

The East-West Gathering of 1962

by Herman Alvarado

In earlier editions of the Quarterly, Herman Alvarado told the story of his family's first meeting with Meher Baba in San Francisco in 1956, and of their time with Him at Myrtle Beach in 1958. His experiences with Baba outside the U.S. came later. Herman now tells about his time with Baba at the East-West Gathering in Poona, India, 1962.

“Allow me to describe those close moments with Him. I don't want to overlook the Mandali and friends who gave me a hand to secure interviews (sometimes almost impossible to do), and who were involved with establishing my inner connection with Him. I give them my cordial gratitude posthumously.

Not having any expertise in writing, it is extremely hard for me to convey in words what my heart is wishing to relate. So please join me with kindness and tolerance as I recall those times.

My first visit to Baba in India was during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when the East-West Gathering took place in Poona. I was there with a Sufi group which included my good friend and mentor Joseph Harb. Originally from Lebanon, he was of Druze tradition. He was a lover of God, like Kahlil Gibran. Joseph was also well-versed in the Sufi Universalism of Ibn Arabi, a scholar and mystic born in Andalusia, Spain in the 6th century.

We were staying at the Napier hotel, a relic of British Colonial India. One morning, while I was waiting in the garden and having a cup of chai, to my enjoyment, I suddenly saw a free show. Many mynah birds were making all sorts of noises, and competing for the space on top of the roof, over our rooms. Another gang of ravens was chasing a poor squirrel carrying a nut in his mouth. In the long run, they succeeded in stealing his nut, as one of the birds took a dive at the rear of the frantic squirrel, and he finally dropped the nut. That was what I call a real rip-off!

In the street in front of the hotel garden and entrance, all kinds of vendors and peddlers were trying to sell me something. One of them impressed me with his courage.

He was playing a flute next to a basket of cobras, trying to bring them out solely with the charm of his music. Another was a juggler throwing his bottles up in the air and catching them in orderly sequence — all this for the sake of one rupee coin.

Such was the flavor of days in Poona. Every morning, Adi K. Irani or Mino K. Karas came to the hotel with a bus and took our group, including Filis Frederick and Adele Wolkin, to Guruprasad for the daily programs there. Hundreds of people gathered under the pandals (canopies) to get drenched with Baba's presence and, sometimes, with a heavy rain!

Many people have seen the films, videos and updated pictures of this Sahavas, and have seen what I cannot describe. I can only say that my personal experience was almost transcendental. Especially when Darwin Shaw read Baba's message entitled “My Dear Children,” I was infused with such a current of empathy that it made me feel like I was floating on air. And when Harry Kenmore recited *The Prayer of Repentance*, my whole body resonated with the roar of his vibrant voice. Those were days when everyone enjoyed the spiritual atmosphere prevailing there. The Quawalli music, pantomimes, discourses and personal prasad from the Beloved made the atmosphere very exhilarating during the entire time of the Sahavas.

Then came the time to line up for His Darshan. The line was long, and there was a feeling of thrilling expectation throughout the crowd as the various groups waited for their moment. Some were expecting material or spiritual rewards, while others were there just for the curiosity of the event. I noticed a very colorful group of women dressed in different saris, trying to please Baba with their flowers



Meher Baba in His seat at the East-West Gathering.

and garlands. Also, there were others carrying coconuts to be broken near His feet, perhaps to gain His blessings.

Then I heard a voice mention my name, telling me it was my turn to walk to Baba's dais. My heart was pounding in the excitement of the moment, until I knelt down and touched His feet with my hands and forehead. I had embraced Baba on previous occasions when He came to San Francisco, but this time I felt He was more than a Perfect Master. Was He the Avatar of the time, as he claimed to be, or just a saintly, spiritual man like the Pope? Somehow, in my spellbound moment I forgot everything and decided to kiss His feet. And in that instant, like a flash connection, I felt I was turning a key that would open the doors of my locked soul.

Suddenly, a hand touched my shoulder and a voice told me to move on. But that moment, when I kissed Baba's feet, has endured for many years. Now, in my old age and through the ups and downs we all face in our lives, that moment has always remained like a beacon, or better yet, like an ancient hymn, silently giving me an awareness for the purpose and meaning of my life.

The meeting had been long and I stayed longer, chatting with new friends, reflecting on the importance of what had taken place. By the time I said good-night, got a rickshaw, and returned to the hotel, the stars were already showing their magnificent splendor.

During that evening, before I went to bed, I thanked God for the splendor of the night and all that had transpired during the day. Soon my subconscious mind brought me into a dream's delight. I was dreaming and remembering an incident long-forgotten. It took place when, as a boy of twelve, I was attending Christmas church services. I was then coming home during another splendid night, and, looking at the stars, I asked God why He did not let me meet Him personally, like the three Wise Magi the priest had spoken about during his sermon. He said they had a guiding star directing them to Jesus, in one of Bethlehem's stables.

In my heart, for many years I searched for that magical guiding star in churches and temples and, consequently, I went through many unexpected disappointments. Some gave me a temporal and dim reflection of spiritual progress, but not the kind of light I was expecting in my thirsty soul. I wanted to drink the elixir of life and death, and moreover, find the intrinsic meaning of it all.

Up to the time of the 1962 Sahavas, I had learned in reading the discourses of Baba, of an inner spiritual path toward God realization. I had the conceptual understanding of certain laws governing all existence, order and purpose, such as the effect of one's actions that determine one's destiny (karma). But I was not a sinless fellow, nor have

I ever been one. For sure, Saint Peter would not open the gates of heaven if I knocked at them. I had to look for another alternative, which I did and found through my karmic destiny, when for the first time I entered inside the Sufi Center in San Francisco in 1945.



Meher Baba with His lovers at the East-West Gathering.

The picture of Baba hanging on the wall more than intrigued me, it fascinated me. When I looked at it, my inner self told me I had come home. Let me repeat the same words of that great Greek mathematician Archimedes, when he discovered the law of buoyancy. "Eureka, Eureka!" (I have found it, I have found it!)

From that time on, my whole body has resonated on a higher

key of vibrations, if love can be measured that way. And no wonder. The picture was taken during an intense period of Baba's seclusion at Meherabad in 1941, when the world was at war, and hatred was everywhere. Besides being so majestic and impressive, the picture's pervading love was so permeated with the sadness and suffering of those times. I ought to know; I am a veteran of that war.

Later, before I went to India, I asked my brother to paint a portrait of Baba during the time of His seclusion. My brother was a painter. He never saw Baba, but without hesitation, he did it from my descriptions, plus an old newspaper clipping I sent him. The face of Baba in his painting shows so much suffering over the whole world.

In 1962, when Baba invited His western lovers to attend the East-West Gathering (Sahavas) in Poona, India, I naturally jumped onto the bandwagon. Our airplane landed in Hong Kong for refueling, and an overnight stay, departing for India the next morning. That was the beginning of an Odyssey of many rewarding moments, sometimes with happiness and sometimes with sadness; but nonetheless, it was my Odyssey of love, with all the corresponding emotions.

'Tomorrow, who knows? Only He knows what is best for all of us.' Those were my words back in 1962, when the Sahavas was over. After packing my suitcase and leaving the hotel for our return trip, I forgot my small transistor radio still playing in the corner of the room. A bellboy called me and told me about the radio, and when I came back to pick it up, it was playing a song by Tony Bennett, *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*. Tears of joy and sadness came to my eyes. I had also left my heart in San Francisco with my wife and two daughters there.

But now I was leaving more than my heart in Poona; I was leaving part of my soul! And that was a very strong reason to come back again.

For the time being, let me close my story now, with a loud Jai Baba to all His lovers. May the peace and love of Baba abide always in you." Herman Alvarado

C A L E N D A R

PLEASE NOTE: For this quarter, most meetings will be held on Sunday afternoons from 3-5 PM. Directions to our 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

Saturday, December 2, 7:30 PM - The 50th Anniversary of Meher Baba's Accident in Satara

Meher Baba explained that His automobile accident in Satara, India, and the one in America four years earlier, symbolized His bringing together the west and the east by shattering first the left and then the right side of His body. He said that this gross exchange in His own body would "result in benefit to the whole world." He also said that during this advent it was necessary for the Avatar to undergo this Self-sacrifice. Tonight we will explore this mysterious sacrifice of suffering. Meher Baba said about these accidents, "Man unknowingly suffers for God, and God knowingly suffers for man." Ben Leet will host.

Sunday, December 10, 3-6 PM - Holiday Party

Bring yummy holiday food to share, sweet or substantial, just like Baba's love for us. This will be the fourth year of this well-attended, festive get-together.

Sunday, December 17, 3-5 PM - Mehera's Birthday

Meher Baba said about Mehera, "She is my very breath, without which I cannot live." Let us get together this afternoon for a grand tea to celebrate her birthday and to share stories of her exquisite life as the Beloved of the Beloved. Please bring tea treats to share.

Christmas and New Year Holidays - No meetings

Sunday, January 7, 3-5 PM - Practical Spirituality

What did Meher Baba say about spirituality in daily life? How do you know when you are making progress? We will explore these topics with host Brian Drygas.

Saturday, January 13, 7:30-9 PM - Cindy Lowe

Cindy Lowe has written some of the all-time great songs honoring Meher Baba and His mandali. Come to hear some of your old favorites, as well as newer compositions to the Beloved.

Sunday, January 14, 3-5 PM - Beyond Programs: Serving Our Master — a Brainstorming Evening

How can we offer a greater scope for participation

with one another? Looking beyond simply receiving from the programs that have been available, to what we can each contribute to our family of Baba lovers. Don't be shy — bring your ideas for how to spark new enthusiasm and be open to the ideas of others. Hosted by Ron Greenstein.

Sunday, January 21, 3-5 PM - Mehera's Piano

At Meheru's request, Hermann Loew traveled for several years to Meherabad during the hot summer months to work on the restoration of Mehera's piano. He will share the story and pictures of this labor of love.

Sunday, January 28, 5-7 PM Amartithi Sharing

Share your pictures, slides, experiences and remembrances of Amartithi's past. Bring potluck dinner to share. This is an encore of a well-attended, jubilant event two years ago.

Tuesday, January 30, 8-11 PM - Amartithi

On Amartithi we remember Meher Baba's departure from His physical body in 1969. We will have readings and a viewing of the interment film, followed by silence from 10:30 to 10:45 PM to coordinate with Baba's lovers observing silence on Meherabad Hill. The Center will open at 8:00 PM.

Sunday, February 4, 3-5: Meher Baba Book Club

Join us in discussing Arnavaz's Book *Gift of God*. Please feel free to come even if you haven't read the book in years, or have never read it.

Saturday, February 10, 12-5: Open House and Valentine Card-Making with the Local Community

This will be the third year of this fun event with our local neighbors, who wander in to make Valentines and then unknowingly get a glimpse of His Love.

Sunday, February 11, 3-5, Valentines for Baba

Valentine-making in a more intimate setting (open house is only on the day before). Share Baba thoughts and feelings while creating your beautiful valentines.

Presidents' Day Weekend: No meeting

Saturday, February 24, 12-4 PM - Baba's Birthday

Come and celebrate this special event with your Baba community. Bring friends, family and anyone interested in knowing more about Meher Baba. We'll have great food, music, entertainment and who-knows-what? Are you interested in helping to plan the party? Please contact dawndolan@neteze.com or (707) 795-6134.

Meher Baba Center of Northern California, Inc.

President, Dawn Dolan; Vice President, Ann Holm; Secretary, Fred White; Treasurer, Cheryl La Rosa Longo

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Notes from the Board President

We need assistance in the following areas:

- Committee members are needed to plan for Baba's 113th birthday celebration on Sunday, February 25.
- The fundraising committee needs more members.
- A few volunteers are needed to help out with minding the Center bookstore for a few events.
- We also need a person to oversee the bookstore. Volunteers staff the bookstore for various events, but we need someone to be responsible for checking over the inventory, placing orders and handling finances.

If you can help, please contact dawndolan@neteze.com or (707) 795-6134. We welcome your good energy!

God Speaks Reading Group Resumes

By popular request, our *God Speaks* reading and discussion circle will reassemble at 7:15 PM on the first and third Monday of each month, beginning on December 4, at the El Cerrito Center. Please bring your copy of *God Speaks*. We will begin by reading the supplement.

"I am the Ocean..."

An ocean-themed quilt is about to materialize! We have received a large donation of lovely fabric scraps, so Janet White is coordinating the creation of an ocean-themed quilt to be raffled to benefit our Center's Break Room fund. If you want to make a quilt square, or just see the beautiful array of fabrics, call Janet at (510) 843-4417.

Post script to Herman Alvarado's article, from page 2

"P.S. It has been a pleasure to share my experiences with lovers and non-lovers of Baba. But these experiences do not make me better spiritually than the millions who never met Him physically. My sole purpose is, and has been, to plant a seed of hope and love for His awakening humanity."



All photos courtesy of Lawrence Reiter (Hermes).

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 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: mbe3@sbcglobal.net 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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