

Placing One's Hand on a Cloud: Meeting the Saheb-e-Zaman

by Khaled Al-Faqih

Last October, Khaled Al-Faqih told our group the fascinating and funny story of how he met Meher Baba at the East-West Gathering in 1962.

When I was growing up in a small mountain village in Lebanon, my mother told me that our faith, the Druze, longed for a wondrous Being: the Saheb-e-Zaman. "How would we know Him?" I asked her one day. She replied, "It is written that our prophet said that placing one's hand on His shoulder would be as placing one's hand on a cloud"

In 1945, my father Asad, a career diplomat in the service of the King of Saudi Arabia, established that nation's first embassy in Washington. Our family came to live there, down the street from the Duces, an executive of the Arabian-American Oil Company and his wife Ivy Oneita Duce, who became Aunt Ivy.

In 1958, when I was 16, I had the good fortune to move in with my sister Selma and her husband, Aneece Hasen, in Sulfur, a little town in south central Oklahoma. Selma and my older sister Aida had just returned from a place called Myrtle Beach. I heard Aunt Ivy's name again, and a new name: Meher Baba. Selma told me that Aida had told Meher Baba a "shaggy dog" joke one day in the Barn. Baba had liked the joke a lot.

While I was attending the University of Oklahoma, Aunt Ivy visited and became my Murshida. Soon thereafter she invited me to continue my studies in California. She became a familiar and trusted friend, who tried to get me grounded and connected to life, to "wake up" rather than "gripe" (I called it "commenting").

Then, in the fall of 1962, Murshida suddenly said, "Write your father, dear. We are going to India to see God!"



Khaled Al-Faqih

True Hospitality from the Ancient One

On the first day of the East-West Gathering, Baba had arranged to greet his female lovers in the morning and the men folk in the afternoon. We men stood in line up the stairs of the porch and into the hall at Guruprasad. I began to get really nervous. I leaned out of the line and saw a white sadra and a pink shoulder. I leaned a little further, and then suddenly Baba leaned way over to His left and smiled at me! My reaction was to jerk back into the line! He had caught me peeking! It was as if my hands had turned into giant basketball-sized mitts and embodied every aspect of self-consciousness and awkwardness. Every doubt

and negative thought about being with Baba came to the forefront of my consciousness. I was ready to flee when suddenly I was at the head of the line.

I stepped up and leaned over to embrace Baba. He gave me a warm hug and gestured back at Eruch, who was momentarily distracted by one of the staff. With His palm up, Baba was gesturing towards some cane-backed chairs. Eruch, who caught every intonation of Baba's said, "Please sit down and be comfortable." My confusion and self-consciousness dissolved. When He looked back at Eruch, and, looking at me, motioned towards the chairs, I felt the full meaning and awareness of being welcomed home — as if Meher Baba were saying, "Eruch! Pay attention! This is Khaled, the commentator! I have been waiting for him. I love him! Tell him to sit and be comfortable!"

There was also something about that embrace. I couldn't think about it right away; too much was happening too fast. But eventually it came back to me: I had placed my hands on a pink cloud. I remembered my mother's story about the Druze savior. The Sahib-e-Zaman, the Ancient One, was Meher Baba.

Career Counseling from God

Extraordinary days followed. In fact, at first, I kept looking around for the source of the light that bathed Baba. I thought it might be a spotlight.

There were two afternoons of rain. You may have heard how all the Western women were taken back into the mansion and dressed in makeshift Indian outfits. The second time it rained, Baba's fingers flickered like falling rain and He said, "God's Grace falling. All your sanskaras in this life (up to this moment) will be wiped out." Two thoughts came to me. One: get wet, boy! Two: Darn! If I had only known, I sure could have had a lot of fun in Berkeley!

Previously Murshida Duce had often looked at me with an arched eyebrow and an amused expression and said, "You can easily sit there and watch life go by dear, can't you?" Murshida was, of course, totally aware of my inherent love of relaxing and taking it all in. Hence, Murshida asked Baba if He would counsel three of her students about their life's work. He agreed to meet with us late one morning. We sat in an arc around Baba's feet. I sat at His right., Murshida was given a chair behind us, facing Baba.

Murshida said, "Baba, I have these three boys who do not know what work to do in this lifetime."

Baba looked at me quizzically. "What do you want to do?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Pick something," Baba said.

"Medicine?" I answered, as a question or a guess.

"Okay!" Baba said, much to my confusion, "Be a doctor!"

Then he turned and had similar conversation with my two companions. Afterwards Baba looked at me again. He pointed at His eyes with two of his long elegant fingers and then flicked them quickly at me; "My Nazar is on you!"

I was vaguely aware that He turned and repeated the gesture to my companions. I was overwhelmed. When Baba had pointed to His eyes, it seemed my whole being followed the gesture. I felt as if I would fall and tumble eternally into those lovely eyes.

Entertaining the Lord of "Disturbed Universes"

After Baba had given us our career guidance, I decided that we should put on a skit for him. My co-conspirators were Jimmy (Brynar) Mehl, Diane Cobb, whom we all called 3B (Meher Baba had once referred to her as Baba's Beloved Baby) and Murshida's daughter Charmian, who became M.C.

As part of the program, in keeping with the career advice I had received, I presented myself as a new graduate of the "Seven-hour Medical School and offered a free exam to Meher Baba, my first patient. I borrowed a stethoscope,

reflex hammer and one of Dr. Donkin's black bags.

Right off, I have to say that Meher Baba was the world's best and most friendly audience. He loved to laugh and was very sensitive to my stage nerves. At one point my internal critic got going: "What am I doing? This is not funny!" Holes were burning in the back of my neck. Baba looked over my right shoulder, frowned and quickly shook his finger "No!" Then He reached His hands forward to pinch my cheeks gently and pursed his lips in a kiss. As I leaned forward to embrace Him, I nearly lost my balance and almost wound up in Baba's lap. Ironic, I thought, if Baba's third serious accident were to happen when a guy he told to be a doctor crushed Him.

I diagnosed an enlarged heart! I looked in His ear and told him I saw many disturbed Universes, Baba

looked at me as if to say, "You don't know how many!"

Then I said, "Okay, open your mouth and say OMMM!"

Baba shook a finger back and forth and gestured, "No. First I will sleep for five hundred years, then I will say OMMM!"

At that point, I gave Him a prescription made up of all the foods that He had ever said He did not digest well: Grapes, walnuts, you name it, all were in the mix, which He was to place in a blender and eat a spoonful three times a day.

As I walked out of the hall, Baba called out, "Doctor, oh doctor. Don't worry, I will take this prescription three time a day if it doesn't put me to sleep!"

Confirmation for the Commentator

As this miraculous visit drew to a close, I was still in doubt



"Doctor Al-Faqih" checks Baba's pulse. Charmian is in the background.

C A L L E N D A R

Meetings are held Saturday nights at 7:30, unless otherwise specified. Doors open at 7 PM. Directions to the new center: From Hwy 80 in El Cerrito, take the Central exit east, toward the hills, cross San Pablo, go under the BART tracks to Richmond Ave. turn left, go a few blocks to Stockton (the first stop light), turn right at Stockton, go a couple of blocks, park on the street. The center is on the left side of the street, 6923 Stockton Ave. El Cerrito, CA. Phone: (510) 525-4779

September 3 - No Meeting, Labor Day Weekend

September 10, 6 PM - Remembering Eruch

We will have a potluck dinner at the Center followed by shared stories and a video. Bring your stories, pictures and remembrances of Eruch.

September 17, 7:30 PM - Baba Stories

An evening of telling and listening to stories related to Baba and spirituality. Ron Greenstein will facilitate.

September 24-25 - Urban Sahavas with Shireen Irani Bonner and her mother Freny Irani

Shireen Bonner is Meher Baba's niece, daughter of His brother Adi. Her stories are humorous, poignant, and priceless. Freny, too, tells special, first-hand stories of her life in the family of the Beloved.

Saturday, September 24, we will meet at the El Cerrito Center from 11 AM - 5 PM, with a lunch break.

Sunday, September 25, we will meet at the Talbot's, 721 Crossbrook Drive, Moraga, from 11 - 4 PM. Call (925) 376-4325 for directions. Bring potluck lunch.

Suggested donation: Full weekend (Sat and Sun), \$25 for adults, \$10 for ages 18 to 29. \$40 Maximum per family. Single day (Saturday or Sunday), \$15 for adults \$5 for ages 18 to 29. \$25 Maximum per family.

October 1 - No Meeting, Meherana Sahavas

October 9 (Sunday Morning) Sailing with Harold

Sailing in the Ocean of Love (er, the San Francisco Bay) with Meher Baba as the captain of our ship and Harold Jamison, his first mate. Space limited - RSVP to Harold by Friday October 7 at (510) 932-3656.

October 15, 7:30 PM - LeRoy Parker Sings the Blues: A New Life Benefit Concert for our Kitchen

Last year, LeRoy's concert brought in 50% of the funds needed to build our kitchen. With a good turnout tonight, we can complete the kitchen this year! LeRoy's prints will also be available for sale, and Janet White will provide refreshments. Suggested donation: \$15.00.

October 22-23 - Urban Sahavas with Henry Kashouty

Henry and his wife Kecha first met Baba at the Del Monico Hotel in 1956. They met Baba again in 1958 and again in 1962 at the East-West Gathering. Baba said to Henry, "Your connection with me is of a longer duration than you consciously realize. You are one of the fortunate ones." Come and hear Henry's story. We will meet at the same locations and times as the previous Urban Sahavas. Prices will also be the same.

October 29, 7:30 PM - Halloween-style Karaoke

Get your groove on with other Baba lovers in a cabaret atmosphere. Come dressed as your favorite singer, mandali member, or mast...if you dare.

November 5, 7 PM - Charles Gibson in Concert

Charles will rock our Center with his powerful, earthy voice. This will be a general fundraiser for our group. Suggested donation is \$15.00.

November 12, 7:30 PM - Baba's Work in Assisi

Alisa Dreyfuss will share slides and stories of her recent visit to Assisi, including slides of Baba's Cave.

November 19, 6:30 PM - Remembering Mani

Come for Indian dinner, followed by a video of Mani, at the Stovalls' home, 869 Appaloosa Dr., Walnut Creek. Please bring dessert or drinks. RSVP to (925) 938-2126.

Nov 26 - No Meeting, Happy Thanksgiving!

DANNY NEWS - WORLDWIDE

Anyone on our e-mail list has heard the story of young Danny Maguire's accident last July in Los Angeles. Danny sustained head injuries resulting in a coma, and is now recovering. A phenomenal world-wide outpouring of prayers and love for him is coming from far beyond the Meher Baba community. Bhau Kalchuri told his parents Jeff and Lynn to "ask ALL to PRAY." And they have! Every continent in the world is represented in the prayer circle.

Danny's little hospital-mate, 6-year old Jaylin Carter, has been included in the prayers. Danny and Jaylin have been remembered far and wide—at Baba's Samadhi, at a gathering of 50,000 Pakistani Muslims, at a Mayan ancestral shrine in the mountains of Guatemala, at a research center in Antarctica... Jeff calls this experience an "adventure" in sharing of faith. This heartfelt story, with all updates and letters from around the world, can be read at the L.A. Center's website: <http://p217.ezboard.com/fmeherabodefrm7>.

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about my future. It had been decided so quickly. Baba did not give me a chance to express any of my carefully thought-out complications to every possible career.

I complained to my confidante, Charmian, "Baba knew that my mother always wanted me to be a doctor. I am not interested in medicine! He must have told me to do it because he did not want to upset my parents." Charmian grabbed me by the arm and said, "Let's go ask Him!" Stunned, I wavered, "No, no, Baba said we had to go home now. Wait! I'll do it. No, let's not!"

My pleas fell on deaf ears, and I seemed totally helpless in her firm grip. Our last morning meeting with Baba was over. He had said His farewells and told us to go home, taking Him with us. Charmy and I approached Baba, who was talking to one of His "sahas-wallas." While we were waiting for Baba to finish His conversation with His worker, I kept trying to get Charmian to change her mind.

"Just shut up, dear, and look at Him," she said, "You may not get another chance."

Baba looked over the man's shoulder at us in an apparent frown. When He finished His answer to the worker, He motioned us closer and asked what was up.

"Baba dear," said Charmian, still clasping the now mortified commentator by the hand, "Khaled was worried that you may have told him to be a doctor because his mother wished him to be one and not because you did."

"No, no, I wish you to be a doctor. I wish it. Will you do it?" said Baba.

"Yes Baba."

"Good, now go," He gestured, literally shooing us out with his hands.

Like most of those attending the Gathering, I never saw Him again. Yet I knew forever that I had received the glance, the touch, the embrace, the advice and the laugh of the Saheb-e-Zaman. And thanks to Charmian, I had one last look at His radiant face.



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LOCAL MEETINGS

Lafayette - Sunday Afternoons

Monthly meeting at the home of Kirk and Marlene Allen. Please call to confirm. (925)-284-4066.

Los Gatos - Sunday Evenings - 8:00 PM

Arti, singing and readings at the home of Clint and Sharon Snyder. Call them at (408) 395-6865, or Betty Lowman at (650) 323-1900.

Petaluma - Sunday Mornings - 11:00 AM

Arti, readings and fellowship. Contact Hermann or Jeanette Loew at (707) 778-1195. Please call ahead.

Sacramento - Several Gatherings Each Month

Times and locations vary. Contact Mike and Jean Ross, (916) 359-2954 or Cheryl Johnson (559) 312-3751 for details. See more info. on the web: www.garlic.com/~cdjohnso/SacMeher Baba

FOR ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER CHANGES:

e-mail: amba42@yahoo.com call: (510) 525-4779
write: **MBCNC 6923 Stockton Ave. El Cerrito, CA 94530**

To receive e-mail updates from the Center,
send an e-mail to: elist@MeherBabaMeherBaba.org

Our Center's Web Site: Program information and more!
www.MeherBabaMeherBaba.org

THE TRUST

All who wish to share in the commitment laid down by Meher Baba through the Trust should contact Jack Mormon, P.O. Box 70383, Richmond, CA 94807-0383.

MEHER BABA INFORMATION

For introductory information about Avatar Meher Baba, e-mail MeherBabal@aol.com, or write to P.O. Box 1101, Berkeley, CA 94701. See our online catalog of books and other materials at www.MeherBabalInformation.org.

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