leave the table thinking we have achieved something, but we will not really be nourished. Our hearts will remain empty and our lives unfulfilled regardless of our momentary triumph. This is because, as Meher Baba pointed out, even if we accomplish what we intended, we have not maintained oneness.

In fact, we will have created more "unnecessary" suffering for ourselves. This is because we have not paid heed to the first condition of happiness--right adjustment to others. And what did this entail but self-forgetfulness and love. So let's go back and look at the preconditions for happiness as Meher Baba explains them, which is the first step towards maintaining a sense of oneness, giving us opportunities for real community life.

RIGHT ADJUSTMENT TO OTHERS LEADS TO HAPPINESS

As we have seen in "Conditions of Happiness," Meher Baba implies that the main building block to happiness is right adjustment to others. But He also suggests that this, in turn, is made up of self-forgetfulness and love. So it is up to us to learn how to

put these building blocks together. We do so by experimenting in our attempts to uphold the truth of the unity of all life. Thus it seems the happiness equation is: us + others (in the right adjustment of self-forgetfulness and love) = happiness.

Self-forgetfulness--now that is a word for you, but what does it really mean? The thought that came to me when I asked that question is that although I cannot completely forget myself, what I can do is to try to forget my irritations, anger, pettiness, judgments, my need to be right, etc. I have to try to forget anything and everything that could cause ego-justification that enhances separation.

As we continue to ignore the disruptive, separative ego, something deeply worth while occurs--we begin to forget ourselves. This starts to bring true happiness. Where before we found tension and disagreement with those around us, we now begin to experience a sense of accepting life as it is, which leads to contentment within and harmony with others. This seems to spring up with the lessening of our separative ego's assertiveness. Moreover, because our focus has changed from insisting upon our momentary viewpoints, a sense of self-forgetfulness evolves in our daily life. This produces the very faint semblance of infinite bliss called true happiness.

This contentment and harmony is not just a reflection of lack of conflict (the natural result of ego no longer trying to contend and contest everything), but is a glimpse of existing underlying harmony. This is due to the fact that beneath the limited ego there is, in fact, an essential unity of life because there is really only One soul. This glimpse spontaneously brings with it a nascent feeling of love as well. So "self-forgetfulness"

automatically helps create the love that Meher Baba says is the second essential action for right adjustment with others.

We can perhaps understand this dynamic better by looking at what Meher Baba has said about love in the discourse where He makes a very important distinction between human love and divine love. He says, "Divine love is qualitatively different from human love. Human love is for the many in the One, and divine love is for the One in the many."

When Meher Baba says, "Human love is for the many in the One," I think He means that in human love we usually focus on one form alone, separate from others. Each soul may be part of the One, but we love them as individual souls. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Elsewhere, Baba has lauded even ordinary human love, because no matter where it starts, it can lead to the divine.

My parents loved each other very much. It was very evident to me as I was growing up. They expressed qualities of the heart that helped me come to God. They never turned to God, but they lived such lives that their love was based on sacrifice for each other and their children. And so, at least in their hearts, their sense of self expanded to create a world of love for their family. Their love for each other, and their children, helped them forget themselves to some degree.

The question for followers of Meher Baba, however, is how to expand this sense of self-forgetfulness that human love gives. We can do so when we focus on loving the One in the many, which Meher Baba calls divine love. Such an all-embracing love not only helps us forget ourselves more

completely, but it also leads us to the truth of unity of all life.

Earlier I had mentioned trying to “forget” my irritations, anger, pettiness, judgments, my need to be right, (etc.). This requires constant vigilance and tremendous effort. These conscious efforts to curb the ego's assertiveness are indeed acts of love. It may be just a shadow of Divine Love, but when we try to uphold the unity of all life, it is an act of love nonetheless, because it points to the truth. And whether we realize it or not, what we are doing, according to Meher Baba, is transforming the life of our limited self into a life of love. We may not look at it that way, but Baba does!

What the search for real happiness ultimately means for us is that it presents the real possibility of having a sense of oneness with others in our daily interactions. Such feelings create the foundation for community life.

In the discourse, “The Travail of the New World Order,” Meher Baba explains how this occurs. He tells us that as we perceive “the infinite Self in all selves,” we will readjust our attitudes towards each other in everyday life. We will outgrow and discard “the limitations of the ego-life,” as we identify more and more with the universal soul. Thus, He says, “Brotherhood then becomes a spontaneous outcome of true perception”--a perception of oneness. He further tells us that as we perceive oneness, we also begin to perceive its real value, which in turn allows us “to promote real unity and cooperation.”

We now have seen that as Meher Baba guides us to find true happiness, He is also telling us that by

putting aside our ego assertions and forgetting ourselves, we encourage love for each other. These actions, which recognize the One in the many, give us the spontaneous opportunity to establish community life based on the truth of the unity of all life.

This may all sound like utopian nonsense. Yet Meher Baba assures us that, “It is not something that belongs to utopia but is completely practical.” He encourages us to put our best efforts forward, for they are “based upon spiritual understanding” and as such, they are “an affirmation of the Truth” and the New Life.

So we begin with searching for our happiness, and we end up at the threshold of the New Life. Just as true happiness, according to Meher Baba, is different than what we thought it was, so too the path to community life is not as we had assumed. It comes in the shape of the New Humanity which has its foundation in the New Life itself.

THE NEW HUMANITY IS THE NEW COMMUNITY

There was a general anticipation of the New Humanity amongst my generation in the 1970s. We felt we were going to witness a great change where humanity would reach beyond insensitive materialism and experience a real brotherhood of man. The catchphrase, “The New Humanity,” was uttered ceaselessly, so excited were we at its impending arrival.

So I am going to go back to those times and look at the way I might have talked about the New Humanity. There I was at some Baba meeting in the U.S.A. and talking to a friend saying, “Yeah man, Baba tells us we are part of a new humanity. That's great.

You can feel it, can't you?" My friend replies, "Of course I can feel it. Baba says it's so, so I feel it." Then I say, "It is going to be great, the world is going to change at last. A real brotherhood will be established." My friend utters, "Yeah, everyone is going to be spiritual and the world will be a different place." I say, "Where do you want to go to eat?" My friend responds, "What about deli?" I say, "Deli sounds good, let's go."

I still agree with one thing in this paragraph--deli sounds good. Although I enjoyed talking about the New Humanity, words were not enough to enable me to understand what real brotherhood meant. So eventually my idealism crashed into the limitations that made up my life at that time, and I bequeathed the notion of the New Humanity to future generations to live.

Years later, as I struggled once more to find real spirituality in my life, I discovered that I was also trying to put into action the very themes of the New Humanity without calling it that. Vaguely, I would reach out for that truth called the unity of all life. Nowadays that initial uncertainty is gone and instead there is the ongoing struggle to uphold a sense of oneness at the expense of my ego assertions.

There really is nothing vague about the New Humanity. We just have to dare ourselves to try to put Meher Baba's words into action. Let us then look at several statements that Baba makes in the discourse, "The New Humanity," to see how they can help us right now live with a sense of spiritual unity that could help establish community life.

I think we will all agree that the life of the old humanity is a life of the ego and its self-centered nature. Meher Baba does not present a pretty picture

of our selves. He describes the false self as, "caught up in the clutches of separative and assertive tendencies." Literally, our life's picture is framed by our separative limitations.

How these tendencies operate is fascinating. Meher Baba explains, "Even when military wars are not being waged, individuals or groups of individuals are constantly engaged in economic or some other subtle form of warfare." No wonder building any kind of community is difficult or near impossible when our minds operate this way.

Meher Baba gives us a valuable insight here. For how aware are we that often, underneath the surface of our minds, there is some kind of warfare with someone over something? The basis for this mental warfare and the frustration and hatred it engenders is nothing other than our addiction to maintaining our separative self. Baba explains this compulsion by stating, "Separative existence derives its being and strength from identifying itself with one of the opposites and contrasting itself with the others."

Because we are engaged in subtle warfare with others over any matter, small or great, Meher Baba further states, "The urgent problem facing humanity is to devise ways and means of eliminating competition, conflict, and rivalry in all the subtle and gross forms that they assume in the various spheres of life." Therefore, we have to find a way to overcome the dilemma that the separative self presents, so that community life can flourish.

It is interesting to note here that Meher Baba leaves it to us to find the ways and means to remove the competition, conflict, and rivalry that our separative self promotes. And although He leaves it to us, Baba

makes several statements in the discourse that, if put into action, can lead us to a sense of unity and spontaneous community life.

Let's start with, "In the light of the truth of the unity of all life, cooperative and harmonious action becomes natural and inevitable." You might feel that to live in the light of this truth is beyond us and so discard it. I know I did for many decades.

But I finally discovered that as I deeply considered Meher Baba's words, He was not speaking of the final Realization that lets us become one with the light of the Truth, but a process that allows for this truth (and for that matter, any truth) to gradually rise into our lives just as the sun gradually lightens up the skies.

Therefore, if I dared to deeply and firmly believe, uphold, and even love the truth that all life is one, I found at times that I was living by the light of that truth. A glimmer of it is so strong that it can stand up to the separative attitudes that I face all day long and because of it, I can still maintain a cooperative and harmonious manner.

However, when I say a sense of unity can stand up to separative attitudes, it does not mean that the separative attitudes I face would disappear. Usually others do not appreciate or understand such efforts. In fact, the person we are interacting with may not perceive our actions as being cooperative or harmonious at all! Our actions might simply be judged upon whether we have agreed with them or not. If we agree, we have been cooperative and if not, then we have been difficult!

What happens, then, to our sense of

brotherhood, community, and spiritual unity when others express aggression or distrust or arrogance or misunderstanding or pride or simply don't listen, etc.? Regardless of the behavior thrown at us out of ignorance of the truth, we should try to keep the other person close to us in our hearts out of a sense of unity. We should try not to distance ourselves from them, even if they have done so to us.

I know this is not an easy thing to do, and I continue to struggle to uphold this insight. At such times, I try to remember, as Eruch would remind me on occasion, not to be concerned about the person's attitude, but to be concerned only with my attitude. I think this is one of the meanings of his comment (which at first confused me) that we shouldn't worry what others think, as long as we know we are focused on Meher Baba. Too often, all of us get caught up in trying to correct another person's attitude. In fact, we get weighed down by it. But we can be free of the burden of judgment by focusing on Baba and His truth of the unity of all life. It is the only focus that naturally and inevitably leads us to cooperative and harmonious action, even if it is only on our part.

As I said, when I first came to the Trust Office, I had discarded the notion of living in the truth of the unity of all life, thinking it was beyond my capacity to live. Nonetheless, I still would try to uphold spiritual ideals that were related to oneness and harmonious action. These efforts brought their own dilemmas which I would share with Eruch. Here are a few of them along with his guidance to me.

During my first year at the Trust Office, I was greatly surprised by some of the unfriendly or hostile attitudes that were expressed toward me. I did not know how to appease these attitudes. So I finally

explained the situation to Eruch. He replied, “If that is the situation, then don’t keep your hand extended all the time like a dodo. But keep it ready to be extended at any time, once the person wants to make amends.”

And then there is the daily grind when, from time to time, we are so fed up by those around us that we just want to walk away from them and our work. When I would share these irritations with Eruch, he would tell me, “Give in but don’t give up.” What a profound statement! I still apply this wisdom to my life today, reminding myself to give in and let go and just keep focused on the service I am performing.

In our life, when we enter into discussions, often we insist on our point of view. It can even reach the point where a battle of wills begins. Eruch told me to go to the extent of pleading in such a situation, but not to assert myself. You may wonder what he means by that. For me, it meant to express myself in such a way that I do not create separateness. If I follow Eruch’s guidance, I would not use my willfulness to insist upon my point of view but instead I would plead it. And usually, in pleading, there is an element of the heart.

One day several of us residents were sitting with Eruch at the Trust Office. He was speaking of working and living together and he said at one point, very imploringly, to all of us there, “Let go, let go, let go.” He said these words with such profound humility that I burst into tears!

As you can see, Eruch was a guiding force in my life. One of his earliest statements to me when I started working at the Trust Office made a great difference in my life. He said, “You have to learn how to swallow, brother.” But this was not an easy way of life. Although

I understood that he meant that I was to swallow my ego assertions, I did not know how to properly do so.

It took me well over a decade before I began to understand how to swallow the separateness I daily faced, and reprocess it into harmonious actions that uphold the truth of oneness. Naturally to swallow something, we have to digest it in a way that nourishes us. The continued bitterness that we may feel over a situation, and the hidden anger that keeps brimming within us, are examples of undigested experience. To consciously swallow these and other separative feelings takes a mental digestive system that is based on spiritual understanding. Because I had no spiritual understanding at the time, all I did for many years was swallow the separative attitudes without any understanding of how to digest them. I eventually developed a terrible case of spiritual indigestion where I was receiving no nourishment from my attempts to uphold oneness.

When this spiritual indigestion became acute, I became very confused as to why this was happening to me. After all, I had read all the books, listened to all the mandali stories, intellectually believed in all the truths I heard. Eventually I came to understand that it only stayed in the superficial part of my mind. Yes, I was a “Baba-lover.” I acknowledged who He is! But I had yet to understand how to live what was being told to me.

When I finally understood that I was not living these truths, I had to seriously reconsider every single thing I had previously understood. I had to review all my spiritual ideas and see if I was really living up to them or not. And since I was not, I had to begin to dare to live up to them. That process was painful and exhausting. It took me several years but it led me to

learn the art of how to swallow and digest separative attitudes.

And what I learned was that I had to consciously use my heart. I had to use my heart to swallow all the separative attitudes. If I used my mind, as I had been doing, indigestion would continue. Why is that?

I discovered that the heart had the capacity to dissolve separateness through its sincere belief in the truth of the unity of all life. The remarkable thing is, by making this belief an underlying principle to my actions, a spontaneous love for this truth arose, which in turn further enhanced the belief. Moreover, and most importantly, I found that these actions actually nourished my heart.

I also came to understand why my efforts failed when I relied on my mind. They failed because the mind simply does not have the capacity to dissolve separateness. Merely accepting the truth, without a deep faith in it, is not adequate. These growing understandings led me to be very vigilant in my actions to try to make sure that I was meeting life and its challenges with my heart and not my mind.

Let's make this a bit more concrete using an example. Say I'm having an argument with you. My mind thinks, how arrogant you are. But then my mind says, wait, remember, we're all one, don't react to the separative ego. And so I bite my tongue and don't say what's on my mind. But I still am thinking and feeling it, and end up with feelings of resentment or bitterness towards you which stay with me, even though, outwardly, I may have managed to stay calm and apparently friendly throughout the discussion. This often happens when we try to uphold the truth of unity

by relying on the mind. Such emotional outcomes end up being undigested experience.

But let us say we rely on our faith in the truth of oneness as our core belief and base our experience upon it. Then I not only remind myself not to get caught up in the ego clash, but also calmly accept the misunderstandings that come from it. In this way I have swallowed the separateness, as Eruch would say, maintained harmony, and because I have upheld a truth, I am nourished.

By making these efforts I can say this: To uphold the truth of oneness requires more than the ordinary mental effort that is required to succeed in normal endeavors in our life. Ordinary mental discipline faces opposition in only a few categories of life, but spiritual truth faces complete opposition in all categories of life. Spiritual effort requires something that is out of this world--renouncing what we see for what we don't see! This is called faith, living faith which activates our heart. Once the heart is activated, it takes control of the wheel and turns off the automatic pilot of our habit patterns and pre-conceived beliefs, etc. that control us, and it directs our consciousness where to go. Since I have begun to make these efforts, I feel they are a genuine step forward to conscious spiritual living.

Now that we have looked at Meher Baba's affirmation that cooperative and harmonious life comes when we live in the unity of all life, we will look at another statement that can lead us to community life. "Through divine love the New Humanity will learn the art of cooperative and harmonious life."

Isn't it interesting to see that Meher Baba states that there is an art to cooperative and harmonious life? Having the faith in the truth of unity of all life allows us

to uphold oneness. Still, we have to put that belief into action. How we put it into action is where the art of it comes into play. And the effort we make to do so is an act of love on our part based on truth.

Throughout the years, Eruch used to tell me on occasion, "You have to win people over, brother." As I learned to approach experience from the viewpoint of oneness, I would feel some kind of gap between the other person and myself. So what I began to do was try to fill in the gap myself in any way I could that would lessen the feeling of separateness between us. Such actions made me recall Eruch's words. As I continued to try to fill in the gap, I observed that each time it required a different kind of response. So when I read Baba's words above about learning "the art of cooperative and harmonious life," I could see the practical truth behind His statement.

Part of the "art" of cooperative and harmonious life, I think, is to learn to deflect the separative attitudes of others without letting them upset us and, at the same time, to keep them close to us. Separative attitudes are dangerous, like a charging bull, and can upset our balance with disastrous results. We must learn the art of letting all the actions and words of others that are based on separateness go right past us without touching us, just as the bullfighter doesn't try to stop the bull, or wrestle with it, but gracefully pirouettes out of its way, all the while keeping his balance and composure. It is an art. I think part of the trick for us is not getting caught up in who is right and who is wrong, not worrying about the words used, or the need to explain ourselves. What we all really need is to keep our focus on our belief of the truth of oneness, even if we don't directly feel it yet.

Let me add further that upholding our belief in

the unity of all life is a learning process. Through trial and error, we learn the art of making the appropriate response according to a situation in order to maintain oneness. It is similar to a painter who looks at his canvas and chooses what color to use on a particular part of the canvas. The way in which we uphold the truth is so important to Meher Baba that He tells us, "Learn the art of taking your stand on the Truth within."

It is instinctual for every individual to take a stand. The critical decision in life is what to stand for. Meher Baba wants us to take a stand on the Truth within. But we are not just applying a bunch of rules in order to do so. Baba tells us that it is an art to do so. So what we do is to take His words, His statements, and apply them in our daily life and see what happens. We learn, we experiment, and we grow.

This leads me to bringing up an incident at the Trust Office that I enjoy recounting because Eruch expressed a unique understanding that I had never heard before. It illustrates the kind of attitudes that are required for us to live a community life. And I think it may well sum up in a practical way those truths that Meher Baba stated in the discourse, "The New Humanity."

It was a quiet afternoon. A few of us were sitting around Eruch. Mani did not come to the office that day. As we sat there, one resident from Meherabad came to see Eruch. He was greatly distraught. We all moved away from Eruch's table so he could sit with Eruch undisturbed and explain his problem. The person was so upset that Eruch had to calm him down so he could even speak about what had happened to him. But he could not be calmed down. He spoke

boisterously about the humiliation he had just gone through. Because he spoke so wildly, the few residents that were in the compound heard the noise and came to see what was happening.

By the time the person settled down to some extent, there was a small crowd around Eruch listening to this person. By this time, I had removed myself and stood some distance away from where Eruch and this person were seated. As the person continued to explain the great humiliation he just experienced at the hands of several people at Meherabad, I was reminded of biblical scenes as portrayed by great artists.

Here was Eruch intensely listening to a Baba-lover who was wildly gesticulating as he expressed his anger, while all around them, at varying distances, were people with various strikingly dramatic expressions on their faces. As I watched this, I was stunned. I used to think that such paintings were overly dramatic, bearing little resemblance to what must have actually taken place. However, since that time, whenever I go to a museum and stand before paintings of dramatic biblical scenes, I know that such expressions can indeed be true!

Ultimately this biblical spell was broken by Eruch speaking. He said very firmly, "Now, are you through? Have you said everything you want to say? (Eruch only said this after the person had spoken for quite a while.) Now I want you to listen to what I have to say. I want you to go back to those people and apologize to them. I want you go back to them and ask for their forgiveness. It can never be the other way around. If you don't do this, then you and they will start to harbour all sorts of ill feelings. You will become

bitter towards them and they will feel justified in their wrong beliefs about you. Therefore, for the betterment of all, you must go back to them and seek their forgiveness and restore the harmony between you all. That is Baba's work."

The person was shocked at Eruch's response and we all were equally amazed, for this guidance was way out of the ordinary. The person insisted once again that the others were at fault and he was not going to apologize to them, and left Eruch's company abruptly, uncomforted and in dismay. With equal shock and amazement at Eruch's words, everyone who gathered quietly dispersed. Eruch said nothing more about this incident and continued his work.

What do you make of Eruch's response? As I was typing this story, I decided to relate this incident to some Baba-lovers who were nearby. Although they enjoyed hearing this incident as a story, they commented, "We are only human, how can we do what Eruch said to do?" And that is the problem we all face. We are so bound by our limitations that we prefer to keep such powerful incidences only as pretty Baba stories instead of using them to inspire us to act upon them. At some point in our lives, we will discard our excuses and start to live out the truths of these stories. As Eruch would tell me time and again, "Rise above your weaknesses."

This incident and Eruch's advice illustrates many of the things we just discussed. It is up to us to live a spiritual life and not wait for others to do so in order for us to reciprocate. As we forget our pride, our anger, our pain, we are able to forget our self and extend our hearts to others. Such actions uphold the belief of the unity of all life and help us rise above our limited self. Meher Baba confirms this by saying:

To face the truth is to realize that life is one, in and through its manifold manifestations. To have this understanding is to forget the limiting self in the realization of the unity of life.

So what it boils down to is that even if we feel we have been wronged, it is for us to take a stand on the truth of oneness within and create harmony amongst all concerned. These efforts, without us thinking of it in that way, make it possible to establish the ideals of the New Humanity in our hearts.

Now if many people who are in close contact with each other live this way, what would be the outcome? Well, I imagine the outcome would be a real community life, because it is based on oneness. And thus it seems to me that we cannot create community life. It is the spontaneous result of many people genuinely living spiritual truths.

This is illustrated in the lives of the mandali. I will share two remarkable moments that I wrote down in my diary that illustrate how living the truths of the New Humanity results in the New Community.

One time in the Trust Office, Mani said to me about Eruch, "He can't understand why people can't live together harmoniously. He can't understand the jealousy, greed, (etc.) He asks, 'Why?' He really wants people to live harmoniously together, and feels it when it does not happen."

And because Eruch truly felt this way, he emanated the truth of the unity of all life. That is why so many people naturally felt a sense of harmony or great familiarity when they were with him. He didn't

have to talk about oneness; it was just there in his presence. In fact, this holds true for all the mandali. Most people spontaneously felt a sense of intimacy or community with them. They didn't lecture us about how to form a community; their living it gave us a taste of it and made us feel close to them, despite the fact that most of us did not, ourselves, experience the truth of Unity (except perhaps when we were around them).

The other touching moment was this. One day at the Trust Office, Eruch said to me, "Baba would always want us to live together harmoniously. I love feeling equal with others. I love it!" When Eruch said that he loved feeling equal with others, he meant feeling at one with others. He never liked undue respect other than normal etiquette.

Sometimes when I first started working in the Office, I would show him excessive respect and he very firmly let me know not to behave this way. He would always want a feeling of oneness around him and sometimes, when we kept him at a distance in our chatter, he would let us know that he too was happy to be included. In even such a small way, a sense of community was fostered. Through such actions on our part, we can do the same.

THE GREATER COMMUNITY

A New Way of Thinking

My sense from Meher Baba's discourses and Eruch's comments is that, almost paradoxically, the path to harmonious community life begins with focusing on ourselves and not on the community.

I don't mean in the worldly sense of “looking out for number one” which you hear bandied about, but in the sense of individually working to eliminate one's own false self. This seems to be confirmed when we look at Baba's statements about working in a larger context to create harmony.

Meher Baba ends the discourse on the New Humanity by saying, “When it is recognized that there are no claims greater than the claims of the universal Divine Life--which, without exception, includes everyone and everything--love will not only establish peace, harmony, and happiness in social, national, and international spheres but it will shine in its own purity and beauty.” Sounds like the typical Avataric promise of the kingdom of heaven. But note the key word here; it is the first word, “when.”

Yes, when it is recognized, but will it ever be recognized? How will general humanity live up to this truth, when we ourselves have such difficulty doing so? Nonetheless, Meher Baba challenges us by stating that if we accept spiritual oneness as having the greatest claim on our lives, then peace, harmony, and happiness will come to us individually and to our communities.

We have seen in the first section that Meher Baba states that happiness comes through right adjustment to others, and we have seen in the previous section that Meher Baba states that harmony and cooperation come when we all live in a spirit of oneness. Certainly then, harmony and happiness would be the outcome of living a spiritual truth if not in our outer life, then at least in our inner life.

There is a discourse called “The Infinity of the Truth” where Meher Baba explains what must change

with the individual, with society, and with civilization itself so that the claim of Universal Divine Life is upheld. Real community life must have its basis on the understandings that Baba provides in this discourse. As we have discussed, for such community life to exist, it must first begin with the individual. Then like-minded individuals spontaneously base their group activities on these spiritual understandings.

First of all, Meher Baba, I feel, equates the expression “infinity of the truth” with the “unity of all life.” And interestingly enough, He points out that there is definitely a way for mankind to solve its social problems. That should make us breathe a sigh of relief. He says, “When the infinity of the Truth is adequately grasped from the point of view of nonduality, this understanding also becomes fruitful for the adequate solution of social problems.” So when we “adequately” or sufficiently grasp the truth of the unity of all life, this then becomes the vehicle for us to effectively solve social problems.

This understanding also applies to our community life. When harmony is disturbed amongst us, the issues involved do become “social problems.”

Meher Baba's guidance here is stunning. Baba explains what understanding is required so we can properly confront not only our immediate community problems but also the greater problems of society. Yes, we can do it, not in the way that we have been trying to, but in the way that the Creator is telling us to do it--that is, through understanding the unity of all life. So we don't have to throw our hands up in the air and give up on community life, as all of us have felt like doing now and again. There is a way out of this terrible confusion. But in order to confront social problems, we are going to have to give up some of our old tried and so-called true ways of doing so.

Ordinarily we feel there is no other way than to uphold the majority viewpoint. When community issues come under discussion, we immediately want to know who is for and who is against, and the number on each side. This is the customary approach to making a decision. In fact, we cannot imagine any other way to solve such problems other than this method.

Meher Baba tells us, "As long as a social problem is dominated by the idea of numbers and multiplicity, there is no lasting solution for it." This way of solving such problems does not work because Baba says, "Mere manipulation of numbers, however clever, can neither yield the right adjustment between the individual and society, nor can it yield true harmony between various groups that come to exist within the society." There is that phrase again "right adjustment." We saw how Baba used it earlier to explain how to achieve happiness. Now He uses the same phrase to explain how to solve social problems.

Meher Baba further clarifies that the right adjustment required to solve social problems is not through majority-minority perspectives:

If social claims of a general nature are determined by the considerations of a small minority, the interests of the vast majority remain unreconciled; and the majority remains inevitably in rivalry and opposition to the minority. On the other hand, in democratic countries the claims of a general nature are determined by consideration of the majority viewpoint rather than by the minority. This point of view, however, is still within the domain of duality, where the many exist; and therefore

the problem of minorities remains unsolved. Since their interests remain unreconciled, the minority remains inevitably in rivalry and opposition to the majority.

Thus it is futile to try to solve social problems from the viewpoint of manyness. The reason this is so, Meher Baba tells us, is because "Where there are many, there is necessarily comparison between them. There is a smaller and a greater, a hierarchy of claims, privileges, and rights; and all valuation gets twisted by the recognition of gradations of different types."

Thus looking at life from the viewpoint of "manyness" brings about endless complications of trying to adjust all the innumerable claims that everyone has. Think of a circle with its 360 degrees, each degree sees the centre point from a different angle. How can we reconcile all these perspectives?

At present, what we try to do to solve social problems that arise from all these individual claims, privileges, and rights, etc. is to create a standard of equality, hoping that by making everyone equal, we will arrive at a fair and just solution. However, Meher Baba informs us that no matter how hard humanity strives for equality to solve social problems, it will fail, because ultimately we are looking at life from a false perspective. Baba explains, "Although the sense of equality is made the basis of many social and political ideals, the real conditions of rich cooperative life are fulfilled only when the bare idea of equality is replaced by the realization of the unity of all life."

I don't think He can make it any clearer to humanity than with this statement. The truth is that we are not equal but One. Even in duality, no one is really equal, as we all are very different people. As

such, humanity is wrongly trying to reach out for equality, thinking it will solve social problems when, in fact, it should be reaching out for the truth of the unity of all life which will solve social problems.

Returning to the analogy of the circle, instead of looking at life from the individual degree each of us represents on the outer circumference of the circle, we travel the distance to the center point of the circle. There all the various degrees converge in one point, the point of unity. This is the journey we need to make. And as such, Meher Baba concludes, "The lasting solution can come only when it is illuminated by the truth of the indivisible totality and intrinsic unity of all."

Therefore, as we perceive the truth of oneness, Meher Baba tells us, "...initiates a new way of thinking in terms of an indivisible totality." This is a great shift in perspective for us. Things are literally perceived differently than before. This shift is not something that we achieve because of being on the inner planes. It is achieved by us through simply and yet courageously upholding the truth of the unity of all life in the midst of the continual onslaught of separative statements made by our own minds and the minds of others.

When we look at life from a perspective of oneness, spontaneously, "all comparison is out of place." We begin to truly see that "there is no smaller or greater" when it comes to people or events in our lives.

We also begin to see the "hierarchy of claims, privileges, and rights" that we all feel justified in asserting, as well as "all the relative values of comparison" that our judgmental minds make can be discarded "in favor of the recognition of the intrinsic

worth of everything." This changes our value system dramatically because we recognize that God is in everyone and therefore everyone has value.

Therefore, this new way of thinking brings us to acknowledge and uphold the critical understanding that "Since everyone in creation is not only in spiritual infinity but *is* that indivisible spiritual infinity, then everyone is first in importance and no one is second."

And thus, if we genuinely begin to think in this new way, then what will follow is that the hierarchy of claims and rights of others, along with the burden of mental comparisons, disappears. This is because we now have one overriding claim in our life that touches upon everyone. It is the claim of the unity of all life. We now recognize, as Meher Baba states, "that there are no claims greater than the claims of the universal Divine Life." It is the claim of universal Divine Life that now allows us to dare to solve social problems, replacing the hierarchy of claims and rights that separated us from one another, and kept social solutions unsolvable.

At this point, we may say that we have adequately grasped the infinity of the truth, and as Meher Baba has stated above, "This understanding also becomes fruitful for the adequate solution of social problems."

Now we have learned from the Creator Himself, Meher Baba, that social problems will remain unsolvable unless we change our perspective to Oneness. Let us return for a moment to another discourse where He tells us how the world's economic problems can be solved.

From Selfish-Interest to Interest of the Self

Meher Baba states in "The New Humanity" that, "Economic adjustment is impossible unless people realize that there can be no planned and cooperative action in economic matters until self-interest gives way to self-giving love. Otherwise, with the best of equipment and efficiency in the material spheres, humanity cannot avoid conflict and insufficiency."

We now know very clearly that humanity's efforts to adjust the economic situation in the world will fail, in spite of all the planning and regardless of cooperation in using the latest equipment and professional skills, because we lack the real skill--giving up self-interest. We can assume that the only way to let go of self-interest naturally and express self-giving love is through the understanding of oneness.

Otherwise our idea of forgoing self-interest will vary according to each individual's perspective based on a sense of self. Meher Baba explains that the only way humanity is ever going to give up self-interest is through spiritual adjustment. "Spiritual adjustment requires the elimination of self, not only from the material aspects of life, but also from those spheres that affect the intellectual, emotional, and cultural life of man."

Thus humanity needs spiritual understanding to genuinely solve any of life's problems. And because we don't have spiritual understanding, we don't grapple with the real problem, which is the "elimination of self." This dooms our efforts, no matter how grand, to eventual failure.

Global efforts will fail, no matter what governments try to do. Local communities will fail, no matter how hard they try. We will fail too--unless we give up self-interest, unless we give up the perspective of manyness.

Meher Baba ends the discourse, "Infinity of the Truth," by describing a civilization that has understood and maintains the truth of the unity of all life. He tells us that "in a civilization based upon a true idea of the spiritual infinity of the Truth, there will therefore be no problems of majority and minority, of rivalry and competition, and of those comparisons and laborious assessments that so often become a shelter for pride and separative ego. Life then will be infinitely simple and integral because the illusions that create rifts and complexities will all have disappeared."

We may find Meher Baba's statement extraordinary, shaking our heads and wondering how it can ever come to pass. Yet Baba is not saying it is going to happen. He is saying that by having an understanding of the unity of all life, this is what happens to a civilization, to a society, to an individual's life.

Although Meher Baba does not give a direct answer in either discourse about how to solve social problems, He does tell us that the way to solve them can be revealed by the truth of oneness. When mankind in general has the intuitive tools to solve social problems creatively through the "new way of thinking in terms of an indivisible totality," the solutions will become possible. When I use the word creative, I mean it in its fullest sense: resourceful, imaginative, and ingenious solutions will evolve through the united efforts of all. Or another way of

looking at it is that perhaps it is like having the ability to solve a complex scientific or mathematical problem in today's world, where it would not have been possible centuries ago.

So after reviewing some of material in the discourses, "The New Humanity" and "The Infinity of the Truth," we have seen that community can be formed and societal problems can be solved, if we operate from an understanding of Oneness. But society is not going to change unless we as individuals begin to change. Although larger global, societal, and communal issues will remain, we can begin to transform our lives as a first step. With Meher Baba's help, we can begin to make our life simple and whole by focusing on the oneness that makes life's complexities disappear. By doing this, we help create an atmosphere that is conducive to promoting community life based on oneness.

The Daily Effort

How can we begin to make life simple for ourselves? Well, all day long we make value judgments and often we agonize over these decisions. But there is a way to stop the agony. There is a way to make clear judgments. Meher Baba tells us that when we uphold the unity of all life, our decisions are "unclouded because of the unmarred perception of the One in each and all."

By having faith in the truth of oneness, many petty concerns in our life disappear. How we relate to others will change, because our perspective has changed from manyness to oneness. This perception alone ends a lot of pain in our life. This perception alone makes things simple. We would be freed from the

mental strain of "laborious assessments" driven by our pride. All the rivalry, competition, and comparisons would have no place in our lives. We would see them clearly for what they are--creations of the separative ego.

Such an attitude would also alter how we make group decisions, for we would no longer see things in terms of a majority versus minority dichotomy. We would consider everyone as our own and try to accommodate each one, not even through external compromise, but through a sense of oneness.

By living this way, we do fulfill Meher Baba's promise that life becomes simple for us, "because the illusions that create rifts and complexities will all have disappeared." How can we contact the One in all of us? Baba tells us that it is accomplished, "only by shedding the false idea of the many."

I have shared in previous booklets my process of trying to shed the false idea of the many. It is an ongoing, moment-to-moment experience, from the time I wake up until I go to sleep. Do I remember to forget, or do I forget to remember? And by that I mean, as I said previously, do I remember to forget the false self and all of its paraphernalia of pride, anger, hurt feelings, (etc..) Or do I get so caught up in the moment of life before me that I forget to remember the truth of Oneness.

No doubt about it, to shed the false idea of the many takes sincere and constant effort. In fact, making any spiritual effort requires great focus. I have found that when I do sincerely focus on Meher Baba and His Truth, I become more aware of just how critical single-minded concentration is to overcome any spiritual problem.

In fact, Meher Baba speaks of this effort in the discourse, "The Ways of the Master." He says that, "intensive concentration of mental energy is necessary if the aspirant is to break through the many barriers that lie between him and his goal." So we must accustom ourselves to the necessity of making a more concentrated effort. As often as we can, we should experiment and explore ways of putting into action not only the truth of oneness but any spiritual truth that springs from remembrance of Meher Baba.

It may be similar to the following analogy: We are in a forest and we are lost. We need to build a fire to keep warm and to keep the animals away. We had previously read something about building a fire. So we have a vague notion of what to do, but we have never done it before. We fail at our first attempts. Then we think about what to do and we decide to search for different kinds of material that may help us to start the fire. We experiment with as many materials as we can find without any luck. We are at a loss what to do. We have exhausted all means and our mental energy is low, our mind bereft of thought. Just then, a thought comes to us to use the same material in a different way to start the fire, and it works. We are thrilled that we have succeeded. We are safe and warm.

After a while, we realize that the work does not stop with building the fire. We also have to try to maintain the conditions that keep the fire going. One of our main obstacles is the wind that can arise from any direction and blow the fire out. So now we are on guard to make sure the fire does not go out. We keep a lot of material on hand and keep the fire alive. But eventually the wind blows out the fire and we have to start to build the fire all over again. But at least now we know how to start the fire and we have learned a little about keeping the fire going in spite of the wind. And

for a longer time, we have a fire that keeps us safe and warm.

I feel this analogy describes the concentrated focus that I try to have daily. I am always trying to experiment how to build a better fire to keep me warm with the truth of oneness and how to keep the fire burning longer than before to overcome the onslaught of the wind of manyness. This discipline is accompanied by having faith in my actions and relying on intuitive guidance from Meher Baba.

If your heart is set on a goal, especially living a spiritual life, it starts with some disciplinary effort. I know many of us feel that effort is a mechanical and therefore a distasteful discipline. And sometimes we belittle mechanical means, thinking they are unworthy of the path of love. But I feel we should appreciate our own efforts with the understanding that they are the beginnings of the act of divine love. I believe there is a quote from Meher Baba where He states the necessity for mechanical means to begin with.

Just as I typed this, a memory raced through my head. It was in the beginning of my life at the Trust Office. When I first came to live in India, I followed Eruch around the Office, in an attempt to learn from him all that I could. Perhaps I did this with too much enthusiasm. One day, as we were standing outside the Trust Office, he grabbed a hold of my arm and sat me down on the bench. He said, "Now look, I am not a Perfect Master that you should follow me, but what I can do is give you discipline." I had no idea what he meant by discipline, but I learned!

Perhaps another way of looking at discipline is the effort required to build a canal. If you have seen or read about a canal being built, then you know what tremendous effort is involved. The builders have to confront many uncertainties, face many setbacks, and experience many failures before the canal is built. Sometimes they have to divert the water from one direction to another. But once the canal is built, the water flows. This is how I look at the effort that is required to overcome manyness, so that the feeling of oneness can flow from the heart. Although at times the effort is overwhelming, I have found that sometimes the effort itself refreshes me, even as I struggle to build a connection to the truth. Such is the grace of love.

So if we want to live a life without “the illusions that create rifts and complexities,” then we are going to have to discipline ourselves daily to make a concentrated effort. The first obstacle, as I mentioned earlier, is the inertia of our accumulated karma, our habitual pattern of self-preservation which seems to be our default mode of behaving. But once we are determined to try to change our behavior and not just act reflexively, I think our biggest obstacle is our pride. It is important to become aware of how our pride maintains separative attitudes which cause separative actions.

Because we see ourselves as separate individuals, we build up both an image of how we see ourselves and also how we want others to see us. I think, overall, much of our troubles arise when this self-image gets disturbed by others. Once this occurs, we almost feel as if we were physically assaulted, our pride burning with deep irritation. The common reaction is to justify our behavior through emotional outbursts, proving, “You are wrong and I am right.” We do this perhaps to try to heal our wounded pride.

As I have been saying, the work we all need to do at that time is not to give in to any of these separative ways. At times, we are going to feel that our self-image is hurt. At times, we might even feel humiliated before others. But this is only our ego feeling these things. The important work that we have to do is to not be concerned about this. The world is concerned about such things. We are not! This is in part what we discussed earlier, when Eruch told me that I have to learn “to swallow” separative attitudes.

Our concern is to try to uphold the truth of oneness regardless of how our ego-self feels at the time. So even though our pride is burning with irritation, our work is to quietly bear what I call the burning of our false self. In a sense we are sacrificing up our ego. Who knows, this might well be the real meaning of the burnt sacrifices the ancients made to God.

This is not easy work at all! It requires the determined effort to successfully thwart our ego tendencies and at the same time not get involved with the aggressive behavior of others. And then after doing that, carefully observe how our mind reacted to the situation. We have to do this because the mind is the seat of the ego. As such, it is likely that some part of it feels hurt.

So after the incident, we should try to be emotionally alert as to how our mind reacted. Sometimes we can let the whole confrontation go and maintain a sense of oneness. But sometimes we can't and we feel hurt. At such times we need to see which parts of our psyche are in pain and why this is so.

If my pride gets hurt, I have learned that if I don't take care of it, the wound may spread, affecting other

parts of my life. So how do I take care of the wound of hurt pride? In other words, how do I heal myself?

I try to make an honest emotional assessment of myself. It is always better to admit any anger or bitterness that I may feel so I can understand and confront my reactions to it. Such explorations bring further self-understanding.

If I don't do this, then my attempt to uphold oneness will be subverted by subconsciously harboring ill-will towards others. Then I am caught in the same spiral of separative thinking that I was trying to overcome.

Perhaps it is a question of which fire we allow to burn within us. Do we succumb to having our pride burn with anger or do we try to have our hearts burn in longing for love of God.

Every day I still work on trying not to let the burn of pride get the better of me and instead try to long for the fire of love which burns the separative self. In fact, right now as I type this, my pride is on a low sizzle over something going on at the Trust Office. I feel that I have been excluded from a discussion on a subject with which I am deeply familiar. No doubt, all of us have had this experience from time to time.

So what did I do about this situation? I informed the people concerned about my feeling that I needed to be part of the discussion. But I chose not to express anger towards them because that only enhances separation. I swallowed the frustration, recognizing that it is only the reaction from the false self. And in the meantime, I try to keep them close in my heart while this issue is being resolved.

Now sometimes issues don't just resolve themselves overnight. I have found some long-held misunderstandings take quite a while. And yet I have experienced that, if I am patient, if I don't indulge in emotions or actions that enhance separation, then eventually the separations do disappear. When we dare to do this, then this really is a time to say, "Jai Baba," for it is a victory of the spirit. This is indeed the daily effort as we make our way to the truth of oneness.

A Real Example of Community

What would a community look like if it was based on oneness? In some ways, it is impossible to know because clearly we do not have an understanding of the unity of all life. If anyone did, it was Beloved Baba's mandali. So you may ask, "How about working and living in the community of the mandali? That might be the closest thing to a society that is based on the Truth of Oneness that we will ever know or that will ever be known to the world."

Well, I can only speak of the Trust Office and my close proximity with the mandali who lived and worked there. Unfortunately, I have to look back to a time when my understanding was less developed than it is now. Having the understanding I have now, undoubtedly I would have picked up more than I did at the time. But I do have an overall impression and a few memories that I can share.

One time Eruch said to me that he felt that joint responsibility was the way for the New Humanity. And I believe that is the way the mandali worked also. They really did work as a team, perhaps a team of

individuals but nonetheless a united group of people. I remember on a couple of occasions, Bhau said to me in his office, "You all cannot imagine how united all the mandali are deep down. We have differences, but underneath it all we are deeply united, nothing can separate us." He said this with great conviction. In fact, Bhau said on other occasions that he thought never before had the mandali been as united as in this advent.

How were they in working together? Well, each had different duties but at the same time they all relied on each other. A significant part of my duties involved taking dictation from Bhau concerning all the Trust-related correspondence. After I took the dictation, I then read it to Eruch who went over it first before it went to Mani and Rano. After they added their suggestions, if any, I would return with the work to Bhau if something needed clarification. Otherwise, I would then type the letter. Bhau did a tremendous amount of correspondence for the Trust, especially letters to the government. But he never signed them. Mani was the Chairman, so he would have her sign the letters. One day I remember asking him how he felt about having Mani sign all the work that he had done. I could see that he was totally unconcerned about such things. In fact, he was taken aback that I had asked such a question. I will always remember the expression on his face, surprised that that might be of any concern whatsoever.

During the day, Mani might go to Bhau's office and talk with him, or Bhau might go to see Mani at her office. Later on, after Mani's passing, Eruch would make it a point to go to Bhau's office every day. Even when he had difficulty walking and needed help, he would still insist on seeing Bhau.

How did they come to their decisions? Well, for the most part they would do that privately amongst themselves. But I am glad that I did write down in my diary that one day an issue came up at the Office and I was able to ask Mani, Eruch, and Bhau their viewpoint on the issue. I did not record what the issue was, but each one of them had an entirely different opinion. Somehow it concerned some directive from Baba. Mani felt we should stick to the letter of Baba's words. Eruch felt we need only express the intent of Baba's words. And Bhau stated that we could elaborate on them. Interesting, isn't it? Each had their own viewpoint on how they would work for Him.

Another diary notation is this: There was a conversation going on in the Trust Office with Mani and Eruch concerning some Trust matter. Mani, being the chairman, was leading the conversation. Eruch was sitting quietly. Now and again, Mani would ask Eruch for his opinion which he would offer such as, "It is for you all to decide." And, "I only want that you should make up your mind."

I found this to be true, over and over again, of Eruch. His attitude was the same at Board Meetings. Although he was not a Trustee, he attended all the Board Meetings. (He had me attend Board Meetings from, I believe, 1982 or 1983, to help him with the Board work he was concerned with.) If the conversation went on too long, he would forcefully pound the table with his fist and say, "Okay now, what have you all decided?" Sitting with him for over 25 years at the Trust Office, I found, as much as I could see, he was not concerned so much about the decision as he was about being indecisive. Of course, he would want all of us to put our hearts into the work because we were doing it for Baba. Constantly, I would discuss

Trust matters with him and then go to Bhau. Whether my comments or viewpoints were accepted by Bhau was not important to Eruch. He would say, "Once you have expressed your viewpoint to the office bearer (in this case Bhau), it is his responsibility. You have done your duty by saying what you have to say."

In conjunction with that, I also noted this statement by Mani in my diary. One day, in the Trust Office, she said to those around her, "Each situation merits your own judgment. Don't rigidly stick to what I say."

In sharing these few passages from my diary, I am not talking of my life with the mandali--that will be done in Booklet No. 7. But I wanted to make a few general statements about them in the context that we are talking about right now. These statements shed a bit of light on how we too can have different vantages points but, when it comes down to it, we all can be united in His Cause. When we let momentary issues have more value than the truth of oneness, it is the separative ego that is victorious. From that vantage point, nothing good can come out of it. But when we choose the truth of the unity of all life over any issue, then the truth prevails. I know for sure that Eruch did not approve or agree with some decisions, but he never ever let it affect the atmosphere around the Trust Office. He always maintained harmony with those around him. The same can be said of Mani and Bhau as well.

As you may recall, the mandali used the word "family" to describe their connection between themselves and us. Whenever they sent out any information to the Baba world or in their correspondence, they often referred to themselves as, "Your Meherazad Family."

In fact, both Eruch and Bhau would say that we should think of us getting together and working in His Cause, not as a community, but as a family. Eruch elaborated on this saying, "This is because only in a family will all members, regardless of their eccentricities at times, be loved and tolerated. Such love and toleration would not extend to outsiders such as gather for community meetings, (etc.,)"

Moreover, I have this interesting quote from Eruch in my diary where he says, "First there are strangers, then acquaintance, friendship, relationship, and then family."

In order to create such a family atmosphere it begins, as we've seen, with overcoming our self, or I should say our ego. So we will return to Meher Baba's discourses on the ego and start to see what we have to overcome in order to move towards real community life.

WE LIVE BY THE SEPARATIONS WE MAKE

The Worthlessness of the False Self

Eruch once said to me, "Don't put us on a pedestal; we are no different than you all. But if there is a difference between us and you all, it is this--that when we get off the track, we immediately re-focus back on to Baba. That is there with us, and that is the only difference." Eruch felt there was no difference between the mandali and the rest of us Baba-lovers. Whatever ideas we had that made us feel they were different or separate from us lay in ourselves.

We cannot help but make separative statements all day long. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep, we continually think, speak, and act in some way that gives us an identity, a separate identity from everything else. And because it is a separate identity from everything else, from what Meher Baba tells us, it is a false identity.

There is a notation in my diary that recalls the following exchange between Eruch and myself. After all the Trustees left a Board Meeting, Eruch was placing the chairs in an orderly fashion around the table. As he did this, I told him how I had felt humiliated at the meeting because I could not express what I wanted to say. And when I said that he just groaned and said, "What is there to be humiliated about when we do not even exist?" As he spoke these words the authority of them trickled into my heart--we do not even exist.

This truth was further elaborated by Eruch on another occasion. He told me that Meher Baba once said to him, "You are even less than a puppet, even less than a rag doll."

How can we ever grasp this truth about our existence? Can you imagine sitting in front of Meher Baba, the Lord of the Universe, when He first tells you that you are not even a puppet? A puppet has some kind of existence because there is someone pulling the strings. But Baba is telling you that there is not even a puppeteer. Then Baba tells you that you are even less than a rag doll. Where a puppet exists because of the puppeteer, a rag doll does not have any apparent existence whatsoever. What would be the impact of the Lord of the Universe telling you that? When He conveys something, it is not like you or I conveying something.

Our words are made out of momentary breath. His word made Creation.

So how can we comprehend that we are not even a rag doll, when our daily responsibilities to our families and friends make them all seem so important? Well, I don't know if we can.

However, what we might just be able to do is something related to it. Eruch once told me, "The real awakening is in knowing one's worthlessness." Here Eruch is talking about awakening to the worthlessness of the false self, whose very existence is even less than a rag doll.

So how can we awaken to the worthlessness of the false self? Whenever we want to get a clear, intellectual understanding of a spiritual truth, it is always good to turn to the "Discourses". So let us turn to the discourses on the ego.

Meher Baba tells us that the ego does indeed serve a useful purpose to us as "a medium for the integration of human experience." In other words, it is our "center of consciousness." But the problem is in the way that the ego attempts to integrate experience. "It does so around the false idea of separateness." What this means for humanity is that unknowingly it bases all of its actions on separateness. And what this means for us is that unless we focus on Meher Baba, we do likewise.

The ego is faced with a continual dilemma in trying to integrate experience. Meher Baba explains this predicament. "While always striving to establish unity and integration in experience, the ego can never realize this objective." Now that is quite a statement for us. The ego can never ever establish unity because of

the way it incorporates experience. And because it can never establish oneness, "It represents an active principle of ignorance that prevents further spiritual development" which, in our case, is to begin to perceive the unity of all life.

Although we aspire for a sense of unity with others, Meher Baba tells us that our ego can never do it. So we all are putting our confidence in something that continually misrepresents our life to us. It seems we all are at the mercy of our own centre of consciousness. It operates not only as "an affirmation of separateness" and but also "constitutes the chief hindrance to spiritual emancipation and enlightenment of consciousness." My God, what are we to do with a friend like that?!

New Centre of Integration

Meher Baba tells us that, "Life cannot be permanently imprisoned within the cage of the ego. It must at some time strive toward the Truth." When does this momentous event occur? It occurs when we begin to understand "that life cannot be understood and lived fully as long as it is made to move around the pivot of the ego."

At that time we are deeply challenged. We become restless to find "a new center of integration that will steer clear of the basic ignorance of separateness." Then life intensifies for us. We recognize that we must "reorganize [our] life in the Truth."

The new center for integration of experience, Meher Baba tells us in the "Discourses", is the Spiritual Master and all He represents. Although our

ego continually asserts separateness, we also acknowledge Meher Baba as the "standing affirmation of the unity of all life." Therefore, as we remember Him our thoughts and actions become connected to Him as this new centre of experience. The more we focus on Him the more "a gradual dissociation from the ego-nucleus" takes place.

The shifting of our thoughts and actions from the ego centre to this new centre of experience, which Meher Baba represents, is a real movement in consciousness. And ultimately it brings us to an "important crisis in the life of the individual."

Although we may have been remembering Meher Baba with various degrees of frequency, once this crisis begins it will not end until "all mental activity has a new frame of reference." What is this new frame of reference? Meher Baba says that all mental activity is now looked upon in "its relation to the Master as the manifestation of infinite Truth, not in the light of any relation to the ego-center as a limited I."

Many years ago, I underwent such a crisis. But I was in the dark as to what the crisis was about. During that time of crisis, I was fervently reaching out for something new but I could not understand what it was. Eventually, I began to see that I was being more forcefully challenged to associate everything I thought, did, or said to Meher Baba. And by doing so I was creating a new reference point in my psyche--"a new center of integration that will steer clear of the basic ignorance of separateness."

There is a very practical outcome for us when trying to create this new center of integration. It allows for the expression "of all values formerly inaccessible

to the ego-center.” What are these values that the ego cannot incorporate? It is any value that tries to lessen it, like humility, patience, loving-kindness. Each bestows what is necessary to gradually lessen the ego. The ego only wants to enhance its pride, not lessen it. The ego only wants to enhance its domination, not lessen it. The conscious process of incorporating and acting upon these values establishes what was brought about by the mental crisis--the new centre of integration. Moreover, Meher Baba explains that as we establish a new centre of integration of experience, “the ego gradually adjusts itself to the spiritual requirements of life...and suffers a drastic curtailment...through the cultivation of humanity, selflessness and love, wholehearted surrender and offering oneself to the Master, as Truth.”

In this way, as we gradually create a new centre of integration, we confront and lessen our separateness. Naturally this new centre of experience discards the exclusive attitudes of the separative self, while incorporating the inclusive attitudes of upholding the truth of oneness, allowing for genuine community life.

Overcoming Separative Feelings

In order to confront our separate self intelligently, let us continue with the "Discourses" to hear what Meher Baba says about it. He tells us, “Every thought, feeling, or action that springs from the idea of exclusive or separate existence binds.” His across-the-board statement that seems to encompass our whole life reveals the overwhelming difficulty we are up against in overcoming the separative ego. Yes, it can seem overwhelming if we consider tackling

everything at once. But we don't have to. Real progress is always made one step at a time.

What I try to do to begin to confront the separative self is become aware of those feelings, such as hate, anger, or fear, that clearly separate me from others, and witness for myself how these and other such feelings are “directly instrumental in the affirmation of separateness of the ego.” I then will be able to see not only how they strengthen the ego, but also how they “bring about a narrowing down of life and contribute to the limitation and restriction of consciousness.” To get a better understanding of how anger, hate, etc. enhance the separative self, let us see how Meher Baba describes their effect on us.

How do hate and anger increase separateness? When we feel these powerful emotions, Meher Baba says we are trying to remove the person from adversely affecting our life. “The other person is, so to speak, thrown out of one's own being and regarded not only as a foreigner but as definitely hostile to the thriving of one's ego.” Our instinctual reaction to so many circumstances in life is to protect ourselves. So when we feel that we have been harmed in some way, we arouse the powerful emotions of hate and anger to protect us.

When we express fear, Meher Baba tells us there is a “deep distrust” of the other person. Such a feeling “inevitably brings about a shrinking and withdrawal of consciousness, so as to exclude the being of another from the context of one's own life.” In the case of anger and hatred, we try to remove the person from affecting our lives by the force of our emotion, but in the case of fear, we helplessly withdraw from them so they don't affect our life.

As for jealousy, Meher Baba says, “The feeling of separateness finds most poignant expression in jealousy.” I imagine that we all have experienced, at some time, the heartbreak of jealousy. Baba describes the dynamic for jealousy this way. In jealousy, “There is a belief that some other soul has successfully identified itself with the person whom one sought. This creates a standing and irreconcilable protest against *both* individuals for developing a relationship that one really wished to reserve for oneself.” Whereas hatred and anger take the aggressive action of removal, and fear takes the passive action of withdrawal, jealousy is stuck in a dilemma of perhaps feeling both at the same time.

In addition, to show how hate, anger, fear, and jealousy can cause separation, Meher Baba also tells us that our craving for the company of others does the same thing. It is a common experience that at some time in our life we will wish we were in the company of someone special. Although this feeling is usually highlighted because of being rejected by them, we can also crave to be in the company of others who are friendly to us but who, for some reason, we cannot join. Nonetheless, we intensely feel separate from them. Baba explains the dynamic of craving this way. “When a person craves the company of others, he is keenly conscious of being separate from them and thus feels his own separate existence intensely. The feeling of separation from others is most acute where there is great and unrelieved craving.”

Thus in order to confront the separative self, whenever I am feeling or expressing craving, hatred, anger, fear, or jealousy, I try to pay heed to the alarm bell ringing within me, warning me that I am only strengthening my separative self. This alarm bell is my

understanding that all of these emotions “are all exclusive attitudes that create a gulf between oneself and the rest of life,” and if I express any of them, then all I have done through my assertions is to enhance the illusion of the separate self.

Although I can lessen my anger, hate, fear, etc. through understanding how harmful they are to me, what is the solution to overcoming separative feelings? There seems to be no other answer than love. The clear and simple reason is that “the ego is the affirmation of being separate from the other, while love is the affirmation of being one with the other.”

Loving others may sound daunting to us. But loving others may be more natural to us than we realize. This is confirmed by Meher Baba when He says, “There is a deep and imperative need in the human soul to love and identify itself with other souls. This is not fulfilled in any instance where there is craving or hate, anger or fear.”

That the basic fabric of our souls is to love must make us reconsider how difficult it really is to love others, especially when we have the Creator, Meher Baba, tell us that the “deep and imperative need” of our soul is indeed to love.

Ultimately we are faced with the truth that “love alone is an inclusive attitude, which helps bridge [the] artificial and self-created gulf” of separative emotions when we have not allowed ourselves to enhance the separative self’s barriers of anger, greed, and fear.

Thus community life can occur as the natural outcome of expressing the need of the soul. Love lessens the ego-self, and longing for the truth of

oneness lessens the feeling of separateness--all bringing about spontaneous community life.

Overcoming Mental Complexes

Meher Baba tells us that there is another fascinating mental activity that keeps us separate from each other and maintains the separative self. It is our instinctual habit of comparing ourselves with others. The mental operation of comparison is a very subtle thing, reaching way into our sub-conscious, affecting our every action and mood. Baba explains, "As long as there is ego, there is an implicit background of duality; and as long as there is the background of duality, the mental operations of comparison and contrast cannot be effectively stilled for long." The mind looks at experience by comparing ourselves with others all day long. Out of this comparison come the inferior and superior complexes that shape our feelings about ourselves and our actions. Let us see further what Baba says about these complexes that shadow our mental activity.

Meher Baba informs us that there is an unfulfilling addiction in wanting to be better than others. And if we fail in our attempts to be superior to someone, then we fall unhappily into the role of being inferior to the person. Through these two sets of mental activity, the mind creates and maintains separation from others. Sometimes we make these adjustments consciously, but I feel, for the most part, our sub-conscious mind makes these adjustments as we go through our day.

Even when we decide that we want to be equal with others, we will fail. Meher Baba explains why the

desire for equality does not work. "Even when a person seems to feel a sense of equality with another, this feeling is not securely established. It marks a point of transition between the two attitudes of the ego rather than permanent freedom from the distinction between the 'I' and the 'you.'" This is because our mental life rapidly changes. No sooner do we feel one thing, then another element arises in our life. No matter how mentally alert we may be, "The balance between the 'I' and the 'you' is constantly disturbed by the predominance of a superiority or inferiority complex."

However, Meher Baba informs us that we can restore the lost balance of our mind, not by seeking equality, but by seeking unity. Baba explains that equality is "utterly different from the sense of unity that is characteristic of the life of spiritual freedom." And as we noted earlier He tells us, "Although the sense of equality is made the basis of many social and political ideals, the real conditions of rich cooperative life are fulfilled only when the bare idea of equality is replaced by the realization of the unity of all life." As I had stated in Booklet No. IV, He is not talking about God-Realization. He is speaking of us attaining a spiritual, and not intellectual, understanding of the unity of all life.

Remembering and having deep faith in the spiritual truths we have been talking about can begin to give us a sense of oneness and provide us with the courage to reject the emotional appeals of the limited self. Then as we experience the different complexes in our life, they will begin to have less and less sway over us. We will begin to perceive their falsity. We will become aware of how they manipulate us into fear, hatred, anger, (etc.). And we will no longer be so ready to accept them.

Meher Baba explains that the way for the disciple to accommodate the superiority and inferiority complexes within himself is to become aware “that he is nothing in himself, but in and through the Master he is enlivened by the prospect of being Everything.” Having this understanding allows these complexes to begin to dissolve “the separative barriers of the ego in all its forms.”

The result will be less mental fluctuation. The calmer the mind is, the more opportunity there is for us to become aware of the underlying sense of oneness. Very naturally then, a sense of unity gradually replaces the ordinary life of mental tension that the complexes create and maintain.

If we do not make these efforts, then we will be at the mercy of the oscillations of our mind, looking at others either from an inferior or superior perspective. No matter how we justify our thoughts, there is no possibility of creating community life under such a perspective. Community life can only come about as we free ourselves of these complexes.

CHANGING BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE LIGHT OF AWARENESS

The External Environment

Meher Baba makes a remarkable statement about how the environment affects us in the discourse, “The Removal of Sanskaras.” He says, “Man is mostly what he becomes by being chopped, chiseled, and

shaped by the sculptor of environment.” Did you notice that Baba used the word “mostly?”

How aware are we that our environment can affect us and therefore our behavior so deeply? We probably think that we are not so much affected by what is around us. We probably think that we are independent-minded and free. Well, Meher Baba's statements lead us to see that this may not be the case.

Meher Baba says that the way one is affected by the environment depends on “whether or not he can surmount his surroundings” which, He goes on to say, “depends upon his strength of character.” He continues, “If he is strong, he remains free in his thought and action, even in the midst of action and reaction with his environment. If he is weak, he succumbs to its influence.”

To remain free in thought and action, as the reactions of others are expressed in our environment, is a very worthy goal. This does not mean stubbornly pursuing our own notions. It means living up to the highest spiritual ideals that we have come to understand. However, we are not always able to do this and we do succumb to the influence of others for any number of reasons.

I remember an occasion when I was clearly influenced by others. In the mid-1980s, there was a growing feeling amongst many of the residents who lived in India at the time that there was no such thing as spiritual training! Surprisingly this was felt at a time when most of the Meherazad mandali were still alive and quite active. I suppose, in looking back, we did not understand the subtlety of spiritual training, and some of us felt that the mandali were not training us. I also had my frustrations, despite being in the

daily company of Mani, Eruch, and Bhau. But my frustrations, admittedly, were more of a superficial nature. Others strongly felt the absence of any spiritual training. And eventually, in order to be part of a group, I finally yielded to participating in a nightly gathering of loose talk.

Later on in the last year of Eruch's life, when I was alone with him in his cabin at Meherazad, I admitted that at times I had been influenced by others in the past. I did not tell him how I was influenced. I will never forget the expression on his face when I told him this. His face immediately changed to one of disgust with me. In all the years with him, he had never looked at me in this way. He knew that being influenced by others meant that I had not kept my focus on Baba.

Yes, we all can be influenced in our daily life to do things we know are not in tune with values that uphold the Truth. But Meher Baba states that there are times when even the strong succumb because of what is taking place in the environment. He says, "Even if he is strong, he is likely to be swept off his feet by a powerful wave of the collective mode of life and thought. It is difficult to withstand the onslaught of a current of ideas and avoid falling prey to circumstances."

I suppose you could say I fell prey to a collective mode of thought in the group I was associated with. However, there are many degrees of collective thought, starting with our small social group, work group, widening to parts of society, and then finally a whole country. We have to be very alert not to succumb to such influences in the various groups we associate with. They operate in the common circumstances of our life. There is always a beguiling element of supposed rationality in these waves of collective

thought that exist in a group. And because one of the major needs of human beings is to have a sense of belonging, we sometimes accede to the group's dynamic when we know we should do otherwise.

And if the community is not established on the inner understanding of oneness, then it is bound to be shaky. There is indeed the innate desire to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. And this is where we need to be careful, for the desire that truly leads to something worthwhile is not to be bigger than ourselves, but to be bigger than our false selves. Look at my mistake. I was looking for community. But what was it based on? In looking back, I simply wanted to have a sense of belonging, so I ultimately gave up my own beliefs. This is not true community. In fact, I dare say that a lot of seeking that leads to dead ends has to do with looking for community.

The Internal Environment

What then do we do so that we are not at the mercy of an external environment that chops, chisels, and shapes us more than we realize? Well, it is for us to grab hold of these tools that are in the hands of others, so that we begin to consciously chop, chisel, and shape ourselves, and not let the environment do it to us.

How can we begin to shape ourselves? Let us return to the discourse, "The Removal of Sanskaras." Here Meher Baba gives us some genuine methods to chop, chisel, and shape ourselves. We might not have looked at His words that way before. So let us see them in this light.

Now what do you think we are chopping away at? Well, it is those notions in our minds that limit us called sanskaras. And one of the ways to chop, chisel, and shape ourselves, and free ourselves from sanskaras, Meher Baba tells us, is through penance.

For most of us, “penance” is a strange word, bringing up all kinds of images, perhaps even medieval. But really speaking, I would say, the kind of penance Meher Baba talks about is produced in part by genuine self-reflection, which gives us the basis for changing our character. To see who we are, we have to see what is within us. Self-reflection sheds a light within the mind that makes us aware of our false self, enabling us to chop, chisel, and shape our character so that we can act upon spiritual truths.

It is not enough for us to vaguely admit our frailties. We must spend the time to clearly see them with the honest objectivity of self-reflection. As we do so, our self-awareness grows. That is, we begin to see how our behavior maintains the false separative self. We also begin to see the principles that motivate this behavior through our ideas of what is good and bad, right and wrong, what is spiritual and what is not, (etc.). These and much more are all revealed through the light of self-awareness.

Moreover, as we grow in self-awareness, we become aware of how the separate self operates within us to conceal oneness. In fact, as self-awareness becomes a natural part of our life, we also gradually become aware of the spiritual truths that we are longing for.

Although we may perform self-reflection in any number of ways, Meher Baba explains the process of

penance in two distinct ways that allow for genuine change in our character. Either we deliberately recall those acts, words, or deeds we have committed in the past for which we have genuine misgivings. Or in the midst of the actions themselves, we become aware that they are not proper and begin to repent them. This is especially helpful if we remain “vulnerable during periods of emotional outbursts.” It is at these times that we can dare to see what really motivates our behavior.

Either way, Meher Baba says, the main feature of the act of penance is “in mentally reviving the wrongs with severe self-condemnation.” This consists of intensifying the feeling of remorse we deeply feel. In essence, we “recall the past incidents with a remorseful heart and acute disapproval.”

In fact, Meher Baba tells us that this process is so powerful that “self-condemnation accompanied by deep feeling can negate the sanskaras of anger, greed, and lust.” Isn't it amazing that when we vividly recall our anger, greed, and lust, we can overcome these tendencies through the intensity of the emotional awareness of self-condemnation. Understanding this should give us the confidence to use this process to free ourselves of the sanskaras of anger, greed, and lust.

However, it is hard for us to admit, even to ourselves, that we have been wrong. We feel humiliated. But Meher Baba assures us that this feeling of humiliation is helpful to us because, “penance can bring the desired good effect through self-humiliation, which unwinds and eradicates the different sanskaras connected with good and bad actions.”

And although this process frees us from sanskaras, Meher Baba warns us to be careful in practicing it. He cautions us not to “dwell too long upon the wrongs done and thus develop the morbid habit of wailing and weeping over petty things...It should not become a tedious and sterile habit of immoderate and gloomy pondering over one's own failings.”

Meher Baba gives us the proper understanding of what true penance is by emphasizing, “Sincere penance does not consist in perpetuating grief for the wrongs but in resolving to avoid in the future those deeds that call forth remorse. If it leads to lack of self-respect or self confidence, it has not served its true purpose, which is merely to render impossible the repetition of certain types of action.”

Ultimately what we have in our own hands is a tool with which we can internally chop, chisel, and shape ourselves through the light of awareness to transform our character. That tool--self-reflection through penance--“inevitably results in the mental revocation of undesirable modes of thought and conduct, and makes one amenable to a life of purity and service.” Through this powerful tool, we can rebuild our character with divine qualities that not only lead us toward the truth of oneness, but also allow us to spontaneously express truths that make community life possible.

COMMUNITY LIFE BEGINS WITH CHARACTER BUILDING

The Role of Faith

One of the main divine qualities with which we can rebuild our character is faith. Through the power of self-reflection, we can make an honest assessment of ourselves and begin to see how and where we need to increase our faith. But first we need to really understand what faith means according to Meher Baba. As Baba describes it in the "Discourses", there are three kinds of faith: faith in life, faith in oneself, and faith in the Master.

Meher Baba first tells us that, “Faith is so indispensable to life that unless it is present in some degree, life itself would be impossible.” I think everyone in the world knows this deep down in themselves.

So where does faith begin? It begins in our childhood. As children, Meher Baba tells us, we naturally have faith in our elders. We “...look to them for protection and help” without a second thought. “Faith is natural to man” and, as Baba said above, indispensable to life. This “quality of trusting others” that is normally experienced in childhood continues in our adult life unless we have been hurt very badly in our youth.

As we grow out of childhood, faith also grows into a critical factor affecting not only our individual life but also our social life. Concerning social life, Meher Baba says that we have to become worthy of the

faith that others place in us and at the same time have faith in others. These two complementary virtues, as Baba calls them, are so important to us that they are the very “conditions for an unhampered flow and development of individual and collective life.” And therefore as Baba explains, “it is because of faith that cooperative and social life becomes possible...It is faith in each other that facilitates a free give-and-take of love, a free sharing of work and its results.”

So here Meher Baba tells us what is required for successful community living. To hear what is needed to fulfill those requirements is quite daunting. No wonder our attempts at community life fail. It is all about faith. It is our faith in each other that allows for a free give-and-take of love and service. If we do not have faith in each other, then how can there be such an exchange between us that promotes community life?

Is there anything that can be done when so often there is little faith between us? Thankfully, Meher Baba makes it clear what is required of us in such circumstances. As usual, it starts with us and not the other guy. It is up to us to develop “those qualities that invite and confirm faith” which He describes as “being reliable, steadfast, and invariably helpful.” So knowing what is required of us, it is our daily challenge to develop those qualities and be ready to offer them to each other.

Meher Baba further explains the importance of developing these qualities when He tells us that faith “grows and flourishes in a society where people are reliable, honest, and worthy of faith; and it fades in a hostile environment.” This just about sums it up for us and now we can gauge what is lacking in our environment.

After hearing Meher Baba's clear explanations, there should no longer be any hidden mystery about why attempts at community life fail. Thus it is up to each of us to develop the qualities of “being reliable, steadfast, and invariably helpful.”

But there is another factor to the growth of mutual faith in each other. We have to develop faith in ourselves also. If we don't have faith in ourselves, how can we honestly extend ourselves so that we have faith in others?

However, the problem of having faith in ourselves is that we are “always being challenged and undone by the constant experience of one's own frailties and failings.” The difficulty is further aggravated when our problems “often prove to be unyielding, even when one knows what is right.”

Who doesn't feel this way? So how do we develop faith in ourselves? Meher Baba tells us that: “The confidence that you can remain loyal under all sorts of trying circumstances to your own perception of what is right is the very foundation of the superstructure of a reliable character.”

In other words, the key to becoming “reliable, steadfast, and invariably helpful” is to concentrate on upholding the truth, regardless of whatever difficulties we are facing. I can say from experience that Meher Baba's guidance has helped me enormously. As situations arise in my life, I try to remember His injunction, no matter what I am facing, and faithfully try to uphold my perception of what is right--the truth of oneness. His words give me the courage to do so and hopefully invite the faith of others in that truth.

Character Building--Some Divine Qualities

No doubt such injunctions as, "Take your stand on the truth within," or, "Uphold the truth of Oneness" may seem too vague to put into action. This is the case especially when our present ideas of spirituality are a mix of mental notions and emotional ideas, leaving our thoughts on the truth of oneness an additional uncertainty.

However, we can approach oneness in a very practical way. In the "Discourses", Meher Baba explains the qualities He wants us to develop that will lead us to this truth. Most likely it may be easier for us to focus on developing a specific quality, like patience or faith, than to try to act upon the concept of upholding oneness.

In the discourse, "Some Divine Qualities," Meher Baba points out a significant developmental guideline that can help us begin to dispel uncertainty and direct us toward an inner life that will express the truth of oneness. He states, "If the inner life of an aspirant is to be harmonious and enlightened, he has to develop and express many divine qualities while he is engaged in his daily duties."

Isn't good to hear that we have Meher Baba's word that a "harmonious and enlightened" inner life is possible for us? But we have to do something to attain this. We have to develop and express some divine qualities in our daily life.

It seems to me that if we seriously try to develop these qualities, gradually an inner life will certainly unfold, perhaps in the following way. We will become

more cooperative and harmonious as we strive, at all costs to our ego, to uphold the truth of oneness. This gives us faith in ourselves that we can "remain loyal under all sorts of trying circumstances" to our "own perception of what is right." As a consequence, we become "reliable, steadfast, and invariably helpful." In turn this naturally invites and encourages others to have faith in us as well.

This inner unfolding brings us the chance that community feelings will evolve. They will evolve because they will be based on the truth on the unity of all life. So let us see what divine qualities Meher Baba says will help us shape our characters, which in turn will help promote real community life.

First, Meher Baba speaks of the qualities of patience and persistence. If our spiritual understanding takes us no farther than being patient, and being persistent in expressing patience, I feel that this alone can be sufficient to begin to reshape our characters. I have found time and again that patience leads to everything good in the spiritual life.

We are confronted daily with the distinct choice of giving in to our anger or expressing patience. One of the values of patience is that it directly confronts the aggressiveness of the ego-mind. It allows us to consciously control the separative impulses within us, which then grants a more creative state of mind to tackle the situation from a belief in oneness.

Imagine if all of us were indeed patient with one another most of the time, how different our interactions would be. Certainly community life amongst us would grow if we had the faith that we could rely on each other's patient understanding.

However, be aware that as we express the divine quality of patience in our lives, we enter into a new awareness of the very obstacles to outer community. These are the separative impulses within us and within others. As we withhold our separative impulses, it makes us “painfully sensitive to the impact from outside actions that do not taste of love.” This is not easy to accept because we feel all the emotions that divide us: “the cold contempt, cynical callousness, agonizing antipathy, and unabating hatred.”

As Meher Baba explains, “All these encounters try [our] forbearance to the utmost. Even the worldly person suffers in a world he occasionally finds indifferent or hostile, but he is more thick-skinned and his suffering is less acute. He does not expect anything much better from human nature and thinks that these things are inevitable and incurable.”

In the face of these continual encounters, forbearance is most important and is the second divine quality that Meher Baba brings to our attention. I remember once how Eruch looked at me very seriously at the Trust Office and, inches from my face, uttered in a firm voice, “Forbearance.”

What we are forbearing is the world and its ways. Believe it or not, accepting the world “as it is,” is another divine quality according to Meher Baba. Yet Baba makes it clear that this does not mean accepting the ways of the world. Having the moral courage and confidence to reject the ways of the world and to stand by the higher truths is yet another divine quality Baba wants us to develop.

Accepting the world “as it is,” gradually puts a halt to our habit of insisting that it should be

otherwise. How many times in a day do we shake our heads and say to ourselves, “Things shouldn't be like this.” But no amount of our unwillingness to accept a situation is going to change it. In fact, our very own notions of how things are supposed to be obstruct us from honestly confronting the ego viewpoints that we defend, justify, and identify with as our selves.

The world, and everyone we know in it, is never going to be the way we want it to be. We cannot expect otherwise because it is all based on Maya--illusion. We have to confront Maya as it is, without our expectations making things worse. In other words, to confront Maya we cannot run away from the world in any manner. As we accept the world as it is, we can begin to see life as it is--unclouded by our willful viewpoints of how things should be.

Therefore it is a divine quality to accept the world as it is. As we develop this quality, we begin to see things as they are and not as we want them to be. The world with its vast array of human expression becomes more acceptable to us. We no longer feel that we have the responsibility to sit in judgment. We become free--free of the habit of judging others and their circumstances--and become more tolerant and understanding.

But the curious twist is that accepting the world as it is does not mean accepting the values that the world maintains. Meher Baba warns us, “The world is caught up in Maya and is addicted to false values. Therefore the ways of the world run counter to the standards the aspirant has set for himself.”

We all have certain understandings that are born out of our experience. This is what makes our

hearts turn toward Meher Baba. And we cherish what brings us closer to Him. These same understandings, in a sense, are our standards.

As such, Meher Baba explains that we must stand by these standards even if the whole world opposes us. Baba goes on to say, “Loyalty to the higher truths of [one's] own perception demands unshakable moral courage and readiness to face the criticism, the scorn, and even the hatred of those who have not yet begun to open up to these truths.”

To uphold those perceptions of the truth that we have come to cherish is not at all easy. Time and again we will be faced with situations where the practicalities of daily living try to beguile us into thinking that our perceptions are idealistic. However, it is never idealistic to maintain our perceptions of the truth. As we firmly uphold them in daily life, we gain the inner strength to develop that particular divine quality ever more deeply. However, Baba's injunction here does not mean for us to stubbornly maintain our personal perspectives; it means upholding those spiritual truths that we love and have faith in.

I want to add a further comment to the practical application of the divine qualities of “accepting the way the world is” and “not accepting the ways of the world” where it concerns our Baba groups, gatherings, and organizations.

The quality of accepting the world as it is should be applied to how we look at our Baba groups, gatherings, and organizations. This quality will allow us to be more accepting of what goes on in them. Regardless of their being associated with Meher Baba, they too operate in the world and therefore are a part of Maya.

Once we see that our community settings of Baba groups, gatherings, and organizations can also create Maya, we still need to develop the divine quality of not “accepting its ways.” This non-acceptance, however, is a very subtle thing. The principle “to be in it [that is, acceptance] but not of it [that is, be detached in order to uphold the higher values]” not only stands for our activities in the world, but also stands for our activities for Baba.

Just because an activity takes place under the umbrella of Meher Baba's name does not mean that worldly understandings don't creep in. No one among us is free of Maya. We all are on the battleground of trying to free our souls. And so we are still consumed with worldly ways to such an extent that we are not even aware of them. Even though we may be putting our best efforts forward, they may still be filled with an ego willfulness that enhances the separative self.

An example of this is the notion of “speaking my mind.” More often than not, speaking our minds creates disunity. As Meher Baba pointed out to Eruch, honesty is that which uplifts others. It is critical for us to find how to confront the things that could cause disharmony with others in a way that uplifts the situation. Such understanding can only come from our patient, forbearing, courageous, and loving heart. And these are the qualities that Meher Baba wants us to develop. If our actions are otherwise, no matter how we justify them, then we are not only doing a disservice to our own search for Truth, but we are also dimming the chances of any community life. This points to the importance of developing those qualities that Meher Baba has explained are essential for a spiritual life.

I think what will help us the most is to remember that all of our group efforts in the cause of Meher Baba

are only a medium for His remembrance. A water pipeline is useful only because it is the medium to supply water. In and of itself, it has no meaning. The same is true of any organization that is created to help serve His cause, which is to free us from the illusion of being separate.

Divine Qualities Bring Spiritual Life and Grace

Although these qualities can help create a true spiritual community life, they have even a more profound place in our spiritual life. Meher Baba explains, "Every person is a rightful heir to the Truth. But he who would inherit it must be spiritually prepared for it."

Meher Baba explains what this preparation is in the discourse, "Love." He says, "The descent of the grace of the Master is conditioned, however, by the preliminary spiritual preparation of the aspirant. This preliminary preparation for grace is never complete until the aspirant has built into his spiritual makeup some divine attributes." So by developing the divine qualities, it also spiritually prepares us to receive Meher Baba's grace.

Besides the qualities we have spoken of so far, Meher Baba says that other qualities that spiritually prepare us for His grace are: not worrying, cheerfulness, equipoise, enthusiasm, and one-pointedness. In the discourse, "Love," Meher Baba adds, "When a person avoids backbiting and thinks more of the good points in others than of their bad points, and when he can practice supreme tolerance and desires good for others even at cost to himself--he is ready to receive the grace of the Master."

We have seen earlier how insidious comparing ourselves with others can be. Meher Baba explains to us one of the negative effects backbiting has on our relations with others. "To portray others as evil is to glorify oneself by *suggesting* a comparison--a comparison the ego would willingly develop, though it often restrains itself from doing so."

By not backbiting, we lessen our tendency to compare ourselves to others, and also motivate ourselves to genuinely tolerate others by lessening our feelings of separateness. In addition, Baba wants us to extend ourselves to others to such an extent that we desire their good even at our own cost. No doubt such actions uphold the truth of oneness. And who knows, it may even lead us to supreme tolerance--whatever that is!!!

If one is uncertain about how to begin a spiritual life, I would say, stop backbiting. This will offer the opportunity to practice self-control. And by doing this, we may see, maybe for the first time, many of our prejudices and false viewpoints. We then have the choice to confront them and be free of them. This practice can lead us to try to build other divine qualities into our character. But I suggest this one first because there is nothing vague about it. Making any progress in spiritual life is filled with vagaries, but not the effort towards lessening the bad habit of backbiting. I personally have found that when I made a concerted effort not to speak ill of others in any way, then I gradually felt lighter within. This became quite noticeable to me after some time. And I was glad to have made the effort.

When Meher Baba was physically present, He encouraged His close ones to develop these qualities. This is noted in the discourse, "The Ways of the

Master.” In fact, Baba explained that His encouragement was so appealing to His close ones that they came to value His approval and delighted “in it more than in anything else.” It made them “ready to resist the greatest of temptations and undergo the most trying ordeals, which would otherwise have seemed impossible to [them], if only [they knew] that this will make the Master happy.”

Well, what to say? We don't have Meher Baba's physical approval to inspire us to go through anything for His sake. So as we have been discussing, we have to develop our inner connection with Him. And one way we can do that is to act in ways that we know for certain would please Him. We are fortunate that in this discourse, Baba explains, “Any one of these [following actions] is sufficient to make the Master happy and evoke his approbation”:

The glow of noble emotion,
a gesture of self-denial,
a heroic sacrifice,
an incident revealing extraordinary
patience or love or faith.

Even if Meher Baba is not in physical form, we can be in tune with what pleases Him, as we develop the divine qualities. But as He warned us, “To love the world and serve it in the ways of the Masters is no game for the weak and fainthearted.” The same could be said for those who dare to try to please Him by upholding the Truth of the unity of all life.

THE UNDERLYING ADJUSTMENT TO COMMUNITY LIFE

We noted earlier that Meher Baba said harmonious relations with others were only possible when each of us had faith in one another. One way to develop this faith is to be faithful to the Truth in ourselves. But significantly, Meher Baba tells us that faith “can be securely established only when the individual has before him the vision of a living example of Perfection, and has faith in it.”

We do not have Meher Baba physically with us, but we do have the “vision of a living example of Perfection.” If we keep before us a vision of Perfection--Meher Baba--the truth of oneness becomes accessible when we have faith that He is the One who resides in every heart. Then what in our lives seemed to be a series of never-ending problems of adjusting with others, starts to merge into one all-inclusive dilemma: how to arrive at true adjustment to Meher Baba who is the One who resides in every heart.

In the discourse, “The Ways of the Master,” Meher Baba tells us that by making this our singular dilemma in life, we are poised to genuinely tackle the problem of harmony with others. We do so, not by making temporary compromises with them, but by having faith that Meher Baba is in everyone. Then we can begin to achieve true adjustment to others as manifestations of the one indivisible soul. It is only from this foremost perspective that true community life will be able to flourish.

SOME UNDERSTANDINGS THAT PROMOTE COMMUNITY LIFE

This next section is unlike the previous ones. I want to make some brief comments on what I feel are seven very important subjects. This comes from my experience at the Trust Office trying to live a harmonious, spiritual life with others. Each of these subjects and the understandings derived, like any understanding, did not come cheaply. I know how I struggled to achieve them to lessen my ignorant suffering. I think if they are deeply reflected upon, they will be of some benefit.

1. Learning cooperation by balancing mind and heart:

In the last booklet I talked about this at length. But I want to add a further thought here. If we understand the importance of balancing our mind and heart, then we will understand the real meaning of cooperation. And by that I mean that in order to balance them, we have to learn how the mind and heart have to cooperate with each other in order to attain balance. We have to learn that the mind and the heart have different functions and purposes and specializations, and that we must understand how they must cooperate with each other in order to be balanced. Learning this inner cooperation helps us learn what is necessary for outer cooperation, that is, how to cooperate with others. If we have not achieved a growing understanding of the cooperation required between our mind and heart, I don't think we will really understand what real external cooperation means.

2. A thought about communicating with each other:

In speaking to each other, we naturally assume we are relating to the conscious mind of the other

person. But this is not necessarily true at all! It may be that we are relating to their sub-conscious mind. This is the case whenever we face others' self-protective mechanism of defensive or self-justifying behavior. When this happens, it may be that their sub-conscious mind has control over them. They may not be entirely aware that their instinctual self is dominating their choice of self-expression. When this happens, instead of being irritated at this kind of sub-conscious behavior, it is better for us to consciously choose to express tolerant understanding that upholds the Truth of oneness.

3. Give love for its own sake:

In the discourse, "Avenues to Understanding," Meher Baba makes it clear that our mind gets in the way of the heart when we require assurances before "there is a release of love." He goes on to remind us all, "Love is nothing if it is not spontaneous. It cannot be a conclusion of reasoning. It is not a fruit of the spirit of bargaining. If you want to be certain about the object of love before giving your love, it is only a form of calculating selfishness." So let us not restrict ourselves in expressing loving kindness.

4. Don't worry about being misunderstood:

It took me many years to recognize how much mental energy I expended when I was concerned that I was being misunderstood. In fact, to this day, I am amazed at how ready we all are to misunderstand each other. I see how little it takes before misunderstandings arise between us. And so often, no matter how many words are spoken to mollify the misunderstandings, they seem to have a life of their own that perhaps only time heals.

In the discourse, "Removal of Sankaras," Meher

Baba tells us not to be concerned about being misunderstood in the context of our selfless service. He says, "Selfless service is accomplished when there is not the slightest thought of reward or result, and when there is complete disregard of one's own comfort or convenience or the possibility of being misunderstood."

In reading Meher Baba's words, it strikes me as an interesting quirk of human nature that we may not mind losing our comfort or convenience in our service activities, but we do find it difficult to give up the concern of being misunderstood. It may be because it touches upon our pride.

Moreover, although being misunderstood is a continual experience for us all, it is the very thing that often ruins community life because it destroys trust in one another. However, we can remember Eruch's words that I quoted at the beginning of the book, "...that we should only be concerned with holding on to Baba," regardless of our being misunderstood. Nonetheless, Eruch would also try to inculcate in us the need to drop the pettiness of ill will when we were misunderstood.

I finally came to the conclusion that if I really did not understand myself, how could I expect others to understand me? Once this understanding came, I gradually began to accept the daily misunderstandings that crop up, and tried to tolerate the situation the best I could.

5. Spirit of community living:

The other side of not creating ill will because of misunderstandings is having genuine goodwill in our hearts for each other. We can't cheat the heart on this

one. We can feel if someone is wishing us well or not. Again, Meher Baba explains to us how to express goodwill when He says, "When there is true union of hearts, you completely identify yourself with the other person. Your act of help or word of comfort supplies to others whatever might be lacking in them; and through their thoughts of gratitude and goodwill, you actually receive more than you give. Thus, through living for others, your own life finds its amplification and expansion."

6. Community activity: In the discourse, "Selfless Service," Meher Baba gives us some very critical guidelines on how to perform it. This was discussed in Booklet III, but I want to bring up a few of them again here because they are also very important to help us establish community life.

It is interesting to see that Meher Baba differentiates between intelligent and unintelligent service. He tells us that even if our service is unintelligent, we do get some spiritual benefit. But the important thing to me here is that He tells us that our unintelligent service causes "unnecessary suffering to others."

Now to me, Meher Baba is giving us a priceless understanding. Okay, we serve. We want to serve selflessly and no matter how we end up doing it, if our heart is there, we do derive some spiritual benefit.

But at the same time, because our service was unintelligent--because of the way we interacted with others in our service--we caused them suffering. Naturally, the suffering we caused others is going to dampen any chances at community life.

In fact, Meher Baba confirms that we "may be selfless, but [our] actions create chaos instead of harmony because [we have] not learned how to render real and effective service without creating complications." Here Baba states the crux of the matter: although we may even be selfless in our actions, without spiritual understanding, we only create chaos instead of harmony. And thus as a consequence others suffer.

Meher Baba goes on to say, "It is very important that service, even when it is utterly selfless, be guided by spiritual understanding; for selfless service, when unintelligently handled, often creates chaos and complications." If we develop spiritual understanding, then most of the lost opportunities at community life will disappear and sudden bursts of honest community expression will grow into a full-scale community experience.

Meher Baba ends this part of His discourse by encouraging us to develop spiritual understanding. "If action is to be a pure blessing for the universe, it must be born of consummate understanding of life. Those who come into contact with me should develop true understanding of life and cultivate that type of service which creates no complications." And thus Baba wants us to develop spiritual understanding so those complications in our service that cause others to suffer will become fewer and fewer, and, as I have been saying, will create the community life we want.

7. Maintain a moving equilibrium of mind: This is more of a required quality than an understanding. It was so apparent after a short time of being and serving with the mandali that they lived an extraordinary pace of life that was in tune with Meher Baba. I and the others

who worked with them had to learn to adjust ourselves to this pace.

I believe as we all move closer to Meher Baba, each of us has the same challenge to live up to His inner dictates. And thus as Baba explains in the discourse, "Perfection," He wants us to "maintain a moving equilibrium of mind" as we keep "pace with the swift changes of life."

FINAL WORD

Summing up what I have been trying say on community life, I am going to keep it simple. I think if we take to heart Meher Baba's following message, we will be on our way to restraining our separative self and on our way to accepting others. That alone will help us to begin to create the community life we want. The expression of harmony is the manifestation of inner oneness, which is the truth of the unity of all life.

I tolerate everything. So, you must do the same. Be tolerant with everyone and when you feel like rising up in a fury and having an argument with your adversary, say: "I am here for Baba, and Baba wants - above all else - harmony." Harmony is the basis of life, living in a group, working for and living with me and helping in my work.

Meher Baba

Nasik Ashram, 1937