



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