

I am equally approachable to one and all, big and small.
To saints who rise and sinners who fall,
through all the various Paths that give the Divine Call.
I am approachable alike to saints whom I adore
and to sinners whom I am for,
and equally through Sufism, Vedantism, Christianity
or Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, and other "isms"
of any kind and also directly through
no medium of "isms" at all.

Meher Baba

As Only God Can Love, Darwin Shaw, pg.121

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Meher Baba Center of Northern California

INsights

Community Newsletter

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calendar@meherbabameherbaba.org

Check out the newly updated website, thanks to Jeanne Mojé MacDonald (first link above).

Newsletter wallas:
Ben Leet, Lisa Greenstein, Cherri Nelson,
Alan Talbot & Karen Talbot

Dear Reader

In this issue we have commentary on the Northern California group's Annual General Meeting, June 16. All of those who attended were invited to share their experience of the meeting for this article. While everyone agreed on the tone of the meeting, the perceptions of the discussion of a controversial issue varied quite a bit.

Ron Greenstein reviews Steve Klein's new book of poetry, *Fire and Smoke*, and selects some of his favorite poems to share with you.

Long time board member and past board president, Billy Baum, was recently interviewed about his views on Behaviorism, Spirituality, and Meher Baba.

 Baba long hair

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Click the link below and click on the > icon to hear the interview.

[Link for interview with Billy](#)

This summer Susie & Kirk Davidson and Andrew Talbot & Jackie Erbe were blessed with baby boys: Reighton Davidson and Aldon Michael Erbe Talbot. Jai Baba!

Long time friend in Baba, Joy Mauzey, passed away on July 5. We send our condolences to Cliff and all of her family.

-Lisa

"This incredible lady, who was like a second mom to me, welcomed me into her family when I moved here from Hawaii. She will be remembered for her kindness and sweetness. Joy had a remarkable ability to remain cheerful and poised in the face of adversity; this was an inspiration to all who knew her. She truly lived up to her name and will be dearly missed." - Annie Stovall

 Bird on Baba photo

photo courtesy of Ellen Peskin Baum

This is a photo taken just before the Community Strengthening June meeting commenced. A baby dove flew into the Center, upstairs to the bookstore, and perched on Baba's photo!

The Poetry of Steve Klein

By Ron Greenstein

While sitting in an audience of Baba-lovers during a program in Meherazad Garden in 1979, I was introduced to the poetry of Steve Klein. One fellow read a selection from Steve's first published collection, *Praise in Complaint*, as his contribution to the program. I resolved then and there to acquire my own copy of this book.

There are many attributes of these poems that appeal to me. The poet employs a variety of styles that include rhymed couplets, prose-like narration, and blank verse. He adopts a fascinating assortment of aspirants and lovers of God, who tell their own story and experience great blessings and great tests on their path. With this breadth of styles and voices, the collection seems more like an anthology than the poetic expressions of one individual. The poems are beautifully composed, but never at the expense of the accessibility of their meanings and messages. The poems seem to uncover layers of truth that lay just below the surface of consciousness -- at least this was my experience. They are revelations that come across as friendly reminders.

It was not too long after that I was thrilled to discover that Steve had published a second collection, *O Beloved*. Even more thrilling was the recognition that this collection was at least equal to *Praise in Complaint* in the qualities that I so much appreciated and maybe even more lovable. To this day, I try to have these two books accessible for sharing, as I often recall the themes of certain favorites when that theme arises in a conversation.

Years later, on pilgrimage I met up with Steve. I told him that I was a big fan of his poetry, and got him to sign my two well worn collections that I had taken with me. I was disappointed to hear that he had not been moved to write much poetry since the last publication. He had, instead, been writing introductions and offering editorial assistance for other Baba publications by the Mandali and other Baba-lovers who sought his expertise. (You may be familiar with Steve's series of essays that appear on the Sheriar Foundation web site under the title, "All Baba Things Considered.")

I have chosen to write about these two "old" books at this time, for the purpose of indicating why I was so excited to see a new collection of Steve's poetry, *Fire and Smoke*, lying among the books at our local Baba bookstore's display at Baba's birthday celebration.

What a gift! Thank you, Baba! Of course, I became the happy owner of the new work. Delving into these new offerings, and wanting to savor them, I made it a point to take my time by limiting myself to reading only a few per session. The experience was like getting back together with old friends to share their new experiences. I look forward to sharing -- and wearing out! -- this book, as I have Steve's others.

I wholeheartedly recommend all three of these poetry collections. To close, I will offer three tastes from *Fire and Smoke*:

#54

Oh darling, I am sorry if I have embarrassed you. But what can I do? Whenever I see you, I forget myself. How can I pay heed to the opinions of others when all but you disappear and in your eyes I see this message, "O proud stiff backed fool, why do you value your self esteem so? Only madmen, lovers and children can have my embrace."

#12

Never wait for certainty.
Plunge ahead
with His name
on your lips
and hope for the best.
You cannot lose.
Either you will blunder on,
only to discover,
to your immense surprise and delight,
that He is well pleased
with what you have done,
or you will come
to the realization,
invariably painful,
that you have done exactly
what you should not have done.
But that is no reason to hesitate,

for even this
is gain.
The lesson learned
will be indelibly etched
on your heart's commandments.
You will not make
that mistake again.

#22

Whatever you say about spirituality, the opposite is
equally true.
What one Master forbids you doing, another will command you to do.

The key to understanding this riddle lies not in analyzing
external behavior,
But in deciding whether you're interested in finding a
teacher or a savior.

For there is much that can be understood -- and many who are eager to teach.
But spirituality itself will always lie just beyond the
intellect's reach.

Because no matter how much you know, there will always be a variance
Between your knowledge of a thing and its actual experience.

Spirituality consists in being spiritual and not just
reading about it.
Unless you become the Truth, the mind will always find
reasons to doubt it.

Obviously, the only way to become Truth is to stop being what you are now --
a lie.
All the different ways of the Masters are merely techniques to eliminate the I.

Knowing the details of the operation will not help you
save your life.
For that, there is only one thing you can do -- lay
yourself open to the knife.

Fire and Smoke can be found at Sheriar Press books and Baba books in Los
Angeles. Our bookstore has more copies on order.

June 2012 Annual General Meeting Commentary

It seemed to me that AGM this year showed the fruit of our Community
Building work, in and since the workshop with Daniel Stone. I came away from
it with a lovely feeling of having been in a group of people who listened to one
another and responded to what they heard. There was a feeling of respect and
even tenderness, in the way that people related to one another.

The group attending was larger than last year, and there was active
participation throughout the meeting. Reports were given on Finances,
Programs, the Website and Online Presence and the Bookstore. There were
questions and contributions to the discussion from almost everyone present.

The minutes of the meeting are being shared elsewhere, so I will just speak to one part of the meeting where I felt the new spirit was particularly evident.

There was a point of potential disagreement regarding a workshop that was proposed to be held at the Center. Some felt that it was not primarily focused on Baba and, therefore, should be held elsewhere. I found it wonderful to watch the give and take as this was discussed. There was a feeling of a loving whole that enveloped the entire group, which was maintained throughout. The discussion ebbed and flowed, many differing viewpoints were shared, and there was a fluid movement to an agreement that this time the workshop would be held elsewhere. Looking back at the notes from Daniel's workshop it seems that I was witnessing exactly the process and sense of community aimed for in his work.

Ellen Van Allen

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I would just like to register that we had a reasonable discussion of what sorts of gatherings in the Center should be appropriate. No decision to change the current policy was taken, but everyone who had a view expressed it, and the views varied, but we all heard one another.

Jai Baba,
Billy Baum

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I was surprised that my offer to run a RUH Healing Workshop for Baba Lovers at the Center raised a lot of concerns. On balance, I believe it is a good thing that it did. Apparently, we, as a community, need to have a dialogue about how we use our center and what kinds of events are appropriate. Our opinions appear to differ widely.

Anne Speirs

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I felt uplifted by the tone of kindness during the AGM this year. I was especially happy about this because I had girded myself for the controversy over whether the center would sponsor an RUH workshop. This was last on the agenda and not a lot of time was left for a long discussion.

Billy first read the Center's policy, which has been posted there for many years.

The primary focus for events held at the Center must be on Meher Baba.

Other groups have been permitted to use the Center in the past under these conditions.

- 1) They may not promote another master.**
- 2) The group must carry their own liability.**
- 3) They must do their own advertising.**

Most everyone gave their personal viewpoints without attacking, defending, or expressing enmity. There were a number of people who strongly expressed their preference for events held at the Center to stay directly focused on Baba and felt the workshop would be inappropriate. Others did not feel the workshop would take the focus away from Baba. I appreciated Billy's query as to whether anyone had actually read the book, *Walking with God*, by James Keeley, which explains RUH.

Since Anne withdrew her offer early on in the discussion and the meeting time ran out, there was no consensus reached, nor was a vote taken, as it was not needed. I don't think the discussion was tabled, but perhaps a future general meeting could take up clarifying what the community means by primary focus on Meher Baba. I wonder if our community building and strengthening meetings or the non-violent communication workshop we sponsored would pass the standard.

Lisa Greenstein

~~~~~

Jai Baba,

I thought one of the best things about the AGM was that it was harmonious and civil, especially with respect to the somewhat controversial issue of whether our group would sponsor Ann's RUH spiritual counseling workshop. However, I do have some quibbles with the way that the provisional version of the minutes describe that discussion. For instance, the following passage is included as if it effectively contradicts the central problem that makes the proposed workshop controversial and contrary to our long-established policy: "Ann was asked if she thought another master was involved and she stated that James Keeley is a Sufi but wanted to develop a method that was independent of Sufism, open to all faiths."

It seems to me that if that paragraph were included, there should also be more detail and accurate paraphrase of the specific objections that various people had to the sponsorship of the workshop. In my view, the central issue that all the objections to the sponsorship had in common is that the workshop would involve a form of "spiritual counseling" that is not based upon either Meher Baba's recommended form of spiritual practice or the intimate mandali's interpretations of Baba's training practices. Rather it would be based upon spiritual beliefs and practices that originated in a specific form of Sufism as interpreted by James Keeley, and Ann Speirs as a student in his professional spiritual counseling training program.

It was uncontested at the meeting that the RUH training workshop embodies a form of spiritual counseling and training that originated in a particular form of Sufism rather than in Meher Baba's own form of spiritual training, belief, and practice. Both Ann's own professional website --- in which she describes herself as a "spiritual counselor" who uses the RUH training as the basis for the individual and group counseling that she wishes to offer to us in the proposed workshop --- as well as Keeley's book, clearly establish the accuracy of this central problem that was articulated in various ways by various people. Ann's statement didn't really address that central issue. From the point of view of this central problem, it doesn't really matter if James Keeley, or Ann herself in her application of Keeley's spiritual framework, is viewed as a spiritual master, a spiritual teacher, or a spiritual counselor. That is largely a semantic rather than a substantive question. Nor is it relevant to this central problem that the RUH training is open to people from a variety of religious or spiritual traditions. So are many postmodern or new age spiritual training programs such as Transcendental Meditation. (Or our own Meher Baba tradition, for that matter.) Neither of these factors solve the central problem that Ann's proposed spiritual training workshop is based upon spiritual practices and beliefs that were not based upon Meher Baba's practices and beliefs, which our by-laws and traditions define as the sole spiritual focus of our sponsored meetings. Finally, I am uncomfortable with this last summary statement re: Ann's workshop:

"It was suggested that, as there was no agreement in the room and Ann had offered to hold this workshop elsewhere, the group agreed that that would be

best and move on. This issue was tabled for further discussion at a later date." First of all, it seems to me there was general agreement that our group would not sponsor Ann's workshop and that if she went ahead with it she would do so under private auspices and not at our center. Given that, I don't remember that anything was said about the group's sponsorship of Ann's workshop being tabled for further discussion at a later date. Actually, given that we had reached agreement with Ann that she would conduct it privately at a private site if she decided to go ahead with, it would have made no sense to table that issue for discussion at a later date.

Additionally, to do so would have raised the following issue under our bylaws: Since sponsorship of a workshop such as Ann's would arguably involve a conflict with our long established official policy, it could only be meaningfully discussed and voted on at a special or an annual general meeting wherein the members would have been notified about that topic in writing six weeks in advance of the meeting. Since we've already discussed the issue at an AGM and reached a resolution of the issue without having to go through that formal process, it would seem that there would have been no reason to table it for further discussion through such a formal process. Certainly any further discussion at a board meeting, for instance, should involve formal notification of the membership that such a discussion would be held, and should be based upon the understanding that the board could not itself change our long-standing policy on this issue, which could only be brought about by an AGM or Special General Meeting wherein the membership would have been notified of that topic in writing six weeks in advance.

Dick Anthony

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

This year's AGM had a sizable attendance. We spoke about the successes of the past year, from becoming a more paperless organization with a newly hosted site and processing systems, a revitalized service project committee, insightful Urban Sahavas events with Ward Parks and others, among many other fun events that brought us together as a community.

We discussed how we are currently breaking even with our operating budget and how we may begin fundraising for and hopefully increase interest in utilizing our Center for a wider range of sponsored events. We briefly entertained the idea of allowing events, that some may not see as directly related to Baba, occur on Center property, e.g. Ann Speirs' proposed workshop. The topic was tabled until such time as adequate notice could be given to the community about this possibly being accepted. There was no consensus made at that time.

In summary, there was a true sense of Baba at work whittling away at our egos, pushing us to be more tolerant and accepting of others. I am excited to see what the next year brings.

Jai Meher Baba!!!

Jess Maron

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The new controversy flamed by Msr. Anthony's articulate positioning of the issue at hand drew me like a moth to the flame....and so, there I was amongst you all again, to discover how this would play out and, having never met Mdme. Speirs nor had any acquaintance whatsoever with James Keeley, *Walking With God* and RUH Healing.....

I witnessed Speirs as centered and balanced, in a state of equipoise, while the barbs were tossed left and right. Intuiting the outcome, she had already moved on. So I was one of just a handful attending Ann's first RUH Healing Workshop 6/16/12 at 14th and Franklin, Oakland. After the AGM Meeting, I logged on to Amazon, ordered two used copies of *Walking With God* and received one in time to read chapter one before 6/16.....

I was totally blown away by my direct experience of self and Baba that day and immediately positioned myself to become the 11th of 12 participants in the yr. long training program at the Farm of Peace, an intentional Sufi Community in very rural Warfordsburg. PA, some 2.5 hrs from Baltimore, MD.

Among other things, I have uncovered in self-inquiry regarding a mean streak within me, with Ann's direction, how my life has been affected by my tendencies toward impatience/ naive ( french w accent ague.....maybe accessible on my keyboard, not sure where) and, how a wall between Baba and myself can dissolve naturally with a shifting from too much doing to much more being, that is, being still...and for me, my key to being in the world but not of it.

Thank you Dick for drawing me in, and, especially thanks to Ann for blazing the RUH healing trail.

I have found my passion again....and, my music, so long in the closet is reawakening as well.....

In His abounding love,

AllenRay Powell aka A R ( for those who are challenged by three syllables)  
~~~~~

My memory tends to be more impressionistic and subjective so I value those that can report more objectively to fill out the picture. With that said, I walked away from the meeting very moved by the quality of the discussion. I felt we really listened respectfully to each other.

For myself I learned a lot from the discussion: about the Center's by-laws and Baba's directives, and from the heartfelt contributions of those who shared their views about what the Center meant to them.

I walked away with a much greater sense of the seriousness and sacredness of the Center and its activities and a profound sense of what we can aspire to as a Community.

Jai Baba,
Ellen Peskin Baum

Announcements

Center Library Note:

Would you like to be a "patron"? We have a library for your reading pleasure and convenience. Our library is housed upstairs in a bookcase at the MBCNC Center on Stockton Street. We have had 14 borrowers over the past year. You may access a list of the holdings at the web page meherbabameherbaba.org;

look for library, and open the book or video pdf files.
When you visit the Center, remember to check out the library books. We would also like donations. For a list of books we need, see the section at the end of the library holdings.
Contact the Newsletter about donations.

The Trust

All who wish to share in the commitment laid down by Meher Baba through the Trust should contact Jack Mormon, ambkj@aol.com

Meher Baba Information For introductory information about Avatar Meher Baba, e-mail:

info@MeherBabaInformation.org
or write to P.O. Box 1101, Berkeley, CA 94701.

<http://MeherBabaInformation.org>

Meher Baba Center of Northern California

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El Cerrito, California 94530
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www.meherbabameherbaba.org

The meeting schedule is now included in our online calendar (web link above), and can be printed directly from the calendar.

Directions to our Center:

From Highway 80, Interstate 5, going north or south, in El Cerrito, take the Central Avenue exit exiting east, toward the hills. Cross San Pablo Avenue.

Go under the BART train tracks and less than a block after the tracks, turn left on Richmond Avenue. Head north on Richmond Avenue until Stockton Avenue (the first stop light), turn right on Stockton. About two blocks onward, the Center is located on the left side of the street. Address and phone are listed above.

More Local Meetings Lafayette - Sunday Afternoons

Monthly meeting at the home of Kirk and Marlene Allen.

Please call to confirm. (925) 284-4066

Sonoma County - Arti happens once a month, usually the first Sunday.

Locations vary. Call Ellen Van Allen at 707-528-0357 for specific information.

Sacramento area - Meeting times and locations vary

Contact Marilyn Buehler: inquiry@radiant-light.org www.radiant-light.org/meherbaba

Los Gatos - Sunday Evenings

At the home of Clint Snyder

Call (408) 395-6865

contact for messages to newsletterwalla: newsletter@meherbabameherbaba.org

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