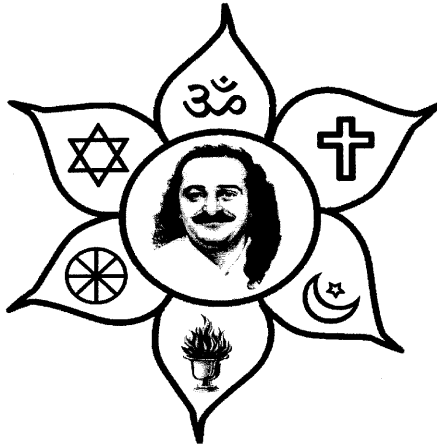


# THE REAL TREASURE

“ Life Of A Resident  
With  
Avatar Meher Baba’s Mandali ”



*Rustom Falahati*

# **THE REAL TREASURE - I**

**"Life Of A Resident  
With  
Avatar Meher Baba's Mandali"**

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## **Dedication**

**I dedicate this book to  
Beloved Avatar Meher Baba's Mandali,  
whom I regard as the eighth wonder of  
the world.**

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## Acknowledgements

In the year 2000, my health broke down completely and I was unable to do even simple things without help. After leading a very active life prior to this, I struggled for close to a year, unable to do anything useful. It was at this time that my friends Cyrus and Soumya Khambata suggested that I write down the story of my life as a resident and my interaction with Meher Baba's close disciples, know as the Mandali. My primary intention when I started writing this book was to fill up my time, to fight depression, and to share my storeis with friends.

First and foremost, I am indebted to Beloved Meher Baba's Mandali for this book, especially Chairman Bhau Kalchuri, who was emphatic that I share with people storeis of how the Mandali would "hammer" the residents. With more encouragement from other friends, especially Jade and Misty Shanker, and not being able to do anything else I started to write this book.

I thank my wife, Meher Desai, who married me in 2002 and has been a source of constant support and encouragement in all my projects. My thanks also go to Steve Klein for editing and giving shape and format to this book. I thank Josh Lee for the corrections and giving the book the final touch. I thank G. Bernard Rodrigo for the computer work and the final printing. I thank Craig Ruff for his constant support of my work which was moving at a snail's pace. Craig was always there to priase my work, no matter how small it was. I thank my family and friends who have stood by me through my illness and continue to do so. I thank all my brother and sister residents in Meher Baba's Ashram who were always there to help me. I salute them for surrendering their all to Meher Baba out of love for Him and living the resident's life in His service.

Most importantly, I owe everything to Meher Baba for sending so many wonderful people in my life to help me and for sending me all those pleasant and not so pleasant experiences which were necessary for me to grow. I thank Him for everything.



## Introduction

**Meher Baba** proclaimed Himself as the Avatar of the age and is regarded as such by millions of His followers, all over the world. According to Meher Baba, the Avatar takes birth from time to time to give the weary world His message of Love and Truth. In our history He has come as Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Mohammed.

During His life, (1894-1969) Avatar Meher Baba traveled extensively throughout India and all over the world for His spiritual work. In the early 20's He established a base of operations near Arangaon village, some six miles north of Ahmednagar, in Maharashtra, India. This was called Meherabad and it is here that Meher Baba's Tomb, or Samadhi, is located. It is also now the home of the Meher Pilgrim Centre, Dharamshala, and Hostels, which accommodate hundreds of pilgrims who come to visit Meher Baba's Samadhi each year.

It is here too, that staff quarters have been built to house those who have come to live and work under the auspices of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust. These workers are sometimes referred to as residents. The Trust Office is located in the city of Ahmednagar in what is known as the Trust Compound.

During Meher Baba's life, those close ones who lived with Him and dedicated their lives to Him, were called His Mandali. A few of the Mandali, like Padri and Mansari, were living at Meherabad when Meher Baba dropped His body in 1969. Most, however, were living with Meher Baba at a home that He established in the 50's, named Meherazad. This is located south of Ahmednagar, about 15 kilometers from the center of town, next to the village of Pimpalgaon.

Meher Baba is commonly referred to by His followers simply as Baba. After 1969, drawn by some irresistible pull, pilgrims from all over the world, also referred to as Baba-lovers, began to flock to Meherabad and Meherazad to visit Baba's tomb and to talk with His Mandali. The attraction of these places, redolent with Baba's presence, and the personal appeal of the Mandali, was so strong that many people decided to live there and, over

time, some were allowed to do so under the spiritual training program set up by the Meher Baba Trust. I had the good fortune to live and work as a resident in all three places, which include Meherabad, Meherazad, and the Trust office, at different times, thus giving me the opportunity to interact with most of Baba's Mandali. What follows is the story of my life as a resident.



I first heard about Meher Baba in 1981 through someone I met in Bombay. At the time I was serving in the Merchant Marines and was an atheist. I used to enjoy asking religious friends questions they couldn't answer, such as, If God is our divine father and all-powerful, why does he allow one child to be born a cripple and another healthy? What kind of father would do that to his children?

I guess you could say I was seeking, but through the circuitous method of harassing people who believed in God. My first reaction on seeing Baba's photo was, "Oh, one more Baba, as if we don't have enough Baba's in India." As I had not heard of this particular Baba before, I decided that he couldn't be important.

Yet through a series of coincidences, or one can say, Baba-arranged situations, I ended up reading the Discourses. I was impressed by the logical manner in which Baba not only addressed the sorts of questions I had been hounding people with, but answered them convincingly. I began to feel that this Baba must, after all, have some sort of spiritual status to be able to write so authoritatively. On the other hand, when I started reading about His life, I became confused once more.

Baba's life was not at all the sort of life I imagined a Master would lead. He claimed to be all-knowing, and His Discourses certainly made me predisposed to accept that claim, and yet he didn't seem to know His own mind. For example, He kept declaring that He would break his silence on a certain date, which would have great spiritual implications for humanity, (Meher Baba stopped speaking on July 10, 1925 and remained silent for the rest of His life), but the dates would come and go

and nothing would happen. Baba would continue His silence and simply set another date for when He was going to break it. And that was only one aspect of His life, which utterly confused me. The more I read, the more I discovered things, which I found difficult to understand, and this was a paradox not easily resolved. His writings were so powerful that they had begun to form the foundation of my life. I could not just dismiss Baba as a charlatan or a self-deluded crank. I did not know what to make of it. So I continued to go to sea, and when I was back in Bombay, I would visit the Avatar Meher Baba Center there. Oddly enough, no one there ever told me that quite a few of Baba's Mandali were still alive or that they lived in nearby Ahmednagar. Maybe people assumed that I must know that, but the first time I met one of the Mandali was when Bhauji came to Bombay Centre in 1985 to give a talk on his way to tour the West.

When Bhauji was introduced and I heard that he had spent his adult life with Baba and had done duty as Baba's night watchman, I felt an electric current flow through me. At the end of the talk, I went up to Bhauji to ask him some of the many questions which had been plaguing me for the past four years. Bhauji asked me to meet him the next day at Havovi Dadachanji's place, (the woman who had first told me about Meher Baba in 1981).

For some reason, as the time came near for the meeting, I felt very reluctant to go. I phoned with the intention of canceling my appointment, but before I could say anything of the sort, Bhauji told me to come immediately. "I am waiting for you," he said and hung up the phone.

I was upset that I hadn't been able to explain that I wasn't coming and, as I made my way across town, I decided that I would corner Bhauji intellectually and either get the answers to all my questions or make him admit that he did not know. We talked for perhaps an hour. In the end, Bhauji gave me such a profound answer that my heart was touched and suddenly all of Baba's actions began to make sense to me. I knew then, with absolute certainty, that I had to go to Ahmednagar and meet the rest of Baba's Mandali and I was sure that there, at last, I would find relief from the mental turmoil of the last four years.

Accordingly, as soon as the Pilgrim Centre opened for the season (it remains closed during the hot summer months) I went to Meherabad. I felt, right away, that I had come home and that this was where I wanted to live.

When I met the Mandali at Meherazad, there was something very familiar about all of them, even though I was meeting them all for the first time. I felt as if we had met before; no, it was stronger than that, I felt as if somehow we knew each other very well, as if these were old, old friends of mine.

I had a sense that this was where I belonged, where I should have been all along. I felt very strongly that all of my past confusion, indeed all the suffering and struggles I had ever had in my life, had been worthwhile because they had brought me here, this was what I had unconsciously been looking for.

It wasn't just the easy sense of familiarity which produced this effect – that might have led me to enjoy my visit. I felt as if my soul were, for the first time in my life, receiving nourishment.

It is hard to talk about this in a way that doesn't sound either trite or overly dramatic. On the other hand, it is important to try to give some idea of the experience; otherwise nothing that follows will make any sense.

As I met with the Mandali and peppered them with questions, I found that they had answers. They all were able to answer my questions, and yet, each one gave me different answers. I began to perceive that my intellectual confusion was really only a small part of a much larger state of emotional turmoil I had been in the midst of. While I had thought that I was in the midst of a prosperous and promising career, I discovered that I had a profound sense of emotional dissatisfaction within me which I was not aware of. I realized this because as I talked with the Mandali, I began to see just how irrelevant my questions were. Their answers were satisfying me, not because they stilled my mind as much as because they fed my heart.

Thus Mansari could joke about the planes of consciousness, by asking whether I was talking about Air India or TWA, while Eruch could go into detail about the subtleties of the subject and both these answers satisfied me because both Eruch and Mansari made me feel unconditionally loved. The Mandali just

exuded this love, effortlessly. Just as the sun radiates its warmth and light, so too did their very presence, even when silent, drench one in love.

And in the light of this love, I suddenly had the clarity of vision I had lacked before. Spiritual paradoxes, mental confusions, no longer seemed irresolvable. In fact, spirituality no longer seemed to be about understanding at all, but rather about living a life of love. As simple as that. And in the atmosphere of Meherabad and Meherazad, in the presence of the Mandali, I felt that this was a life I could lead, indeed it was the only life worth living.

It was when I left, when I returned to my job and my everyday life, that I became confused again and no longer sure of how to go about putting spirituality into practice. Things that had seemed so clear were now murky once again. I would try to pattern my behavior after that of the Mandali but, somehow, I wasn't able to produce the atmosphere of love and acceptance which existed around them. So, the next chance I had I would return to Meherabad / Meherazad and, through the atmosphere there, and the interactions I had with the Mandali, my way would seem clear again. It is my hope that the following short vignettes will give you some idea of what the experience of visiting was like for me. Many of them deal with suffering. This is probably because one of the most common questions people in the world have is "Why, if God is loving, is there so much suffering in the world?" For many this is a major stumbling block to their acceptance of God. For those who have already accepted God and who can, at least intellectually, accept the idea of suffering, I've found from personal experience that, when the suffering befalls you, the question tends to be, "Why me?" This is a question I've posed myself a number of times, and you may find what the Mandali said to me to be of interest to you.

I think the next most common question is actually a series of questions, all beginning with "How? How can I do this? How can I do that? How can I avoid this? How can I achieve that?" The answers to so many of these questions seem to boil down to, "Remember Him," and so you will find quite a few anecdotes on remembrance.

As I look back over these little encounters with the Mandali, I find that I am moved anew, and sometimes even touched to a

greater extent than I was at the time, by the wisdom and profundity of the answers the Mandali so casually gave out. Yet, I know that many readers will skim through these and feel, “So what?” or “Everyone already knows that.” What I wish I could convey to you is not just the words, but the loving authority with which they were issued. If a child falls on the street and scrapes his knee and is in tears and pain, a passing adult might stop to comfort the child by saying, “Don’t worry, it will be all right. It’s nothing serious.” Most likely, the child will continue crying. But if the child’s parent comes by, and gathers the child into his arms and makes the child feel the depth of their love and concern and then, from the midst of that, tells the child, “Don’t worry,” the effect is very different. The child trusts the parent, knows that the parent cares about him, and is therefore genuinely reassured when the parent tells the child that he will be okay.

This is the dimension of the Mandali which is so hard to capture by merely repeating their conversations. The authority, with which they speak, the love they manifest, is so strong that hearing something from them is like hearing it from a beloved parent. One implicitly trusts them and their words have a power to transform one’s heart that seems far beyond the capacity of the words they use.

For those of you who have spent time with the Mandali, I hope these stories will bring back to you your own vivid memories of being with them. For those of you who have not met them, I hope that at least a small whiff of the perfume of their love comes through and you may imagine what it must have been like to be around them and think how great their love must be for Baba, and Baba’s love for them, so that you cannot help but feel nourished by it.



## Prayers

In the latter half of the 1980's almost everyone would go to Meherabad on a bus that the Trust provided. It would leave Meherabad from the Pilgrim Center and then stop in town briefly to pick up anyone who was there and to allow for the pilgrims to quickly attend to personal matters at the Trust. It would then head out to Meherabad.

Some days there would be two buses of pilgrims. Generally, after getting down from the buses, people would line up in a queue for the chance to greet the Mandali. It hadn't always been this way, but the sheer volume of pilgrims, and the diminishing number of the Mandali, eventually resulted in there being large crowds around Eruch and Mani. As the Mandali were always sensitive to someone feeling left out, they would try to make it a point to greet everyone. Eventually, the habit fell into place of forming a queue so that everyone got a chance to greet all the Mandali.

I was standing in queue to greet Mani Irani, Baba's sister. About her, Baba had said that she was His sister, Subhadra, when He was Krishna. Although it must have been exhausting for her, Mani would greet every pilgrim in queue with an embrace that overflowed with love. She would also spend a minute or two after each embrace chatting with that pilgrim or making a joke or telling a funny story, as was Mani's nature.

When my turn came, Mani embraced me but then looked at me and said very seriously, "We have had no rains this year; the water situation is bad. Rustom, pray to Baba on our behalf to send us rain."

I was surprised by Mani's request and said, "Mani, you are Baba's sister and if He doesn't listen to your prayers, then why would He listen to mine?"

Mani replied, "You see, that's not true about prayers. Let me tell you a story to help you understand the significance of prayers."

"There was a party going on in a huge hall. The table was laid with the best food that you can imagine. Delicacies were flown in from all over the world. A royal feast was being given to all

who assembled for the party. However, a condition was imposed on everyone who came for the party. One hand of each person was tied behind his back and to the other hand was tied a long spoon. They were free to eat to their hearts' content but had to comply with this restriction.

“One would think they would have a grand time but no, that was not the case. The people were unhappy. The long spoon made it impossible for them to eat anything. The spoon would not reach their mouth because it was too long and the food was spilling all over the floor. People were terribly unhappy because the room contained delicious items as far as the eye could see but not a single morsel entered anyone's mouth.

“Meanwhile, in another room a similar party was taking place. Again, a royal banquet was laid out and delicious food was flown in from all over the world. The people assembled were subjected to the same condition. One hand of each person was tied behind his back and to the other hand was tied a long spoon. But there was a difference in this party. Everyone was enjoying the food. How did they manage to do this? Each one was picking up the food with the spoon and feeding the person sitting opposite him. In this way, everyone was happy and enjoying the food.”

Mani ended by adding, “Prayers are like that. When you pray for someone else, they are answered.”



## Only Remembrance Matters

**Bal** Natu, a long-time disciple of Baba, lived at Meherazad. He had not lived with Baba the way the others at Meherazad had. Baba instructed him to look for a job and live in the world. So, he had been a school teacher at Kurduwadi for many years. However, Baba gave him the rare privilege of being able to come any time he wasn't working to spend his holidays with Him, an offer Bal took advantage of at every opportunity for some 30 years.

I felt drawn to Bal because he had a chronic health problem which was similar to the one I suffered from and yet, unlike me, he was always cheerful and his fragile health never seemed to come in the way of his remembrance of Baba.

In fact, most pilgrims never even knew that he was not in good health. But, as someone who suffered from a chronic digestive disorder, I knew how difficult it is to do anything when you are in its grip. Every time you sit down for a meal, it becomes an agony. Stomach ache and diarrhea become part of your life. There is a constant sense of unease throughout the day and when things flare up, then you can experience a discomfort and an anxiety that can cloud your mind and make thinking about anything else almost impossible.

Bal's health had been extremely fragile ever since his acute tuberculosis in the 1930s. On top of that, he had digestive problems for decades and now suffered from amoebas which only made the problems worse.

Knowing this, I asked Bal, "You are one of His close ones, so what do you have to say about your health? Why does Baba keep you in such a state?"

Bal said, "Anything that helps you to remember Him, no matter how painful or uncomfortable, is good for you. On the other hand, anything that comes in the way of your remembering Him, no matter how good or sublime it may be from the worldly point of view, is spiritually bad."

Bal then added, "In one of my Conversations with Baba (Bal wrote three books of inner dialogue with the Beloved, all of

which had 'Conversations' in the title) I was complaining about my bad health and Baba said, 'Do you remember the time when your health was not so bad, when you were okay? Tell me, was your remembrance of Me as intense?' I had to admit that in good health I remembered Him less as my dependence on Him was less. Baba then said, 'So you are better off being in bad health.'

Bal laughed and said, "He is constantly thinking about what's good for you. So why worry, leave it all to Him." He then added, "One can do yoga, meditation, and other things that make the mind feel blissful and sublime. However, more often than not, the ego gets strengthened and the person affirms, 'See what a great yogi I am, or I am above the common people because I meditate.' So something good, as in this case, can become spiritually harmful as it creates more binding."



## Suffering: A Wake-up Call

**Bhau Kalchuri** was one of Baba's close Mandali members. Baba said about him that Bhau was His John when He was Christ. I happened to be with Bhauji when a pilgrim asked him, "Why doesn't Baba, who is God, take away the suffering from His lovers?"

Bhauji replied, "All of life is an illusion, a dream. All that we experience, whether happiness or suffering, it is all a dream. It is not real. Happiness is a good dream, an enjoyable dream, whereas suffering is a bad dream, an unpleasant dream.

"If Baba wants, He can take away suffering and replace it with happiness, but that is just replacing a bad dream with a good dream. That is not Baba's real job. His real work is to awaken you from your dream, and often a bad dream serves the purpose of waking you up earlier. That is why you see His lovers everywhere are going through so much more suffering than others.

"When you become His, it is His duty to awaken you from the age old dream of illusion. What you call suffering is really His wake up call to awaken you."

Bhauji's reply reminded me of a poem by Helen Steiner Rice, which someone shared with me once.

*Our Father knows what's best for us, so why should we complain,*

*We always want the sunshine, but He knows there must be rain.*

*We love the sound of laughter and the merriment of cheer,*

*But our hearts would lose their tenderness, if we never shed a tear.*

*Our Father tests us often, with suffering and with sorrow.*

*He tests us, not to punish us, but to help us meet tomorrow.*

*For growing trees are strengthened, when they withstand the storm,*

*And the sharp cut of a chisel, gives the marble grace and form.*

*God never hurts us needlessly, and He never wastes our pain,  
For every loss He sends to us, is followed by rich gain.  
And when we count the blessings that God has so freely sent,  
We will find no cause for murmuring and no time to lament.  
For our Father loves His children and to Him all things are plain,  
So He never sends us pleasure, when the soul's deep need is pain.  
So whenever we are troubled and when everything goes wrong,  
It is just God working in us, to make our spirits strong.*



## Divine Will

**B**aba referred to Eruch Jessawala as His 'Mummy,' for he looked after Baba's personal needs. Baba also referred to him as His friend, and said that Eruch was His Peter when he was Christ. A pilgrim asked Eruch, "If everything happens by God's will, then what about murder, rape and robbery? Is that God's will too?"

Eruch replied, "Everything is God's will, even a leaf does not move without His will, but what is His will? We have to understand that first. His will is the law of karma which simply means that 'what you do comes back to you.'

"The law of karma is inviolable, unbreakable and knows no exceptions. This is His will and the whole universe is subject to it, and governed by it. People who are murdered, robbed or raped, have committed similar acts in their past lives and, as a matter of God's will, subject to the law of karma, have invited such incidents in their present life through their own actions."

Eruch paused and then added, "Let me explain it to you by a story. A king governs his kingdom and maintains harmony by means of laws which are implemented by his council of ministers with the help of his soldiers. Now, the law of the kingdom states that if someone commits robbery, he should be imprisoned and a person committing murder should be hanged.

"In one village a man commits robbery. He is tried and found guilty and put behind bars. Another man commits murder. He too is tried by the council of ministers and put to death. While this is happening, the king is not even aware of it because the ministers and soldiers see to everything, and yet it still happens by the king's will.

"He does not do anything, but his will, through his law, governs the kingdom. It is the same with God's will too. God does not do anything, and yet the slightest movement of a leaf is governed by His will."



## **Karma and Grace**

Discussions about karma invariably lead to questions about whether one can alter one's karma. Once, in response to such a discussion, Bal Natu told the following story.

“Suppose a man goes to the bank where he has an account and asks the banker for a sum of Rs. 1500/- because he wants to go on pilgrimage and needs the money. The banker asks the man to wait as he needs to check the man's account. After checking, the banker says, ‘Sorry, but you can only withdraw Rs. 1000/- from your account because that is all that you have.’

“Karma is like that. You only get what is due to you, which is decided by your actions, whether good or bad, which get recorded in your account as your sanskaras. You can call it destiny.

“Now if the banker's son was to approach him with the same request, asking for Rs 1500/- to go on a pilgrimage, the banker's response would be different. He would ask his son to take at least Rs 2000/ and even then, would express concern that it might not be sufficient for the journey.

“Baba's grace is like the banker's love for his son. He would not insist on checking his son's account. Out of love for his son, he would want to help. Baba's grace is like that. You have your karma following you from the past, but His grace supersedes karma. In order to invite this grace, one has to remember Him constantly and call out to Him.”

Bal chuckled and added, “We are like the foolish son who tells his banker father, ‘Dad, I can't take Rs. 2000/ from you, because I have only saved Rs. 1500/ in my account.’ The son could not understand his father's love and concern.

“In the same way, if we insist on going through our karma instead of accepting Baba's loving grace, Baba says, ‘All right, if you want what's due to you by way of karma, it's okay. I wanted to give you more by way of grace, but since you want karma, it's okay.’”

This reminds me of how Bal would often laugh as he quoted the following:

“Agar na abhi, toe phir kabhi hum mast banege kabhi na kabhi.”  
“If not now, then later we will become God intoxicated some time or another.”



## **Truth Upholds and Brings Cheer**

Once a month the women Mandali, would come from Meherazad to visit Baba's samadhi at Meherabad. An announcement would be made about when they would arrive and usually there would be quite a crowd of pilgrims and residents waiting at Meherabad to greet them.

It always seemed like a special occasion and I felt very fortunate to be able to participate. The atmosphere around the samadhi as the women performed arti, (devotional singing), seemed surcharged with devotion and love.

After the garlanding at Baba's samadhi and reciting prayers and arti, the women would walk over and garland Mehera's samadhi and then the stretcher and Baba's picture in Baba's cabin room.

After this the Mandali would walk over to the tin shed and garland Baba's gaadi or throne. Often the Mandali would then sit for a while and greet everyone who had gathered around. Mani would share a few Baba stories or jokes and anyone who approached Mani would get an embrace and lots of love.

One time a female pilgrim from Delhi approached Mani and embraced her. Mani asked her where she came from and what her name was. The woman answered and then tried to remind Mani of how she had met her on her last visit (about three years earlier).

Mani's face looked blank for a moment or two and then she broke into a big smile and said, "I remember meeting you. Oh yes, I clearly remember meeting you." The woman was obviously thrilled that Mani had remembered her and walked away in delight.

As Mani turned and began walking to greet someone else, I said softly in Gujarati, (vernacular language), "That was a white lie, wasn't it? From your expression, it did not look like you remembered her."

Mani looked at me with a big smile, reached out and held my hand saying, "Look at the joy in the girl's heart when I said I remembered her. Anything that cheers a heart and makes it

happy, how can it be a lie? It is the truth in Baba's eyes. Baba has even said that a smile that brings cheer to a drooping heart, a word that brings hope and joy in gloom, has as much claim to be regarded as service as onerous sacrifice and heroic self denial. Truth is that which upholds a person and spreads happiness."



## Taj Mahal

On one occasion Mani brought up the subject of speaking the truth. “Baba wanted us to speak the truth at all times, but we don’t have to say everything,” she explained.

Once there was a Baba lover who was visiting Meherazad for the first time. She was really taken by the beauty and atmosphere she found at Baba’s home. When the time came for her to leave, she looked sad.

Mani saw her crying and tried to console her. She told Mani, “Mani, I am not crying because I am leaving, it is something else.”

Mani said, “Tell me what it is and maybe I can help you.”

She proceeded to tell Mani her story.

“You see, my trip to India was financed by my granny, but on the condition that I visit the Taj Mahal and tell her about it. She always wanted to see the Taj Mahal and couldn’t do it, so she wanted me to visit the place for her. I was hoping to spend a few days at Meherabad and Meherazad and then leave to see the Taj. But it was so beautiful here that I couldn’t tear myself away. Now that it’s time to return to America, I am feeling guilty and sad that I did not keep my word. I am afraid of facing her.”

“That’s all?” Mani said. “I can tell you what to do.”

The girl asked, “Are you going to ask me to lie? Others have suggested it and I just can’t lie to my granny.”

“Not at all. You don’t have to tell a lie. When you go to Bombay, make sure you visit the hotel that’s there, called the Taj Mahal. Then, when your granny asks you, tell her that you visited the Taj Mahal and that it was beautiful. You won’t be telling a lie.”

The pilgrim cheered up. After she went home she wrote to Mani telling all about her visit to the Taj Mahal hotel and her encounter with her granny who was happy to hear all about her visit to the Taj. She even thanked Mani for her advice.



## Using Tact in Conveying the Truth

Eruch often spoke on truth. He would frequently assert that “Truth is that which upholds a person,” and told the story many times in Mandali Hall about how Baba, Himself, had brought this message home to him.

Elaborating on this theme one day he said,

“You may narrate a fact, but if in the process of doing it, if you belittle someone, then it’s not the truth.

“A pilgrim once said to me, ‘People don’t like it if I speak the truth about their nature.’ It depends on how you present it. You have to be careful about what you say and how you say it. If you hurt a person, then it is not the truth. For truth uplifts a person.

“Suppose you see a woman who is ugly and tell her that she is ugly. You have narrated a fact, but it is not the truth, for you have broken her heart. But if you were to praise her by saying that she has a simple heart and a friendly face, then it would be the truth.

“If you come to know that a Baba worker is doing something wrong or if he has made a mistake, you have to tell him very carefully. If you just blurt out his mistake to him, he will react with anger. It is because his perception will be that you are attacking him, which you are not, and he will then go on the offensive and attack back. That’s what anyone would do if attacked.

“So you have to be very careful about how you point out a person’s mistake. You have to be loving and tactful. First, you must win the person over with love. Let him know how his effort and work for Baba is appreciated. Praise him for something good he has done. Ask him what he is doing now. When he talks about his work and he comes to the part where he needs correction, carefully suggest to him the correct way to do it. Without telling him that he is wrong, suggest to him an optional way of doing it and make it appear that it is his suggestion and not yours.

“It’s an art, a divine art. That’s how it was around Baba. Even the most ordinary thing became difficult. That’s what spiritual training is all about.”

One of Mani’s favorite quotes on the subject was:

Karo toe aisa ke Khuda bhi Kush ho

aur shaitan bhi naraz na ho

Behave in such a way that not only is God pleased,

but even the devil is not displeased



**E**ruch once said, “On many occasions Baba would give us an order which was difficult to carry out. In order to do it, we had to be tactful. For instance, when we were traveling with Baba, He would order us not to reveal His identity to anyone.

“So what do we do when someone points to Baba and asks us, ‘Who is he?’ We had Baba’s order not to tell a single lie and, in this case, we could not speak the truth either, so what would I do?

“I would pretend that I could not hear the person and would say to him, ‘Excuse me, sir, could you speak louder?’ I created the impression that I was hard of hearing without lying.

“The person would repeat the question loudly, ‘Is that man over there, Meher Baba?’

“I would again pretend as if I could not hear well. ‘Which Baba did you say? Please repeat that.’

“After repeating the name of Meher Baba several times, the person would conclude that since I didn’t seem to be familiar with the name, Meher Baba, then obviously the leader of our group could not be Meher Baba.

“In the meantime, the group would have moved forward so I would excuse myself and run away. That’s how it was with

Baba. You could not say, 'No, that is not Meher Baba.' That would be a lie and Baba would not like it.

"Have you heard the story of the time Baba ordered me to bring some coriander for Him in the middle of the night? Yes, the whole market was closed and everyone was fast asleep when Baba asked me to get Him some coriander.

"As it so happened, I knew the house of the vegetable vendor, but to make matters even more awkward for me, I had just had a big fight with him during the daytime because he had been washing his vegetables in dirty water, or some issue like that. I had expressed myself very forcefully that this was not proper. Now I had to wake this same person up and ask him to get me some coriander in the middle of the night.

"I went to his house and knocked on the door until I finally roused him. He recognized me and became quite upset. 'What do you want?' he demanded angrily. Now I knew, under ordinary circumstances that there was no way he was going to give me the coriander so I pleaded in a very sorrowful voice, 'Please sir, you have to help me. My elder brother's last wish is to have some coriander.'

"So, without telling a lie, I created the impression that my elder brother was dying. Baba had told us that we could refer to Him as 'our elder brother' and His last wish when He called me was that He wanted coriander, so this was not lying. It was the truth.

"The vegetable vendor thought someone was dying and so he opened his shop and gave me some coriander which I then took back to Baba."



## Parrot Recites Ram's Name

**Bal** Natu, as was his custom, was sitting in his room, avoiding the crowd of pilgrims. But, invariably pilgrims discovered him and sat on the floor to hear his stories. This particular day the topic of discussion was his book of poetry, *Conversations with the Awakener*.

One of the pilgrims remarked that he had found them to be very powerful. But he wondered if Bal could put into practice the things that he had written about. He said that he, and most pilgrims he knew found it very difficult to put Baba's teachings into practice.

Bal said, "I will tell you a story to explain my state.

"A master trains his parrot to repeat the name of God. Morning and night the parrot would keep repeating the name of God. If any guest came, the parrot would start saying loudly, 'Ram, Ram, Ram,' which, as you know, is one of God's names.

"Soon, everyone came to know about the parrot and people would talk of it with respect and reverence. One day a fire broke out in the house and the parrot was trapped. As the fire approached the parrot's cage, instead of saying, 'Ram, Ram, Ram,' the parrot went 'squeak, squeak, squeak.'

"In the time of crisis, the parrot forgot to take God's name and started squeaking. I am like that." We all laughed as Bal concluded. The pilgrim said, "I guess Bal, we are all like the parrot." Bal laughingly added, "I don't know about everyone, but I am like that."



## **Baba Alone Does His Work**

**We** were all sitting in Mandali Hall when Eruch unexpectedly turned to me and asked me to narrate my story of how I came to Baba.

In brief, I said I was an atheist. I was studying in engineering college and had borrowed some course books from a friend, Rayoman Dadachanji. When I went to return the books, I ran into his mother, Havovi. She was a woman who did not talk about Baba, but simply thrusts Him on you, and that's what she did with me.

She handed me several Baba booklets and photos and said, "Here, take Baba with you. He will solve all your problems."

My first reaction when I saw Baba's photo was, "As if there are not enough Baba's, we have another one." I was not the least interested in anything Havovi was giving me but her personality was such that I meekly accepted it all, even though normally I was quite aggressive in defending my belief that God does not exist.

On my way home I flipped through the pages. I was fascinated by some of Baba's quotes and I changed my mind about throwing the booklets away, which had been my original intention. That was the beginning of my journey to Baba.

When I finished narrating my story, Eruch looked around the room and asked, "What would have happened to Rustom if Havovi had not introduced him to Baba? Where would Rustom be today?"

Eruch paused and no one in the hall ventured to guess. Eruch laughed and said, "Rustom would still be sitting here with us. It was Baba who brought Rustom here and not Havovi. She was only a medium, a tool. The only person you should thank is Meher Baba. He is the One who brings all things in your life.

"When someone helps you, remember to thank Baba and not the person. The person is only a medium, an instrument. However, we forget to thank Baba and instead we thank the person, the medium. That's how it is, instead of remembering

the Creator for everything, we think of the creation - it's all because of illusion."

One of the pilgrims protested, "We have to thank the person for his role too, Eruch."

Eruch replied, "If a postman came and gave you a money order of Rs 10,000/-, would you thank the postman or the person who sent it?"

Eruch then added, "You can thank both, if you want, but thank Baba first."



## Conquering the Mind

**Mansari** was one of the Mandali who lived at Meherabad. She had been there pretty much since 1938. Although the only thing she wanted when she came to be with Baba was to stay physically close to Him, she had, under His direction, spent most of her life living on Meherabad Hill and seeing Baba only occasionally.

According to His instructions, she never even crossed the railroad tracks to go into lower Meherabad unless it was to go into town for medical reasons, or to visit Baba. She once said that the two things she didn't like were cooking and sewing and now that was how she spent her time. Although she lived the life of a hermit, alone on the hill, she was very lively and gregarious and loved to joke and laugh with pilgrims who came to visit and went out of her way to make them feel at home.

She was about four feet four inches tall and would gleefully announce that she was getting shorter all the time. She used to say that she was waiting until she was so short she could fit into Baba's pocket. Baba nicknamed her "chili" both because of her size and her fiery nature.

She told me the following story.

"A slave went around looking for work. He would tell those who might employ him that he would work for free, but that he had to be kept busy all the time. If a would be master failed to keep him occupied all the time, then he would eat him up.

"The slave worked for a lot of different masters and ended up eating them all because, sooner or later, the master would run out of work for the slave.

"Nobody knew how to control this slave and all the masters who tried would eventually fail and be eaten. Then, came along a wise master. He heard of the slave and agreed to hire him. Even when the slave explained the condition under which he would work, the master agreed. He told the slave to bring a ladder and set it up against the wall.

“Then the master asked the slave to do some work around his house and told the slave that as soon as the work was done, he should start climbing up and down the ladder; that was his next job.

“The slave finished his work and was happy that he could now eat up the new master when he suddenly remembered that the master had given him another task as well, to climb up and down the ladder. So the slave kept doing this until the master came around and gave him some other work to do. But again he instructed him, ‘As soon as you finish this work, then your next job is to climb up and down the ladder.’ This went on day after day, month after month and finally the slave died.”

I had to admit to Mansari that I did not understand the story, so she explained it to me. “The slave is one’s mind,” she said, “The masters whom the slave ate up are ordinary humans. The wise Master is the Perfect Master. To climb up and down the ladder represents repeating God’s name.

“Most ordinary humans are unable to keep their minds occupied, unable to control it and the mind overwhelms them. However, under the guidance of the Perfect Master, constant repetition of God’s name, while attending to worldly duties, keeps the mind under control and eventually quiets it.”



## Stop Trying and Start Remembering

Nana Kher was one of Baba's early disciples who later came to live at Meherabad. Unlike Mansari, he lived at lower Meherabad, but would come up the hill every day to sit outside the Samadhi and give pilgrims Prasad as they left. Like Bal, he hadn't lived with Baba on a continuous basis but used to come for Baba's darshan and would spend time with Baba at Guruprasad during the summer months.

Many pilgrims will remember Nana's warm embrace when they first arrived at the Samadhi and his smiling "Welcome home" greeting. Once Nana got to know you, he would ask, "Do you remember Baba throughout the day?"

Most would say something along the lines of, "I try."

Nana would then lovingly tell you, "Do not try. Trying is not enough. You must remember Him. Baba said, 'Remember Me,' He did not say, 'Try to remember Me.'"

This seemed illogical to me and I argued with Nana about it. He told me to bring him the Discourses and show him any place where Baba said, "Try to remember Me." So for the next few days, I flipped through the Discourses but I could not find the relevant quote. Finally I found a quote in *Mastery of Consciousness* written by Allan Cohen in which Baba used the word "try."

Nana just laughed when I showed this to him and insisted that I had to show him the same quote in Baba's *Discourses* or he would not change his stand that Baba always said, "Remember Me," and never "Try to remember Me."

I protested that I didn't have time to go through the entire *Discourses*. Nana didn't say anything for a moment or two and then he turned to me and said, "Have you heard of mountaineers making an attempt to scale a peak? What great preparations, what great efforts and what great hardships and trials they face while trying to reach the very summit. They risk their lives and some even lose their lives while trying to reach the peak. But think of the glory one experiences when one

finally succeeds in reaching the top. How exhilarating it must feel.

“Then what about the ultimate glory of God-realization? How much more is expected of us to scale that peak? Shouldn’t we risk everything and give our best effort for that ultimate glory? No sacrifice is too big to reach the ultimate goal.”

Nana concluded, “Effort invites grace, so stop trying and start remembering Him.”



## **Remembrance Through Hatred**

In response to a question about how to control one's anger, Eruch said, "Remember Baba when you feel angry, and if you still can't control it, then get angry with Baba. That way you remember Him. Baba never said you have to remember Him with Love. Baba is in everyone, so He is also in the person who is making you angry. Why shout at that person, Baba is only using that person, so express your anger at Baba. It's okay to remember Him with love, anger or hatred, as long as you remember Him, that's what is important."

Eruch then went on to talk about Colonel M.S. Irani, Mehera's uncle. "Col. Irani fiercely opposed Baba even though his niece Mehera was living with Him. He did not like the fact that Baba had taken his family away, so he kept a close eye on Baba's activities. Wherever Baba went, Col. Irani would go before Him and speak out against Baba. Col. Irani would be there before Baba, distributing pamphlets, writing articles in local newspapers and even speaking against Baba in public gatherings. So Col. Irani was constantly remembering Baba because of his hatred of Him.

"He did this till the very end of his life. Years later, when Baba willed in His Trust Deed that a memorial tower be built in memory of His close lovers, can you guess whose name was at the top of the list? Yes, it was Col. M.S. Irani. His remembrance of Baba was whole hearted. Also, in those days no one knew of Baba and it was through his opposition that people came to know of Baba and were eventually drawn into His fold."

Eruch continued to narrate a similar episode from Mahabharata. "Ravana, who opposed Lord Ram, was given a choice. He could either oppose Rama for one life and get liberation or he could be Lord Rama's companion for four lifetimes and then get liberation. He chose to oppose Him, because He wanted liberation quickly."

At this, a pilgrim commented, "It appears by opposing the Avatar, you reach the goal quickly, as compared to the one who serves Him."

Eruch jokingly said, “Even we do that, don’t we? We get rid of someone who is opposing us, but when someone is helpful, we hold onto him.”

Everyone laughed and when the room quieted down Eruch added in a more serious tone, “It’s like this you see, when you hate a person, the intensity with which you remember him is much stronger than when you love a person. For the most part, when hatred of a person is created, then you forget everything and think of that person constantly. In love, also there is remembrance, but not as intense or as constant. Even the demons of Ravana’s army who were killed got liberation. Why? Because in their dying moments they were thinking of Lord Rama with hatred.”

Eruch continued, “The Avatar is the Ocean. Our sanskaras, good as well as bad, are like garbage. Remembrance is the act of throwing the garbage into the Ocean. Constant and continual remembrance of Baba amounts to drowning your entire sanskaric pile of garbage in the Ocean.”

Another time Eruch used this example.

“Compare your soul to a mirror. The mirror is covered with dirt, which is our sanskaras, good as well as bad. Now, in order to see one’s self clearly, the dirt has to be wiped off. Only when the mirror of your soul is cleaned of all the sanskaric dirt can you see your real Self [God] in it. Remembrance is the act of cleaning away the sanskaric dirt.”

When asked why good actions create binding Eruch said, “At times good actions bind more than bad ones, because one takes pride in them and this only strengthens the ego instead of weakening it. Only when you offer your actions completely to Him, through constant remembrance, then the burden of the sanskaras falls on Him. Otherwise the consequences of your actions and the sanskaras created thereby are yours.”



## Nero Wolfe

Mani would sometimes tell the following story which occurred in the final days of Meher Baba's life. Mani was reading a Nero Wolfe detective novel to Baba who was sitting with His eyes closed, completely relaxed. Baba had already stated that His work was 100% complete, but His health was very poor and the times that Baba seemed to be able to truly rest were few and far between.

So when Mani noticed that Baba's breathing had become very deep and steady, as if He had fallen asleep, she stopped reading. She was thinking that it would be good for Baba if He could nap for a while. But the instant she stopped, Baba gestured, "Why did you stop?"

Mani would say, "But Baba, you were asleep and not listening." Baba gestured, "I was listening, go on reading." Mani began reading again, but again the same thing happened. Baba's breathing became deep and regular and to all outward appearances He had fallen asleep. Mani read on, and on, but Baba continued to sleep soundly and Mani was just about to reach a point in the book which she knew was one of Baba's favorite passages. (This was the second time she was reading it out to Him.) Not wanting Baba to miss that section, Mani stopped. But again, no sooner had she done so, than Baba gestured, "Why did you stop?"

"I thought you were asleep, Baba and I didn't want you to miss anything."

"I was listening," Baba gestured. "Tell me then, what did I just say," Mani asked and, to her amazement, Baba was able to recount everything that had happened while she had been sure He was sound asleep.

"I was sure you were asleep," Mani insisted.

"Remember," Baba gestured, "even when my eyes are closed and I appear to be asleep, I am still listening,"

Mani would then turn to those around her and add, "It is like that even now. He may appear to you to be a sleeping God, but He

is listening. So call out to Him from your heart, repeat His name, talk with Him. You can begin by sharing all your problems. Ask Him for everything - even small things. It's a good way of remembering Him.

“It doesn't matter whether or not He gives you what you ask for, leave that to Him. Anything and everything that happens to you, throughout the day, share with Him. Slowly, by doing this, a time will come, when you will remember Him constantly and your dependence on Him will be complete. He will then take over your life. He will provide even before the need arises and answer even before you ask.”



## Peter the Dog

A similar story Mani would often recount was about Baba's dog, Peter. One day Mani was called into Mandali Hall by Baba. He was sitting in His usual chair and the men Mandali were sitting on the floor around Him. Baba gestured towards His feet and Mani noticed that Peter had crawled over toward Baba and was now sleeping there. Thinking that Baba wanted her to remove Peter she started forward, but Baba gestured to her to look at Peter and she noticed that the dog's legs were moving in his sleep. He was whining as well and Baba gestured, "He is dreaming. He is having a bad dream and is very afraid. He is dreaming that he is being attacked by big dogs and he is very scared. He does not know that he is safe and sleeping at my feet."

Mani would then add, "That's how we all are. Just like Peter, we are sleeping safely at His feet, but we forget this. Like Peter, we are so absorbed in our illusory dream that we take the illusory suffering to be real and feel the pain. Only on awakening do we experience the reality—that we were always safe with Him.

"It helps, to remember during our moments of suffering, that we are only dreaming. He is always with us. Don't let the dream overwhelm you. Remember Him all the time. Call out to Him. Talk to Him. Repeat His name. This weakens the effect of the dream. Have you ever had a dream where you are aware that it's a dream? It's like that. When you remember Him constantly, you become aware of the dream and it does not overwhelm you."



## Connect Bogie to the Engine

“How can I overcome my weakness?” a pilgrim asked Bhauji.

Bhauji replied, “Through constant remembrance of Baba. We worry and think about our desires and weaknesses all the time. Yet we know that God, who is all power and strength, is within us. Then why don’t we think of this strength all the time instead of thinking about our weaknesses?”

Bhauji would often narrate the following to make his point even clearer.

“Take the case of a train engine. As long as the bogies are connected to it, it does not matter if the bogie is carrying gold or iron or just plain garbage. The engine will carry all the bogies to the goal, as long as they are connected to the train.

“In the same manner, it does not matter whether you are strong or weak, as long as you are connected to the Avatar. He will take you to the goal, it is His responsibility. But how do you connect yourself to the Avatar? The link is remembrance. The more you remember Him, the stronger your connection. And when you remember Him constantly, your link becomes strong and unbreakable.”



## **Spiritual Training: 'Focus on Baba'**

The times I spent at Meherazad and Meherabad, with the Mandali, were golden times for me. I tried to come every chance I could, but even that wasn't enough. So I began staying for longer and longer periods when I came to visit. I started to get involved in some of the work as this gave me an excuse for extended visits. Still, even this did not satisfy the longing that had developed in me so, in 1989, I asked Mani, who was Chairperson of the Trust at the time and, as such, was responsible for making the final decision, whether I could live there.

She asked me, "Just what exactly do you think you are going to experience as a resident? Do you think you are going to experience bliss over here."

I replied, "I think I have a fairly good idea of the hardships the residents have to face. I have worked with some of the residents during my long visits."

Mani said, "This place is a ball of fire. You will have to walk through fire." I replied with what I now see was complete, naïve glibness, "But we will have to walk through it some day, so why not now, under Baba's guidance?"

Little did I know the soul-cleansing suffering that awaited me.

As was customary, when Mani decided I could come, I was given permission to come for 6 to 9 months and then would have to leave. The idea was that an extended stay of this type would give potential residents a taste of the life that awaited them and help them decide whether or not they really wanted to go through with it. Especially once they realized that, unlike their pilgrim visits, their life as a resident would entail many more agonizing moments than blissful ones. In fact, many did decide to change their minds but invariably a few would come back for more and would end up staying for varying lengths of time.

Life as a resident was, indeed, quite different from life as a pilgrim. Of course, before coming I had read stories about the Mandali's life with Baba. I had read of how Baba would often put the Mandali into excruciating situations, trying both their

physical fortitude and their emotional stamina (to say nothing of their mental stability). These stories seemed amusing, in fact, when told by the Mandali, they somehow seemed to make Baba more endearing. But when you begin to experience such situations for yourself, you realize just how difficult they are to endure.

These experiences gave me a little taste of what life with Meher Baba might have been like. Mind you, I say only a “taste,” because I don’t think there is any resident who could have gone through what Baba put His Mandali through. And yet, that “taste,” was sometimes almost more than I could handle. I ended up living as a resident from 1989 to 2000 and those were the happiest years of my life and yet, I must honestly admit that they were filled with hardship, mental turmoil and emotionally agonizing moments. And it wasn’t just me, I think this is something that all residents experience.

There were certain matters which made life as a resident challenging. Perhaps the most obvious was the fact that I was now part of a community of residents. I was no longer just vacationing at Meherabad and focusing only on Baba and the Mandali; I now had to relate to all the other residents who were living there as well. One of the first things that struck me was that the other residents, unlike the Mandali, would not always radiate love, they did not seem full of spiritual wisdom, and they would not go out of their way to encourage or comfort me. At first it seemed surprising, then disappointing, and finally, annoying that the other residents seemed to be less friendly, helpful or “spiritual” as compared to the pilgrims.

Whether this was really true is hard to say. But it seemed that way because one’s expectations were so much higher for the residents. Although you knew that residents were bound to have off moments, even bad days, you expected them, nonetheless, to be trying all the time to remember Baba, to be self-effacing and loving towards others.

But just like any organization in the world, Meherabad too had its internal bickering, power struggles and personal politics. I don’t think this is just my perception because many others before me had complained to Mani and Eruch that such things should not be allowed to happen in Meherabad as they ruined Baba’s atmosphere.

Actually, the fact that residents, who ostensibly had come to dedicate their lives to Meher Baba, should behave in this way was disappointing, but the fact that the Mandali seemed to allow it to happen without saying a word was all the more troubling. The Mandali were so significant in my life, I imagined that if they simply called in the offenders and pointed out the error of their ways, that this would instantly put an end to the troubles we were having. I found myself getting irritated at the Mandali for not stepping in and using their authority to put things right. This, of course, only made it harder for me to tolerate the situation.

At the time I was staying at Meherabad and Meherazad, I was doing the spade work to close down an illegal and polluting chemical factory which had sprung up on the Meherazad approach road. It was causing severe hardships for Meherazad Mandali and residents as well as nearby villagers. The work itself was very stressful and the pettiness of some residents made it all the more difficult for me.

Finally, one day I could not take it anymore. I approached Eruch and poured out my heart to him. When I finished, I said to him what so many residents had often said, "Why do the Mandali keep quiet about such matters? Why is no action being taken to prevent such things from happening at Meherabad? It is ruining the atmosphere."

Of course this was nothing Eruch hadn't heard many times before. He did not respond but looked indifferent to my outpouring. Or perhaps, more correctly, I should say he looked "detached," although it felt, at the time, like indifference. So I repeated my complaints.

He responded by asking me a question which startled me. "Rustom," he said, "why did you come to live here?"

Without thinking I said, "Meher Baba - That's my reason for being here."

"Good," Eruch replied. "Don't lose your focus."

But this answer did not satisfy me. I felt as if my concerns were being brushed aside and I insisted, "You have not answered my question."

Eruch said, just as forcefully, “I have answered it, but you were not paying attention, so you could not grasp it. Did you come here to close down a chemical factory? If you wanted to do that, then you could have become an environmentalist. You came here for Meher Baba, so keep your focus on Him, all the time.”

Some of what Eruch said made sense to me but it still seemed to me he was avoiding a legitimate question about why the Mandali didn't do more to stop the kind of petty bickering which was going on and I couldn't shake my strong conviction that the work I was doing was also Baba's work and I put this to Eruch, “But isn't closing the chemical factory to preserve the Meherzad and village atmosphere from pollution, also His work?”

Eruch paused and then said with a deep sigh, “The work that you do around Meher Baba or for Him is only a medium, or an excuse, that Baba uses to work upon you. Baba's real work is something else entirely. All this politics and petty infighting which the residents complain about was much more intense around Baba, when He was in the physical body.

“It was there between the Mandali who lived with Him. In fact, if things were quiet, Baba would not like it and He would stir things up and create situations in which Mandali members would end up quarreling. That was His real work. To bring up all the ugliness buried in your soul, in the form of anger, greed, lust and desires, to the surface for you to see and for eventual cleaning.

“As long as the dirt stays buried inside, you may get the sense of apparent cleanliness; however, when real soul cleaning begins, that's when you realize just how much dirt had covered your soul, for in the process of cleaning, it all comes to the surface and can even be suffocating. But be sure that Meher Baba will take you through the cleaning process and when it is all clean, the suffocation will end.

“Did I tell you my own story with Baba? After living with Baba for several years, I found that, instead of becoming more spiritual, more calm and tolerant, I was becoming more ill natured, I was losing my temper, becoming impatient and would even lie at times. I never did all this before I came to Baba.

“One day I was thinking about this and Baba suddenly asked me, ‘What are you thinking?’ When I told Baba what was bothering me, He said, ‘Have you ever been in a room full of dust that is being cleaned? As the sweeping is carried out, the dust begins to rise and often chokes the person sweeping as well as everyone else in the room. As long as the dust was lying on the floor, people in the room were not affected by it. Even in a dirty room, one can continue to live without noticing the dirt. But when the sweeping begins, then one suddenly notices the dust, because of the discomfort it creates.

“But does the sweeper stop sweeping because of the discomfort? No, he continues to sweep regardless of the discomfort until the room is clean.’ So, Baba’s work is like that; He sweeps the soul, bringing all the hidden dirt to the surface. What you experience is a temporary discomfort in the form of mental turmoil and agony, but there is no other way to clean the internal dirt.”

Eruch concluded, “In so far as the Meherabad environment is concerned, all the internal strife makes it a perfect environment for Baba’s spiritual work. He would be pleased. So, that’s why I tell you not to lose your focus.”



## Harmony

Although I was disappointed that Eruch did not speak out or step in and settle the disputes that occurred at Meherabad, he would constantly emphasize the importance of harmony to anyone who cared to listen.

I remember very clearly one early morning walk that Dr. Anne and I were taking with Eruch. We had gone about 200 feet down the Meherazad approach road, when Eruch stopped and pointed to a tree to the left of the road. He asked us if we saw anything unusual about it. Anne and I looked but didn't notice anything.

"Look at the leaves," Eruch directed and then, knowing how careless and unobservant most of us were, added, "Carefully."

When we did this, we saw that there were different kinds of leaves on the tree almost as if they were from two different trees. I said this to Eruch and he said laughingly,

"You are correct. There are two different trees though the trunk seems to be one. But if you look at it carefully you can see that there are two trunks very close to one another."

When I looked at it carefully I saw what Eruch was pointing out.

Eruch then said, "I want all residents to live like these two trees. They are both different in all respects - different leaves, different fruits, and completely different species, yet they exist in harmony, side by side. When trees, who are less evolved can live together, why can't we? I would like to see the residents who come from different countries, who speak different languages and who have different personalities to live together as one unit, as one family, just like these two trees are doing. Live together in harmony." I remember one of Eruch's favorite quotes, which he used to have read out in the hall from time to time, went something like, "Harmony is the reflection of God's oneness in the world of duality,"

The funny thing was that the more Eruch emphasized the need for harmony, the more I was confused and irritated that he didn't

do more to establish it by 'cracking the whip' and getting all the residents to tow the line.

And I was not shy about expressing this view, though for all of my complaints, I have to admit that I myself was very hot tempered and full of fire when I first came to live as a resident. I was very lucky to be given the opportunity to live at Meherabad, the Trust Compound and Meherazad for varying lengths of time.

When I was staying at Meherazad, one of the ways I used to pass the extra time I had with Eruch was to argue with him about his ideas on harmony and other things over which I disagreed with him. Although I agreed that harmony was a nice idea, I felt that the way to achieve it was by correcting all of those who were misbehaving. I felt that when it came to Baba's work, it was especially important not to compromise over what one felt was right.

Eruch's pleas for harmony were beyond my capacity for understanding. I even told myself that it would be cowardice to give in to something other than what you believed in for the sake of harmony.

I expressed this to Eruch. One day I said, "Eruch, I believe in harmony. I also believe that as Baba lovers we should make an effort to be loving to others, even when someone has been rude to us. I agree that we should do our best to win over or change a person who is rude through our loving behavior. But, what if after we have made all our best efforts, the person continues to be rude, continues to hurt everyone by doing wrongful things, and refuses to change, no matter how much love you shower on him? Shouldn't such a person be stopped, in whatever way he can be stopped?"

Eruch shook his head, "That would be your weakness if you resorted to such means."

"Then what should one do?" I asked.

"Give in," Eruch replied without hesitation. "For the sake of harmony let him have his way. Harmony is more important than anything. It should be maintained at all costs."

“But Eruch,” I protested, “should we not take a stand on the truth? If someone is doing wrong, isn’t it our moral duty to stop him?”

“If you take such a stand,” Eruch replied, “it will be a stand on falseness and not truth. From the point of view of Meher Baba, there is no such thing as good or bad. Both are equally binding. Both fall in the domain of falseness - call them relative degrees of falseness.”

This answer did not appease me. I said, “Eruch, I am not talking from the spiritual point of view or Meher Baba’s point of view. I am talking about the point of view of society, which operates on certain values, commonsense values of right and wrong.”

Eruch replied very calmly, “Not only is it all illusion, but society operates on values based on relative falseness. We know that what is true for one society or country may be considered wrong and illegal in another. The only clear perspective is the spiritual perspective of Meher Baba. If you see everything from that perspective, things will be clear. But the moment you try to break your life into compartments by separating the spiritual from your day to day activities, then a conflict arises.”

I couldn’t understand Eruch and asked him to explain it in simple terms.

“It’s all very simple,” he said. “Every soul in creation is on its journey to God. We are all at different places in that journey. Call them levels of relative truth or relative falseness. What level a particular soul is on, depends on his sanskaras. To a “good” person, a thief may appear as “bad,” but a saint on the 5th or 6th plane, will see both of them, the good and the bad man, as souls bound in the falseness of illusion. A God-Realized soul, on the other hand, will see all three of them, including the saint, as still caught up in falseness, although a 5th or 6th plane saint is closer to the Truth.

“So, from the point of view of a God-Realized soul, every soul is bound in the falseness of illusion. Remember, there is no such thing as right or wrong. Baba gave us an example once. Baba pointed to the sky and said, ‘If the sky is the 7th plane of consciousness, or God-Realization, then the person on the 6th plane is someone standing on the Meherazad roof, and gross-

conscious souls are on the ground. The distance from the ground to the roof, about 14 feet, is the distance from the gross plane to the 6th plane, whereas the distance from the roof top to the sky – which is infinite – is the distance from the 6th to the 7th plane.’ This is the comparison Baba used, to give us an idea.”

I still could not accept all of this, though I liked the stories and thought I understood them. I still felt that as human beings we have a moral duty, if we are in the right and if someone else is in the wrong, not to give in, but to do our best to see that right prevails. I told Eruch this, and he sighed and said, “All right, I will tell you something that happened to me when I was with Baba.

“A person had come from Poona for Baba’s darshan. The man was known all over Poona to be a big scoundrel, and yet, when he came, Baba praised him in front of everyone. Baba was calling everyone’s attention to this man, saying how much love this man had and how this man truly loved Baba and that he was really close to Baba’s heart.

“I could barely control myself. As soon as the man left, I blurted out my mind to Baba. I told Baba, “This man is well known throughout Poona as a rogue and a scoundrel, and yet you, Baba, are praising him.’

“Baba said, ‘What do you know about him? You see his actions only in this life, but I can see all his previous lives and I tell you honestly, he is a very good soul and has done good work; he is close to me.’

“Ever since that day, I have stopped judging people based on their actions.”

Although I intellectually grasped what Eruch had said, my heart could not accept it at that time. But now that Eruch has gone from our midst, all of a sudden my heart has awakened to his words. “No such thing is right or wrong. Every soul in creation is at a different level trying to progress on its journey toward God.” It brings to mind what Bal Natu had once said to me on this subject: “Harmony does not mean that we agree with one another, but that we respect each other’s different views.” Bal further explained, “Different personalities, different approaches,

and different thoughts and views should not come in the way of us loving one another.”



## Marriage

Although Mehera was no longer alive when I was a resident, I did have the wonderful opportunity to meet her when I used to visit as a pilgrim. Baba said that she was the purest soul in the universe. He also said that she was His beloved and that she was to Him as Radha was to Krishna, or Sita was to Rama.

When I would sit on the porch with her, listening to her stories, I always felt that she was giving me all of her attention. This is what everyone felt around her. She could touch your heart in such an intimate manner, bringing to mind stories of how Baba, when in a crowd of thousands, could make each person feel that He was giving His full attention only to him or her. Of all the Mandali, I have found only Mehera to possess this quality.

Another distinctive feature of Mehera's personality was that when she told stories, it wasn't so much that she was remembering past incidents, as it was that she was reliving them at that moment. The expression on her face showed that she was seeing Baba in her mind's eye.

She also seemed to see Baba in everyone and everything, such as her love for Baba. It is for this reason that Baba had declared, "Mehera is the only one who loves me as I should be loved." Though I did not meet Baba, I feel fortunate to have met His reflection in His beloved Mehera.

A resident told me the following story about Mehera. A couple who were close to Mehera, approached her at the time of their marriage for her blessings and advice. Mehera's advice to them was to "Give in. Learn to give in for the sake of Baba."

Over the years the couple had major differences and often they would go to Mehera with their problems. Mehera would allow one of the partners to speak. So the wife would first explain her point of view. If the husband tried to interrupt, Mehera would ask the husband to be quiet.

Once in a while the husband would protest, "But what she is saying is not true." Mehera's firm reply would be, "It does not matter. Allow her to speak. You will get your chance too." Once

the wife finished speaking, the husband would be allowed to speak without interruption.

Once they were both finished, Mehera would address them both, “All right. Now I want to know which one of you loves Baba more. I want to see who gives in first.”

Time and again she would explain that one had to learn to see Baba in all. If that could be done, then there would be no disputes. In order to do that, one has to surrender the ego. That way, the irritations caused by different personalities won't come in the way of loving that personality.

Khorshed, Mansari and other Mandali have said the same thing on the subject of marriage, which I was fortunate to hear. For we give too much importance to understanding one another in marriage. I remember once Eruch commented, “Where there is love, one wants to give. In order to give, one has to be willing to adjust and give in. Love belongs to the domain of the heart, whereas when one tries to understand, he is entering the domain of the mind and you know how deceptive the mind is. It creates suffering. That's why it's said, 'Not even your worst enemy will treat you the way your mind treats you.' Usually we find people making the comment, 'Now, I understand.' It only shows that he never understood all along and thinks that he has understood now. But a fresh wave of situation will again stir up the mind and the understanding disappears. No wonder Baba said, 'Do not try to understand me - just love Me.'”



## Death

All of these stories would warm my heart and quiet my mind when I heard them, but, just as Eruch suggested, fresh waves of situations would stir my mind up again and I would be lost in mental turmoil again. I think this made me appreciate even more those moments when I could simply relax in the atmosphere of Baba's love that truly did exist when I wasn't too distracted to notice it.

As I said, I had the incredibly good fortune to live at Meherabad, the Trust Compound and Meherazad. Each had its own special charm as well as its own unique way of driving you crazy. I think what appealed to me about Meherazad was that it felt so much like an ashram. It seemed cut off from the world and full of Baba's presence, which was also reflected through His Mandali, many of whom still lived there.

In the early morning, Eruch would walk down the Meherazad approach road and I would accompany him. As we walked down the road, the children who lived in the huts adjoining the road, would come out and run up to Eruch. He would then remove a packet of prasad from his trouser pocket and would parcel out the sweets to the kids clustered around him, making sure that everyone got some. The kids, as well as their parents, seemed overjoyed at this distribution.

I once said, 'It's a joy to watch their expressions as you give them the prasad.'

Eruch replied, 'It's not the sweet, but the sweetness of Baba, which they are receiving through the prasad that lights up their hearts.'

When we reached the end of the road, Eruch would say "My day is over." Every day he did this. Finally I asked him why he said such a thing when the day was actually just beginning. Eruch's answer was,

"This part of the day was mine. Now the rest of the day I give to others."

Dr. Anne Moreigne, another long time resident would usually come out on Sunday to join Eruch on his morning walks. On one such day, during the winter when the cold was severe, Eruch gave us dry ginger to chew. It gave a nice warm sensation in the mouth. We reached the end of the driveway and Eruch turned back quickly towards Meherazad. Halfway there, he turned to us and said, "I have to urinate. I can't control the urge anymore, it's too strong."

Eruch always had amazing self control, but in his later years, due to his illness and the heavy medication he was under, he no longer could control his body the way he had been used to. So we stood to one side while Eruch crossed the road and went a little way into the field to ease himself. Coming back to us he said, "You have no idea how happy I feel. What a relief. What a relief."

I commented that I had been in similar situations and knew how he felt, but Eruch repeated, "You have no idea, Rustom, how happy I am. It is such a relief."

Eruch then paused and added, "Just imagine, if the soul feels so happy upon throwing out such a small load of urine, how much joy it will experience when it throws out this huge load of a body at the time of death. Can you imagine the joy it will experience then?" Eruch then went on to relate an incident from his life with Baba, a story he often related in Mandali Hall.

"When my father, Papa Jessawalla, passed away, Baba had me drive Him to the fire temple where the funeral ceremonies were taking place. We didn't go inside, but as the dead body was carried out to be taken to the tower of silence, Baba pointed at it and asked me, 'What is that?'

"I said, 'Baba, that's Papa's body.'

"This didn't satisfy Baba and He asked again, 'What is that?'

"Again I explained that it was the dead body of my father. But Baba asked me again, 'What is that?'

"I couldn't understand why Baba was asking me this. He was supposed to be All-knowing and yet He seemed not to understand what my father's dead body was. So I began to explain, 'Baba, you know when a person dies, then the body

dies. That's the dead body that's left, Baba.' I felt ridiculous explaining this to Baba as if Baba were a child.

"Baba suddenly seemed to change the subject and asked me, 'Do you go for a shit in the morning?'

"I said I did. Baba then asked, 'Do you feel sad when you shit?'

"No,' I replied. 'In fact, I feel very happy when I pass it.'"

Eruch chuckled when he told us this, perhaps because at the time he was suffering from chronic constipation and so could appreciate just how much pleasure he did indeed receive each morning that he successfully had a motion.

"Baba then pointed to the dead body and said, 'Death is the process by which the soul excretes the human body. What you see lying there is the soul's excreta.'"

Eruch then said to us, "All our lives we give so much attention to the human body which is the soul's excreta, whereas we neglect the soul."



# Spiritual Training

## The Chemical Factory Fight

Earlier, I said that there were certain matters that made life difficult as a resident. The first was the behavior of the other residents. The second was the way things were done. The Trust was organized; it had a Chairman and a board of Trustees, and there were committees for specific tasks and people assigned to certain committees and yet, in spite of all this, things never seemed to be done in a logical manner. As an engineer, I was used to problem solving and figuring out the most straight forward and efficient way to tackle a particular task. But this never seemed to be the way problems were approached by the Trust. As Craig, a long time resident once told me,

“At Meherabad, two plus two can be five, and if you insist that it is four, then you have a lot to learn about living a spiritual life under Meher Baba.”

It was a daily frustration, in working as a resident, that the philosophy of the Trust in regard to work seemed to exemplify Baba’s definition of philosophy, “A simple thing made complicated.”

This could have been tolerated, perhaps even accepted with some affection as a charming idiosyncrasy were it not for the third thing that made my life so hard—that no matter how carefully you tried to navigate through this chaotic, illogical mine field, you always ended up setting off an explosion.

Anytime you had a choice to make, even if you were doing exactly what the Mandali had asked you to do, invariably you were told you had made the wrong choice. And not by other residents, but by the Mandali themselves. This is really what distinguished life as a resident from that of a pilgrim.

Pilgrims, by and large, had just the opposite experience. They came and, because of the love that the Mandali poured out on them, left feeling confirmed that they were “right” in the way that they followed Baba. They felt that the Mandali approved of them and they felt strengthened in their resolve to continue. But once you were a resident, that self-confirmation disappeared. No

matter how diligently you tried to obey any request the Mandali made of you, no matter how exactly you followed their instructions, you ended up being wrong and feeling that you had disappointed them, that, in some fundamental way, you had let them down. Knowing that this was also the experience the Mandali had with Baba was a consolation, but only in an abstract intellectual sense; emotionally, it was still excruciating.

As Eruch once commented, "The work is only an excuse that Baba uses to work on you. He grinds your ego by working on your sanskaras. If you resign to Him completely and become His slave, then He will give you the experience of real Freedom."

Although there was no doubt in my mind that this was something Eruch had done – the tang of freedom in his presence was as palpable as the scent of the sea on an ocean voyage - resigning completely to Baba was something I found difficult to do, despite my best intentions and most earnest dedications.

The result was that I often felt frustrated and confused in trying to work for Baba at the Trust. And the fourth thing, which in many ways, was the most difficult aspect of my life as a resident, was that it seemed to me that not only did the Mandali not use their authority to resolve problems, but that they themselves were, all too often, the cause of the problems in the first place.

As a pilgrim, whenever I had been confused or felt unappreciated in some fundamental way, I would turn to the Mandali for clarity and support. Now, as a resident, I found that I was thrown back on my own resources, meager as they were. To keep myself sane, I would constantly have to remind myself that it wasn't the Mandali who were giving me a hard time, it was Baba working through them in order to grind away at my ego.

An example might make this clear. In 1991, a local businessman started a small chemical factory on the Meherazad approach road. The odor was quite strong and sometimes it was enough to make one nauseous on inhaling it. Nearby farmers started to complain about health problems and chemical pollution of their wells.

Dr. Goher was concerned for the well being of the farmers in the area and we arranged a meeting with the owner of the factory to discuss the matter. He assured the Mandali that the little tin shed structure he had put up was only temporary and that he would be shifting to an industrial zone soon.

The Mandali decided not to do anything about it. But then, without any advance warning, indeed in direct violation of his promise, he built a larger more permanent structure on the site and adamantly refused to move. All appeals fell on deaf ears. The fact that he had never obtained the necessary permits for even the small temporary tin shed was somehow deemed unimportant by him.

I took an interest in this affair and decided that I would help the Mandali get rid of this nuisance. I started visiting government officials but discovered that the owner had strong political connections and therefore no action was being taken. The pollution problem became more pronounced, as did the smell of chemicals now that he had expanded his operation.

I suggested to the Mandali that we should enlist the aid of environmental organizations in the country and fight to have the chemical plant removed. I volunteered to undertake the preliminary work on my own because I had friends who worked for environmental organizations.

The Mandali were divided. Dr. Goher wanted to fight, but Eruch felt that they shouldn't get involved in such an affair because it was a distraction. So time passed and no action was taken. In the meantime, the owner expanded the factory still further and brought in a chlorination unit. Inevitably, not long after, a leak occurred. One night chlorine gas was released and almost everyone at Meherazad woke up with symptoms of one sort or another - watering eyes, nausea, tingling in the hands and feet.

The next day I was called to Meherazad and another meeting was held and this time I was given permission to contact the environmental organizations I knew of and to ask them for help. Eruch was still very reluctant about the whole affair and, if it had been up to him, he would not have agreed. But the others wanted to go forward with the plan, especially since there was no telling just how big the chemical factory might become or

how large the potential health hazard to everyone in the surrounding area might be.

I consulted my friends who were environmentalists and two organizations came forward to help. They advised me to file complaints with all the appropriate government offices as a first step. Accordingly, I drafted a letter and showed it to Falu, a long time resident and the Meherazad caretaker. He made some corrections and then asked me to get the letter okayed by Eruch.

The next day, at the Trust Office, I asked Eruch to look at the letter before I sent it to the government departments. Eruch's first response was that I should show it to Falu first. I replied that I had already done so and that Falu had okayed it and sent me to him. Eruch seemed to be upset and said,

"Tell Falu that I have no time for all this, and not to involve me. I have nothing to do with it."

Naturally, I went back to Falu and told him what had happened. Falu said that Eruch's response was typical, but that it was absolutely necessary that Eruch approve the letter. Falu explained that Eruch's involvement was critical because if things went wrong, he then wouldn't be able to blame us.

"But how do I get him to okay it," I asked, "when I can't even get him to read it?"

"Keep going back," Falu said. "Again and again, even if he throws you out, go back."

Fortified with this advice, the next day I approached Eruch again at the Trust Office. He dismissed me rather curtly saying, "I have nothing to do with all this and I don't have the time."

This was all very upsetting to me. I felt I had taken up a good cause and that the Mandali had finally given me permission to go forward on their behalf. But the very first thing I tried to do was now being thwarted by Eruch. And worse than that, Eruch seemed irritated at my efforts. It wasn't as if he were saying apologetically, "I don't have the time right now," or even, "I'll never have the time but go ahead on your own, it's a good thing you're doing." Rather, his manner made me feel that I was pestering him, and unnecessarily at that. He made me feel that

the whole project wasn't worth his time or, if it came to that, my time.

The difficulty of getting Eruch to read the letter was insignificant compared to the emotional devastation I felt at seeming to be displeasing him so intensely. I couldn't understand why Eruch was behaving this way. No matter how often I examined the issue, I could not see in what way I had erred. And yet the choice seemed clear; I had to drop the whole matter and feel restored in Eruch's good graces, or I could persist and risk alienating him even further. Perhaps this sounds like an easy choice but, for me, it was not.

Because of my contacts with environmental groups, I felt that this was a job I was particularly well suited to undertake. It was also a work I believed in. I would have no trouble pursuing it whole heartedly. And I suspect that somewhere there was the lurking thought that, given all these circumstances, it would also be an opportunity for me to help preserve Meherazad's pure atmosphere. But mostly I found myself thinking that this was a job that needed to be done. I was very concerned at the health problems the pollution was causing and could cause to the Mandali. It was a natural response to the love I felt in their presence, to want to protect them and take care of them. And so, for the most part, I saw myself as engaged in a noble and basically selfless quest. Yet, instead of being lauded for my efforts, instead of being the apple of the Mandali's eye, I seemed to be turning into the worm that despoils the apple. Still, I had invested too much in the task to back out, so my only option was to go forward.

Trying to show Eruch the letter again during Trust time seemed pointless. It would only make him even more upset. So I decided I would try to do it during tea time. In those days, as they had been doing for many years, around 3 p.m., there was a break in the day's work and tea was served. But this was more than just a temporary halt to the work, it was almost as if, for the next half hour or so, the Mandali stepped back into their pilgrim greeting roles.

Mani used this time to have relatively intimate chats with pilgrims whom she hadn't been able to spend much time with. More often, people just showed up on their own to get another chance to be with her. Sometimes people came with personal

problems and wanted advice, other times people came to complain about something at Meherabad since Mani was the Chairperson of the Trust.

The same thing happened with Eruch. Not only would the residents working in the Trust Compound flock around his small table on the back verandah, but residents from Meherabad and Meherazad would come in when they could. The atmosphere was relaxed and informal, and yet lively as it always was around Eruch.

Sometimes Eruch might have permitted a particular pilgrim to come by and then the scene resembled a miniature Mandali hall session, in that Eruch would do whatever he could to put the person at ease. Sometimes they would want him to tell a certain story and invariably he would comply. Sometimes they had questions to ask, which inevitably brought forth the comment, "Why didn't you ask me that in the hall?" followed by "never mind, what is it?"

If it was just those working in the offices, conversations could be about almost anything. People usually tried to come up with something they thought might interest Eruch and before too long there would be laughter and good cheer.

For two or three days I went to tea and waited for my chance. Finally, one day only Davana and I were there. Casually I asked, "Eruch, are you free just now?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

I took the letter I had drafted and put it before him on his desk and asked him to read and okay it.

Eruch immediately looked irritated. "I told you I don't have time for all this," he said.

"But just now when I asked you if you were free, you said 'yes,'" I protested.

"I don't want to get involved," Eruch insisted.

"Falu says that unless you okay it, the complaint won't be filed," I said, subtly trying to put Eruch under pressure.

With reluctance, Eruch agreed and read the letter and even made some corrections. I was so happy that it was finally done.

I retyped the letter, thinking that at last I could submit it. I told Falu that I had succeeded and was going to post the letter. To my surprise he said that I should show the application to all the Meherazad Mandali and get it okayed by everyone before submitting it. I was dumbstruck.

“But Falu,” I protested, “we’re not writing a book. It’s a complaint letter and it has to be submitted immediately considering the serious nature of the problem.”

Falu was sympathetic but said that this was a normal procedure and it had to be done, even if it meant delaying the complaint. He suggested that I mention to all the Mandali that Eruch had already corrected and okayed the application. He felt that, hearing this, the other Mandali would okay the application without much further revision, if any.

This turned out to be true, but I had to go to Meherazad two or three times to get the necessary permissions because the Mandali had other things to attend to and were not necessarily free to look at the letter when I was there. Eventually, however, everyone had seen it and I retyped it as there were some minor suggestions and corrections which had been made. I told Falu that now it was finished.

“Not yet,” Falu informed me. He said that the last and final approval had to come from Bhauji who was living in the Trust Compound.

So I took the letter to Bhauji and told him that everyone at Meherazad, including Mani and Eruch had okayed this draft. I was hoping that reading it out to him would just be a formality and that he wouldn’t want to make any changes.

I finished the letter and expected Bhauji to tell me it was fine and to post it. Instead, I was completely taken aback when Bhauji started adding some additional comments. And not just a line or two, but para after para. By the time he was finished it was a long document. I was crushed because I knew for a fact that government officials wouldn’t even read the letter if it was too long. Nonetheless, I retyped the whole letter again and

showed it to Bhauji for his final approval. To my amazed consternation, Bhauji not only corrected what he had dictated the day before, but he started adding more points.

I asked Bhauji to try to keep the points very short, but he would dictate long paragraphs on every point. Finally we were finished. Once more I retyped the whole thing and Bhauji asked me to show it to him once more. To my horror, when I read it out again, he decided he needed to add even more points.

Days passed and the letter kept getting longer and longer as Bhauji continued to add more corrections. Falu phoned me from Meherazad to ask why I hadn't sent off the letter yet. I told him what was happening and he said, "Tell Bhauji that the Meherazad Mandali want the final draft today, so whatever corrections he wants to make should be done for the last time. After this, there will be no more corrections and the complaint will be sent in."

I was so relieved to hear Falu say this because Bhauji showed no inclination of slowing down. Just the reverse, each day he seemed to add more than the day before. The original letter was one page long; it was now a small booklet.

Twenty one days after the gas leak, we sent in the letter. A copy was sent to the environmental groups and their advocates. They were upset that an "urgent" letter had been mailed three weeks after the emergency. They told me that in such situations you have to submit your complaint the same day so that the appropriate government body can visit the site and carry out an inspection.

I relayed this information to the Mandali, thinking that this would expedite matters in the future; the Mandali might not listen to me, but surely they wouldn't ignore the advice of experienced advocates. Well, a second major gas leak took place not long after this. I drafted a letter after consulting with the advocates and I was hoping to submit it the same day. I explained to everyone how important it was that we get this letter submitted immediately and they responded. Instead of three weeks, it only took ten days this time before I was given permission to submit the letter.

The advocates who had agreed to help us were, understandably, astonished at this delay. They let me know, in no uncertain terms, that this wasn't acceptable. I explained that I simply couldn't mail a letter off on my own, but had to get it approved by all concerned.

The advocate couldn't believe it. "Are these people normal?" he asked me.

"No," I told him. "They are not normal people; they are the apostles of Christ."

The advocate was a Christian and he rejoined, "Well, if you won't follow legal advice, you will definitely need a miracle from Christ to close the factory down."

The next time I went to Meherazad I sought out Falu and relayed to him what the advocate had said to me and I pleaded with him to help me cut down on the red tape. Falu arranged a meeting with all the Meherazad Mandali at which he suggested that in the future I should simply submit all letters after consulting with the advocates and without passing them around for everyone to correct. To my surprise, everyone readily agreed to this plan.



## Whiling Away Your Time

Once the Mandali gave me permission to file complaint letters without checking it first with any of them, work seemed to go much more smoothly. But even here, there were mind boggling obstructions. Every now and then, it seemed that there would be a crisis in the work, a new gas leak, new evidence of illegality, something that required me to quickly file a complaint. I would be in the Trust Office as soon as it opened and try to get one of the clerks to type my complaint letter quickly. Or sometimes it would be a rebuttal to some article that had appeared in the newspaper, or to a political organization which, goaded by false information by the factory owner, had threatened some kind of action against the Trust.

The factory owner was really going all out on all fronts not just to defend himself, but to actively attack the Trust in a variety of ways. I felt it was critical that we meet each and every threat in a timely way so that the threatened strikes and protests and demonstrations never built up any steam. As I hustled about the office, the urgency could clearly be seen on my face.

Just as I got the fresh copy from the typist and would be about to rush off to submit it, Eruch would pass by and innocently ask, "What are you doing?"

I would tell him, "It's something about the factory that I need to get out immediately."

"But what is it all about?" he would ask. And then, he would lead me back to his table on the back veranda and say, "Why don't you sit down, relax and tell me?"

"But Eruch," I would protest, "can't we talk about it later? I'm in a rush right now."

Eruch would then say in his most reasonable and persuasive manner, "Tell me in short then, it will only take a few minutes."

So, inevitably I would sit and try to explain it to Eruch as quickly as I could. Every time, however, Eruch would claim that he didn't understand a particular point and would start asking me

questions until, finally, in order to clarify it, I would have to tell him everything that had happened since I last spoke to him.

In this manner, a few minutes would turn into hours, because we were constantly being interrupted by the office staff who would be approaching Eruch about their work.

At the end I would ask Eruch for permission to leave and Eruch would ask, "Can I have a quick look at what you've written?" He would go through it very carefully and would end up suggesting some changes. This meant I had to go back to the clerk and get him to retype it when he had time.

I told myself that this was Baba's way of working, but I still felt frustrated at the whole process. What helped me see things in a different perspective was not so much the dawning of some deeper understanding but the fact that, after a while, when Eruch kept this up, I realized that it was a game for him. Once I approached it in this manner, I felt free to change my behavior.

I also remembered something Eruch had told me, "If God-Realization is the goal, and Remembrance the key, then everything else is whiling away your time. Whatever you do, do it for Him, that way Remembrance becomes a part of your life."

Now when Eruch would ask me what I was doing, instead of saying that I was doing anything about the chemical factory, I would just say, "Nothing."

Sometimes Eruch would then persist, "But what is that paper you're holding in your hand?"

"Oh this?" I would say, "It's just some thing I was doing to while away my time, it's nothing." Eruch would laugh and let me go.



## The Madness Continues

**B**ut, it became apparent, as the months went by, that the work wasn't really progressing. Clearly the various government departments I had contacted were reluctant to take any action even though it seemed very clear that the factory had never received any legal sanction in the first place.

The owner had often boasted of his political connections and it seemed more and more apparent that these had not been idle boasts. Our advocates saw that despite our letters, despite the publicity we were able to raise through newspaper articles, the politicians were not going to do anything unless they were forced to do so. They said we had no other option but to go to court.

Filing more complaints was senseless and delaying the matter would only weaken the case. Three major gas leaks had already taken place and there was ample evidence to show both that the factory was illegal to begin with and that the industry was polluting.

I shared this information with the Meherazad Mandali and all agreed to follow the advocates' advice. I was told to ask Bhauji and, if he agreed, then I could ask the advocate to move the court. Bhauji agreed, so I informed Falu that I was going to Bombay in a few days to meet the advocates.

When I reached Bombay, I received a phone call from Kacy Cook, a Meherazad resident, informing me, "I have a message for you from the Mandali. Tell the advocates that, apart from going to court, they can take any action they want."

I was astounded. "But Kacy," I replied, "I came to Bombay because the Mandali wanted to go to court. Besides, the advocates have already told us that filing more complaints is senseless."

She said, "One minute, let me talk with Falu." After sometime she came back on the line to tell me, "Well, they want you to come back then."

I was flabbergasted. “Why did they ask me to go to Bombay?” I demanded. Kacy didn’t say anything so I hung up. This was the kind of inexplicable madness that had become part of my daily life. Nothing made sense to me. I felt I had to hang on to Baba with both hands just to keep my sanity intact. I told myself that I was “whiling away my time.” Clearly, I wasn’t accomplishing anything else, but somehow, I didn’t find this thought all that comforting at the time.



## Contradictory Orders

I often felt that it was easy for the Mandali—they had only one master, Meher Baba, who gave them instructions. Whereas, I found that in my work, all the Mandali would give me different orders and I did not know whom to follow. That was one of the particularly maddening things about living at Meherazad.

When it was decided that we were going to fight the chemical factory, I invited my friends, who were environmentalists, to visit the factory site. There were two environmental organizations that were helping us. They were both well known for fighting court battles against major polluting industries throughout Maharashtra. They were so busy with their other cases, that it was not easy for them to arrange a visit to our site. It took quite a few phone calls before we were finally able to settle on a date. Then, at the last minute, they had to postpone their trip.

This just seemed to fit the pattern of my work. And then, to make matters worse, they paid a surprise visit a few days later. Unfortunately, it was a Friday. Friday is a day when Meherazad is closed. Even Meherabad residents are not allowed to visit Meherazad. It's a day when the Mandali attend to their own affairs.

The environmentalists met me at Meherabad and we drove out to visit the factory site. They also wanted to visit Meherazad since my complaints dealt with the pollution and health hazards that were occurring there because of the factory. I had to tell them that Meherazad was closed on Friday so that while we could visit the site, I didn't think it would be possible to see Meherazad.

Fortunately, when we reached the chemical factory on the Meherazad approach road, Shankar happened to be there. Shankar had worked at Meherazad during Baba's time, there's a quick shot of him playing seven tiles with the Mandali in a home movie that was shot in the 60s. He was also a key player in the fight against the factory, in that, he spent time talking to the villagers, keeping them united in their opposition. This was doubly important since the owner was trying to overcome their resistance either through threats or through bribes.

I approached Shankar and asked him to inform Falu that the environmentalists had come and to see if it was okay for me to bring them to Meherazad. If it wasn't, I asked Shankar to ask Falu to come and meet everyone down at the factory.

Shankar left and the environmentalists went about their work of inspecting the factory site. After about half an hour, they were done and Shankar had not yet come back. Just then, one of the environmentalists felt a sudden urge and needed to go to the toilet. The obvious solution seemed to be to use the Meherazad toilets. Just as we reached the gate, Shankar appeared with the message, "Falu says not to come in as Mani is upset."

Everyone heard this so they turned the vehicle around and drove at break neck speed to the nearest hotel. After they had eased themselves we talked about the strategy we would use in the upcoming court battle and they left. I went back to the Trust Office and told Craig what had happened.

That evening Falu called to say that it was good that I had not brought anyone to Meherazad since Mani had been tired that evening. Meanwhile, Craig mentioned to Eruch what I had told him, as Craig was very diligent about keeping Eruch informed on all that happened concerning Trust affairs – something Eruch had been training Craig to do for years. Eruch then called me and reprimanded me.

"Why didn't you bring them to Meherazad?" he asked.

I tried to excuse myself by saying, "But Falu sent a message through Shankar telling us not to come as Mani was upset."

Eruch brushed this aside and told me I should have brought everyone. As this was what I had wanted to do, I felt I was being unjustly accused and tried to defend myself but Eruch was having none of it.

"Rustom," he told me quite bluntly, "it's your fault. You made the wrong decision." I continued to try to explain that I hadn't made the decision at all but no matter what I said, Eruch continued to reprimand me.

"So what?" Eruch demanded when I repeated that Falu had sent a message saying not to bring anyone. "You should have

brought them anyway to Meherazad. Why don't you use your common sense?"

Finally I switched tactics. "All right," I said, "I made a mistake. But as the chemical factory fight is just beginning, I want to know if, in the future government officials come on a Friday, should I bring them to Meherazad? Is that the correct thing to do according to you?"

Typically, Eruch avoided my question, but I was angry and kept after him.

"Ask the other Mandali, don't ask me," he said,

"But just now you said what I did was wrong," I retorted. "So what is the correct thing to do?" Eruch would not give me a direct answer and the conversation ended unsatisfactorily from my point of view.

I would not let it go, however, and when I was at Meherazad I began asking the other Mandali. Each seemed to feel, individually that what I had done was wrong, but when I asked them directly, "Is it okay in such circumstances to bring the concerned people to Meherazad on a Friday?" they would all tell me to ask somebody else.

Finally a meeting was called at Meherazad. It turned out that Falu had not told Shankar to tell me not to bring the environmentalists, he had said, "If possible, avoid bringing them since Mani is tired." But wanting to clarify the matter once and for all I asked whether I could bring people to Meherazad on a Friday. No one wanted to say anything since Mani wasn't present. Mani was trying not to get involved in the fight since she already had too much work to do with other Trust business. I couldn't get an answer and, frustrated as usual, I gave up and let the matter drop.

I was surprised, therefore, when, a few days later, Goher came up to me and said, "I am giving you permission to bring anyone on any day to Meherazad if it is regarding the chemical factory. And, if anyone asks, tell them I gave you the permission." It was such a relief to get such a clear cut direction like that. I had fully expected that the situation would not be resolved and that in the future it would be up to me to make the decision, knowing full

well that more likely than not, whatever I decided would be deemed wrong by the Mandalai



## **It's Meher Baba's Fight**

The Central Government had inquired into the chemical factory's activities and submitted a report stating that the industry was a health hazard. They directed the state government to take action. However, the state government helped the owner to regularize his illegal structure and industry. This was done in spite of the fact that the factory inspector's office, which is part of the state government's body, on inquiry and inspection had found the factory lacking on safety and health front. The factory inspector's office had filed 13 criminal cases in the local courts and they claimed that so many cases had never been filed against any industry in the entire history of Maharashtra. Despite this, the industry could not be closed down because of the factory owner's close political connections.

We had gathered enough evidence against the industry. At the advise of our advocates, and having no other option the Mandali finally agreed to move a petition in public interest in the high court which is the state's highest court. The advocate felt confident that the state government would not make a representation, as the facts were now out in the open. So it came as a surprise to us, on the first day of our arguments in court, when 5 advocates representing different parties had come to the defense of the factory owner. One of the advocates on the owner's side represented the bank that extended the loan. Our advocate was taken aback. He looked at me and asked under his breath, "Who are we fighting?" I replied softly, "I warned you of his political connections. The state government is here to defend him."

During the arguments the Judge dismissed 2 of the advocates including the one representing the bank, as it was a case concerning pollution.

When I came back to Meherazad all of the Mandali assembled to hear what had transpired. I mentioned how we were shaken to see 5 advocates come to the factory owner's defense. At this Eruch commented, "It does not matter how many people come to his defense. Remember that in the Mahabharat war the entire Kaurav army was no match for Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna was on the Pandava's side, and Krishna's guidance alone (for he did not lift any weapon) was responsible for the defeat of the

superior army of the Kauravas. Don't forget that it is not your fight, it is the Lord's fight, our Lord Meher Baba's fight and so He will guide us. Do not worry. Do your best and leave the result to Him."



## **Victory Will Always Be His**

Our petition in the High court was dismissed by the Judge on technical grounds and not due to lack of evidence. So we moved an appeal in the Supreme Court of India which is the highest court in the country. Our advocate was Mr. M.C. Mehta, a renowned environmental lawyer.

When our case came up for hearing the judges had already read both our petition and the owner's reply in advance. So after a brief argument by our advocate, the chief Judge (there were 2 Judges presiding over the matter) turned to the owner's advocate and asked him, "Tell me do you agree that this industry was started illegally?"

The advocate tried to explain that the owner was currently regularizing it. The Judge exclaimed, "So you agree that the foundation was built on fraud?" The advocate conceded, but explained to the Judge that the state Government and the Maharashtra pollution board had not found the pollution to be serious. The Judge commented, "That is because they themselves cause so much pollution." The Judge then asked, "Have there been any chlorine gas leaks in the area?" The owner's advocate admitted that 3 gas leaks had taken place but no one was affected.

The Judge commented, "There have been 5 gas leaks as per evidence." He further questioned, "And what exactly do you mean by saying that no one was affected? Do you mean no one died? So do we have to wait for death to take place before taking action?"

Finally, the Judge commented, "If the owner knows what is best for him he better start making arrangements to relocate the industry."

After a few more hearings, the Judge passed an initial order to relocate the industry and asked the government to give the owner an alternative site. After returning from each of these trips to the Supreme Court in Delhi, I would go [to] Meherazad where the Mandali would assemble and I would give an update. Everyone appeared pleased at the way the case was progressing.

On returning from one such trip from Delhi, when I reached Meherazad I found Falu very agitated. He came up to me and in front of several Mandali members, including Eruch, said in a loud voice so that all could hear, "Rustom, I am hearing all kinds of things being said about you since the time you lost the High Court case. I too am being indirectly blamed for this. It was decided by all at the beginning that we were going to fight this case till the end and if we lost no one should blame anyone. It was a collective decision. But some one or another is constantly blaming and complaining to the Mandali about you. It is enough. I have had enough of it. I want you to go and ask each and everyone of the Mandali what their view is. If anyone has any objections or misgivings about the way things are going then we shall withdraw the case." I protested, "But Falu, we are winning the case, and it would be stupid to withdraw now. Besides, I do not care if any one blames me. I am doing this for Baba and He knows the truth." Falu replied, "I do care and so I want you to do as I say. Remember, even if one person objects we will withdraw the case."

Eruch was sitting and listening to the drama in his usual detached manner. I walked straight up to him, knowing that he was the one who never wanted us to start the fight in the first place and would constantly remind us of it at every opportunity. I dreaded his reply, but I braced myself and prepared for the worst. I asked Eruch, "You heard Falu, do you want us to continue the fight or withdraw?" Eruch looked indifferent and said, "You already know my answer." My heart skipped a beat and I was very careful with my next question. "Eruch," I said, "All I know is that you did not want us to start this fight. It has been 3 years now since the fight began. I would like a very clear answer to my question. Do you want us to withdraw the case now. Just say yes or no." Eruch got up from his easy-chair, walked towards me, put his hands on my shoulders and shook me. "Rustom. O my dear Rustom." Then, wrapping me in his arms like a mother does, he said into my ears very lovingly, "Of course we are going to fight till the very end. There is no question of withdrawing now. But no matter what the outcome, remember that Victory will always be His."

I broke down and wept from sheer relief as the strain of the fight which had stretched on for three years was beginning to fatigue me. When I composed myself Eruch repeated again "No matter

what the outcome, victory will always be His. Jai Meher Baba.” With that Eruch sent me away. The rest of the Mandali too granted their permission and the fight continued.

Eruch’s words reminded me of a quote ‘His failure is not a failure, whom God leads.’

We have seen many times in Baba’s life how He underwent humiliation or apparent defeat, but despite this, the number of His lovers kept increasing. At the time of Baba’s Satara accident, some of the close Mandali were worried about the impact it would have on His lovers. The Mandali worried that His lovers would wonder how God could meet with an accident and become a cripple. The Mandali expected Baba-lovers to leave Him but instead more kept coming to Him. Even when Baba sent circulars about breaking of His silence on a particular date and kept postponing it, it was expected that many of His lovers would definitely quit His fold. To everyone’s surprise the number of His lovers kept increasing. Eruch was correct when he said “No matter what happens, the victory will always be His.”

\* \* \*

## **Victory Or Defeat**

### **The Correct Perspective**

**When** the Supreme Court gave its final verdict to close down the chemical factory there was great jubilation amongst all the villagers and the Baba community in Ahmednagar. In their excitement, some Baba lovers brought sweets and distributed them to everyone. As one person approached Eruch to offer him some sweets Eruch looked at him as if he did not know and asked, “What is this for?”

The Baba lover replied, “Don’t you know? The chemical factory has been shut down.” Eruch continued, “I know that, but why the sweets?”

The Baba lover was taken aback by Eruch’s question and said, “Well we are celebrating the victory.” Eruch asked him, “Would you celebrate if you had suffered a defeat or some member of your family did?” By now, the man had become confused and was sweating. “No” he said.

“How strange it is that we don’t celebrate our defeat but only our victory,” Eruch said. “When we win it is always someone else’s defeat but we don’t see it that way. In a way we are celebrating someone else’s defeat. Why is this? It is because that person is not one of us, he is an opponent. But all of this is in illusion. From Baba’s point of view, there is no one but Him. I tell you there is no other. He alone exists. So do not get affected by worldly victories and defeats. Instead, concentrate on winning Him then nothing will affect you. Victory will not excite you and defeat will not disappoint you.”



## The Importance of Meher Baba's Form

One reason why I constantly felt distressed was that I held the Mandali in such high esteem. Thus every time we had a run in of sorts, it hurt twice - one that they didn't seem to be living up to my high image of them, and secondly because inevitably I ended up feeling that I had lost their respect as well. Either would have been intolerable, but to experience both simultaneously was torture.

It was like a Zen koan, my mind wrestled with it constantly. Here were people who proved, on a daily basis, that they were wise and loving, and yet they seemed to be the cause of my not being able to accomplish the simplest and most straight forward task. And, despite the fact that I was doing, what my mind told me, was entirely sensible and correct, I was invariably being told by them that I was doing the wrong thing.

How could people I respected so much make such mistakes, or judge me so harshly? If their judgment was correct, then I was such a wretch I couldn't bear to live with myself, but if their judgment was wrong, then how could I live with their misjudgment and what did that say about my high regard for them? Yet, my heart held on, knowing that there was something deeper going on here that my mind was not grasping.

There was no way out of this conundrum, at least for me at that time. So I learned to take "vacations." These didn't involve stopping my work, they were more about learning to let go of it when I wasn't directly involved so that I could appreciate better the other experiences that were open to me.

As a kind of consolation, I took to spending whatever time I could around Eruch. During my time as a resident, I lived for quite a while in the Trust Compound itself. This gave me a great opportunity to see Eruch when he came into the Trust Office three days a week. Eruch would be busy with Trust work in the morning, but I would make it a point to attend tea whenever I could. As I've said before, other residents who worked in the Trust Office would congregate around Eruch's little table on the back verandah and the atmosphere was informal, relaxed and intimate. Residents from Meherabad and Meherazad would also try to stop by for tea if they could as well.

Gary Kleiner, a long time resident, would almost always come by. Gary enjoyed teasing Eruch by saying the most outrageous things, in an effort to provoke Eruch into saying something significant. He would do his best to argue with Eruch, to engage him in a bout of intellectual gymnastics. He would try to talk Eruch into a corner and Eruch would always escape with ease. Things were never dull, when Gary was around. He was, by nature, gregarious, even flamboyant, and I think he went out of his way to accentuate this when he was around Eruch in an effort to amuse him.

Eruch seemed to enjoy Gary's mischievous and humorous nature and, for the most part, so did the other residents. Gary seemed to feel that most of the time Eruch just gave out the "party line" when he was talking to pilgrims and Gary was determined to somehow get Eruch to reveal the real "secrets" in these less public settings. To this end, Gary would often ask questions or make statements that most of us found outrageous, but Eruch would generally just laugh, knowing what Gary was up to. It was all just part of the everyday fabric of life as a resident. But I remember one occasion when it seemed to me that Eruch spoke very forcefully and quite seriously, as if he was trying to drive a point home. A point that could not be taken lightly. Gary started off, in his typical manner, "Eruch, Baba often said that He is not the physical form; that He is not the physical body. He has repeatedly said that He is Infinite Consciousness. Yet the Mandali encourage everyone to hold onto the form of Baba, to remember Baba as we see Him in His physical body. Wouldn't it be better if I pursued the Infinite Consciousness? If I focused and meditated on the infinite aspect of Baba, wouldn't that be a superior path to one of clinging to His form, which Baba Himself, said is not His reality?"

Eruch chuckled and said, "No, Gary. The path of Meher Baba is superior to the path of the Infinite aspect of God."

Inevitably, Gary persisted. "Oh, come on, Eruch. You are not being open minded. After so many years of being around Baba's body, you have become attached to it. Your attachment has biased your opinion and your reply too."

Eruch, to my surprise, reacted with uncustomary sharpness. "Gary, you don't know what you are saying. The path of Meher

Baba's form is superior to all other paths. You would piddle in your pants if you got the experience of Infinity or Oneness. The path to that experience is full of dangers and if you get that experience, it will be too much for you, it will cause you too much suffering. You would become like the mast who stood on his head all day long. Do you know that story?. (Masts are God's intoxicated souls, who have lost normal consciousness).

"There was this Mast who would not put his feet on the floor because he saw God everywhere and putting his feet on the floor would mean putting it on God's face. He was considered mad and locked up in an asylum.

"A Baba lover happened to meet this mast and tried to convince him to stand on his feet, like everyone else. The mast refused, saying, 'How can I put my feet on God's face, it's blasphemy to do that. I have to stand on my head; there is no other way for me.'"

Eruch concluded, "You have no idea of the suffering that the experience of 'oneness with the whole creation' can bring. Just thank your stars that Meher Baba has come in our midst to save us the agony of that journey. So hold on to His form. Hold on to Him."



## Sacrifice

For a while, when I was living at Meherazad, Dr. Anne Moreigne was also staying there as Shelley was away for some reason. The two of us would accompany Eruch on his early morning walk down the Meherazad approach road. This particular time, Dr. Anne was a bit late and Eruch was getting restless.

He asked me a couple of times, “Why is Dr. Anne late today?” This was a habit of Eruch’s. Although he had incredible patience, and although he seldom reprimanded the person who was tardy to any great extent, he would often go on and on to those around him, repeatedly asking why this person was late and what they were doing and so on.

Eventually Anne arrived and Eruch looked at me and said, “Viccho has come.”

“What does that mean?” Anne asked and I told her that Viccho was a Gujarati word meaning “scorpion.”

“Am I such a horrible person?” Anne asked.

“It was a compliment,” Eruch replied.

“How could it be a compliment? A scorpion is supposed to be a vicious creature.”

“Don’t you know what a great sacrifice a female scorpion makes for the sake of her babies?” Eruch asked. He then proceeded to explain: “After giving birth, the female allows her babies to feed upon her own body. The babies eat the mother until they are strong enough to fend for themselves. The mother perishes in order that the babies can survive. What a great sacrifice the scorpion makes.”

To this day, I do not know if this is a fact, but it was Eruch’s illustration of true sacrifice.

On another day, however, Eruch added another nuance to the notion of sacrifice. Somebody had made a comment about how much a certain person had sacrificed for the sake of his girl friend. Eruch commented, “Sacrifice is always for false love. In

true love there is only oneness—the question of sacrifice does not arise in true love.”



## Divine Love

Pilgrims would leave Meherazad in the early afternoon. A little before 3 p.m., Aloba would ring the bell to announce that tea was about to be served. The residents who were there working would come to the tea table and most of them would pick up their cups of tea and then head towards the verandah to sit around Eruch. On this particular day, out of the blue, Eruch suddenly asked

“Does anyone know what the test is for pure honey?” Nobody said anything and Eruch repeated the question.

“Does anyone know how to test whether honey is pure or not?” We all looked around to see if anyone had an answer, but no one there could hazard a guess.

“All right,” Eruch announced seeing that no one was forthcoming, “I’ll tell you. If the honey is pure and a fly sits on it, its legs won’t stick to the honey. The fly can drink to its heart’s content and then fly away. But if the honey is not pure, the fly’s legs will get stuck.”

Eruch then added, “Pure love, or Divine Love is like pure honey. You can drink of it to your heart’s content without getting entangled. But if your love is impure, if your love is for the worldly object or materialistic things, if your love takes the form of craving, desires or lust, then, just as with the impure honey, if you try to drink, you will get entangled and bound in illusion or this illusory world.”

I don’t know if this is actually true about honey or if Eruch just decided to make it up to drive home his point.



## **A Master Economist**

After accepting Baba as the Avatar, I naturally told my friends about Him. It is my nature that when I discover something that I think is important and can help others, I want to share it with everyone. So, naturally, my friends all came to hear of Meher Baba. One of them became quite interested and started to follow Baba, not so because of anything I said but because of a personal crisis in his life. After doing so, his life seemed to straighten out and it looked like Baba had resolved his problems. He was happy with his life and, not surprisingly, with Baba.

After a few years, suddenly the crisis erupted again and soon it became overwhelming. His marriage broke up and there were other tragedies in his life. He couldn't understand why all this was happening and why Baba had not come to his rescue even though he had repeatedly called out to Him for help.

My friend would call me often and I would try to comfort him, explaining to him my understanding of how karma worked out in an individual's life. It was obvious that my words provided little consolation and so I suggested he come to Meherabad and Meherazad to talk with the Mandali. I felt certain that if anyone could give him some relief, it would be them.

My friend came and talked with Bhauji and Bal Natu, but nothing they said helped him understand "why things were going wrong." After staying only for a few days he left.

About a week later he called me up again.

"Bal Natu tells stories in Mandali Hall about how people take Baba's name when they are in difficulty and invariably help comes in time and their difficulties are resolved. So please ask him why my difficulties are not diminishing even though I am taking Baba's name."

I did as my friend requested. The next time I was in Meherazad I posed the question to Bal.

He said, "Tell your friend that Baba is a perfect economist and He only gives a soul what is necessary. Those who called out to

Him and got an immediate response, that experience was necessary for them. If a response is not coming, in spite of sincerely calling His name, it is because the response is not necessary for that soul. It would not help the soul spiritually for Baba to respond to its cry for help.

“Often we find that Baba gives to His lovers, when they are new to Him in order to strengthen their faith. But once their faith is established and conviction in Him is firm, then Baba tests their faith by sending difficulties and hardships along. Baba’s job is to help every soul progress spiritually and so He sends only those experiences which are necessary. One can say He is a Master economist.”

Bal’s story also reminded me of what Sai Baba, one of the five Perfect Masters alive during Baba’s time, said, “I give you what you want, so that you may begin to want what I have to give.”

Bal shared with me a passage he enjoyed and remembered from a book about Christ’s disciples:

“No man suffers because of a neglectful God. Man builds his own body by his past and present thoughts and deeds. Creation contains no accident or injustice. That which appears as physical misfortune is but the love of God operating in a concealed manner, providing special experiences needed by the afflicted. When that particular experience has served its purpose, the appearance of misfortune will be no more.”



## Crisis is Opportunity

These stories helped me. Not just because of the “suffering” I felt I was going through, trying to work for the Trust, but also because my own health which had been problematic before coming to live as a resident continued to be haphazard. But none of them was as immediately helpful as a very quick interaction I had with Mani one day.

One day when I was unable to shake off the gloomy clouds darkening my emotional landscape, I happened to run into Mani at the Trust Office. I don’t know if I was looking as depressed as I felt, or if Mani somehow intuited my inner state, for she came over to me and asked, “Son, is everything all right?”

Somewhat absently I said, “Yes, yes, I’m fine.”

But Mani persisted, “Is your health okay?”

“Yes,” I said hoping she would leave me alone, “I’m okay.”

“People are troubling you, isn’t it?” she declared. I didn’t say anything but she must have known she had diagnosed my problem correctly for she went on,

“You know Chinese is one language in which crisis and opportunity have the same meaning. So when you are experiencing a crisis in your life, remember that Baba is giving you an opportunity to grow, to learn from the crisis.

“And, see how compassionate Beloved Baba is? If we waste the opportunity by not learning the lesson, by not growing from it, then, in His compassion, He sends us another opportunity. Another crisis will come into our lives, a new opportunity.”

By the time she finished, I was in tears. Mani came up to me and gave me a warm embrace. Even today, whenever a crisis appears in my life, I remember her story and her warm embrace.



## Divine Drowning

On days when pilgrims visited Meherazad, Eruch would spend most of the morning sitting in Mandali Hall sharing stories of his life with Meher Baba. After lunch, the pilgrims would leave and Eruch would go into his room, take off his pants and emerge wearing just his short pajama and t-shirt, or, quite often, just his pajama.

One afternoon Craig and I were sitting with Eruch. Craig was a long time resident who had been working very closely with Eruch for years in the Trust Office. This afternoon Craig said, "Eruch, in front of the pilgrims you tell stories of how Baba lets the water rise to your nose, but never lets you sink. You tell stories where Baba pushes someone to the limits, but never beyond it. In short, you tell only the good stories. We are made to believe from these stories that it all ends well.

"But what about the stories where it does not end well, where Baba did allow people to sink, where He did push them beyond the limits and they broke down? I feel frightened when I hear about what happened to Norina or Donkin. They were stalwarts and yet Baba pushed them beyond the breaking point. Eruch, can you please explain what happened and why it happened? These things are not supposed to happen to those close ones around Baba."

Eruch sighed and said, "I do not understand the question. What exactly do you want to know?"

Craig said, "Eruch, if you find the topic too controversial and don't want to talk about it, that's okay. I won't ask."

Eruch seemed annoyed as he repeated his questions a second time, "What is it that you want to know?"

"Why did Baba allow Donkin and Norina to have a mental breakdown? Baba could have spared them."

Eruch said matter of factly, "So what is there to it if they broke down mentally? We make such a big issue about mental suffering and mental breakdowns. Why do we not give the same importance to physical suffering or physical breakdowns?"

“Pendu, after the car accident, was crippled. He suffered too, yet the breakdown of the physical body is not given importance as compared to a mental breakdown. Why do we forget that it is all a dream?”

“All suffering, physical or mental, serves only one purpose. It helps the individual soul to wipe out his sanskaras and progress towards the goal of liberation or God-Realization. Baba, as a rule, does not take away your sanskaras or suffering, but helps you go through it. Suffering comes as a wake up call to awaken you from the dream.”



**As** my work at the Trust consisted of interacting with government officials for permission regarding various Trust activities, I was directly under Bhauji’s guidance because he was the “chief functionary” of the Trust and, subsequently, became its Chairman.

One day, as I was sitting in his office, he was referring to the hard times that lots of Baba lovers were going through. He commented, “Baba is testing all His lovers. He pushes everyone to the limits. He will let you sink till the water reaches your nose, but He will never let you drown.”

I took this opportunity to ask Bhauji the same question that Craig had asked Eruch as I was curious to see what his reply would be. Not only did I want to see how his answer would compare to Eruch’s, but I was also interested in the question in its own right because I often felt that Baba was definitely letting the waters rise over my head at times.

“Bhauji,” I said, “we know that both Donkin and Norina had mental breakdowns when they were still with Baba. Baba did allow the water to rise above their noses and allowed them to drown, didn’t He?”

“No, it was a different kind of drowning for them,” Bhauji replied. “It was a drowning in the Ocean of Bliss. Baba had taken the responsibility of wiping out the sanskaras through intense suffering of those who were His. The intense suffering they experienced was Baba’s compassion. It was the final drowning in His Ocean of Love.”

## Speed-Breaker Story

Another story that helped me was one that Mani told once in the hall. She said, "Our life with Baba was timeless, as if time ceased to exist. There was a sense of eternity; however, to watch the present generation rush through their lives with no time for anything or anyone is very sad. People do not have time to meet their parents, family or friends for years. In some documentary films that I have seen, the people are in such a hurry that, even while walking they are leaning forward, you don't find people walking straight. Some pilgrims have come up to me and said that in just one life, they feel they have undergone the suffering and experiences of ten lifetimes.

"We feel sad for them. Things are so fast that people are breathless. It's time to slow down. What we need is speed-breakers. What are these speed-breakers? Let me tell you a story.

"This is the story of a dacoit who ruled a jungle. He was so ferocious that no one would dare cross the jungle. His name was Angulimala, which means garland of fingers. He would murder his victims, chop off their fingers, and make a garland to wear around his neck.

"Despite everyone's warnings, Gautama Buddha decides to undertake his journey through the jungle. The dacoit, on sighting Buddha, first wonders who the foolish man was to venture to his death. When he sees Buddha dressed in a monk's robe, he felt that it would be nice to kill a monk and have his finger garland made. So he follows this monk, but he finds that the distance between them is increasing. So the dacoit increases his speed, but to his surprise, the distance between him and the monk was still increasing, although the monk was walking leisurely.

"In desperation the dacoit breaks into a run, but still the distance between him and the monk was increasing, even though the monk was not running. Totally exhausted from the chase the dacoit shouts at the monk and says, 'Please stop, please stop.' Buddha turns around and tells the dacoit, 'I have already stopped my child, it is time for you to stop now.'

“Stopping refers to the stopping of the mind. Baba said, ‘Mind working is man, mind working fast is mad, mind slowed down is mast and mind stopped is God.’ So how do we go about stopping the mind? First slow down by introducing speed-breakers. What are these speed-breakers? Your coming and visiting Meherabad is one, visiting Baba-centers is another. If you can’t do that, then just a few Baba-lovers getting together and reading His books and discussing or talking about His stories of love and compassion, is a good way of slowing down. And if you can’t do that, then create some time during the day to remember Him or remember Him in any way you think fit. Increase these speed-breakers more and more and finally a time will come where the speed will slow down and eventually stop.”

This was helpful to me, not that it made my situation any easier, but it brought home to me that although I experienced a lot of frustration and opposition in my work at the Trust, my suffering was brought on by my mind’s reaction to it. The more I could just think about Baba, the more I could escape the mental anguish I otherwise was undergoing. Of course, this was easier to say than to do, but every now and then, something the Mandali said, or their living example, or even just the impact of Baba’s love flowing through them, was enough to help me, even if only momentarily, realize the larger Truth that lay beneath the surface of my resident life.



## Zest for Life

One of the greatest qualities of the Mandali was that their presence made one happy. Pilgrims would flock around them like bees around a flower. The hearts and faces of the pilgrims would light up when the Mandali greeted them or inquired after their health, their family or business. If pilgrims had a problem, they would pour out their hearts to the Mandali, who would listen with great concern and love and then gently, compassionately, guide the pilgrims, giving them courage and hope.

As I lived there, and my relationship with the Mandali became a little different, I became more aware that all of the Mandali suffered chronic and multiple health problems. Some of these were quite severe and yet the pilgrims were never aware of it. They only noticed the radiating faces and Baba's love that flowed from the Mandali as healing balm.

I mentioned before, that each of the places I lived had its own unique charm and one of the immeasurable benefits of living in the Trust Compound was the chance it gave me to spend time with Khorshed. When I lived there, Khorshed was the only Mandali member left who had lived with Meher Baba when He was still speaking. She and Mehera had been amongst the very first women that Baba allowed to come and live with Him at Meherabad.

I felt very fortunate, when I was in the compound, to be able to visit her every day. I would joke with her and make her laugh, which she did easily, and she would share her stories of her life with Baba. If I happened to miss a day's visit due to the pressure of work, she would always ask after me and inquire about my health. To me she was one of the greatest Mandali.

I think part of the reason I felt this was because of the fact that the circumstances of her life were not easy. Her health was poor and she had limited mobility. Indeed, for almost twenty years she had been confined pretty much to sitting in a chair. With the help of a walker, she would slowly and painfully make her way each day to pay homage to the large painted photograph of Baba which was outside the Pilgrim Reservation Office but that was pretty much the extent of her travels and, as

time passed, even this trip, (a distance of maybe 20 feet at the most), became too much for her.

Her adopted son, Sudam, and his wife, Asha took care of her, and they and their two children all lived together in one small room in the compound. Eventually, another room became available and all of them then lived in two rooms.

Khorshed would generally be found sitting in her chair near the door and would always seem delighted to see me. I say “see,” but Khorshed’s vision was in as bad shape as the rest of her and she really only saw a shadowy outline of the person before her. Yet, in spite of this, she always seemed to be in a good mood and radiated love and thoughtfulness. Despite her own poor health, she was always most solicitous of mine and would always inquire how I was doing when I would visit her. She took an interest in my problems and was a source of constant support during my low periods, not so much through her advice, but just through the joy and love she made me feel.

One day, when Khorshed was ill and therefore experiencing even more pain than usual, I said to her, “Khorshed, you are already handicapped, and yet Baba keeps sending more suffering your way. Why is He indifferent and heartless?”

Khorshed scolded me good naturedly, “Do not say that about Baba. He is the most compassionate One. What can He do about it? It’s all our sanskaras, so why blame Him? In fact, we are fortunate that He is helping us go through it by holding our hands. He carries us in His arms and that is His compassion.”

On another occasion, I asked Khorshed “Do you ever wish that Baba would release you from this body which is totally handicapped?”

Her reply surprised me, but reflects her greatness. “No, no. I want to live more. In fact, when my chest hurts, sometimes at night I pray to Baba and tell him ‘Please don’t give me a heart attack. I want to live to see my grandchildren’s wedding.’ I keep rubbing my chest and taking Baba’s name, it’s too soon to die.”

Khorshed’s zest for life was stronger than her incapacities.

## **Surrender To Him Completely .**

After Khorshed passed away, my health broke down completely. At times I could not walk and even simple things that I had always done on my own, I now needed help to accomplish. I became severely depressed because of this, and suddenly the realization of Khorshed's greatness dawned upon me. Her incapacity had been even greater than mine, and yet she had been full of life, eager to live more. I often wondered how she had managed it.

A year passed, two years passed and I was still struggling with my health, my moods and I could not help but think of Khorshed often. I wished she were still around to guide me. The burden of my suffering, although smaller than the one she had carried for so many years, was breaking me. I could not take it, could not go through it.

Then, very vividly, I suddenly recalled an incident which had occurred between Khorshed and Rhoda Dubash. In her last years, Rhoda's vision began to fade and her hearing, which had never been good, became even worse. She was very close to being deaf and blind. Naturally, this depressed her. She often complained to Baba, "Why don't you take me? I can't see, I can't hear, why don't you take me?"

In spite of her failing eyesight and hearing, Rhoda was still ambulatory and was a daily visitor to Baba's samadhi and often visited Meherazad. On the way to Meherazad, she would stop at the Trust Office to visit Khorshed.

One day Rhoda's spirits were very low when Khorshed asked after her. Rhoda complained, "Khorshed, my eyes are fading. I am having difficulty in seeing things clearly. My hearing is fading too. I cannot hear without the hearing aid. I have become useless as I can't do anything. Why does Baba keep me like this? Why doesn't He take me away?"

The irony was that Rhoda was complaining to Khorshed who couldn't walk and therefore couldn't visit Meherazad or the Samadhi and whose vision was even worse than Rhoda's. Knowing what an old time lover Rhoda was, Khorshed replied with a lot of fire. "When you have surrendered your all to Him,

then even your body is His. So leave it to Him completely. Once you have given something to Him, it is His to do with, as He pleases. If he wishes to take away your eyes, ears or legs - let Him. It is His already, so why resist, why complain? When you give Him your all, then remember, it is all His and nothing belongs to you. The act of giving has to be unconditional and complete.”

Rhoda was so happy when she heard this that for days afterwards she was talking about it cheerfully.



## **Being Stronger than Your Suffering**

During my illness, a point had reached where my health was very bad. I had so little energy that I could hardly move about and that too, only with the aid of crutches. For close to two years I battled poor health and I was fed up with my incapacity. I often prayed to Baba to release me from my body.

Once, while visiting Meherazad during this period, I happened to meet Meheru. Naturally she asked about my health and I told her quite frankly how I felt. She said, “Baba knows what you are going through. He has given you this suffering for a specific reason. Let the suffering do its job and you continue to do your job. Don’t let the suffering overwhelm you, so that your life comes to a halt. Be stronger than your suffering and, in order to do that, continue living and continue with your work. Don’t give undue attention to your suffering, try to ignore it and concentrate on your Baba work.

“It does not matter how much you do in a day. Do just a little, but do it for Him. Also, remember that where Baba is concerned, everything that happens is fine and just the way He wants it. So be happy, for His sake, no matter what situation He puts you in.”

This made a deep impression on me. A year has passed since Meheru told me this. I am still struggling with my bad health, but I keep reminding myself that from Baba’s point of view, everything is fine, so I tell myself to look at it from His viewpoint and be happy.



## **Infinite Treasure**

Along these lines, is a story told by Cyrus Khambata, a long time Baba lover from Bombay.

We all have the infinite treasure within us and yet we feel insecure. Why? Because we are not aware of the treasure within. It is like this. A father has put Rs 100,000/- in his son's coat. The son is not aware of it and he goes traveling.

The son has a few hundred rupees with him and begins to feel anxious and insecure on his journey because he does not know if the money will be sufficient. Then, one day his father phones him to inquire how he is doing. The son tells his father about his anxiety and his father informs the son about the Rs. 100,000/- which he had put in the coat pocket. When the son becomes aware of this, his anxiety disappears.

In a similar fashion, Baba gives us the awareness phone call. He tries to make us aware of the wealth within, and more often than not, this awakening call may come in the form of suffering which we find unpleasant.



## **Black Spot On White Screen**

As my health worsened I wrote to Bal Natu “I know what is happening to me. I also know why it is happening. I am not writing this letter, seeking answers because over the years, Baba has given me the answers. Can you send me some of your pearls from the vast treasure of wisdom that Baba has given you, in order to lift my spirit.”

Bal wrote to me the following, “A master decides to test His disciples. He fetches a big white screen and makes a black spot in the center. He then asks each of His disciples to stand up and describe what they see. One by one the disciples get up and say ‘A black spot’.

“When the last disciple gives the same answer the Master looks disappointed and says ‘All these years that you all have spent with me, not one of you have learnt anything. Each one of you noticed the tiny black spot but no one noticed the big white screen’.”

Bal Natu added, “Suffering is like a tiny black spot. We should not pay attention to it. Our focus should be on the big white screen, which appears in our life, every moment in the form of Baba’s love filled presence.”



## Playing Hide & Seek with Bhauji

Working with the Mandali, over an extended period of time, wears you down. In addition to the mental vacations I took by trying to temporarily forget the work and just focus on the experience of being with the Mandali, I developed some other techniques to get by as well.

Sometimes, just getting involved with a different project, a different sort of work would help me regain my enthusiasm and recuperate mentally. But this was not always possible. Sometimes, what I really needed was a break, not from the work so much as from the Mandali.

One such situation, which took on a humorous aspect was my working with Bhauji. Of all the Mandali, Bhauji was the most ferocious worker. He could tire out the strongest resident and we could not keep pace with him, even though he was decades older and in poor health. As it turned out, Bhauji was the Mandali I happened to work most closely with. I would keep him informed about every development with the chemical factory and he would guide me as to what steps I should take.

In the midst of the chemical factory fight, two other major crises erupted. One involved the workers at Meherabad who, at the instigation of a political party, joined a union. The other involved a land dispute case with a farmer. Because of my experience in dealing with government officials and lawyers, which I had gained from the chemical factory work, Bhauji asked me to get involved in both of these issues.

At the time I was living in the Trust Compound, in Feram Workingboxwalla's, (one of Meher Baba's Mandali), old room. On a normal day, Bhauji would have his breakfast and come to the office at 9 a.m. Therefore, I was surprised when, one morning at 8:30 a.m., there was a knock at my door and I opened it to find Bhauji standing outside. He wanted to discuss the labour and land situation and he asked me to come immediately. Usually, this was the time that I would have breakfast in my room but, because of the urgency of Bhauji's summons, I skipped breakfast and went with him.

We discussed both issues at great length and Bhauji made me note down many points to remember. The next day, again there was a knock on my door at 8:30 a.m. and I heard Bhauji say, "Rustom, come to my office. I have something important to discuss with you."

Once again I went without breakfast and headed over immediately to Bhauji's office. But we ended up having the same discussion we had the previous morning and Bhauji made me take down the exact same points I had taken down the day before.

This now became our daily routine. After three weeks of jotting down the same notes and listening to the same issues discussed, I was feeling mentally exhausted, so the next day I protested, "Bhauji, you are making me note down the same points every day."

Bhauji replied, "No, these are different points." I went and brought all the previous lists I had made and read out the points one by one. They were identical.

Bhauji said, "But I was just going to dictate a different point when you interrupted me." Bhauji then proceeded to dictate a "new" point which was basically the same point as before but worded a little bit differently. And so the routine continued.

Except now, Bhauji would have me first read the previous day's points. Then he would dictate all of the points over again but wording them all a little bit differently.

For some reason, I found this exercise to be a torture and I felt completely mentally drained from having to listen to the same thing over and over again. I decided my only recourse was to avoid Bhauji. Now, as it so happened, my room had two doors, one in the front and the other at the back. Bhauji always came to my front door. So, the next morning, at about 8:20 a.m. I sneaked out the back door and went to the toilet. By 8:40 a.m., when I was sure Bhauji would be in his office, I sneaked back into my room via the back door again.

I lay on my bed for a moment, just savoring the peace and quiet. At 9 a.m., while other residents were with Bhauji and his attention was on other Trust work, I went to his office and

greeted him and then left promptly before he could get me involved in dictating his points again.

For two days I was successful in doing this. On the third day, Bhauji commented, "Rustom, I pass by your room at 8:30 a.m. and knock on the door, but no one answers. Where are you?"

I said, "Bhauji, usually I go to the toilet at around that time."

"But your door is locked from the inside," Bhauji pointed out.

"That's because I use the back door," I explained.

Bhauji didn't say anything and the next day I stuck to my new routine. However, just about 8:40 a.m. when I was leaving the toilet I suddenly heard Bhauji's voice, "Rustom, come to my office, I have something important to discuss."

The toilet is located to the side of Bhauji's office. If you look out the side windows, you can see it, and obviously this is what Bhauji had done. He had been in his office looking out the window and waiting to catch me.

There was nothing I could do but to go into Bhauji's office and jot down the same points again and listen to the same discussion again. I put up with this for another week and then decided I had to do something or I would go mad.

The next day, at 8:20 a.m., I left my room by the front door and went across the compound and sat in the room we used as our dining room until 8:40 a.m. Then I walked back across the compound and re-entered my room by the front door.

This worked for two days. On the third day, Bhauji again confronted me and said, "Rustom, I don't see you coming out of the toilet at 8:40 a.m. anymore."

So I told him that I was in the dining hall having breakfast. Bhauji commented, "You keep changing your morning routine." "I don't really have a fixed routine," I replied.

The next day, as I was leaving the dining hall I was surprised, and a little shocked to hear Bhauji's familiar call, "Rustom, come to my office."

Bhauji was standing near the Pilgrim Reservation Office and had my front door covered, my back door exit to the toilet covered and he could see the dining hall as well. There was no escape possible.

So I just gave up and resigned myself to a never-ending exercise of jotting down the same points and hearing the same discussion. Each morning, at 8:30 a.m., I would accompany Bhauji to his office and begin the ordeal. The funny part, however, is that after resigning myself to my fate and accepting it, I found that after one or two weeks, Bhauji stopped calling me.

One day, while having tea with Eruch, I narrated the whole incident to him as I thought he would get a kick out of it. He laughed and said, "It was like that around Baba too. Baba would ask you the same question again and again and one would feel fed up."

Later I found out that Baba would sometimes ask Bhauji the same question, not just once or twice, but 30 to 40 times in a night and would go on repeating this procedure for weeks at a time. I often wonder how the Mandali managed to go through all this. What great strength they had.



## **Sushila Fails but Gains Baba's Love**

As I thought about these things, I realized that in many small ways, the Mandali were helping me experience a little bit of what they had gone through with Baba. At the time, I didn't appreciate it for what it was because I was so focused on accomplishing the task at hand.

In retrospect, I am beginning to understand that part of the problem was that my idea of the "task at hand," was not the same as the Mandali's. Although I knew full well that elimination of the ego and union with God was our ultimate task, I assumed that achieving it would be a long task, lifetimes at least, and so I actually didn't strive towards it as a goal. I concentrated instead on much smaller ones, like winning the fight against the chemical factory.

The Mandali, on the other hand, although they were engaged in Trust work, and had to attend to worldly affairs, never lost sight of the fact that the "task at hand," was always to please Baba. Over time I gained some insight into how their interactions with me, confusing, frustrating, maddening at the time, were really just simple exercises in trying to get me to be more aware of pleasing Him at each moment, and less concerned and caught up in my particular "work."

Thus, I noticed, unfortunately long after the process was over, that quite often, after driving me mad by insisting on some procedure which seemed pointless and self-defeating, when I finally reached a place of internal resignation, they would then rescind their objections without a murmur, allowing me to proceed with what I mistakenly thought of as the "work."

Another story which helped me understand the difference between the worldly work and the inner life was one Sushila told me once. Sushila was a long time resident and also had had the good fortune of living with Baba for a while.

She told me, "I was studying to become an ayurvedic doctor. I had completed three years of my college and was in my final year. I was a brilliant student and was confident of clearing my final year exams. As the days of the exams were approaching, I was studying very hard. Baba would keep inquiring if I was

studying. I would tell Baba, 'Yes Baba, and I am also taking your name and I will definitely pass.'

"On the day I was to appear for my exams Baba called me and said, 'You will fail in the exam, but do not worry because my love will be with you.' It happened as Baba said. Although I did well in my exams, I failed.

"I was determined to complete my education, so I started my preparations for the second attempt. This time too Baba inquired about my exams and studies and on the day I was to appear Baba called me and said the same thing again. 'You will fail again, but do not worry because you have my love and that is important.' I failed again in spite of doing well in my exams.

"I worked really hard for my third attempt. Again Baba told me on the day of my exam that I would fail but His love would be with me. When I failed again I was upset and went to Baba and said, 'Why do you make me fail? I have never failed before, it's all because of you.'"

Baba replied, 'If you pass, you will become a famous doctor and drift away from Me and My Love, which is the most important thing that anyone can have. Now what do you want?'

"I told Baba, 'Your love, Baba.'"



## Extinguishing the Ego

Of course, the difficulty in “working for Baba” while living as a resident is that the choice was never made so explicitly clear. Still, over time, I found that I did begin to occasionally get explicit hints from the Mandali about what they were doing and why they were doing it which helped my poor mind relax its torturous grip on its own logic. For example, it was fascinating to watch Bhauji in action. Not only was the work load on him immense, but the manner with which he handled it was amazing. People would pour into his office, one after another, with some problem. Bhauji would reprimand someone and in the very next instant he would shower love on another. Over years of working with him I began to realize that Bhauji’s response was according to the spiritual need of the soul. If a particular resident’s ego was inflated by his successful work, then his work would be criticized.

All Mandali, including Eruch, followed the same pattern. At such times it appeared that the Mandali were harsh or obstructive to the work one was doing, but spiritual training is all about slimming down one’s ego. When a resident would be down in the dumps, feeling low, the Mandali would shower lots of love, regardless of his behavior.

Once in a while, a resident living at Meherabad, would be such a strong and hard-headed personality that almost every resident would complain about him or her and would want the person removed or placed somewhere out of everyone’s way. We who worked around Bhauji knew, that no matter how bad the resident was, Bhauji would refuse to remove him.

On one occasion a particular resident was always creating troublesome situations. Complaints were pouring in and eventually it reached such levels that complaints went to the Meherazad Mandali. When the Meherazad Mandali phoned Bhauji to inquire about the situation, Bhauji explained the problem, but the moment it was suggested that the resident be removed, Bhauji very calmly replied, “The problem will not be solved by removing the resident. The root cause of the problem will be solved only when the ego is removed.”

After Bhauji finished his talk on the phone, he turned to us and said, “Only when you throw out the ego, then He will manifest in you and then you will have real poise. Nothing will disturb you then. Right now one is easily affected by praise or blame and also by other people’s behavior. Why? Because it is all within you, lust, greed, anger, jealousy and all this is because of the ego which separates you from one another and creates within you likes and dislikes for different people. If someone pleases your ego you like him, but if your ego is hurt you dislike him. So what is the source of your problem? Is it outside you?”

“A person does something, but why do you react with anger? It is because of the ego. So work hard to remove the ego. Removing a resident would not make a difference. Baba always had someone like that around Him who would always create lots of problem for the Mandali. And Baba would encourage such a person to create more problems. There were the boys Ismail and Isaac. Then there was Krishnaji and many, many others.

“Why did Baba do this? To wipe out the ego. Baba would treat such people as royalty giving them good food and the best treatment and the Mandali had to serve them. The Mandali did it without complaint. So no matter what work you do, or what situation you are placed in, do it wholeheartedly for Him. When you do it for Him there is no room for complaints and that is the only way to get rid of the ego.”



## **Pretending to be Angry**

On another occasion Craig, who works around Bhauji, came to discuss with him several problems related to Trust work that needed Bhauji's attention. As Craig finished explaining the nature of the problem Bhauji got very upset with Craig and started reprimanding or should I say "hammering" him. Bhauji angrily said to Craig "You always create problems for the Trust and for me. I had already attended to these problems and now again the problems have come up. I know you go around talking with people, instigating them and then you advise them to come to me. I know you are behind all this."

Craig meekly protested "Bhauji you know it's not true, I was only trying to help by drawing your attention to the problem."

This made Bhauji even more upset and he said "Yes I don't know what is happening. I am not doing my work properly. So I need your help in drawing my attention to Trust problem. Now you teach me how to do my job."

Craig protested again and Bhauji hammered him even more. In the end Craig said sorry and left.

I had seen Bhauji getting angry with me on many occasions and this time Bhauji was really fiery. As soon as Craig left Bhauji started laughing and asked us, "Did I look very angry?"

I could not believe that Bhauji was pretending. Bhauji then said "Craig is a very good worker, but do not tell him that. The hammering is his spiritual training and see he still continues to do his work. He does not run away."

At this point I asked Bhauji directly "Tell me Bhauji, how many times in the past have you hammered us and it was only a pretense?" Bhauji laughed and said "The Mandali who could pretend anger 100% of the time was Eruch. Eruch never got angry—never. He only pretended."

I again asked Bhauji "And what is your percentage rating of pretending anger?" Bhauji laughed again and replied "Maybe 80% of the time I pretend, but I still lose my temper 20% of the time."

## **Anger Should Not Touch Your Heart**

A similar incident occurred with Eruch once after the pilgrim bus had left Meherazad. Eruch was sitting around, as usual, just in his half length pajamas. He turned to Davana and asked her if she had finished some work which had been given to her earlier in the day. Davana had forgotten to do so. Eruch got upset and started reprimanding her.

With Eruch, one could never be sure whether he was really upset or just pretending. So I took the opportunity while Eruch was scolding Davana to look at his stomach muscles which were quite visible given that he was bare-chested. I had been taught in yoga class that when a person is upset, his stomach muscles tighten immediately. Since Eruch's were still relaxed, I knew he must be pretending.

After Davana left to attend to the work, I told Eruch that I had a problem with my temper. Even after living at Meherabad and trying my best to control my temper, I found myself getting angry time and again. Was there some way or technique that I could use to prevent myself from getting angry?

"What's there to it?" Eruch asked. "We all get angry because we are humans and have feelings. Baba did not want stones around Him. He wanted humans who expressed their feelings. So long as you are making a genuine effort, Baba will help you. If you lose control and get upset, it's okay; don't dwell on it."

"Yes, there is one thing that Baba would make us do when we got angry with one another. He would interrupt us and ask us to embrace one another and forget the whole incident. That's what one should do. Embrace and forget, do not carry the feeling in your heart for it will poison your heart. People tend to carry the feeling for days, so much so that when they run into the person again, the anger comes back. That is not good. After expressing your anger you have to let go of it. Even I get angry. Just now you saw I got angry with Davana. What is there to it?"

I said, "Eruch, you were not angry with Davana, you were only pretending." Eruch looked at me seriously and asked, "How do you know that?"

I explained to him about a person's stomach muscles tightening when he is angry and how I had looked at his and seen that his were relaxed.

Eruch laughed and said, "It's true, I was not angry, but don't tell Davana." He added, 'Yes, that's what one should do. Do not get angry, but use anger to get a job done.'

Eruch then proceeded to tell me a story of how Baba had once asked Donkin to pretend to be very angry and reprimand someone. Donkin did such a good job of simulating anger that as he was scolding the person he actually lost his temper and became angry with him. Baba did not like that. Baba reprimanded Dr. Donkin and told him, "Never let anger touch your heart."

Eruch's story of not letting the anger touch your heart reminded me of a story where a saint is telling his disciples to be like God Shiva and keep the poison of anger only in the throat, not to let it touch the heart. "Let only Lord Rama dwell in your heart all the time. For if you do this, then the 'Vish' or poison will remain in your throat and Rama in your heart and you will enjoy being in 'Visharam' which means relaxation."



## Depend Only on Baba

**M**uch of the work that I undertook for the Trust involved me working in the Trust Office. I also lived in the Trust Compound for quite a while and both of these activities brought me into close contact with Craig Ruff. We became friends and we would often consult each other regarding our work related problems and try to help each other out.

As time passed, I noticed that Bhauji did not like the fact that we were friends. He often made sarcastic jokes about it. As I had gotten used to Bhauji's hammering, as part of our spiritual training, I would just laugh at the remarks. But, one time, it occurred to me to question him directly on this issue to see what he would say. So the next time he made some comment about my friendship with Craig, I asked him, "Is there anything wrong with the two of us being friends and helping each other out with the Trust work?"

Bhauji laughed and said, "I was only joking."

I persisted, "But Bhauji, I have noticed that you don't like it."

"It's not that," Bhauji replied, "Try and do your work alone. Instead of depending on friends, depend on Baba. He will send the right person to help you out. Don't get involved with the person."

"It was like that with Baba. If two Mandali would get friendly, He would not like it. He would create a rift between the two and break up the friendship. When He is there, then your complete focus should be on Him only. Instead of turning to friends for your problems, turn to Him. Depend only on Him. When you do that, He will take care. With every passing day, your dependence on Him should increase. Depend on Him for your smallest needs and then He will become your best friend."



## **Balancing Sanskaras**

I was alone with Bhauji, doing some Trust work when Bhauji stopped the work and asked, “Do you know what balancing of sanskaras means?”

The suddenness of the question really startled me. Not just because it seemed to come out of the blue, we hadn’t been talking about this subject earlier, but also because when he was working, Bhauji rarely talked about spiritual topics. He was always so focused on the work at hand.

Still, I managed to say something along the lines of, “When the good sanskaras and bad sanskaras are equal and opposite, then the sanskaras are balanced and one achieves liberation.”

Clearly this answer did not satisfy Bhauji and he asked again, “But what does it mean when you say the sanskaras are equal and opposite, so they are balanced?”

I didn’t know what to say and so I kept quiet.

Bhauji went on, “If a person has an excess of good sanskaras because of his good deeds, then at the time of liberation, in order to balance his sanskaras, a Perfect master will make such a person perform bad deeds, creating bad sanskaras, to balance the good ones.

“Baba has balanced the sanskaras of all His Mandali. They are bound, by Baba’s promise, to get God-Realization within two to three lifetimes. As Baba has balanced their sanskaras, no matter what they do, they cannot create new sanskaras. Their actions are directed by Baba, so that they will achieve the final balancing.

“Now, it may so happen that a particular Mandali may appear to be doing bad deeds or negative acts. People may wonder why a Mandali, who has lived all his life with Baba, would do such a thing. It is because he has an excess of good sanskaras from his past life which can only be balanced by negative acts. However, such a balancing can only be carried out by a Perfect Master and He uses the negative acts for His work. An individual cannot attempt it on his own.”

Bhauji continued, “This is what happened in the case of Judas. Judas was not only a disciple, Mandali of Christ, but he also belonged to the inner circle of 12 disciples. Christ had to balance his sanskaras and that is why He made Judas commit the act of betrayal. It was also necessary for the work of Christ, that He should be crucified. So Christ used Judas for His work. That’s how it is. So never judge the actions of any of Baba’s Mandali.”

This reminds me that on a different occasion one of the Mandali had mentioned what Baba had said about Judas, “This poor child of mine has carried the blame for two thousand years. He loved me the most.”



## Three Types of Lives

**When** inaugurating the Spiritual Training Hall, which is located behind the Savage's Kitchen at Meherabad, Bhauji told all the gathered residents, "Spiritual life is completely different from normal life or an 'ideal' life. You see a person of good character and generous actions doing a lot of good work and you consider it spiritual. In fact, Spiritual Masters appear to be doing completely the opposite. The masts, who are experiencing the planes, are often found living in filthy places. So what appears to the world as good need not always be spiritual. And often the actions of a spiritual person may appear to be nasty and cruel in the eyes of the world.

"There are three types of people and three types of lives. Let us see how each type reacts to a particular situation.

1. A Normal person - If you normally blame and scold such a person for a mistake he has made, his immediate reaction will be to defend himself. He will deny his mistakes and refuse to accept that he is wrong. This is the case of a normal person living a normal life.
2. An 'Ideal' person - If you blame and scold such a person for a mistake he has made, he will accept his fault and apologize. He will even try hard not to repeat the mistake, but if you blame such a person for something he has not done, he will react and defend himself. If you continue to blame him, because he is not free of ego, he might get angry. Such a person is an ideal person living an ideal life.
3. A Spiritual person - If you blame or scold such a person even for acts he has not committed, being free of ego, he won't react or defend himself. He will apologize and accept the blame. If you humiliate such a person, his poise is not disturbed for he has no ego, and he does not feel any humiliation. Such a person is living a spiritual life."



## **Exercise Your Freedom To Become His Slave**

Eruch had a quality which seemed to distinguish him from the other Mandali - he could tell you anything, with a straight face, and you would believe him. Eruch could fool anyone if he wanted to. Often, when residents gathered around him at tea time, Eruch would put on his serious expression and fool everyone, giving all of us a good laugh. Eruch played this trick on almost all the residents, including me, and even though we had seen him do it with others, when he played it on us, we believed him.

One time he happened to make Craig his target. Naturally, Craig believed whatever it was that Eruch was saying and Eruch kept up the act for about 10 minutes. Then Eruch finally chuckled and told Craig that he was only joking. Craig laughed but then asked, "Tell me something, Eruch, do you ever speak the truth? You are so good at this act that I think you and Baba must have played it all the time. Tell me, did Baba ever speak the truth?"

Eruch paused and then gave a very profound reply. "If you consider God-realization to be the only Truth, then everything else is false. It is all illusion. Everything that you speak or do in the domain of illusion is false, except when you are taking His name or remembering Him. So, in that sense, Baba had to use the illusory language of falseness to communicate with us. If He were to speak in His language of Absolute Truth, it would be difficult for us to grasp.

"Everything that we do binds us in falseness, in illusion. Good acts bind and so do bad acts. Upasani Maharaj once said, 'Even your very breathing is wrong.' That's how it is in the world of illusion. Every effort we make binds us, except the effort to become His completely.

"When we surrender to Him completely and obey Him 100%, then we are no longer bound by actions. The responsibility of an act, when carried out in obedience to a Perfect Master, lies on Him. You no longer create binding sanskaras.

“That’s what we did,” Eruch concluded. “We exercised our freedom to become His slaves. By becoming His slave, you will experience real freedom one day.”



## Stepping Into the Fire

On one occasion while having tea in the Trust Office with Eruch, a pilgrim asked Eruch, "Since Baba is everywhere, does it make a difference if one lives in the world and serves Baba, and someone lives here at Meherabad and serves Baba?"

Eruch replied. "There is a world of a difference between the two."

The pilgrim was amazed and asked, "Why should it be? Baba is everywhere, we can serve Him everywhere. Why should service offered to Baba at Meherabad have special value?"

Eruch paused. I noticed that he often did that, not because he was trying to think of an answer, but to give his answer more dramatic an impact. He asked the pilgrim, "Have you ever seen a bon-fire, where people light a fire at night and collect around it. They all sit or stand at a distance from the fire and feel its warmth, sing songs, play games and end up having a nice time. Have you ever taken part in it?" The pilgrim said, "Yes." Eruch continued, "Now what would happen if you went closer and closer to the fire. Up to a certain distance you may be able to bear the heat, but as you go further, then the heat becomes unbearable. And what happens when you decide to step into the fire? All you experience is agony. Working here at Meherabad is like stepping into the fire."



## Invite His Grace

Eruch was in very poor health during his final days. It took a tremendous effort of will power for him to walk even short distances. With people helping to support him, he would walk a short way and then would feel exhausted and need to rest. Obviously, he was in a lot of pain, but never showed it. Occasionally I overheard him say in Gujarati under his breath, 'Baba, when will all this end.'

Once, when he was looking weak and tired, a resident jokingly asked him how he felt. Eruch replied, "How do I look?" The resident said, "I don't know, that's why I am asking." Eruch said, "I feel great - really great."

"If you really feel great," the resident replied, "then let's run down Meherazad Road."

Eruch chuckled. "I feel great," he said, "but my body does not feel great."

"How can you feel great when your body is suffering?" asked the resident.

"Learn not to identify with your body," came Eruch's straight forward reply. "You are not the body. You are one with the Divine reality. If you remember this, then suffering will cease."

A different resident then asked Eruch, "Baba says one should thank God for suffering. Is it possible to have a thankful attitude in pain?"

Eruch said simply, "By His grace, I can do it."

The resident said, "I am not talking about you, or the other Mandali. Can anyone else do it?"

Eruch paused as if considering this question and then said, "It is difficult, but as I have always said, 'By His grace, anything is possible.' So invite His grace through constant remembrance. Initially you have to make the effort to remember Him, but eventually a time will come when everything in creation will remind you of Him. Not only the goodness and beauty, but also

the bad and ugly will remind you of Him. His grace then descends and He takes over.”



## Imagine The Reality

A pilgrim in Mandali Hall was once sharing, how she liked to remember Baba. She explained that at times she would close her eyes and imagine that she was not her body but Meher Baba's Body. Eruch commented "It is good to do that. Any kind of remembrance is good. So keep doing it."

At this, an objecting pilgrim interjected. "But Eruch, are you not deluding yourself by imagining that you are Meher Baba?"

Eruch commented, "No. In fact, you are deluding yourself if you think that you are this body named Jeff or Jill. In reality you are God. So it is better to imagine the reality, because one day it will help you to realize that you are the reality, that is God, and what you thought of as real – this body and this world – is really your imagination." Eruch then cautioned, "Of course, if one pretends to be Meher Baba, and tries to collect disciples, that is improper and harmful for he will take on the sansarkas of his followers."



## The Butcher

This is a story that Mansari Desai would often tell us. Once, Baba was in a good mood while addressing His lovers. He asked them, "Do you know of anyone who is more compassionate than I am? I am the most compassionate one." No one replied. When Baba repeated the question several times, one bold Baba-lover from Karachi got up and said to Baba, "I know of some one who is more compassionate than you." Baba asked, "Really? Who is that?"

The man replied, "The butcher. The butcher is more compassionate than you. The butcher kills with just a single slash from his sword, whereas you, Baba, first pull off a persons hair, then you peel off his skin, then you carve his flesh, and then you kill him slowly. Certainly, the butcher shows more compassion then you, Baba." Baba just laughed.



## **The Master Swordsman**

The interaction between the residents and Meher Baba's Mandali may appear to an outsider at an intellectual level as madness. However, I hope the following story will awaken the reader's heart to the fact that there was something meaningful going on at a deeper level. This story was narrated to me by Craig.

A young Japanese boy growing up in a remote village had his heart set upon becoming a swordsman. He had heard of a master swordsman who lived in a monastery, where only pupils with great courage were accepted. This monastery was located in a deep jungle, the path to which was very difficult. Most of those who attempted to reach the master would give up and turn around half-way. Others who succeeded in joining the master's monastery, would leave the training half-way, finding it too difficult to go through. The boy was determined to learn the art of swordsmanship from this particular master. He undertook the journey through the jungle and after great trials and tribulations reached the monastery. His first meeting with the master left him confused. The master accepted him, but straight away put him to work, of sweeping and mopping the whole monastery.

Everyday for several months the boy continued to sweep and mop the entire monastery, hoping that soon one day the master would begin training him. Finally after six months had passed, the boy decided to approach the master to ask him when his training would begin. The master saw the boy coming and asked, "What do you want boy?" The boy said, "Master I have been here for six months sweeping and mopping. During this time I have not received any instructions on swordsmanship." The master became very annoyed and began reprimanding the boy, complaining how useless he was. "You cannot even sweep and mop the floor properly." The master shouted, "If you cannot even do this simple chore properly, how can you possibly hope to become a skilled swordsman?" The master chased the boy away, telling him to leave if he were going to be so useless. But the boy returned to his sweeping and mopping, though now he felt even more confused. Also the thought that he had upset the

master made him feel worse. He swept and mopped the floor with extra care now in order to please the master.

As he was mopping one day, the master came walking by him, and as he passed, he struck the boy on his back with his stick and then walked away. The next day again the master did the same thing. This happened repeatedly for the next several days. The boy was wondering why the master was beating him. So one day, he approached the master and asked, "Master are you upset with me?" The master said, "No my child, but why do you ask that?" The boy said to him, "You beat me every day. Why do you do this if you are not upset with me?" The master laughed and said, "This is part of your training. From now on you must attempt to dodge my blows."

The boy was confused by all this, but he continued to follow the master's instructions. So the next day, as he continued to sweep and mop with great care, his attention was focused on the blow that he knew the master would attempt to deliver. Sure enough that day the master came in through the same hall he had the day before, and the boy was able to dodge his blow successfully. The next day the master appeared not once but several times, especially when the boy least expected him to deliver the blow. Although the boy managed to dodge some blows, for most part the boy got a good beating as the master constantly changed his strategy catching him unawares.

It took months, but finally the boy became so alert to the master's every possible move and strategy that he was able to anticipate and dodge all his blows. The boy enjoyed playing the master's game because it seemed to please the master and it was also a diversion from his routine job of sweeping and mopping. Still, the boy continued to wonder how this beating would make him into a swordsman.

Soon after the boy had mastered the art of dodging the master's blows the master called him one day and instructed him, "As of today, I do not want you to dodge my blows any longer. Instead, you will try to block them using your mopping stick. By the way your mopping is better but still needs improvement." The boy could not understand the master's ways but continued to follow his instructions.

Blocking the master's blows proved far more difficult than dodging them. So for days the boy received a good thrashing. He would continue to focus on mopping the floor properly, while at the same time, concentrate on the master's attack. With great difficulty, finally the boy began to defend himself using his mopping stick. The game went on for many years, until finally one day, the boy had mastered the art of defending himself with his mopping stick. He could now counter every blow the master made with his stick. The master could change his strategy to any extent, but the boy's sense of concentration had become so sharp that even with closed eyes he could sense the master's blow coming and turn quickly enough to block it.

When the master knew that the boy had mastered this art he called him one day to say, "Your training days are almost over now and it will be time for you to leave me." The boy was confounded, for he had not even held a sword in all these years. He complained to the master, "But master, I came here to be a swordsman and in all these years I have not received any instructions on the subject, nor have I ever held a sword." The master looked at the boy compassionately and said, "My child, you have already become a great swordsman. But you do not believe me, so here catch this." Saying this, the master reached for a sword near by and threw it at the boy. The boy caught the sword and felt it in his hand. The master then removed his own sword and went to attack the boy. Without thinking, the boy moved to counter the master's blow. The master attacked again but every blow the master made the boy easily countered. He dodged and blocked the master's attacks in the same way that he had learnt to defend himself with the mop stick. This dance between the master and student continued for sometime. At the end, the boy felt completely amazed by his own skills. He understood now that all the years of sweeping and mopping, along with the game of constant beatings that the master had played with him had made him into a great swordsman.



\*\*\* THE END \*\*\*

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