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## Introduction

Meherabad was in a state of shock. The residents watched helplessly as the ambulance screamed and rushed away carrying the torn and tattered bodies of two of our beloved friends, Heather and Erico Nadel, who were close disciples of Baba. They had been attacked and robbed by wandering gypsies who had camped in the vicinity of Meherabad. Erico succumbed to his injuries at the hospital while Heather battled for her life over the next few months.

As I sit here trying to make sense of this tragic event, a swarm of confusing thoughts, unwilling to accept the simple truth of *karma*, buzzes angrily in my mind. How was such a ghastly act committed within the precincts of such a holy place? Why did Baba not protect His beloved disciples? Couldn't He have taken care of them and seen them come safely through this nightmare? Shouldn't He have ensured that both Heather and Erico came out of it unscathed to live a happy life in His love and service, as they had been doing for almost the last forty years? Did they need to go through this harrowing experience? Was there a deeper meaning to all this violence that transcended our understanding?

Heather finally recovered after several complex brain surgeries, and returned to Meherabad to serve her Lord. To me, she is a living example, a monument of total faith and trust in her Master.

It made me think ... and it made me realise one thing. We are in this world for our own spiritual growth. That it is we, ourselves, who have chosen to experience certain events in our lives that will help balance out our *sanskaras*, and imbue

us with the qualities of patience, tolerance, perseverance, love, gratitude, faith, and forgiveness.

It is a fact of life that no human being can grow without being tested by trying circumstances, be they physical, mental or emotional. The only choice we really have is whether to react to a situation by assuming a victim's role, or respond to it with understanding and wisdom, recognising it as a fruit of the seed we have sown in the past, and learn to go beyond.

All the Masters have experienced pain too, albeit not of their own making but to alleviate our share of suffering, and they have set an example for us to follow – so we learn how to go beyond the pain and suffering. No sincere plea for help goes unheard and the Masters are always there to help us.

*Beyond the Silence* explains how Baba gives us what He has to give in Silence, without saying a single word. It is in the silence of our perfect *surrender* that Baba's Silent Love flows to us. That is why this book is filled with episodes of so many people who have been struck by tragedy and difficult life situations, and how they have managed to pull through them. It is about how they have been guided and helped to grow in the most amazing ways through difficult times.

We can either choose to be rooted in pain and remain its victims or, encouraged by God's love and grace, we can make a conscious effort to overcome the suffering that our soul chose to experience in the first place.

I start here with myself ...



## My Journey Continues

*January 31st Amartithi, Meherabad*

This is a very special day for me as on this day our Beloved Baba dropped His human form over forty years ago, in 1969. I usually spend the day in Meherabad with thousands of others, experiencing the strength and energy that pervades the whole of Meherabad on this special day.

Around this time people from all over the country and abroad congregate on Meherabad Hill to revive and perpetuate the memory of Baba's ministry on earth and receive His blessings. To experience this phenomenon is a unique and memorable event for Baba's devotees and it becomes more so, especially as the clock moves closer to 11.45 am. That is the time when everyone begins to chant Baba's name in an increasing crescendo for fifteen minutes. After that exactly at 12 noon – 'The Silence' – is observed for fifteen minutes. It is a time when you can truly go within; merge with Baba and feel His Divinity; a time when you can internally listen to the sound of His unspoken voice and, maybe, even experience a deep spiritual fulfillment.

In the beginning when I was getting to know Him, Baba worked really hard to convince me about the splendour of this day but, having experienced it once, I made it a point to try to be there on every January 31st. However, in 2007, I could not make it to Meherabad for that day. So I did the next best thing: I gathered all my domestic help around me, switched on the computer, and shared with them the whole experience that was telecast live on the internet. We became one with all those gathered on Meherabad Hill that day. We sang the songs, said the prayers, closed our eyes and partook of the serene Silence.

Feeling nice and rejuvenated about the whole experience, I then had my lunch. Copying the rough manuscript of my book *Listening to the Silence* on a CD, I packed a bottle of red wine and some sweets for my publisher and his staff, and marched off to give them to him at his new office at World Trade Centre in Mumbai.

But, as you may have already read in the introduction of *Listening to the Silence*, I fell down those huge cement steps as I was coming down from the 18th to the 17th floor and was immediately rushed to the hospital. The doctors there told me that I had a broken femur, a fractured ankle, and also a deep, bleeding gash on my head. The bottle of wine, the sweets, the mobile, and the CD, had all remained intact!

Nothing broke – except my bones!

Over the years, I had been on blood-thinner medicines and so had to wait it out for seventy-two hours before surgery could be performed. So, I lay on my bed with my leg strung up in traction for three whole days, and the thoughts buzzing around my head during that time were not pleasant ones. All thoughts about the benefits of silence, all the inspiring messages from Karl about why things happen the way they do, all the knowledge about the laws of karma; they all seemed to have drifted far away. Pain had taken a complete hold over me. 'Why, why?' I thought, 'Why did I to have fall today of all days?'

Three days later, I was wheeled into the operation theatre for surgery. The doctor had not yet arrived and I was left alone, cold and shivering with fright, strapped to my stretcher, in the middle of that room. Although I have come a long way in my love for, and faith in, Baba, I yet cried in despair, 'Oh Baba ... either You do not love me anymore, or You do not care. Which is it?'

Just then my attention was drawn to some soft music playing in the background. I listened. It sounded so familiar. It took me a while to realise that that was Baba's favourite piece of music, 'Begin the Beguine'. This particular tune had such special significance for Baba that He had requested it to be played seven times near His body when He dropped His form. Just imagine the sense of relief and gratitude I experienced then. It reaffirmed my faith that He is always with me and would take care of me! The cold room, the fear in my heart, and the feeling of being all alone vanished into thin air.



## My Journey Continues

Baba had, in no uncertain terms, made me experience His Omnipresence and had reassured me. Undoubtedly, it was Baba's response to my question and my cry for help.

The surgery over, I went back home and was confined to my bed and a wheelchair for some time. On reaching home, when I checked on my pending emails, the very first email flashed a photo of Baba in a wheelchair! The second photo that came up was Baba walking with the help of crutches. These were mails sent by the Mumbai Centre and I was struck by the precise timing Baba had chosen to comfort and console me.

Accompanying these photographs was a description of Baba's accident at Satara where He had also broken His hip bone, gone through much pain, but had held a firm resolve that He would walk again without a stick. Was this a coincidence, or was Baba trying to tell me something? I made up my mind to have the same firm attitude and work towards the same goal.



Meher Baba in a wheelchair after his accident at Satara.

A metal plate and screws held the shattered bones of my femur together, and I began to live my life again as best as I could. The first two months showed that the leg was healing well but after that, although I struggled every day going miles to the hospital for physiotherapy, there seemed to be no further improvement. At the end of a year and three months, the plate and screws were beginning to loosen and the doctor decided it would be better to go in for a hip replacement. So on 9th April 2008, I was back in the hospital in the very same operation theatre and the hip replacement was done.

The leg certainly felt much better and stronger after that and very soon I was ready to walk. Back in Pune, I continued happily with my exercises, hearing encouraging accounts from other friends who had had similar problems. I was very close to achieving what Baba had inspired in me and was soon ready to attempt climbing steps once more. My physiotherapist suggested that we take one more X-ray to ensure that everything was in place, and that is what I did. The X-ray was sent directly to the doctor and I happily went to my appointment with him. The doctor put my X-ray up on the screen and a gasp escaped our lips. The light shone through the plate to show that the hip replacement shaft had pierced through the outer side of my thighbone and it was peeping through – its point clearly visible in the X-ray plate. I could scarcely believe my eyes. As for my doctor, he just kept saying, 'Oh my God ... Oh my God!' In all his experience, he had never seen anything like this before.

To cut a long story short, a few months of consultations followed and then another surgery was scheduled. It was decided that we had to remove the existing shaft and put in a longer one. But there were many ifs and buts. My doctor was not prepared to put me through so much. So, it was decided to keep a bone graft handy just in case.

The surgery was scheduled, of all the days, on 4th October 2008, which was Karl's birthday. Can you believe that no other day was available? The room, the day and night nurses, the blood donors had already been arranged – all except the anaesthetist. But since I didn't know anyone, I left it to my doctor to get the best one for me. On communicating with Karl a day or two before the surgery, he assured me that he had specially chosen this day; that he would be there with me through the ordeal and that I was not to worry.

The fateful day arrived.

On the way to the hospital, we got a call to say that the occupant of the room we had booked would only be ready to move out after my surgery was over. So, on arrival we were ushered into a dismal looking, small room with no toilet attached. To top it all, another call came to say that the nurse we had booked would not be able to come. I checked into the hospital in a rather depressed frame of mind. What more awaited me? I sent up a silent plea, 'Baba, please help! Where are you, Karl?'

Just then, there was a knock on the door and a young, clean-looking man entered. He held my hand and said, 'Good evening Mrs. Umrigar, I am your anaesthetist and I am going to be with you throughout the surgery. You do not have to worry anymore because I am going to look after you through it all. I will always be at your side and if you need anything, you just have to tell me. My name is Karl – Dr. Karl Vazifdar.'

You can imagine my ecstasy! The dark and dismal hospital room turned into fairyland for me. So did the operation theatre, for Dr. Karl was as good as his word. He was there first thing in the morning to wheel me into the theatre. He sat on the right side of my head through the entire surgery; his smiling face giving me all the courage I ever needed.

Today, I still have the shaft inside of me poking its head out of my thighbone. As expected, it did not come out and a bone graft was done. They say it will take a year for the new bone to fuse with the original bone. I am back home again in Pune, not fully recovered, but definitely more comfortable and with much less pain. There is however one small drawback: although I am not confined to a wheelchair, one leg is a little weaker than the other and I have to support myself with a stick. In the beginning, this was very upsetting and I found myself wondering why I needed to go through this particularly painful period of my life. I tried to find the answers and, at times when the pain was severe, I would once more question why Baba and Karl were even allowing me to go through this.

It was then that the thought came back to me that Baba Himself had experienced intense physical pain following His second automobile accident in 1956. His head and face were badly hurt, His tongue was torn and, worst of all, His right hip was fractured

and the broken bone slightly displaced. He walked with a limp for the rest of His life.

The history of past advents reveals that the leg was one part of their body that always sustained injuries. For instance, Lord Rama's leg was injured during the battle with Ravana. Lord Krishna died of injuries to His leg. And, Jesus also limped as a result of an injury to his hip. Was this Baba's way of comforting me or making me realise that if He and the past advents have gone through so much pain, why shouldn't we mortals go through the same with fortitude and courage?

I still do not know what the future holds for me. But I definitely see the incident in a better light now; that maybe it was in my destiny to fall that day, and the way I fell could have paralysed me for life. Worse, I could have even died that day. Today I really thank Baba from the bottom of my heart for always finding a way to show me when I stray, or start having doubts in my mind.

For me, it was a clear and poignant sign from Baba indicating that pain is part and parcel of one's life; that each one of us has to go through it and face our own karma boldly and move on in life. I also found myself understanding that I had possibly chosen these events for my own growth as, most certainly, they tested my patience, tolerance and reaction to unpleasant situations like pain.

What also dawned on me was that pain is inevitable, but suffering is a choice. This helped me check my remorse and greatly helped reduce my suffering, knowing that Baba too had gone through much worse. No doubt Baba's suffering is of an entirely different nature altogether as He has often said, *'People suffer for their own karma, Masters suffer for humanity, and the Avatar suffers for each and all in creation.'* Maybe Baba took away a lot of my karmic debts this way and helped me to get free. Who knows? Maybe it is a lesson for me to not only look at the past or the present, but to look at what lies beyond ...

When asked, Karl said that I had been an orthopaedic surgeon in my last life!



## How Baba sent Help for Me

For what I am just about to tell you, I will have to take you back a little in time to when my second surgery had just got over. As some of you may know, I was more or less confined to my home. So I took the opportunity to sit for as long as I could at my computer, in order to put finishing touches to my book *Listening to the Silence*. Most of the chapters were ready, but I still had to give it a final run-through before I sent it to the publisher for review.

I was in the middle of editing one of the most important chapters titled 'Patrick' regarding my coming across Patrick Maclane Carlson (the boy in the red shirt through whom Karl had come on my very first trip to Baba) at the *Samadhi* in Meherabad – when suddenly my cell phone rang. It was a friend from Delhi calling to tell me about a healer who seemed presently to be rocking Delhi with his prowess. 'You have to call him, Nan Aunty,' she said. 'He is very good and I'm sure he will be able to help you with your leg. I will SMS you his name and number right away.'

Not being in the best of moods, I thought, 'Forget it – what can he do for me? My hip has been replaced, and yet both the surgeries have not been too successful, so what is he going to do ... make me walk?' One tends to get so cynical in the midst of pain and suffering, and that is what actually makes it all the more difficult to handle.

My cell phone beeped to indicate an incoming message. It read, 'His name is Patrick and he comes to Mumbai on every alternate Wednesday. You need to contact him, Aunty.'

I sat up with a start. That name, Patrick! The coincidence was too startling to be ignored. Here I was editing a chapter by the title

‘Patrick’ – and here was someone of the very same name and, that too, a healer being recommended to me – totally out of the blue!

I dialled his number. He picked up the phone. I told him who I was; told him all about my fall and the subsequent problems I had. He answered, ‘Yes, I know, I have read your book *Sounds of Silence*. My family is also connected with horses – we owned a few in Bangalore some time ago.’ He then gave me details on how to get in touch with him in Mumbai and asked me to call him on a particular day. I was ecstatic and gleefully called my friend and told her about it.

‘You mean you have already spoken to him, Nan Aunty? That is certainly a surprise to me, as normally he is so busy that he hardly ever picks up the phone. Usually, one has to call him for several days before one can get an answer.’ The conversation ended but it left me with a funny feeling that somewhere, somehow, Baba had arranged it all for me. However, I had to wait a few months before I could go to Mumbai to meet him. I was informed that he conducted his sessions at a flat on Napean Sea Road, and off I went to meet him.

I walked in to see a very tall, thin, soft-spoken man with long hair that fell to his shoulders. He looked a little like Jesus and had a certain confidence about him that appealed to me. He listened with close attention to the details of my accidental fall, my broken bones, the surgeries etc. He closed his eyes, put his hand up near his right shoulder, and said a silent prayer, or so I thought. My meeting with him lasted only three minutes and then I was ushered out. That was it. To me, being so used to George Chapman’s spirit surgery in Wales, which took at least a good half-hour, this hardly seemed to have been a healing session!

A few weeks later I went in for my third surgery at Breach Candy Hospital. Two or three days after it was over, I was surprised to see a strange face peeping into my room at the hospital. It was Patrick! Oh, was I happy to see him! On his fortnightly visit to Mumbai, he had heard that I was in hospital and had come to give me healing. I will never forget that kind gesture. In the middle of his busy schedule of seeing people, who kept waiting in a long queue outside his room, he had made time to visit and help someone in hospital! To me it was reminiscent of Baba’s Grace all over again.

But it did not end there.

One day, after I was better and had moved back to Pune, I got a call. It sounded like someone's secretary was on the line. 'Dr. Patrick is coming to Pune and would like to know if he could hold a healing session at your place.' Just like that. No preliminaries, no hesitation. Patrick would be in Pune ... and would be coming to my house too. It had to be Baba's Grace. I was more than thrilled!

The day arrived. The news seemed to have spread and very soon many people came over, including my neighbours who live down the lane in my complex. Dr. Patrick's healing session has now become a regular feature and, because of privacy and convenience, we have shifted the venue to the last bungalow in my lane, thanks to its kind and generous owners, the Maharaj Singhs.

Am I now convinced that just a three-minute prayer can make a difference and heal your condition? Of course! I am definitely feeling so much better and no more do I have any pain. I have a lot more energy and can even sleep the night through. However, as you may probably think, that could be because nature also heals. Or, maybe it's just blind faith. I wondered about this a great deal until I attended a three-day workshop held by Patrick. There I discovered several truths about his life and how he began to do his work for humanity. For me it was just as if Baba brought him to my doorstep, and now I place implicit trust in Patrick and his method of healing.

(Note on Patrick in Appendix D)

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Due to my troublesome leg, my trips to Meherabad got terribly restricted. I was always longing to go and bow down to Baba and there were so many waiting to go with me. I know only too well how much it helps when someone is there to introduce and show you around during one's first visit and, although the receptionists there are always kind and generous with their time, I have always made it a point to try my best to be there with newcomers and to show them the various aspects of this incredibly peaceful haven called Meherabad.

Now that this was not possible, I was in a bit of a sulk. I guess the ego also has a way of playing its role at such times and I wondered how newcomers could possibly feel welcome and looked after if I was not with them. And suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, almost in response to my thoughts, I get a call

from a young boy called Yohann Noble to inform me that now he was on the Welcome Committee at Meherabad and would gladly help escort any newcomers that I would like to pass on to him. You cannot imagine the relief and gratitude I felt. How lovely to have someone waiting there, on call, to help you with the bookings, to show you to your room and to point out all the important spots and salient features of Baba's life and work.

I have now made this into a regular feature and just so that you know who he is – here is his own story of how he came to Baba and how happy he is there.



### **Yohann Noble**

My name is Yohann Noble and I was born a dyslexic child. Being totally ignorant about the problem, I suffered agonising days when I was in school. Besides doing badly in studies, I used to get beaten by the teachers quite often for small things or, sometimes, even for nothing at all. As I grew up, I was plagued with questions: 'Why was I suffering so much?' 'What had I done to deserve this?' 'Why did these terrible things happen to me, especially when I was always trying to do the right thing all the time?'

I struggled to get through each moment, each day, and each year. It was not easy because I never got a chance to do anything I liked. I loved to take part in sports, theatre, hobby classes, athletic training, scouting, but nothing worked out, as I always had to spend most of my time just studying. Consequently I became a very quiet and shy person and, because of this, I was either at home all the time or just going for tuitions.

Then at last, my Tenth Standard Board Exam was over and for the first time in my life there was no more studying to be done. My life changed. Being an introvert, I had made no friends and had cultivated no interests to occupy my time. This intense loneliness made me ask myself some of the most important questions of my life and that slowly began to sow the seeds of enlightenment.

But a strange thing had happened a couple of months before the exams had even started. I had seen a white book on my mother's bedside table. Browsing around in her room one day, I saw this book again and asked her what it was all about. Mom



told me to read it, saying, 'You may like it.' So I took it to my room and looked at the cover. It read *Laws of the Spirit World – Vol. 1*.

The introduction spoke about an incident that took place with a Parsee couple, Mr. and Mrs. Bhavnagri, who had lost their two boys in a car accident. I read far into the night, up to the stage where the two boys began communicating with their parents. The stories I read answered many of the questions I had asked myself during my agonising school days.

I woke up the next morning, a completely changed human being.

Each night, the more I read, the more it helped to change my way of thinking. It revolutionised my approach towards life. I then went on to learn *Reiki*, as it was the popular thing in the mid-90s. At the Reiki class there was a middle-aged Parsee lady who happened to mention the name of Meher Baba and said that she dreamt about Him very often. When I heard the name Meher Baba, it rang a bell in my subconscious. I wondered who was this man and why I was feeling this curious pull towards finding out more about Him.

I now started reading books on spiritual subjects and found many of my questions being answered. But then, many more questions came up. I also needed answers to these questions. Where was all this leading me, and where would it end?

Amongst this question-answer frenzy, I asked Mom if she knew who Meher Baba was. She said, 'Yes, don't you know? He is that Irani man with long hair.' Then one day she brought home this book called *Sounds of Silence* and told me, 'Yohann, you were asking me about Meher Baba the other day, so I picked up this book for you, it has something to do with Him.' I was extremely moved by the reality of *Sounds of Silence*, and more so because it touched upon the two subjects that were closest to my heart – the Bhavnagris and Meher Baba. I read the initial pages again and again, reliving all that the mother had gone through. I marvelled at how Meher Baba had reached out through her dead son to make Himself known to the family.

Although I was just half-way through, I became so engrossed in the story that I had failed to realise that for the past couple of months my parents had been disappearing from the house on Saturday evenings. When I asked them about it, they

gave me vague answers. When I persisted, they told me that they go to this séance session at Girton High School.

I said that I wanted to come as well. At first they said, 'No,' but finally they agreed and I went along with them. I was interviewed by the group's leader who was called Tara and we had a small discussion. Around 6 pm an old couple and some more people came in. Mom told me the couple were mediums known as Mr. and Mrs. Kapadia.

Mrs. Kapadia soon went into a trance. I was specifically told by the leader not to get up but, to my surprise, the first thing the spirit guide (Mother Catherine) did was to point at me and ask me to stand up. In my simple way I understood that this is a higher authority asking me to do something, so I obeyed. Mother Catherine spoke to me and told me one important thing: 'There are many roads to God and you must choose one.' I kind of grasped what she was saying and, even without knowing much about Meher Baba, I understood that here was a definite command and I must follow it.

I finished *Sounds of Silence* and came to a decision. I would make a trip to Meherabad. We went there on 30th January, which was just a day before the Amarthithi (Baba's Death Anniversary). After taking *darshan*, I noticed there was a bookstall close by. Since I was keen on reading a book written by Meher Baba Himself, I asked the person to give me a book that Baba Himself had written. He showed me *Discourses* and I bought it.

When I started reading it, I was totally amazed. Not only had Baba answered all my questions that had been left unanswered for so long but He had also given me more knowledge about things I had previously not known. At last, I was satisfied and realised Meher Baba is no ordinary Saint or Master. He is beyond that.

By this time I was already in college. Things were still difficult but the difference was that before this I did not know how to live my life. Now with Baba, I was happy and content. But when it came to socialising, I suffered a lot and struggled to make friends. I was still a loner and would go for outings and movies alone. The only place I got to meet more people was in Meherabad. Somehow, with Baba's help, I seemed to get along well with everyone there. In Meherabad, Baba seemed to allow me to socialise and make friends, but once I came back to Mumbai I was back to square one and my best friends

continued to be my computer games, books, movies and music.

So I began visiting Meherabad more often. I really loved staying there and being close to Baba. That continued till one day a strange thought entered my head. What if I really stayed here and began to do some work for Baba? But I still had some responsibilities I needed to fulfil, like helping with the family, getting married and settling down. So I started working in a hotel instead and then, later, in a Human Resources firm.

As usual, I was doing quite badly and my boss wanted to fire me. He called me into his cabin and told me frankly that although they were happy with my conduct and discipline, my performance was unsatisfactory. He said I would be put on notice period for one month and, if my performance improved, then he would reconsider. I agreed to that as it seemed fair enough.

I continued to work and a month passed. I did not realise it but there was a remarkable improvement in my performance. Instead of throwing me out my boss gave me an increment. I was now even training others! This continued for a year, till I knew for certain that yes, this is it – now is the time to go and work in Meherabad.

I did not tell anyone at home. I quit my job. I told my parents I was going to Meherabad for an extended period. I knew they would not at first be too comfortable for me to shift there, but finally they accepted my decision.

I am now working in Meherabad full time in the Welcome and Information Office. This office was set up to help new people when they walk in for the first time. Baba had put me where I belonged.

I constantly get calls from people wanting to know more about Baba: how He lived, what He did, and what He said. I spend my days in happy contemplation of how Baba has turned my life around from being a recluse, to meeting so many new people. I enjoy taking people around, and talking to them about Baba.

Now when I think back to the early days, the days when I used to go for the séance at the Saturday meetings, I remember that at one point, Mother Catharine had clearly told me, 'Whether you like it or not, you will be doing God's work.'

(Yohann can be contacted on [yohann.noble@ambppct.org](mailto:yohann.noble@ambppct.org))

Cyrus Khambata and I met a long time ago. It was sometime during 1986-87, when I was still living in my old home at Eden Hall, Mumbai, that I had called him up to ask if he could recommend some books on Baba to me. I remember him riding up on his scooter with the sidecar filled with Baba books. I think Baba sent him into my life to give the added push I needed, and that still persists till today.

When I was writing *Sounds of Silence*, he helped me by not only giving me all the necessary literature on Baba, but also by relating to me in his own special way, all the little anecdotes he knew about Baba and His life. There was a gap of about two years in which I did not meet him, but our friendship was renewed after I had moved to Pune, and yet used to spend a few months each year in Mumbai at the Cricket Club of India. He has remained a dear friend to me and never fails to enlighten me with his vast knowledge about Meher Baba. My second book *Listening to the Silence*, as well as this one, has a lot of inputs from him and his wife Soumya.

Our Beloved Avatar Meher Baba has placed Cyrus at His Bombay Centre as the person responsible for conducting the Tuesday Study Circle on 'Baba's Words' given by Him in His *Discourses, God Speaks, Beams, The Everything and the Nothing* and other such books. The resulting discussions have provided a platform for understanding the how's and why's of life with insights on making appropriate choices to handle diverse situations of life in the light of Baba's messages. The on-going process of learning and growth as a result of the discussions and shared experiences have enabled Baba lovers, including Cyrus, to enrich themselves by making their lives more impactful and the journey of life more joyous. Besides the Study Circle, Cyrus also helps in conducting the Thursday Open Forum, which is formatted to share Baba lovers' testimonies of His love in their lives, and sharing of news and activities in the Baba community.

How does Cyrus know so much? I will now let Cyrus tell you how, being a young descendant of a priestly and religious orthodox family, he learnt to love Baba and has stayed on to be such a fine example to humanity.



## Cyrus Khambata

How did I come to be placed at the Centre? Well, it was a series of well-defined situations that brought me into Baba's fold. Being born into a *Zoroastrian* priestly clan, my family was into orthodoxy and did not believe that there could be anything superior to Zoroastrianism. Babas, *Swamis*, *Gurus*, were a far cry from it. I was a regular at the *Agiary* (*Parsi* fire temple) from an early age, always beseeching this Supreme One, *Ahuramazda*, to reveal Himself, if He did exist, and to show me a way to find Him.

As the years rolled by, my interest turned to reading life stories of saintly persons belonging to other religions as well. I started buying the *Thus Spake* series of booklets. My favourites were Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Nityananda. The transformation from a narrow religious approach to a more broad-minded one thus occurred.

One day in October 1968, at my friend Jimmy Patel's home, a discussion arose about Meher Baba. The episode of how Meher Baba came to the rescue of a person, who was constantly abusing and spreading negative propaganda about Him, touched a deep chord in my heart. It showed Baba's magnanimity, forgiveness and mercy. Further enquiries about Meher Baba revealed that Baba claimed Himself to be God in human form, the same one as Zarathustra, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Mohammad. I wondered if this was in response to my persistent yearning for an answer from Ahuramazda?

I sought further information and was promptly lent the book *The Perfect Master* by Charles B. Purdom. The author begins his book with ... 'This will be found a strange book ... It is the story of a man whose life will appear incomprehensible, a life in which the contradictions of normal values and actions are prominent. Yet this man says, 'I am God,' and His mission is to change the world, though He neither speaks, nor writes nor even seeks to get followers. It will arouse controversy, and I have no doubts that it will be misunderstood ...'

What an honest and powerful way this was to begin the book, I thought to myself. The author leaves the decision on the reader to believe in Baba's claim or to discard it. I had to find the truth for myself.

Back home, my newfound interest in Baba did not find favour with the family. In fact, my friend's family was squarely blamed for leading me 'astray'. As I read through the book, I saw two clear options opening up before me: one, that Baba is indeed what He says He is, God in human form. Or, two, He is a genius manipulator. I thought the only way to find that out was to put Him through a series of tests. While the tests were various and varied, these two stand out in my memory in the process of my anchoring on to Him.

Once, while in the fire temple, I observed the fire in the sanctum sanctorum in embers. I thought that if by the time I bow and lift my head instantly, I see the embers turn to flames, I would believe that Meher Baba is indeed Zarathustra come again. It happened, and what a flame arose! Yet another time, while at home, I was reciting our Parsi prayers on the balcony. Closing my eyes, I sincerely asked Ahuramazda to show me one unmistakable sign to confirm His endorsement of what I was venturing into and that Meher Baba is in fact the Advent of our times. I opened my eyes and, lo and behold! I witnessed the most spectacular sight ever. I saw a huge ball of fire glide past on the horizon. That unique and majestic sight put to rest my concern about Baba being God in human form.

During this entire process, I could feel Baba gently and patiently, without in the least condemning me, or my ways of testing Him, paving His way into my heart. It was through one of these tests that He led me to the Avatar Meher Baba Bombay Centre at Lamington Road, opposite Minerva Theatre.

Intellectually at least, I was now convinced about Baba's Omniscience and there arose in me a burning desire to meet Him. My daily visit to the Agiary was now replaced by my visit to the Baba Centre, meeting people, reading books, and gathering information. On the Centre's notice board was a circular from Baba informing His lovers about His recent seclusion, the pressure of His universal spiritual work, and a strict warning not to visit Him or even write to Him. How was I to fulfil my ardent desire to meet Him? I justified to myself that those instructions did not apply to me, as I was not yet His disciple. Keeping the whole plan a secret, I bought a train ticket for the next day and on the pretext of going for a scout's camp, I left my home – all set to meet Baba.

However, I felt a strong pull within me to first go to the Centre and take Baba's darshan before proceeding on the train journey. By this time, I was already fine-tuned to such intuitive voices and I felt this was Baba's ploy to stall my visit. Yet, I was determined to go, come what may. As I bowed down before Baba's photo at the Centre, I heard this deep, unmistakable voice asking me to carefully go through the circular one more time. My doubts were confirmed. Baba was in fact dissuading me from going to Him. The voice was so strong and clear that I found my feet moving me towards the notice board. As I was fully conversant with the contents of the circular, having read it many times before, I went through it this time very casually, but when I came to the end and read 'Adi K. Irani, King's Road, Ahmednagar,' something like an electric current ran down my spine. I quickly pulled out the train ticket; it read 'Ahmedabad'. I was stupefied. I couldn't fathom the gravity of my blunder. The sheer beauty with which Baba spared me the arduous and futile journey, through a series of well-orchestrated intuitions, reinforced my faith in His Godhood. I simultaneously felt comforted that His benevolent *nazar* was on me.

However, instead of pacifying me, this incident now created a still greater desire – to leave home and be with Him and serve Him. After much internal deliberation, and relying heavily on His forgiveness for disobeying His order, I finally wrote to Baba in November 1968, introducing myself and asking Him to accept me as His disciple and allow me to stay with Him forever. I was then just seventeen years old, and all this was done secretly without the knowledge of my family or anyone at the Centre.

I got a prompt reply through Baba's close disciple Eruch, which is reproduced here in part:

'My dear Cyrus,

In spite of restrictions on correspondence, Beloved Avatar Meher Baba heard your very loving letter, and He directs me to inform you that He wants you to live with your family and lead an honest and pure life and not neglect your studies. He wants you to remember Him wholeheartedly and as often as you can in the midst of your daily activities! Avatar Meher Baba wants you not to commit any sort of lustful action as long as you are not married. He wants you to lead a pure life. He wants you to face the world kindly and bravely, and shoulder the responsibility that might have

to be shouldered later on in your life. He sends you His Love and Blessing, and wants you to remain happy in the knowledge that those who love Him are dear to Him and close to Him ...'

That Beloved Baba actually heard my letter and took the trouble to dictate a reply, in spite of His failing health and being in strict seclusion, overwhelmed me and sealed my fate with Him forever. There was no looking back now.

Since then, my life's journey has never been alone. Baba has been my constant companion at each and every twist and turn of my life. With Baba's companionship, I feel I have been able to realign my priorities, get a sense of direction in my life, achieve a deeper understanding of why things happen the way they do, recognise the choices available to me in the moment to face up to the destiny that I have created through my own past karma, and handle the situation in the light of 'what would please Baba'. My goal is to remember Baba when I breathe my last, and I beseech Him to grant me this boon.

My observation over the last many years of conducting the Tuesday and Thursday meetings has been that the majority of newcomers who turn up at the Bombay Centre do so after reading Nan's book *Sounds of Silence*. The testimonies that we get to hear about their coming to Baba are so intriguing, that one cannot but marvel at the unfathomable ways Baba uses to bring each lovely soul into the orbit of His love. Their having reached Baba's *Darbar*, my role with these newcomers has been to help them focus all their love and attention on Baba alone because, finally, it is love that matters; Baba that matters.

Let us all pray to our Beloved Avatar Meher Baba to help us grow in His love and lead a life that will glorify and please Him.

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