

New Homes, East and West: Meherazad and Myrtle Beach, 1946-48

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The focus of this year's conference, the years 1946-1948, includes Meher Baba's important shift in residence from Meherabad, the center of his work for more than twenty years, to a new site about twelve miles away, which he would name "Meherazad". At the same time, half a world away in America, Elizabeth Patterson and Norina Matchabelli were creating what would become Baba's enduring "home in the West" in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Thus, in this brief period, Baba established *two* new homes, one in the East and one in the West, which he developed simultaneously, though independently, to serve the evolving needs of his universal work.

As it turned out, Baba wished Elizabeth and Norina to be associated with the inception of *both* of these projects, and he called the two Western women back to India in the summer of 1947 to participate in his work at Meherazad. Others from the West are woven into the unfolding story of Meherazad, including Murshida Ivy Duce and her daughter Charmian, Delia DeLeon from England, and Jean Adriel from California. Indeed, the record of this period shows that Baba was fully engaged with his ongoing work in the West, even as he accelerated his work with *masts* in India during the tumultuous period of the end of British rule and the partition of the subcontinent.

In this presentation, I review Baba's shift in residence from a very broad perspective, situating it in the larger arc of his Avataric work. In this context, this brief period is revealed as a significant transition point during which, unbeknownst to all but him, Baba was bringing the work of his "Old Life" to a close and laying the groundwork for the dawn of his new spiritual age.

Pimpalgaon and Myrtle Beach

Kitty Davy observed in her memoirs that Baba's changes in residence often denoted major changes in the nature and focus of his Avataric work.¹ So it was with his gradual withdrawal from Meherabad in the mid-1940s. For twenty years, Meherabad had been Baba's primary ashram; it was the cradle of his Silence and the home of his major service projects, such as schools for children and health facilities for those in need. For the world, it was the site he had chosen for his tomb-shrine, destined to be the great center of pilgrimage for his lovers. "In the future, Meherabad will be like Jerusalem," Baba declared in 1930. "For spiritual work, it is the best possible place. It will always be a center for my work."²

By 1940, however, Baba had begun to talk about "setting up a home apart from Meherabad". Mani recalled that he even gave "clues" about the desired location: "[Baba] said he wanted a little hill next to it, he wanted water nearby, he wanted this and he wanted that. It was like a treasure hunt."³ The five-acre property near the Pimpalgaon reservoir that would become Meherazad was purchased at auction in 1940, but Baba did not begin to use it until 1944, when he brought five women and five men there for what would be a three-month stay. At that time there were more than seventy people living at Meherabad, and this stay at Pimpalgaon seemed like "just one more [temporary] place of residence for the mandali"⁴.

That was in April of 1944. In May of that year, the 500-acre Myrtle Beach property in America was deeded to Elizabeth Patterson. Here, too, Baba had given Elizabeth and Norina "clues" about what to look for: the site must have an equable climate, an ample water supply, it should be virgin land that had never been built upon, the soil should be tillable, and it should be "given from the heart." The oceanfront land given to Elizabeth by her father met all these conditions. In the first week of June 1944, Elizabeth, Norina, and a small group of helpers began the hard and tedious work of clearing out the underbrush and laying out paths for new roads, living what Elizabeth called their "forest life."

Links Between India and America

¹ Kitty Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, p. 308.

² *Lord Meher*, p. 1134. (All references to *Lord Meher* are to the current online edition at lordmeher.org)

³ Heather Nadel, *The Joyous Path*, Vol. 1, 391-2.

⁴ David Fenster, *Mehera-Meher*, Vol. 2, p. 247.

In the late 1940s, while Baba was constantly traveling for his *mast* contacts, development of the property at Pimpalgaon proceeded slowly and intermittently. The existing old cottage and outbuildings there were repaired and a small house was constructed for the women mandali. At the same time in America, Elizabeth and Norina found ways to build or acquire useable structures in Myrtle Beach despite a general scarcity of building materials and wartime restrictions that sharply limited new construction. They found ingenious ways to create harmonious, graceful rustic cabins out of military hutments left over from the war, transforming the residues of the war to serve fresh, new purposes (as Meher Baba had done in the '20s with the British military encampment left at Meherabad after World War I). Baba supervised this work in America closely from India using a map of the property that Elizabeth had sent him. Margaret Craske, who was staying with Baba at this time, was assigned to keep this map with her wherever she went, so that he could call for it at any time. Margaret recalled, "Baba would send for the map, examine it, and point with his slim forefinger along the edge of the lake, indicating spots suitable for cabins that would not destroy the primitive beauty of the forest. One morning after he had received a letter from Elizabeth making suggestions about the place, he showed his pleasure at her ideas and twice spelt out on the board, 'Elizabeth is unique.'"⁵

Norina, too, played a central role in Baba's work; indeed, Baba once referred to her as "the spiritual mother of the Western hemisphere." In my presentation at last year's conference, I reviewed how during the war years, Norina had served as a unique vessel for Meher Baba's work in America. Her unusual qualities of consciousness gave her the rare ability to receive what she called "thought transmissions" directly from Baba, during which her consciousness was overshadowed by Baba's, and he "spoke through her" with great authority to audiences across America. However, by 1947, the intensity and strain of this work had taken a great toll on Norina's physical health. Now in her late sixties, she was suffering increasingly from exhaustion, an enlarged heart, and high blood pressure. And when this intimate internal connection with Baba came to an end, Norina fell into a deep depression. She was so ill that her doctor advised her not to travel. Fortunately, she chose to follow Baba's orders rather than the doctor's, and so Norina and Elizabeth arrived in India in July 1947, joining Baba first at his *mast* ashram in Satara, and then moving with him to Pimpalgaon. Baba ordered Norina to rest for six months, and even put her on silence for forty days. Her health improved steadily. Norina and Elizabeth would remain in India with Baba for the next two years. In this way, the two "founding mothers" of Baba's "home in the

⁵ Margaret Craske, quoted by Kitty Davy in *Love Alone Prevails*, p. 717.

West” would be present as the Pimpalgaon property developed into Baba’s permanent home in the East. While in India, they kept in close touch with Darwin Shaw and others who had been invited by Baba to take up the work at Myrtle Beach in their absence.

The importance to Baba of a continuing personal link between India and America was underlined in mid-1948, when Elizabeth returned to America for several months on a business trip. At that time, Baba was involved in a major effort to distribute food and cloth to victims of a severe famine in rural India. Baba asked Elizabeth to let people in America interested in his work know of this effort so that more funds might be raised for famine relief in India. Baba stressed that these contributions must be made “from the heart”. Those who wished to contribute were asked to include with their donation a letter addressed to Baba stating that their contribution was “given with love”; Elizabeth was to carry the letters and donations back to India. Baba also instructed Elizabeth to tell the Americans that these contributions, in his words, “will strengthen the link between the United States and India, which is vital to the welfare of the world.”⁶

Later in 1948, Baba called two more Westerners to India, Delia DeLeon from England and Jean Adriel from America. They joined Norina and Elizabeth at Pimpalgaon to attend the formal inauguration of the new two-story house that would become Baba’s residence. The housewarming ceremony was held on August 27th, 1948, which was Krishna’s birthday that year. And it was only then, more than four years after their first stay there, that Baba named the property

⁶A circular that accompanied this appeal described Baba’s work of washing the feet of the hundreds of recipients and handing them a bundle of grain, one at a time, from morning till night in village after village. Adi K. Irani wrote:

“Baba's name is not revealed. People come simply to receive what they need. They are treated with the utmost kindness and sympathy. The humiliating aspect of receiving "charity" is wholly removed. They are made to feel that they are accepting gifts which they have a right to receive, and that the giver is honored by the giving. . . . A divine feeling permeates the whole atmosphere, and everyone is happy and gratified.”

To Adi’s account, Norina added:

“The giving of food and cloth to the poor, as performed by Meher Baba, not only elevates the depressed peoples, but brings about a speeding up of their spiritual unfoldment. When a Perfect Master performs this lowly act of washing people's feet, with His divine compassion for humanity, the result is a shortcut in evolution, which redeems and resurrects their lives. These poor were the same, fundamentally, as the average human being of today—some good, some bad, nearly all uncertain, and for the most part spiritually unawakened. The grace to meet Baba made the whole difference. We hope that it will be your good fortune to meet Baba when he comes again to the West.”

All quotes about the famine relief effort are taken from a letter from Malcolm Schloss, June 21, 1948, forwarded by Elizabeth to Jane Haynes in 1957. Jane Haynes, *Letters of Love*, pp. 14-17.

“Meherazad.” Baba continued to supervise all the details of daily life at his original center of Meherabad, which at that time had about seventy-five residents.⁷ But Meherazad now became his permanent home.

The Different Qualities of Meherabad and Meherazad

How did Baba’s work at these two locations differ? Eruch recalled Baba saying that his two homes were like his two eyes, meaning, “They exist independently of each other, yet they function jointly to create one image—the image of Him.”⁸

Meherabad, from the beginning, had always been a busy ashram community, a center for public service, and, with the completion of Baba’s tomb, a place of darshan, sahavas, and pilgrimage for his growing pool of lovers and devotees. Baba described his primary work there as forging canals and channels, cables and links through which his energy would flow outward into the world. It has been said that Meherabad “represents growth, dynamism, projects, and plans, . . . the bursting forth of activity.”⁹ Baba’s major activities at Meherabad were associated with the very public work of anchoring his message in the outer world.

Meherazad, sheltered by Seclusion Hill, was a quiet, peaceful “place apart”, where Baba lived quietly with only his closest and most trusted women and men disciples. Baba called it “a natural noise-proof abode”.¹⁰ Everything at Meherazad seems to be imbued with a shimmering stillness, even the ground beneath one’s feet. You may recall that in the early days at Meherazad, Baba and the women would collect the bright pebbles and geodes from Seclusion Hill and the surrounding fields to decorate the garden. When Mehera received a wheelbarrow as a Christmas gift from Kitty, the women would fill it each day with the sparkling rocks found on their excursions, which they then used to border the flowerbeds in Mehera’s garden. Mani recalls that almost every stone was touched and admired by Baba.

This story has a surprising sequel. In 1948, while Baba’s house was being built, the women had to shift their residence to Ahmednagar for several months. When they returned, all the lovely stones that had bordered the garden had disappeared! They were dismayed, since the stones had all been touched by Baba, many had been chosen by him, and they were all so beautiful. What had happened to them? Well, it turned out that the workmen, seeing the stones just lying there,

⁷ *Lord Meher*, p. 3188.

⁸ This quote is a paraphrase of Eruch. “A Master Plan for Meherazad”, *In His Service*, July 2005.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Lord Meher*, p. 2519.

had used them in building the foundation of the new house! Though the women were at first dismayed, they then realized that the very foundation of Baba's house is made of stones from Seclusion Hill, blessed by the Beloved's touch.

Indeed, the powerful atmosphere associated with Seclusion Hill seemed to permeate all the structures at Meherazad. Right from the beginning, Baba's focus at Meherazad was on *internal* dimensions of his work. It was here that Baba would carry out his major universal work in seclusion, the work that principally characterized the later part of his life.¹¹ As early as December 1947, Baba began to use Seclusion Hill for this purpose, bringing the *mast* Ali Shah to the hilltop for twelve days. In preparation, Dr. Donkin cut a trail up the hillside, and Padri built two small huts on the hill, one on the summit and another on a lower plateau, where Baba would sit with Ali Shah. Later, Baba had Padri turn these two cabins into a single cabin which Baba used for his *manonash* work, which he also chose to complete in the still environment of Meherazad.

The difference in emphasis at the two locations is further illustrated by the names Baba chose for them: "Meher-*abad*", an expansive term, means "Meher (or Compassion) is flourishing". "Meher-*azad*", by contrast, has more internal resonances; it means "Meher (or Compassion) is free."¹² In this regard, it is interesting to note that the first Western visitors Baba invited to Meherazad were Murshida Ivy Duce and her daughter Charmian, who came for five days in early January 1948. This was Murshida Duce's first meeting with Baba, though he assured her, "You have been with me since ages," and it marked the beginning of Baba's creation of a new lineage of sufism, emanating directly from him and reoriented for the coming age.¹³ Their meeting was in many ways deeply personal, a reunion of Master and disciple, for which Meherazad was the perfect setting. However, when Baba had completed his formal charter of guidance for Sufism Reoriented in 1952, he chose to sign it and set it in force at *Meherabad*; this seemed natural, as he intended the charter to be, in his words, "applicable to the whole Sufi world and . . . lasting in its effect and influence."¹⁴

¹¹ Perhaps the most well-known example of Baba's work in seclusion at Meherazad may be the forty-day period in 1949 that became known as the "Great Seclusion", which Baba carried out primarily inside the restored body of the old Blue Bus, which was modified for the purpose of this seclusion and brought to Meherazad. This seclusion was preparatory to the New Life. Much later, Baba revealed, "The work I have done in Meherazad during this seclusion, I have not done anywhere [else] in the world."

¹² This is the meaning in Urdu; in Persian, "Meherazad" means "Born of Meher, of the Sun." *Mehera-Meher*, Vol. 2, p.356.

¹³ Murshida Duce and Charmian visited Baba at Pimpalgaon (it was not yet named Meherazad) January 7-12, 1948. Of his Western disciples in India at the time, Elizabeth, Norina, and Dr. Donkin were staying with Baba there; Kitty and Rano were then living at Meherabad.

¹⁴ *Lord Meher*, p. 3111.

The Arc of His Work

In Baba's work, timing is always significant, and one may wonder why he chose to establish Meherazad in the late 1940s, at a time when he was constantly traveling throughout India, focused primarily on his work with *masts*. The demands of his work meant that during these years Baba rarely stayed in any one place for more than a few months. You will recall that though the property was purchased in 1940, Baba did not begin to use it until 1944, and he did not fully move in until August 1948. A year later, in 1949, he would dissolve everything and begin the journeys of the New Life.

Perhaps one clue to the timing of the opening of Meherazad can be found in a brief note in *Lord Meher* that informs us that by November of 1948, Baba had stopped reading anything, even the mail or newspapers. Personal letters and urgent telegrams—all were read out to him from then on.¹⁵ In this way, and at this time, Baba took another step along a long arc of work associated with the use of words and silence.

Simply put, words are a product of Falsehood. They are the counterfeit currency of the separative self, nothing more than little packets or pellets of ideational energy that stream forth in myriad ways from the limited mind. No matter how refined or carefully chosen they are, a stream of words can never capture, hold, and reflect the unitary flow of Truth. Words parse, describe, or explain, often with great detail and precision, but inevitably from the illusory, separative viewpoint of subject and object. Verbal expression is the false language of duality. Non-dual Truth is silent.

Over the course of his advent, Baba modeled the progressive, systematic restriction of the outward use of words. When he began his silence in 1925, he demonstrated that speaking was not necessary for his work. When, in 1927, he gave up writing except to sign his name, he demonstrated that writing was not necessary for his work. Now in 1948, he stopped what might be called the “interior stream” of words that one takes in by reading anything, a scribbled note, a book, even a billboard one passes by on the road. In addition to speech and writing, which are active, outward expressions of the mind, Baba now added reading, which is a “passive” impression on the mind, to further limit the distractions of the illusory world of falsehood. As Baba's work became broader and more forceful year after year, more fully engaged with Reality, it became less and less possible for him to work within the illusory, narrow, bounded confines of words, associated with the limited mind.

¹⁵ *Lord Meher*, p. 2684.

Within a year of giving up reading, Baba would enter his New Life, which was the prelude and necessary condition to *manonash*, the uprooting and annihilation of the false, limited mind from the template for the evolution of consciousness. And where would that monumental task be achieved? At the place of stillness and seclusion Baba had so carefully prepared on the eve of his New Life—Meherazad, where Meher became free!

“Mehera is Freed”

There is still another dimension of Meherazad to consider. When Baba formally inaugurated his new home in 1948, he made a word-play on the name “Meherazad”, saying not “Meher is free”, but “*Mehera is freed.*”¹⁶ Kitty Davy, recalling this, felt Baba meant that Mehera’s training was now complete. She said:

There was a big change in Meherazad. . . . I could feel the difference when I went to stay there. There were no rules. We got up when Baba wanted us to be ready for him. It was quite a different life than at Meherabad.

Only a few were called to live at Meherazad—those who were less moody, who needed less pampering, who knew how to stand on their own feet more—who didn't worry Baba with their little worries and troubles. Baba had no time now to worry about people's moods in the same way.

*Meherazad was more like a family home. It wasn't an ashram anymore; it was a home. Though we still played games and charades and had Christmas parties—I felt it was different. It was Mehera's home. Baba had trained Mehera up until then absolutely strictly. Then she became free. . . . Baba himself gave her more freedom. This house, for example.*¹⁶

Kitty is referring to what we now call “Baba’s house”. In a sense, it was “Mehera’s house”, for Baba had invited Mehera to design it, with the help of the women mandali, and they saw to every detail, including the design of the furniture, the closets, the height of the kitchen cupboards, the location of the lights, thinking only of Baba’s needs. When Elizabeth and Norina returned to America, they would build Baba’s house at the Myrtle Beach center with the same loving attention to every detail, their Beloved always in mind.

Mehera’s loving care can be seen everywhere at Meherazad, for Baba gave her a free hand in the organization and arrangement of life there and encouraged her efforts in a way that had not been possible at Meherabad. Goher recalled,

¹⁶ Kitty Davy, quoted in *Mehera-Meher*, Vol. 2, p. 356-7.

“Mehera felt that Meherazad was her own domain. At Meherabad, her life was always in one room. At Meherazad, she could make her garden, be outside more. She had the opportunity for closer contact with Baba. At Meherazad, Mehera felt she could look after each one. She had care and concern for us. . . . She was so tender and kind that she would notice if someone was uncomfortable.”¹⁷

The beauty we see and feel at Meherazad is an enduring expression of Mehera’s love for her Beloved. “She wanted everything to be beautiful for Baba and labored to create an oasis of beauty in the middle of a drought-stricken area.”¹⁸ “[Here], her love for him found its fullest and freest amplitude of expression: and the perfume of that love, like the fragrant neem and jasmine and frangipani that she helped to cultivate, permeates the place as a kind of timeless essence, reminding us all of the sweetness and immediacy of God’s presence in our every moment and breath.”¹⁹ Delia DeLeon observed, “It was lovely seeing Mehera in this special environment, because really this place became Mehera's own.”

Mehera’s Divine Role

This interplay between the Avatar and his most beloved Mehera has an even deeper significance. In Baba’s work, Mehera embodies all the forms of life and the feminine principle that governs the organization of form in Creation; Baba said she represented Creation itself. Thus when Baba made his play on words, *Mehera – azad*, Mehera is freed, he was describing the fulfillment of the central goal of his Universal Work, to free all the forms in Creation of limiting bindings so they might flower and become more divine. In Delia DeLeon’s words, “Mehera was the counterpart. She represented *maya*, and therefore it was as if *maya* was being purified.”²⁰ Baba’s work was designed to dissolve the bindings of the past and to release the innate light, purity, and beauty that always lay hidden at the heart of all the forms and is their true nature, and in this way, to divinize the Earth. This was the underlying purpose of the intense inner work Baba did in seclusion at Meherazad, the work that characterized the last two decades of his life. There can be no more sublime example of the fulfillment of his goal than the divine atmosphere of Meherazad, the labor of love of his beloved Mehera, whose garden is an earthly embodiment of the truth, love, purity, and beauty that are the essence of the higher nature and of Creation itself. When these conditions are maintained, a *sattvic* atmosphere is created that makes it possible for higher energy to descend

¹⁷ *Mehera-Meher*, Vol. 2, p. 330

¹⁸ “Tales from Meherazad”, *In His Service*, July 2005.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, “A Master Plan for Meherazad”.

²⁰ *Mehera-Meher*, Vol.2, p. 354.

and to be held on this plane of life. It is an atmosphere that will settle over the entire world in the coming spiritual age, the age of Meher Baba's manifestation.
