

= Meher Baba =

Meher Baba (born Merwan Sheriar Irani ; 25 February 1894 ? 31 January 1969) was an Indian spiritual master who said he was the Avatar , God in human form .

Merwan Sheriar Irani was born in 1894 in Pune , India to Irani Zoroastrian parents . At the age of 19 , he began a seven @-@ year spiritual transformation . During this time he contacted five spiritual masters before beginning his own mission and gathering his own disciples in early 1922 , at the age of 27 .

From 10 July 1925 to the end of his life , Meher Baba maintained silence , communicating by means of an alphabet board or by unique hand gestures . With his mandali (circle of disciples) , he spent long periods in seclusion , during which time he often fasted . He also traveled widely , held public gatherings and engaged in works of charity with lepers , the poor and the mentally ill .

In 1931 , Meher Baba made the first of many visits to the West , where he attracted followers . Throughout most of the 1940s , Meher Baba worked with a category of spiritual aspirants called masts , who he said are entranced or spellbound by internal spiritual experiences . Starting in 1949 , along with selected mandali , he traveled incognito about India in an enigmatic and still largely unexplained period he called the " New Life " .

After being injured as a passenger in two serious automobile accidents , one in the United States in 1952 and one in India in 1956 , his ability to walk became severely limited . In 1962 , he invited his Western followers to India for a mass darshan called " The East @-@ West Gathering " . Concerned by an increasing use of LSD and other psychedelic drugs , in 1966 Baba stated that they did not convey real benefits . Despite deteriorating health , he continued what he called his " Universal Work " , which included fasting and seclusion , until his death on 31 January 1969 . His samadhi (shrine / tomb) in Meherabad , India , has become a place of international pilgrimage .

Meher Baba gave numerous teachings on the cause and purpose of life , including teaching reincarnation and that the phenomenal world is an illusion . He taught that the Universe is imagination , that God is what really exists , and that each soul is really God passing through imagination to realize individually His own divinity . In addition he gave practical advice for the aspirant who wishes to attain Self @-@ realization and thereby escape the wheel of births and deaths . He also taught about the concept of Perfect Masters , the Avatar , and those on the various stages of the spiritual path that he called involution . His teachings are most importantly recorded in his principal books Discourses and God Speaks .

His legacy includes the Avatar Meher Baba Charitable Trust he established in India , a handful of centers for information and pilgrimage , as well as an influence on pop @-@ culture artists and the introduction of common expressions such as " Don 't Worry , Be Happy . " Meher Baba 's silence has remained a mysterious issue as much among his followers as with the rest of the world .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Meher Baba was an Irani born in Pune , India to a Zoroastrian family . His given name was Merwan Sheriar Irani . He was the second son of Sheriar Irani , a Persian Zoroastrian who had spent years wandering in search of spiritual experience before settling in Poona (now Pune) , and Shireen Irani .

As a boy he formed " The Cosmopolitan Club " , which was dedicated to remaining informed in world affairs and giving money to charity . He was a multi @-@ instrumentalist and poet . Fluent in several languages , he was especially fond of the poetry of Hafez , Shakespeare , and Shelley .

In his youth , he had no mystical inclinations or experiences , and was " [u] ntroubled as yet by a sense of his own destiny ... " He was more interested in sports and was co @-@ captain of his high school cricket team . At the age of 19 , during his second year at Deccan College in Pune , he met a very old Muslim woman who was locally revered as a saint , named Hazrat Babajan , who kissed

him on the forehead . The event affected him profoundly , leaving him visibly dazed , and he gave up his normal activities . After that he contacted other spiritual figures , who , along with Babajan , he later said were the five " Perfect Masters " of the age : Tajuddin Baba , Narayan Maharaj , Sai Baba of Shirdi , and Upasni Maharaj .

Upasni Maharaj , he later said , helped him to integrate his mystical experiences with normal consciousness , thus enabling him to function in the world without diminishing his experience of God @-@ realization . In late 1921 , at the age of 27 , after living for seven years with Upasni , Merwan started to attract a following of his own . His early followers gave him the name " Meher Baba " , meaning " Compassionate Father " .

In 1922 , Meher Baba and his followers established " Manzil @-@ e @-@ Meem " (House of the Master) in Bombay (now Mumbai) . There Baba began his practice of demanding strict discipline and obedience from his disciples . A year later , Baba and his mandali moved to an area a few miles outside Ahmednagar that he named " Meherabad " (Meher flourishing) . This ashram would become the center for his work . During the 1920s , Meher Baba opened a school , hospital and dispensary at Meherabad . All three were free and open to all castes and faiths .

In July 1925 , Meher Baba began a life @-@ long period of self @-@ imposed silence , communicating first by use of chalk and slate , then by an alphabet board and later by self @-@ styled hand gestures . In January 1927 he gave up writing with pen or pencil also .

= = = 1930s ? First contacts with the West = = =

In the 1930s , Meher Baba began a period of extensive world travel , with several trips to Europe and the United States . It was during this period that he established contact with his first close group of Western disciples . He traveled on a Persian passport because he had given up writing as well as speaking and would not sign the forms required by the British government of India .

On his first trip to England in 1931 he traveled on the SS Rajputana , the same ship that was carrying Mahatma Gandhi , who was sailing to the second Round Table Conference in London . Baba and Gandhi had three meetings onboard , including one that lasted for three hours . The British press highlighted these meetings , but an aide to Gandhi said , " You may say emphatically that Gandhi never asked Meher Baba for help or for spiritual or other advice . "

On 20 May 1932 Baba arrived in New York and provided the press with a 1000 @-@ word written statement , which was described by devotee Quentin Tod as his " Message to America " . In the statement Baba proclaimed himself " one with the infinite source of everything " and declared his intention to break his silence : " When I speak , my original message will be delivered to the world and it will have to be accepted . " When asked about the Indo @-@ British political situation he had no comment , but his followers explained that he had told Gandhi to abandon politics .

In the West , Meher Baba met with a number of celebrities and artists , including Hollywood notables Gary Cooper , Charles Laughton , Tallulah Bankhead , Boris Karloff , Tom Mix , Maurice Chevalier , Ernst Lubitsch and others . On 1 June 1932 Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks , Jr. held a reception for Baba at Pickfair where he delivered a message to Hollywood . As a result , Meher Baba emerged as " one of the enthusiasms of the ' 30s " .

In 1934 , after announcing that he would break his self @-@ imposed silence in the Hollywood Bowl , Baba suddenly changed his plans and boarded the RMS Empress of Canada and sailed to Hong Kong without explanation . The Associated Press reported that " Baba had decided to postpone the word @-@ fast breaking until next February because ' conditions are not yet ripe ' . " He returned to England in 1936 but did not return to the United States again until the early 1950s .

In the late 1930s , Meher Baba invited a group of Western women to join him in India , where he arranged a series of trips throughout India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) that became known as the Blue Bus Tours . When they returned home , many newspapers treated their journey as an occasion for scandal . Time Magazine 's 1936 review of God is my Adventure describes the US 's fascination with the " long @-@ haired , silky @-@ mustached Parsee named Shri Sadgaru [sic] Meher Baba " four years earlier .

= = = 1940s ? Masts and the New Life = = =

In the 1930s and 1940s , Meher Baba did extensive work with a category of people he termed " masts " , who are persons " intoxicated with God " . According to Baba these individuals are essentially disabled by their enchanting experience of the higher spiritual planes . Although outwardly masts may appear irrational or even insane , Baba claimed that their spiritual status was actually quite elevated , and that by meeting with them he helped them to move forward spiritually while enlisting their aid in his spiritual work . One of the best known of these masts , known as Mohammed Mast , lived at Meher Baba 's encampment at Meherabad until his death in 2003 .

In 1949 Baba began an enigmatic period that he called the " New Life " . Following a series of questions on their readiness to obey even the most difficult of his requests , Baba selected twenty companions to join him in a life of complete " hopelessness and helplessness " .

He made provisions for those dependent on him , after which he and his companions otherwise gave up almost all property and financial responsibilities . They then traveled about India incognito while begging for food and carrying out Baba 's instructions in accordance with a strict set of " conditions of the New Life " . These included absolute acceptance of any circumstance and consistent good cheer in the face of any difficulty . Companions who failed to comply were sent away .

About the New Life Meher Baba wrote :

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

Meher Baba ended the New Life in February 1952 and once again began a round of public appearances throughout India and the West .

= = = 1950s ? God Speaks and automobile accidents = = =

In the 1950s Baba established two centers outside of India : the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach , South Carolina in the United States and Avatar 's Abode near Brisbane , Australia . He inaugurated the Meher Spiritual Center in April 1952 . On 24 May 1952 , en route from the Spiritual Center to Meher Mount in Ojai , California , the car in which he was a passenger was struck head @-@ on near Prague , Oklahoma . He and his companions were thrown from the vehicle and suffered many injuries . Baba 's leg was severely broken and he sustained facial injuries , including a broken nose . The injured were treated at Duke Hospital in Durham , North Carolina , after which they returned to Myrtle Beach to recuperate . While recuperating at Youpon Dunes , a home owned by Elizabeth Patterson , in Myrtle Beach , he worked on the charter for a group of Sufis , which he named Sufism Reoriented .

Meher Baba began dictating his major book , God Speaks , The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose , in Dehradun , August 1953 . In September of 1954 , Meher Baba gave a men @-@ only sahasas at Meherabad that later became known as the " Three Incredible Weeks " . During this time Baba issued a declaration , " Meher Baba 's Call " , wherein he once again affirmed his Avatarhood " irrespective of the doubts and convictions " of others . At the end of this sahasas Meher Baba gave the completed manuscript of his book God Speaks to two members of Sufism Reoriented , Ludwig H. Dimpfl and Don E. Stevens , for editing and publication in America . The book was subsequently published by Dodd , Mead and Company the following year .

On 30 September 1954 Meher Baba gave his " Final Declaration " message , in which he made

various enigmatic predictions .

In October 1954 , Meher Baba discarded his alphabet board and began using a unique set of hand gestures to communicate , which he used for the remainder of his life .

On 2 December 1956 , outside Satara , India , the car in which Baba was being driven went out of control and a second serious automobile accident occurred . Baba suffered a fractured pelvis and other severe injuries . Dr. Nilu , one of Baba 's mandali , was killed . This collision seriously incapacitated Baba . Despite his physicians ' predictions to the contrary , after great effort Baba managed to walk again , but from that point on he was in constant pain and was severely limited in his ability to move . In fact , during his trip to the West in 1958 he often needed to be carried from venue to venue .

In 1956 , during his fifth visit to the US , Baba stayed at New York 's Hotel Delmonico before traveling to the Meher Center at Myrtle Beach , South Carolina . In July he traveled to Washington , D.C. and received friends and disciples at the home of Mrs. James Terry (Ivy) Duce , wife of the vice @-@ president of the Arabian American Oil Co . He then traveled to Meher Mount at Ojai , California before continuing on to Australia . His final visits to the United States and Australia were made in 1958 .

= = = 1960s ? Later years and message on drugs = = =

In 1962 , Baba gave one of his last public functions , a series of meetings he called The East @-@ West Gathering . At these meetings , in which his western followers were invited to meet his Indian disciples , Baba gave darshan to many thousands of people despite the physical strain this caused him .

In the mid @-@ 1960s Baba became concerned with the increasingly prevalent drug culture in the West and began a correspondence with several Western academics , including Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert , in which he strongly discouraged the use of all hallucinogenic drugs for spiritual purposes . In 1966 Baba 's responses to questions on drugs were published in a pamphlet titled God in a Pill ? Meher Baba stated that drug use was spiritually damaging and that if enlightenment were possible through drugs then " God is not worthy of being God " . Meher Baba instructed some of his young Western disciples to spread this message ; in doing so , they increased awareness of Meher Baba 's teachings among the young during this period . In an interview with Frederick Chapman , a Harvard graduate and Fulbright scholar who met Baba during a year of study in India , Baba stated that LSD is " harmful physically , mentally and spiritually " , and warned that " the continued use of LSD leads to madness or death " .

On this basis , an anti @-@ drug campaign was initiated by Baba lovers in the United States , Europe and Australia . Although the campaign was largely unsuccessful , it created a wave of new followers , and some of Baba 's views found their way into academic debate on the merits and dangers of hallucinogens .

From the East @-@ West Gathering of 1962 onward , Baba 's health steadily deteriorated . Despite the physical toll it took on his body , he continued to undergo long periods of seclusion and fasting . In late July 1968 , Baba completed a particularly taxing period of seclusion and stated that by then his work was " completed 100 % to my satisfaction " . At this point he was using a wheelchair . Within a few months his condition had worsened and he was by then bedridden . His body was wracked by intense muscular spasms that had no clear medical origin . Despite the care of several doctors the spasms grew progressively worse .

On 31 January 1969 , Meher Baba died at his home in Meherazad , conveying by his last gestures , " Do not forget that I am God . " In time his devotees called the anniversary of his death Amartithi (deathless day) . Meher Baba 's body lay in state at his samadhi at Meherabad . Covered with roses , and cooled by ice , his body was kept available to the public for one week before its final burial . Before his death , Meher Baba had made extensive preparations for a public darshan program to be held in Poona . His mandali decided to proceed with the arrangements despite the physical absence of the host . Several thousand attended this " Last Darshan " , including many hundreds of people from the United States , Europe , and Australia .

= = Silence = =

From 10 July 1925 , until his death in 1969 , Meher Baba was silent . He communicated first by using an alphabet board and later by unique hand gestures which were interpreted and spoken out by one of his mandali , usually by his disciple Eruch Jessawala . Meher Baba said that his silence was not undertaken as a spiritual exercise but solely in connection with his universal work .

Man 's inability to live God 's words makes the Avatar 's teaching a mockery . Instead of practicing the compassion he taught , man has waged wars in his name . Instead of living the humility , purity , and truth of his words , man has given way to hatred , greed , and violence . Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past , in this present Avataric form , I observe silence .

Meher Baba often signaled the moment " that he would ' break ' his silence by speaking the ' Word ' in every heart , thereby giving a spiritual push forward to all living things " .

When I break My Silence , the impact of My Love will be universal and all life in creation will know , feel and receive of it . It will help every individual to break himself free from his own bondage in his own way . I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself . The breaking of My Silence will help you to help yourself in knowing your real Self .

Meher Baba said that the breaking of his silence would be a defining event in the spiritual evolution of the world .

When I speak that Word , I shall lay the foundation for that which is to take place during the next seven hundred years .

On many occasions Meher Baba promised to break his silence with an audible word before he died , often stating a specific time and place when this would occur , but according to all contemporary accounts , Meher Baba remained silent until his death . His failure to break his silence disappointed some of his followers , while others regarded these broken promises as a test of their faith . Some followers speculate that " the Word " will yet be " spoken " , or that Meher Baba did break his silence but in a spiritual rather than a physical way .

For many years , Baba asked his followers to undertake austerities on 10 July , the anniversary of the day his silence began , such as keeping silence , fasting and praying . In his final Silence Day request to his followers in 1968 , he asked only that they keep silent . Many of Baba 's followers continue to celebrate Silence Day by keeping silence in his honor .

= = Teachings = =

Meher Baba 's teachings can roughly be divided into two main categories : his metaphysics on the nature of the soul and the Universe , and practical advice for the spiritual aspirant . The two are interrelated . His metaphysics is mostly found in his principal book on the subject , God Speaks . It contains detailed statements on his cosmology and the purpose of life as well as the progression of the soul , while his elucidations on the practical spiritual life are mostly contained in Discourses , although it also covers many metaphysical areas mirroring or amplifying God Speaks .

= = = God Speaks = = =

In God Speaks , Meher Baba describes the journey of the soul from its original state of unconscious divinity to the ultimate attainment of conscious divinity . The whole journey is a journey of imagination , where the original indivisible state of God imagines becoming countless individualized souls which he likens to bubbles within an infinite ocean . Each soul , powered by the desire to become conscious , starts its journey in the most rudimentary form of consciousness . This limitation brings the need of a more developed form to advance it towards an increasingly conscious state . Consciousness grows in relation to the impressions each form is capable of gathering .

According to Baba , each soul pursues conscious divinity by evolving : that is , experiencing itself in a succession of imagined forms through seven " kingdoms " : stone / metal , vegetable , worm , fish ,

bird , animal , and human . The soul identifies itself with each successive form , becoming thus tied to illusion . During this evolution of forms thinking also increases , until in human form thinking becomes infinite . Although in human form the soul is capable of conscious divinity , all the impressions that it has gathered during evolution are illusory ones , creating a barrier for the soul to know itself . For this barrier to be overcome , further births in human form are needed in a process named reincarnation .

Eventually the soul reaches a stage where its previously gathered impressions grow thin or weak enough that it enters a final stage called involution . This stage also requires a series of human births , during which the soul begins an inner journey , by which it realizes its true identity as God . Baba breaks this inner journey of Realization into seven stages he calls " planes . " The whole process culminates at the seventh plane with God @-@ realization , where the goal of life for the individual soul is reached .

= = = Discourses = = =

The Discourses are a collection of explanations and elucidations that Meher Baba has given on many topics that concern the advancement of the spiritual aspirant . Some of the most important topics treated are : sanskaras (mental impressions) , Maya (the principle of illusion) , the nature of the ego , reincarnation , karma , violence and non @-@ violence , meditation , love , discipleship , and God @-@ realization . His explanations often include stories from the lore of India and the Sufi culture . One such story , the wise man and the ghost , shows the power that superstitious beliefs can have on a person , while another , Majnun and Layla , show how selfless love , even in human relations , can lead one to discipleship .

Thus Meher Baba offers many suggestions that keep one moving towards God @-@ realization . These suggestions include putting theory into practice , the internal renunciation of desires , offering selfless service to humanity or the master , spontaneity , while avoiding actions that bind one to illusion . But rather than lay out moral rules , Baba offers an understanding as to why some actions bind the individual whereas some others help towards his emancipation . Many chapters offer a better understanding of the mechanisms by which consciousness gets caught up between the opposites of experience , such as pleasure and pain , good and evil , and point to a way of transcending them .

= = = Perfect Masters and the Avatar = = =

Baba said that at all times on Earth there are fifty @-@ six incarnate God @-@ realized souls and that of these souls there are always five who constitute the " five Perfect Masters " of their era . When one of the five Perfect Masters dies , Baba said that another God @-@ realized soul among the fifty @-@ six immediately replaces him or her by taking up that office .

The Avatar , according to Baba , is a special Perfect Master , the first soul to achieve God @-@ realization . This soul , the original Perfect Master , or the " Ancient One " , never ceases to incarnate . Baba indicated that this particular soul personifies the state of God which in Hinduism is named Vishnu and in Sufism is named Parvardigar , i.e. the sustainer or preserver state of God . According to Meher Baba the Avatar appears on Earth every 700 ? 1400 years and is ' brought down ' into human form by the five Perfect Masters of the time to aid in the process of moving creation in its never @-@ ending journey toward Godhood . Baba asserted that in other ages this role was fulfilled by Zoroaster , Rama , Krishna , Buddha , Jesus , and Muhammad .

Baba described the Avatar as " a gauge against which man can measure what he is and what he may become . He tries the standard of human values by interpreting them in terms of divinely human life . "

Most of Meher Baba 's followers accept his claim of avatarhood and he is said to be " revered by millions around the world as the Avatar of the age and a God @-@ realized being " .

= = Legacy = =

Baba 's travels and teachings left a legacy of followers and devotees worldwide .

The Avatar Meher Baba Charitable Trust , established by Meher Baba in 1959 , maintains his tomb and pilgrimage facilities , as well as a free school and dispensary , a cataract clinic , and a veterinary clinic . The Trust follows the charter left for it by Meher Baba in his lifetime , but does not act as spiritual authority over groups . Likewise , the Trust does not engage in propaganda , promote creeds or dogmas , or seek converts . Baba discouraged evangelizing , stating , " I need no propaganda or publicity . " Rather , he encouraged his followers to " let your life itself be my message of love and truth to others " and to " spread my message of Love and Truth as far and wide as possible " . Followers of Meher Baba have no established rituals . Many do , however , perform practices of choice such as pujas , aartis , prayers , music , plays , viewing films of Baba and so forth , but the choice is personal . The primary focus for followers is living a life Meher Baba would approve of , for example , refraining from the use of psychedelic drugs , including marijuana , and trying to remember God with love .

Gatherings of Baba followers are generally informal . Special effort is made to gather together on Amartithi , the anniversary of Baba 's death , and on his birthday . Many Baba followers keep silent on 10 July (Silence Day) , observing the request Baba frequently made of his followers during his lifetime . Aarti is performed morning and evening at Baba 's samadhi in India . Also at Meherabad , his followers maintain Baba 's practice of lighting a dhuni fire on the 12th of each month .

Although Baba had initially begun gaining public attention in the West as early as 1932 as the result of contacts with some celebrities of the time and from the rather disillusioned account of Paul Brunton (*A Search in Secret India* , 1934) , he received further attention after his death through various mentions in western pop @-@ culture .

Pete Townshend of The Who , who became a follower of Baba , dedicated his 1969 rock @-@ opera *Tommy* to Meher Baba in the record 's gatefold . The Who 's 1971 song " Baba O 'Riley " was named in part after Meher Baba , and Townshend recorded several Meher Baba tribute albums including *Happy Birthday* , *I Am* , *Who Came First* , and *With Love* . In 1970 Melanie Safka mentioned Baba in her song " Lay Down (Candles in the Rain) " with the lyrics " Meher Baba lives again " . Bobby McFerrin 's 1988 Grammy Award @-@ winning song " Don 't Worry , Be Happy " was inspired by a popular quote of Baba seen in numerous Baba posters and inspirational cards . Concepts of Meher Baba 's philosophy , as well as a character based on Baba but unnamed , have also frequently appeared in works of comic book writer J. M. DeMatteis , including *Doctor Fate* and *Seekers Into The Mystery* .

In 2012 , the feature film *Nema Aviona za Zagreb* premiered in the Netherlands with an exclusive interview with Meher Baba filmed in 1967 . In the interview Baba explains the difference between God @-@ realization and drug @-@ induced hallucinations and the scene plays a pivotal role in the documentary 's narrative .