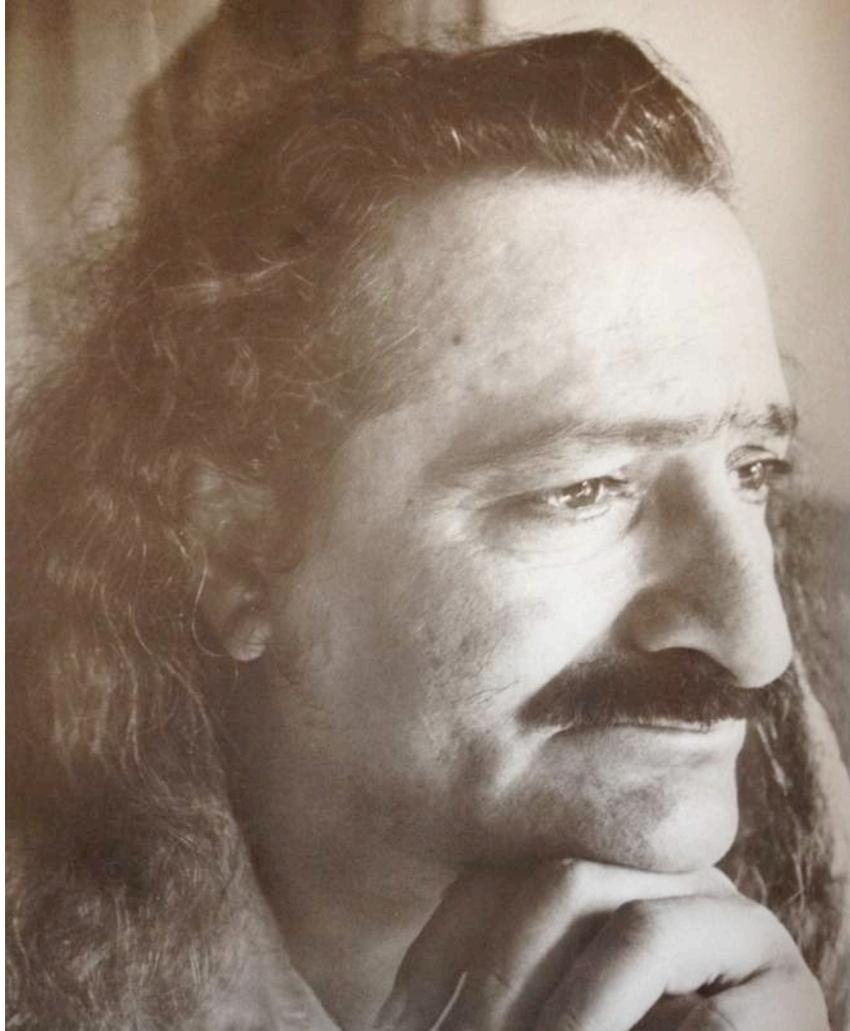


The Spiritual
Abode
For One and All

One is,
One is,
Beloved God
Alone is.

The Spiritual Abode for One and All

Reflections on Avatar Meher Baba's Vision for Myrtle Beach



Meher Baba during seclusion work, Meherabad, August 1, 1941

Through an examination of Meher Baba's words and actions, this article seeks to reflect on the future of Myrtle Beach as the place of world pilgrimage that Meher Baba predicted. It is based on the paradigm of the Avatar's Home as a model of God's presence in every heart. The article is personal and is offered to the individual heart, and only secondarily to organizations.

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***Four Perspectives:
A Center, an Organization, a Retreat, a Home***

What a magnificent expression to contemplate—“the spiritual abode for one and all.” With these very words, Avatar Meher Baba expressed his vision for Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, as he accepted a gift of land in that city from Elizabeth Patterson in 1944.

In this article I refer to Baba’s vision for “Myrtle Beach,” rather than His vision for Meher Spiritual Center. What does this mean? What is the relationship between the Meher Spiritual Center and Baba’s expressed vision for Myrtle Beach? How can we understand and reconcile a vision so that it is mutually respectful and fulfilling, and honors the integrity of the many entities involved?

The intention of this article is to explore Meher Baba’s vision statement and the ramifications of terms associated with Meher Spiritual Center—specifically, Center, Retreat, Home (or Abode), and organization—and the role of the individual in relation to them.

Four noteworthy statements made by Baba suggest a broad range of possible perspectives that are all relevant for ongoing consideration if such an abode is truly to be for one and all.

As early as the 1930s, Darwin Shaw had written that he was hoping to establish a retreat for Avatar Meher Baba in America. On August 14, 1935, Baba wrote back:

Whether that retreat on earth is established or not, I do really appreciate the spirit of brotherhood and Love that has been awakened, and consider it as a spiritual retreat already established within, which is much more substantial and real than any earthly home or structure built for the purpose. The true spirit is there, already awakened, and if it is fostered and kept up with warm feelings of Love and Brotherhood, it will eventually bear results that will be helpful in the development of spiritual understanding of life and things pertaining to life, and wherever such spirit of Love and brotherhood prevails, inner light and guidance follow invariably. And rest assured I will always be with you and the other dear ones working in unison in the spirit of Love, and my spiritual help will always be forth coming wherever I am, wherever you all are.¹

Norina Matchabelli and Elizabeth Patterson suggested to Baba in Panchgani in March 31, 1938, that if he had a “Universal Center,” his messages could be conveyed to other centers throughout the world. And if he were more publicly known, enthusiastic workers would have a chance to actively spread his messages among the masses. Baba replied:

It is a good idea indeed, but by attaching to it great significance or giving it too much importance, it develops into a regular organization or system, and I do not want to limit myself or bind myself with any such thing. I create things on a firm foundation and then pull them down. The more I make changes, the more changeless I am.

Neither do I want an organization, nor any society. That is exactly what I am afraid could happen. If centers are allowed to prosper, they form themselves into organizations or societies. ... [My]^{*} Organizations are like the foam which brings unwanted things up to the surface of the sea, letting the real substance lie beneath, submerged in the depths.²

In the Barn in July of 1956, Baba stated:

I would like you all to belong to certain groups. Why? Because you can cooperate and tell others about Me and share your thoughts. You learn much more than when you remain by yourself.³

Elizabeth wrote to Baba describing and offering land for a Center in Myrtle Beach in a letter dated June 4, 1944. After three months, on September 16, 1944, Baba cabled Elizabeth his acceptance and his vision for Myrtle Beach:

Am happy to find in all your letters about Myrtle Beach everything that I personally and spiritually approve of and sanction. All my lovers should cooperate to make Myrtle Beach the spiritual abode for one and all.⁴

What’s Special about Myrtle Beach?

Myrtle Beach must be a special place indeed to have won the spiritual approval of the Avatar of the Age. Most Americans think of the city as a Southern seaside resort for

^{*} “My” in source manuscript was edited out by Lawrence Reiter, according to David Fenster (personal communication).

beachgoers and golfers, for college kids on spring break or for Canadian tourists chasing the sun. What's so special about Myrtle Beach?

My father, looking to semi-retire in 1962, found Myrtle Beach appealing because it had seasons like his native Northeast but not the snow. It also had two great eighteen-hole golf courses and a third recently opened. I was a golfer about to start college at age 18. My family moved to 211 Lake Drive in Briarcliffe Acres, just down the street from Meher Abode, or "Baba's House," the home built for him in about 1950. While we didn't know anything about Meher Baba or the Center, I always had a fondness for the quiet of nature. My love of silence began in 1949 when I attended Quaker Silent Meeting in Montclair, New Jersey, for about a year with my mother and two brothers. Although only five years old, I was fully absorbed in the hour of gathered silence. In my teens in the 1960's, I especially recall spending quiet time in two places: under a several-acre canopy of towering pines near the ocean by the Briarcliffe Acres swash, and—unaware that I was on Center property—behind the dunes sheltered from the sun by wind-sculpted, igloo-like bushes. During the remaining years of Baba's life, I was in town during school vacations and on military leave. I clearly remember telling my mother that Myrtle Beach felt more like home than any place we had lived.

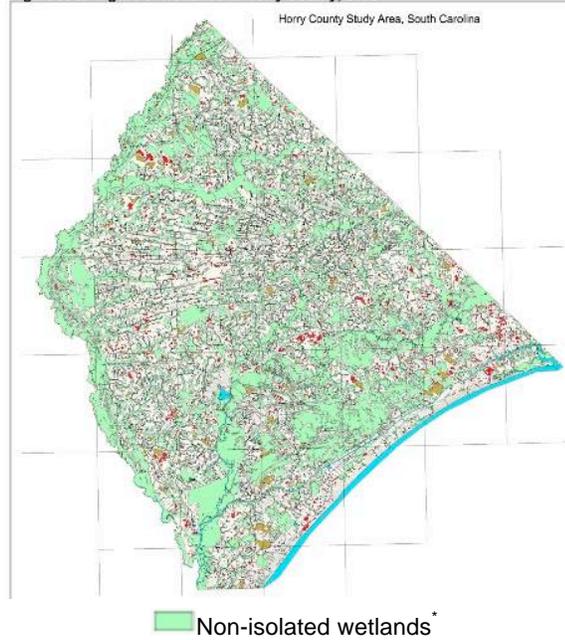
Much of present-day Myrtle Beach was forest then. Going south from Briarcliff and the Center it was all woods until the Dunes Golf Club. There was no Highway 17 Bypass. The Shrine Club dramatically stood alone in its whiteness against the wooded surroundings.

Myrtle Beach and the surrounding coastline had originally been a wilderness. Of the indigenous peoples, the Chicora tribe lived on the coast well south of Myrtle Beach in the Pawleys Island area. The Waccamaw and Pee Dee tribes were inland river dwellers.⁵ On his first visit in 1952, Baba stated that, "this place [the Center] was ages ago where I moved about, stayed and visited."⁶ Could he have been referring to an earlier or minor advent of the Avatar?

Even today, despite the development of the town as a major Southern resort, the forest, wetlands and farms that surround Myrtle Beach account for about 90 percent of Horry County, the largest county in South Carolina.

Two rivers—the Waccamaw and the Little Pee Dee—along with their tributaries are arrayed across the county and converge in Georgetown, south of Myrtle Beach. Together they replenish a water table nourishing the rich soil that supports extensive and diverse year-round agriculture.

Figure A-8: Figure of wetlands in Horry County, 2002



Ample array of Water Resources in Horry County

The rivers and swamp barriers made Horry County very inaccessible. “Settlers came to the area because they were offered free land: 50 acres for each member of the family, each servant or slave, although most had neither servant nor slave. They came as individuals, not as organized groups. The hope of land ownership persuaded them, and they sought independence from landlords.”⁷ As a result, Horry County was originally nicknamed the Independent Republic of Horry (pronounce *Oh-ree*). “Independent we were of the plantation society which grew from colonial times till the end of the Civil War south and north of us, this district having been settled as small, independent farms, in the main by men unaccustomed to titles or large holdings in England. Isolated geographically ... the early inhabitants formed their own self-reliant standards.”⁸ The motto of the Historical Society coined by Ernest Richardson in 1966 and reflecting this period was “The County with a heart that will win your heart.”⁹

Is it any wonder that in the early 1920’s, Baba orchestrated learning to sing the Gershwin hit, “Swanee,” from Mehera, his dearest woman disciple? The lyrics of Gershwin’s most successful hit celebrate the heartfelt longing to return to the Deep South of America. He enjoyed singing it himself before he took silence. The poignant lyrics by Irving Caesar are pregnant with significance in light of the fact that Baba’s Home in the West would come to be located in the South and would evoke in his lovers that same sense of longing for their spiritual home in God.

I've been away from you a long time
I never though I'd miss you so
Somehow I feel
Your love is real
Near to you I long to be
The birds are singin', it is song time
The banjos strummin' soft and lo.
I know that you yearn for me too
Swanee! You're calling me.

Chorus:

Swanee, how I love you, how I love you
My dear ol' Swanee
I'd give the world to be
Among the folks in
D-I-X-I-Even know my mammy's
Waiting for me
Praying for me
Down by the Swanee
The folks up North will see me no more,
When I go to the Swanee shore!
Swanee, Swanee, I am coming back to Swanee
Mammy, Mammy, I love the old folks at home.*

Reflecting on this history, I have come to realize more and more how *all of the Myrtle Beach area* fulfills the following five criteria that Baba told Elizabeth to look for in a Center for him in the West. It seems readily apparent the future promises an ever closer and mutually supporting relationship between Meher Spiritual Center and the Myrtle Beach area.

* "Swanee" (1919), lyrics by Irving Caesar; music by George Gershwin. The Swanee, or more properly Suwanee, is a river of Georgia and Florida. The Gershwin hit was partly a takeoff of Stephen Foster's minstrel song "Old Folks at Home," also known as "Swanee River." Interestingly, Foster had originally considered using the Pee Dee River of South Carolina in his song but finally decided on the Suwannee.

A Center Becomes His “Abode”



Sunrise over Long Lake at the Meher Spiritual Center

Elizabeth and Norina were charged by Baba in 1941 to find a suitable location for a center to spread his message in America. Kitty Davy writes: “Elizabeth’s first reaction was naturally, ‘what are we to look for, Baba?’ ... Baba gave “five specific qualifications ... (1) the climate should be equable; (2) it should have more than ample water; (3) it should be on virgin soil, never before built upon; (4) it should be land that can be tilled*”; and (5) it should be ‘given from the heart.’”¹⁰ Earlier that year, on January 9, Baba had dictated “The Seven Realities of Meher Baba’s Teaching,” printed copies of which were a focal point for spreading his message at that time.

After investigating a number of possibilities, Elizabeth wrote to Baba on June 4, 1944, describing in detail a potential property for the Center in Myrtle Beach, and formally offering the property to Him “from the heart.” Her letter states: “I can only hope You find it useful for Your Universal Cause. No name other than ‘The Centre’ for Meher Baba will be given it until

* In Elizabeth’s letters on file at Saroja Library, the phrase is: “Soil that could be made self sustaining to a large number of people.”

You decide that too.”¹¹

In his cable quoted earlier, Meher Baba’s choice of words is notable: “All my lovers should cooperate to make Myrtle Beach the spiritual abode for one and all.” *Abode* means a “home” and has a most appropriate etymology. It comes from a Middle English root meaning “to wait,” more specifically a place “to abide in.” In the context of his cable, the term *abode* implies a place of spiritual waiting. What might spiritual waiting be? Bhau Kalchuri has described how Baba responded when he complained of not being able to do the urgent work Baba had ordered him to do, because he had also been instructed to spend hours each day waiting for Baba’s call: Baba said: “Can it ever be a ‘waste’ of your time to wait for my call? You think you are sitting there without work. Tell me, is it not work to wait for my call? You have no idea what important work you are doing.”¹² We might draw from this incident the sense that not only Baba abides in his home, but we as lovers of God also abide there in that we long and wait for his presence. In particular, we long for the day he establishes his home in our hearts.

In his cable, Baba also asks his lovers to take *action*, saying that they “should cooperate to make Myrtle Beach a spiritual abode for one and all.” How to accomplish this?

Let us reflect on what a “spiritual abode” means to each of us and how we individually and collectively might respond to Baba’s call to action. Let us reflect not only on the meaning of Baba’s physical home in the West and our own physical homes, but also on the significance of the individual heart as God’s home. We will look for hints from Meher Baba’s words and actions as they pertain to these considerations.

“This Is My Home”

Before exploring the origins of the Center in more detail, it is important to remember the preeminent role that love has played, most notably expressed in the phrase “a gift from the heart.” The land is a grand example of such a gift, but along with it are multiple gifts of money, time and tangible assets by so many people spread over the history of the Center. Filis Frederick and Adele Wolkin had begun living with and assisting Elizabeth, Norina and Nadine Tolstoy in December of 1943. In personal conversations, Adele has said that Baba referred to the Center in those early years as a “playground for selfless service.” Immediately upon his arrival at the Center, Baba clearly stated that the creation of the Center was grounded in

selfless service born of deep love. In the living room of the house built for him, with Elizabeth and Norina present, among others, he refers to the Center as his home:

Baba spelled out on His board, with Mani interpreting, how happy He was to be at the Center, and most of all how deeply touched He was with the love, devotion and work shown by both Elizabeth and Norina throughout the past years preparing such a unique spot for His work and comfort. ... All had been the labor of love—love direct from the heart, and as such He accepted the gift. After embracing Elizabeth and Norina He said, “I have had many homes this time. I have laid My head on the ground in palaces and on concrete floors of humble homes.” Then Baba gestured over all the Center and continued, “Of all the homes I have visited, this is the home that I love the best, because it was given to Me and built for Me with such love.” After a bit He added, “I never leave. Remember, I do not leave, because this is My home.”¹³

Baba had asked for a center for spreading his message, yet only later did it become more than a center: it became his *home*. What a wonderful and profound evolution to reflect on. The significance of Meher Spiritual Center as Baba’s Home in the West, and how that relates to spreading Baba’s message, is at the heart of the ongoing evolution of the Center from its inception.

Baba begins by asking Norina and Elizabeth to spread his message of love and truth and to find a center for that purpose. Note that he didn’t ask them to find a *home* for him in the West. Did the center come to be a home because of the character of their love and service? After decades of service to their Beloved, their love, obedience and surrender conveyed the true substance of his message in action. Indeed, it allowed him to be intimately present in their work because of love. Love transformed a center into a home.

If we trace the origin of the Center to 1941—the year when Elizabeth and Norina first began to actively search for its location—we can link it to an especially profound period of Baba’s work, which he called “the most important [year] in spiritual history.”¹⁴ What were some of the key events of this year that reveal the unique level of importance Baba gives to 1941, and how do they relate to the Center?

67TH BIRTHDAY
OF
AVATAR MEHER BABA
25 - 2 - 1961



I belong to no religion. Every religion belongs to Me. My personal religion is My being the Ancient Infinite One, and the religion I impart to all is Love for God, which is the Truth of all religions.

—MEHER BABA—

1941: A Significant Year in Spiritual History

Planted in the key events of 1941 we find the seed of the Meher Spiritual Center, which like all seeds must contain the whole in latent form. The year began with Baba dictating “The Seven Realities” on January 9 in Jaipur (see page 35). This message is key to the bringing together of all the religions of the world. Baba ordered that copies be distributed throughout India, Europe, and America, to be shared with the heads of temples, mosques, ashrams and churches. Bhau Kalchuri writes:

This message was especially significant because, for the first time perhaps, Baba ordered thousands of copies of it printed and then sent to his disciples and followers throughout India in order for them to

distribute them wherever they lived. Ghani and Adi Sr., in Bangalore, headed up the printing and distribution tasks, and thousands of copies of this message were handed out throughout India in the beginning months of 1941....¹⁵

After announcing in a circular the unusual nonobservance of his birthday that year, he told his mandali that the greatest challenge of this period fell on them. The words of the circular are similar to the New Life theme. Baba said on January 26:

For the next twenty days, you must keep your mood at its best. Under any circumstances and conditions, you are not to get excited, not to have moods, but always to be happy and smiling. This is the greatest help to me.

People join the war, fight, get wounded, and suffer untold hardships—but that is easy in comparison. To keep your best mood in every situation, never to be upset or sad, to speak gently and lovingly, never using a harsh word, not to get excited when someone steals your chapati, but to say from the bottom of your heart: "May Baba bless you!"—that is really difficult. It is easy to win a war

of nations, but most difficult to win your own self. It is the only real thing on this path. To keep a calm head, tolerate and swallow everything. The Sufis call it *zabta*.*

My mother helps me the most now. She gives ample opportunities to me and to others to control themselves. You have won the greatest war when you win yourself. When Shireenmai comes, you will have more opportunities of controlling yourselves. For example, I feel like murdering her sometimes, yet I embrace her lovingly. You should do the same.¹⁶

During 1941 “Baba journeyed 18,000 miles in search of God-intoxicated souls and contacted them.”¹⁷ (His extensive *mast* tours had begun at the end of 1938 with the Blue Bus Tours.) In the two weeks leading up to his 47th birthday alone, he travelled almost 5,000 miles and then issued a circular to his Indian lovers:

First, [I decided] that on the 1st of August 1941, my speaking operation would begin (speaking to myself);

And Second, that my world manifestation would come to full expression on the 15th of February 1942. ...

During this period, I shall lead the world affairs to the climax imperative before my manifestation in 1942, which will make [mark] the beginning of the general adjustment of the world, and bring out the subsequent unfoldment of spiritual revival. I have decided to send Norina, Nadine and Elizabeth to the U.S.A., and Margaret and Irene to Europe, to spread my message there. ...¹⁸

Baba continued:

I will speak on the 1st of August 1941 the divine word to myself and in myself, the word of the will of God that will begin the resurrection of the dead world and start the general adjustment of the world; and this speaking-to-myself operation will continue until the 15th of February 1942, the day that I will publicly and universally speak, the day that my world manifestation will come to full expression, the day that the six months self-speaking operation will bring out the subsequent unfoldment of the spiritual revival and the day that the disciples of

* Persian and Urdu *zabita*, literally law or ordinance, applies to the Sufi notion of self-control (comment supplied by Prof. Carl W. Ernst).

my circle will realize the Truth. My present seclusion will continue till April 15th, but from April 15th 1941 to February 15th 1942 my seclusion will be more absolute.

M. S. Irani ¹⁹

Just before their departure for America, Baba wrote to Norina, Elizabeth and Nadine on June 6, 1941:

I know you three constantly think of me, and Beloved Baba also has you eternally in His heart. You must have only one fixed thought in your minds, and that is that you are going to do Baba's great work. You must remember everything I told you and happily, bravely and willingly carry them out.²⁰

Throughout the early 1940's, in New York and across the country as they looked for a site for the Center, Norina gave public talks in the form of "thought-transmissions" from Meher Baba.²¹ We do not know definitively whether these thought-transmissions were connected to Baba's "speaking operation within myself," but it is interesting to note that this unique form of communication began at that time. Norina herself felt this was true, and on the flyleaf of a copy of *Fragments from a Spiritual Diary* that she gave to Elizabeth, she inscribed: "Baba said in 1941 'I shall speak thru myself to myself.' This booklet makes it clear."²²



Norina, Meher Baba, and Elizabeth

Underscoring the spirit of Baba's message of the Seven Realities, Norina stated in a talk given on March 5, 1942, in New York:

What is after all this Truth of which everyone is so curious nowadays? The relativity of Truth is not to be avoided, and to understand this, is better than to be utterly

agnostic and to deny the fact of Truth which is *to be conscious within of one's own inherent God*. Truth is nothing else but that. ... Man is super-human being, as he is. Nothing is different in the inner structure of man ... only the external structure differs and makes men appear separate human creatures with separate ways of interpretation, separate habits, separate desires and needs. The human being in itself is in its spiritual structure in tune with its Divine Being yet undetected God-conscious state.

... *Nothing will be new in this earth*. No one will invent a new machine to detect the God within. *Nothing can be done to make men happy*. Nothing more will be done to create a more religious outlook. ... The dispensation is the same old dispensation of all times when the Avataric Figure has been personified by the pure self-less human being. *It is nothing more or less than the fulfilled form of the God-conscious Divine human being that has the power to create in man what man himself cannot create. All else is superfluous to be said on the fact of this new dispensation.*²³

The profound nature of Baba's relationship with Norina and Elizabeth is revealed in a special exemption for them during the New Life period when no one was to contact him. He wrote: "But as you are the link between my New Life and the West I allow only you two, and you two only, to cable me when necessary."²⁴

The preeminent role of love was introduced as a underlying theme of the Center's evolution. The importance of love in this seed period is also emphasized from two other perspectives. First, in that same critical month of August 1941:

Sadguru Narayan Maharaj came to a suburb of Bombay to give darshan to his devotees there. Nariman, Arnavaz, and others decided to pay their respects to the Sadguru, and went to see him. ... After some minutes of conversation, Arnavaz wanted to see Narayan Maharaj's reaction to, or comments about, Meher Baba. She broached the topic: "You know, Narayan, my paternal uncle [Chanji] is staying with Meher Baba." Maharaj referred to Baba not speaking and then added, "You should make him speak! Why don't you make him speak?" Arnavaz didn't know what to say to this, so she kept quiet. Narayan then said: "Make him speak with the intensity of your love!"²⁵

Then, on October 17, 1941, Baba's last meeting with Upasni Maharaj took place in a

deserted place in Dahigaon village. Baba said: "Then I motioned, 'I must be going,' and he said, 'Wait for five minutes. We will not meet again. Now Merwan, you have all the work and powers of the great Sat Purushs [the five Perfect Masters]. They are all focused in you. I leave everything to you.'"²⁶

Remarking later (in 1958) about his last meeting with Upasni, Baba said: "Before dropping his body, Upasni Maharaj and I met together in a hut near Sakori. I bowed down to Maharaj. Maharaj wept like a child. He told me to break my silence, but I did not do it."²⁷ In the years leading up to 1941 there had been tremendous U.S. resistance to entering the Second World War. Yet three weeks later, America's isolationist stance was abruptly reversed with the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), and America initiated a new era of world leadership and influence.

The year 1941 was thus a significant year in Meher Baba's advent, in relation to his internal work during the world war, his *mast* contacts, his preparation for his universal manifestation—and the growth of Meher Spiritual Center from a seed idea to reality over the succeeding years.

Baba's Visits to Myrtle Beach

Following a period of seclusion on Center of a little over two weeks, Baba presided over the official opening of the Center on May 9, 1952. Baba's first visit, his automobile accident on May 24th in Oklahoma, followed by his return to Myrtle Beach to recuperate with Mehera and the other mandali in Youpon Dunes (Elizabeth's house south of the Center), and his visits in 1956 and 1958 can be considered a gestation period for the actual birth of the Center as an independent organization in 1959. The formal dedication ceremonies were not held until July 1956, on Elizabeth's birthday, and in 1959 the land that had been gifted to Baba was given back by Baba, enabling the establishment of Meher Spiritual Center as a nonprofit organization under the direction of Elizabeth Patterson. Only Baba's Samadhi and the Center land remained in Baba's name during his New Life period.

"Do not worry about anything. Only love more, and more, and more. Let these words be inscribed in your heart: 'Nothing is real but God, nothing matters but love for God.'" These words were conveyed to Filis and Adele during his first visit to the Center.²⁸ The importance of Meher Baba's declaring the Center his Home because of love echoes the heart of his

message. It is the message of all Avataric advents, the message to love God. Love resides in the heart. It is personal and manifests uniquely within every individual. It both supports and unites diversity. It engenders harmony and cooperation. It celebrates life with a welcoming embrace that transcends differences.

This love and respect for the individual heart that engenders harmony and cooperation can be found in the actions of Simeon Chapin and the Burroughs family regarding the land that would become home to the Avatar.



Beginning with “a true visionary, Franklin Burroughs foresaw that one day the beaches of the Grand Strand would grow to rival the then-famous northern resort destinations of Coney Island and Atlantic City. He died in 1897 before his efforts to link the beach, via railroad, to the rest of the world were realized. In pursuit of their fathers' dreams, the sons of Burroughs and [his partner Benjamin] Collins completed the railroad and built the Seaside Inn in 1901, the first oceanfront hotel in Myrtle Beach.”



Myrtle Beach's first hotel, The Seaside Inn in 1901

In 1911 the beach lands were offered for sale. After initially wanting to purchase the 65,000 acres of land owned by the Burroughs family (no relation) in Myrtle Beach, Simeon

Chapin had decided against it because his managers did not want to move from New York City to such a remote area. As he was literally walking away from the deal, he had a change of heart realizing local management would be best. As recounted in a local magazine article and in a history of Myrtle Beach:

Chapin, however, wanted to tell the Burroughs brothers, Frank and Don, in person about the firm's change of heart. The Burroughs were impressed that Chapin had come to tell them face-to-face about the change of plans rather than by mail or telegram. In turn, Chapin was impressed with the quality of these men and how much they loved the area. He decided to go forward himself. He offered these native sons a partnership, a chance to form a company together. So began the Myrtle Beach Farms Company with Chapin's working capital and the Burroughs' land.²⁹

How significant it is that 47 years after the American Civil War, a Northern financier and two Southern land barons came together to create such a grand and successful venture through mutual respect and cooperation. In the same article: "A friend said of Chapin, 'He truly followed the prophet Micah's injunction to do justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God' [Micah 6:8]. Chapin was prophetic himself—at least in his vision of the endless possibilities in the future of the Grand Strand."

The origins of Myrtle Beach attest to the power of love that transcends differences. It is more than the message of love; it is the *experience* of love that counts. In 2010, the Board of Meher Spiritual Center worked for months to craft the following vision statement: "Meher Spiritual Center, Meher Baba's Home in the West, where all who come can experience His Love."³⁰

While centers and groups play an important role in spreading the Avatar's message of love and truth, Baba stresses that it is an individual calling:

The Book which I shall make people read is the book of the heart which holds the key to the mystery of life. ... Societies and organizations have never succeeded in bringing truth nearer. Realization of Truth is solely the concern of the individual.³¹

Elizabeth Patterson's life exemplified this ideal, namely, to love him more and more, to obey him, to try to please him, and most of all to "hold on to [his] *daaman* until the very end." This is the war to win one's Self and to make a home for him in our hearts.

Centers versus Organizations



Barn, Meher Spiritual Center

On July 26, 1956, Baba celebrated Elizabeth's birthday and chose that day for the dedication ceremony of the Center, with NBC-TV coming to film the proceedings. Later that week, a discussion on groups (in particular "to settle some misunderstandings between the Sufi group and the New York group") was scheduled for an evening meeting in the Barn, but Baba postponed it until the following morning. Instead:

An important meditation meeting was held in the Barn. Baba told all to be alert and put all our hearts into the meditation meeting at which He wanted to give us a special outpouring of His Love. As everyone removed their shoes and got settled, Baba, deep in thought, walked outdoors back and forth around all four sides of the Barn. . . . "After the meditation was over," Filis [Frederick] related [describing her experience walking back with Baba along the road in the dark], "once Baba stopped and stood close by a very tall pine gripping it with His hands. . . . In the dim circle of light, His face looked drawn and full of suffering as if He had expended a terrific amount of energy."³²

In the morning, after gathering shells on the Beach to give to Mehera, all again gathered in the Barn for “the discussion ... on groups and how to work together harmoniously for Him.” Such significant preparation; a meditation meeting embraced by the all-suffering Love of the Avatar, and then paying homage to Mehera, the highest expression of human love for the Christ.

It is important digression to note that in a tangible way this blessing of divine love was not confined only to those at the Center but was playing out on a much larger scale, as indicated by two examples: one on Broadway and one in the White House.

Beginning in 1934, the filmmaker Gabriel Pascal became deeply devoted to Baba and began working on Baba’s film idea. Simultaneously, he began an association with George Bernard Shaw to make *Pygmalion* into a movie. Production finally began in 1937, and that year Gabriel Pascal had contact again with Baba in Cannes, where he said: “I was surrounded by difficulties on all sides, but since meeting you, I have experienced your inner help and found that my difficulties are slowly disappearing. I feel things have adjusted themselves so that I am now in a position to produce great motion pictures, and it is all due to your inner help.”³³

Pascal had promised Shaw, who had resisted his plays being made into movies, that he would not alter a single line of his play, but then, changed the ending of the play so that Eliza comes home to Professor Higgins instead of marrying Freddie.³⁴ Shaw only discovered the change at the opening, but accepted it. *Pygmalion* was released to great acclaim in 1938. *Time Magazine* listed Pascal as one of the ten most influential people in the world in 1938.



Gabriel Pascal and George Bernard Shaw

But Pascal's greatest contribution would go almost unrecognized—in 1951 he began pursuing the idea to make *Pygmalion* into a musical, but died in 1954. Posthumously, he succeeded. In March of 1956 *My Fair Lady* opened on Broadway just before Baba's visit to America. Its theme was the triumph of love that transcends societal distinctions yet honors the honest integrity of individuality. It deals with self-respect, social hypocrisy, and acting according to our nature and not putting on airs. Most of all it is a story of love.

After succeeding in passing Eliza off as royalty at a high society ball. Higgins ignores her as his work is done. But when Eliza stands up for herself and leaves. He is deeply affected by her absence. By the last scene we have felt the love between Eliza and Professor Higgins. Devastated by her absence and having just listened to a recording of her voice, suddenly he is overwhelmed by her voice at the door. In a sustained dramatic moment, he regains his composure and remaining with his back to Eliza and asks for his slippers, not out of coldness but born of love. The scene reveals a love in keeping with his nature and without pretense where personal and societal differences can coexist in the power and harmony of self-sacrificing love. Pascal had changed the ending of the play, yet his and Shaw's rich collaboration continued into the '50's and produced a number of movies despite their differences. I feel this exemplifies the love and cooperation Baba spoke of in the Barn.

With the meditation in the Barn and remembering Mehera lively in everyone's experience, Baba addresses the problem between the two groups, by emphasizing the importance and challenge of love and working in groups:

Last evening I told John Bass and others that in India there are many groups. Each has a group head and all work for the love of Me. All love Me. The group heads are responsible for the work the group does. In India, in different groups, there are different castes, different religions, those of different economic status ... but all love Baba. All want to work for Me and spread My message of Love and Truth.³⁵

Baba asked for and received an explanation of the difficulties between the Sufi Group and the New York group from group heads Ivy Duce and John Bass, and then Baba continued with the following message:

I want you all to bear in mind one thing. I now emphasize one point which I emphasized in India also, when I called all together at the Andhra meeting. I said that for Me, there is no need for centers, for different places, nor different groups

with different heads or names. [1] My center is in the heart of every lover. Every lover with a heart that loves Baba is a center. [2] The second point I would like to emphasize is that whoever wants to work spreading My message of Love and Truth absolutely needs a central office and groups of workers who can function from that central office. There is always a need for a group to have a center. You can have many such centers. [3] Myrtle Beach is such a center—and it stretches for many miles! [4] But there should be cooperation, harmony, and the group heads should not try to win over other members from one office or another. Why? What for? When all work for Baba? There should be harmony, cooperation.³⁶

Baba has stated four concise points, yet he begins by saying he wants all to bear in mind one thing and to emphasize one point. Why then does he state a second point? Paradoxically, it seems to contradict the first point. Baba's one point is love for God in the individual heart. It is because of such a love that a center has become his home. Love and the human heart are his center. This is the reality for Baba, but we are in a world of illusions where his love is not yet fully realized. Above all else the dawning of divine love in each heart empowers the experience of unity and harmony in the midst of diversity. Then, with secondary emphasis, Baba goes on to underscore the need for groups and subsequently states:

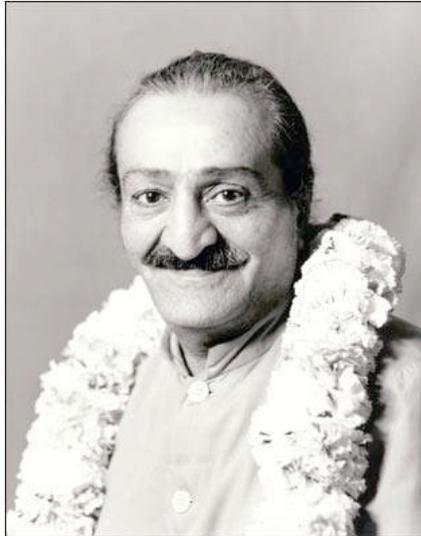
I would like you all to belong to certain groups. Why? Because you can cooperate and tell others about Me and share your thoughts. You learn much more than when you remain by yourself.³⁷

Consider that a center requires a conceptual framework with rules and purposes in order to function with integrity. In contrast to the heart, it is the product of the intellect, the mind. In the New Life, Baba gave the freedom to choose different ways of organizing the groups.* Conceptual frameworks may be inspired by the heart, but they conform to reason and legal requirements. The danger is that organizations, being conceptual (of the mind), can dominate the hearts of individuals within and outside the organization and can create conflict in the hearts of all concerned. The mind should serve the heart, not the reverse. Can organizations fulfill this ideal, or is it an individual responsibility? Baba emphasizes one point: "My center is in the heart of every lover." How do we deal with the challenge of balancing individual integrity

* "Everything is to be managed by the companions, in any way they like, by committee, majority, or appointing a manager." N.L. Circular #3, Plan 1-a (Collective). *The New Life of Avatar Meher Baba and His Companions*, Meher Vihar Trust, 1967, p. 31.

and societal living with its necessary organizational structures?

Recognizing potential and inevitable conflicts that arise within and among organizations, is the solution for groups—and, more particularly, individuals—to trust in God, who alone is real? In the larger context, a second digression reveals this to be emphatically the case.



Avatar Meher Baba, August 30, 1956

Directly after leaving the Center, on July 30, 1956, at the Chase Studio in Washington, D.C., Baba has a series portrait photographs taken. Not just on any day but the day that President Eisenhower signed into law as the motto of the USA “In God We Trust”—and the Avatar was present in the nation’s capital! Two years earlier the President had succeeded in inserting “under God” into the pledge of Allegiance. At the ceremony the leader of the Allied Command in World War II said: “In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons, which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war.”³⁸

History reveals that the adoption of “under God” and the pledge itself were no mere coincidence in the timeline of Baba’s advent. The words “under God” were adopted by a chaplain, Louis Bowan, in February of 1948. The words came from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, where he spontaneously added the phrase to his prepared text, yielding: "that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom." By 1952, the Knights of Columbus, the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization, had officially adopted the phrase and urged it be made universal by the government. On February 7, 1954, when President Eisenhower honored Lincoln's birthday by attending services at the church Lincoln attended,

New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, and sat in Lincoln's pew, the church's pastor, George MacPherson Docherty, delivered a sermon based on the Gettysburg Address titled "A New Birth of Freedom." The President was inspired to initiate the addition the next day, which then became law on June 14, 1954.³⁹

However, the roots of this story are yet deeper. The Pledge of Allegiance was first publicly recited in 1892 for the National Public School Celebration of Columbus Day, a celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas and was organized to coincide with the opening of the Chicago World's Fair, which included the First World Parliament of Religions that opened September 11, 1893 and included an unexpected guest. Swami Vivekananda was initially unknown and uninvited because he didn't have official credentials, yet that day, Vivekananda's opening remark, "Sisters and brothers of America" brought a standing ovation that lasted 2 minutes. His message was one of tolerance and the common goal of all religions. He expressed the hope that the New Liberty Bell, which tolled to open the conference, would be the death-knell of all religious fanaticism. The bell bore the inscription: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." After the Parliament Vivekananda went on to tour and give well-received talks in the ensuing months. All this unfolded on the eve of Baba's birth.

It was not until the key period of 1941–1942 that on June 22, 1942, the United States Congress officially recognized the Pledge for the first time. It did so in part because the Nazi salute, with arm extended, was the same as the original salute used for the Pledge. It was now changed to the right hand being placed over the heart. Symbolically, the salute shifted from acknowledging allegiance to an outer authority to an inner one, the individual human heart.

Organizations do not have a heart; only individuals do. We can personify organizations, even give them some of the same legal rights as individuals, but the fact remains, that ultimately they are a conceptual framework used to facilitate cooperative human interaction.

We can relate to people within an organization on a heart-to-heart level, but if we project personhood onto an organization, we open our hearts and feelings to being hurt by an entity of the mind that can't respond in kind. If we treat workers in an organization as if they were the organization, we preclude the values of the heart and restrict our interactions to the level of the mind and rules. Such an attitude can become self-fulfilling, and we reinforce the role of workers as rule enforcers, which might inhibit a mutual response from the heart.

By the same token, workers who derive their strength more from the authority of organizational power rather than from their own personhood will find that they have to stifle their feelings at the expense of their own fulfillment. In no uncertain terms, Baba is affirming the importance of each individual and emphasizing that ultimately only love matters. To ensure that organizations do not damage the heart, individuals should protect and honor their own hearts and in turn the hearts of others by working together in harmony and cooperation (point 4).

But why, in his remarks about centers, does Baba add that the Myrtle Beach Center is many miles long (point 3)? What has that to do with centers, cooperation and Baba work? One possible explanation is given in Baba's telegram accepting Elizabeth's gift, in which he says: "all my lovers should cooperate to make Myrtle Beach the spiritual abode for one and all." In his choice of words (here and in point 3), he states that the spiritual abode will be, not just the Center, but *Myrtle Beach*.

A "Home" versus a "Center"

What does this mean that Myrtle Beach is to be a spiritual abode? It will be helpful to examine the distinction between home and center. In general, homes have a quality and character unique to their individual homeowners and residents. In its natural origins, a home is a social unit that exists as a personal safe haven from the world within which a family raises children; however, families and homes are not restricted to blood ties by birth. Homes can have a range of hierarchical structures. Just like organizations, their inner dynamics can bring powerful issues to the surface that can even lead to the breakup of the home. While it is a crucible for personal growth, its core value is to create a safe haven from the world. Like the individual, the home, in the sense of "family," is the basic building block of a culture.

A center shares some of these same qualities, but its core value is more focused outward to serve a purpose in the world at large through its members. In Baba's words, a center for his purposes is for those who want "to work spreading My message of Love and Truth" (point 2). Meher Spiritual Center is a nonprofit corporation, whose Charter describes wider responsibilities than managing the 500 acres. Its first object and purpose states that the Meher Spiritual Center is "devoted and dedicated to the name and spiritual purposes of Meher Baba, and to the dissemination of his teachings, without supplanting professed religious

convictions or beliefs, but for the enhancement and strengthening of the spiritual life.” The second and third object and purpose define the organizational structure to carry out this primary mission. They state, in part, that it is “to establish, operate and maintain a central headquarters ... and such additional local centers in South Carolina and in other States of the United States. ...” Although there are many centers throughout the country that recognize the unique status of Meher Spiritual Center, the ramifications of the second and third object and purposes have yet to be fully considered.

To date, the Center has focused primarily on its first object and purpose, along with the Center’s fourfold purpose written up by Elizabeth in 1959. The Charter doesn’t use the term “home” or “retreat.” The term “retreat” first occurs in Elizabeth’s four points, which she calls the “present plans” for the Center, and which she describes as being an “amplification of the purposes and powers of the corporation.” Both documents were written in 1958–1959 in consultation with Meher Baba, and the final approval by Baba came in March of 1960. Regarding this process, Baba stated in a letter to Elizabeth, dated June 22, 1958:

The following are the orders I mentioned. ... For forty days, beginning from July 14th, 1958: 1. Repeat (audibly but softly) 500 (five hundred) times a day at one sitting any one time during the 24 hours: “Beloved God, Thy Will has come to pass in that all our Baba has declared will soon come to pass this year.”⁴⁰

In that same letter, Baba states:

You should correspond with Ramjoo concerning the Centre Estate; I will be sending instructions through Ramjoo in the matter of the Centre Estate. Whether the Centre Estate stands in my name or not, you should have the executive rights, and you should see that the Centre is utilized solely for my Cause. The Centre should be made to flourish; contributions from the U.S.A. should be accepted to intensify the work of the Centre, and to augment the “Fund” which should be utilized only for Baba’s Cause at the Centre and in the U.S.A. according to instructions that you might receive. In short, you should do everything for the Centre under my guidance.

We do not know definitively what “spiritual purposes” (as mentioned in the first object and purpose) Baba has for the Center, but clearly Elizabeth’s actions in forming the corporation with its Charter and first plans were a direct response to Baba’s wishes and orders.

Baba's final approval of her actions came to Elizabeth in a letter written by Mani at Baba's request, dated February 12, 1960:

Enclosed is the Gift Tax Form signed by Baba this morning (in the Hall—i.e., our old garage converted and where He sits with the mandali every day). He is very happy with all you have done, approves of the incorporators and officers, and wants the three additional persons to be Fred Winterfeldt, John Bass, and Ruth White. The "Objects and Purposes" was also read to Baba and His beloved breath has fanned the flame that will now glow and ever grow into the fire of His universal message of Love. ...⁴¹

The three new people mentioned were immediately appointed to the Board and the gift of the Center land to the corporation was finalized. The "Objects and Purposes," clearly refers to the Charter, as it opens with the statement: "The objects and purposes for which this corporation is formed are as follows." We don't know whether the image of Baba's breath fanning the flame of His universal message of Love was Mani's choice of imagery or wording indicated by Baba. What is noteworthy is that it describes an ongoing process centered on his message of love and propelled by the Beloved's breath.

The goal of the Center Board's collective task is similar to Elizabeth's task, namely, to endeavor to respond to Baba's spiritual purposes in its future planning for the Center. One key consideration in this planning must be the seed sown and sanctioned by Baba at its inception: "to make Myrtle Beach the spiritual abode for one and all." It is clear that a center is a much more complex social undertaking than a personal home. And yet, Baba's vision for Myrtle Beach is described by him as being "the spiritual abode for one and all." With regard to Baba's Home and his Center, what is Baba proposing for the people of Myrtle Beach? What is our role individually and as a center?



In the seemingly little things, Baba's actions reveal that the role of the individual in relationship to God is of paramount importance to the Avatar. Norina's health did not permit her to attend the 1956 meetings (she passed June 15, 1957). Baba was not comfortable. "Think, Elizabeth," he gestured, "is there another chair for Baba?"⁴² Elizabeth remembered the yellow chair Norina used when giving her talks in the 40's. To this day this chair

proclaims Baba's abiding love for one and all.

Is the purpose of enhancing and strengthening the spiritual life of individuals similar to the role of a home in creating a safe haven for growth? Or is the primary purpose of a center to spread his message? Or perhaps both?

Myrtle Beach: The Spiritual Abode for One and All

In his cable accepting Elizabeth's gift of land, Baba asks all his lovers to cooperate to make *Myrtle Beach* (he does not refer to the center as such) the spiritual abode for one and all. What an intimidating task to contemplate—that is, until we realize what we all know: ultimately, *God is doing everything*. It is *Baba's breath* that is fanning the flame of *his love* that will make Myrtle Beach *his spiritual abode* through *his lovers*. Even so, we act and seek his wish. Many hearts and minds will go into distilling so many perspectives into a reality that excludes no heart, for Baba says it will be a spiritual abode for *one and all*. How is such a challenge possible to contemplate?

During the time of Baba's visits, Elizabeth regarded the 500 acres as Baba's Home, and not as a place for overnight stays. No one stayed on the Center when Baba wasn't in residence except the caretaker, who Baba had designated should be there. In response to Baba's parting wish that the Center was to be for his lovers and those who want to know more about him, she implemented her initial plan for it to function as a retreat center. Nevertheless, it is recorded that, "Elizabeth commented in an interview in 1977: 'The Center is entirely for Meher Baba.' And it remains so today, as Baba said it would be: 'a place of pilgrimage for all time.'"⁴³ However the center evolves over time, it will be his home because that is his wish.

When Baba arrived in 1952, only a few chosen ones were with him on the Center for the first two weeks of his seclusion.* Then and thereafter, for each of his visits, the large majority of his lovers and guests stayed in nearby motels and other accommodations. Consider the implications of this arrangement, as a possible paradigm for the future in utilizing the many assets Myrtle Beach offers. At the same time, remember that it was important to Baba that those not staying on Center should not feel excluded. All had come to participate in his *sahavas* (intimate company), and he therefore instructed Elizabeth to provide meals for them so they would not have to leave the Center except to rest for the night.

Was it only because there were insufficient cabins on the Center that guests were housed off Center? Or could it be that this conformed to Baba's vision that is inclusive of all of

* Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Goher, Rano, Kitty, Adi K. Irani, Sarosh, Meherjee Karkaria, Gustadji, and Dr. Nilu. Filis and Adele were asked by Baba to stay at the Center from the second week up until the time Baba was to leave for California (*Love Alone Prevails*, p. 390).

Myrtle Beach and that works through the medium of all his lovers? Does this fact of nearby housing utilized during each of his visits give us any guidance regarding any expansion of the retreat function on the Center? That is, to what extent is it prudent to build more cabins for future pilgrims? If the 500 acres do not have the capacity to accommodate all who wish to have a retreat on the Center, we will jeopardize Baba's wish that people not feel excluded. It is my belief that while more cabins or buildings can be built in the short term, they should have a dual purpose that conforms to a long-term plan designed to serve vastly greater numbers of *day pilgrims*, as contrasted with overnight retreat guests.

Baba's Wish: A Request of Great Import for His Vision

A very significant development occurred in the mid-1960's when Baba made it possible for some of his lovers to build personal homes on Center property. Elizabeth had raised the possibility of Jane Haynes and her family living on Center near Dilruba (Elizabeth and Kitty's home) in a letter to Mani in January of 1965. A reply came with Baba's approval for the plan that same month.⁴⁴ Subsequently, Julia Mavris and Tom and Yvonne Riley also replied to an invitation for families with children to build homes on the Center.

Phyllis Ott writes in her memoir, aptly titled *Love Bade Me Welcome*, that in December of 1965 she and her husband Lyn learned about the letter where Baba said that he would like to see some Baba lovers with children settle on the Meher Spiritual Center.⁴⁵ By this time, Tom and Yvonne Riley, and Julia Mavris and their families had received approval by Baba to build homes on the Center in particular spots but were delayed getting started. The Otts, however, were able to act immediately, as they had just sold their home in Woodstock, New York, and in 1966 they were able to begin construction of the home to be called Sheriar Gate House. In November of 1966, Meher House, as the Haynes house was named, was completed. However, concerns about legal restrictions for a non-profit on the use of Center land arose and a legal review precluded any further building. In a letter to Elizabeth dated December 18, 1966, from Mani on Baba's behalf, Mani writes of Julia and Tom and Yvonne:

...Their love for Beloved Baba, and their firm belief that nothing happens but by His will, would drown their natural disappointment and make it yet another precious opportunity for them to resign happily to His Will. And from it all, we know a pattern will emerge in years to come which will show us the perfect beauty of

His plan in this, as in all things.

The letter goes on to relay Baba's reply to points raised regarding this situation. Point 4 states: "Regarding the [Haynes' and Otts'] already acquired properties on Center, Baba approves of the 'life estate' deeds as detailed in your letter."⁴⁶ Thus, both properties will revert to the Center under the terms of their deeds.

This chain of events, in hindsight, reveals a clear pattern for the Center's expansion. In the following excerpt, Baba states by implication how, through the actions of his lovers, Meher Baba's Home in the West could come to embrace all of the surrounding area as the spiritual abode for one and all. As the letter continues, Baba makes his wishes known:

Those who wish to make their homes there [in Myrtle Beach] may build on property around the Center. This would please Baba very much, as it will serve the purpose of surrounding (as far as possible) the Center with homes of close Baba-lovers. This will NOT mean their being excluded from the Center, but rather it will mean in the truest sense their "enlarging" the Center. ...The boundary is only in law not in love.⁴⁷

Once again we see in Baba's words the distinction between mind and heart: law is a product of the mind, designed to give order and integrity in society, while love affirms the transcendent authority of the human heart that unites us with God.



On the path to the Ocean

Here we see a process whereby Myrtle Beach can become the spiritual abode for one and all. Baba has established his Home here, and he invites his lovers to do so as well. The result will be an expansion of the Center, because of internal links and the link of love for God. Residents leading the diversity of their normal lives as Baba-lovers and as members of the

community will facilitate Baba's vision. The sole act of establishing one's home in Myrtle Beach is of foundational importance to Myrtle Beach becoming the spiritual abode for one and all.

In a sense, Baba himself began this process in 1952 after his accident when he and his men and women mandali spent several weeks in residence in Youpon Dunes in the heart of Myrtle Beach, where in addition his men mandali took their meals at local restaurants. In those trying days after the accident, Baba's presence and suffering are significant in that we can surmise that it established a lasting legacy of his universal work in Myrtle Beach

This perspective raises the question: are the Center's concerns about preservation in its strategic plan more a matter of preserving the retreat atmosphere or the home atmosphere of the Center? Given the Center's vision statement affirming the Center as Meher Baba's Home in the West where all can experience his love, the answer seems quite clear. Like Meherasad, Baba's home in the East, the Center is a place where all who visit have the incredible honor of being welcomed into the most intimate spaces of the Avatar's home and living quarters. In turn, according to Baba's wish, the homes of all lovers of God, in all their diverse expressions, will contribute to this grand spiritual abode.

When we are invited into a home, the hosts are sharing with us the essence of whom they are; thus, it is an honor to visit anyone's home. While we might have different preferences regarding interior design, activities, or routines, would we impose them on our host? We would not, because it would both disturb the heart of our host and diminish the quality of our shared experience. A good host wants to accommodate the needs of guests, but no one wants to upset the sanctity of another's home. Above all, a home is a safe haven where the residents feel at ease and natural—"at home." To share that space with someone else is a very special gift. To share God's home is the highest gift.

When we contemplate the potential number of people who will want to visit Baba's home, it is an incredible challenge to plan for additional retreat guests and also to preserve the atmosphere of the Center as Baba's Home. In the short term, the retreat function of Elizabeth's "present plans" for the Center was an appropriate vision for the Center. In the long term, the retreat format will be less and less compatible with preserving the atmosphere of Baba's Home in the context of a place of world pilgrimage.

Jane Haynes reports hearing an alternative vision offered by Elizabeth:

One day, sitting on the porch at Dilruba, Elizabeth turned to me and said

(many, many years ago, before any of the development nearby): “Remember what I say ... One day the Center will be an oasis, just like Central Park is in New York City.” Baba gave her this vision, and she knew, but was not disturbed. Nor are we. Indeed, it is wonderful to know that now over 300,000 people come to Myrtle Beach each week in season; 12 million visited last year. This makes us happy, that so many feel, albeit unconsciously, His presence ... as they are close to the most sacred place in America. Jai Baba!⁴⁸

Central Park is 843 acres and, according to 2011 data, has “37–38 million visits annually, by approximately 8–9 million different people. ... Estimated daily visits range from 40,000 on a weekday in winter to 220,000 on a summer Sunday.”⁴⁹ It exists as a natural sanctuary open to all in the midst of the most populous U.S. city. There are places where, among the large rock outcroppings and trees, one can hardly see buildings or hear the sounds of the city. Whether one goes there or not, the park is a space that influences the whole area.

Like a park, the paradigm of “Baba’s home” can accommodate the diversity of all because it is grounded in the experience of visiting in an atmosphere of his love and the opportunity to be at his home. The paradigm of a retreat, however, is designed to organize living spaces and activities that meet a specified range of needs and desires of anticipated guests. In India, his home (Meherazad) and the retreat center (Meherabad) are 20 miles apart. In Myrtle Beach, these two roles are merged. How to address the dilemma of accommodating a dramatic increase in guests who will want to stay on the Center and preserving the atmosphere of Baba’s home, while ensuring, as Baba wished, that no one should feel excluded?

When we look to the example of guests in Baba’s time staying near the Center, the situation appears less dire. Myrtle Beach is a tourist economy, already set up to house, feed and entertain vast numbers of people according to their varied tastes, and it will automatically respond to new needs and trends. Historically, it has catered to those who loved the beach, golf and other forms of recreation, and it will continue to do so—and more. When we think of Baba’s sahasas, gatherings in his intimate companionship, this is what he wanted for his lovers: to eat and sleep well, to enjoy games and entertainments, to share one another’s company, and to feel at home while forgetting their worries—all in the loving presence and atmosphere of the Beloved.

A comment by Rustom Irani made a deep impression on me. When Baba’s nephews Rustom and Sohrab visit Myrtle Beach, they don’t stay on Center but in the homes of their

close friends. They regularly go out to eat in local restaurants with whoever shows up to join them. These meals are lively affairs with a dozen or more participants. Rustom commented that as soon as they get off the plane they experience Baba's presence. He added that these meals with friends in Baba feel like the summer gatherings they shared at Guruprasad with Baba.

The simple presence of Baba lovers and all lovers of God locating their homes in the Myrtle Beach area and utilizing the infrastructure of Myrtle Beach presents the possibility of fulfilling Baba's vision of a spiritual abode for one and all. The home and retreat functions will continue to be combined, and the atmosphere of Baba's Home, captured in all its natural beauty in the films of his visits, can be preserved as a physical reminder of his presence forever uniquely here. The Love of the Avatar and the legacy of love of his devotees throughout the history of the Meher Spiritual Center will empower Myrtle Beach to become and endure as the spiritual abode for one and all.

Conclusion

While organizations are a necessary part of life in the world, the heart is the "center" that Baba is truly concerned about. When we take a retreat in his intimate company—his sahavas—he says:

You should take proper care of your health and think of me only. ... Let us all feel at home. Forget everything—family, home, job, position—and be with me as much as possible. Forget all difficulties and worries completely. And don't think about your home when you are here."⁵⁰

While Baba is concerned that we meet in groups to cooperate, learn and tell others about him, he is not concerned with what organizational structure we choose. When our hearts through his Love become his home, we will become one with him wherever we are and with whomever we are. In the meantime, we dedicate our hearts to him and strive to embrace the friction that love transcends in a true home. Trusting in God, we celebrate diversity in the spirit of love until we are love, until in Baba's words: "you and I are not we but One."

In her introduction to *Fragments from a Spiritual Diary*, Norina writes:

After five years of stay with the Master in India, in 1941, the Master decided to send me back to the United States to do his Work. Before leaving the shores of

India, he told me:

I have given you the order to find me as God Personal.

You have found me.

Go and tell this to the world.

You *will hear my voice* within.

You will hear no other voice.⁵¹

In conclusion, the following thought transmission of Norina Matchabelli and “The Seven Realities” by Meher Baba are most appropriate:

Do not belittle yourself through furies and frenzies.

You cannot do wrong unto others, without doing a wrong unto yourself.

Be steady in the Truth of your own perception.

Live and die in the sanity of Truth.

Do not cripple yourself with borrowed or imposed pettiness.

Rise above animality.

Break asunder all shackles that hold you down.

Rise into your full divine stature.

In the freedom of purity, you will see me.

In the lucidity of love unperturbable, you will find me.⁵²



Entrance to Meher Abode, Baba's Home

The Seven Realities

Existence, Love, Sacrifice, Renunciation, Knowledge, Control, and Surrender

I give no importance to creed, dogma, caste, or the performance of religious rites, but to the *understanding* of the following seven Realities.

1. The only **Real Existence** is that of the One and only God Who is the Self in every (finite) self.
2. The only **Real Love** is the Love for this infinity (God), which arouses an intense longing to see, know, and become one with its Truth (God).
3. The only **Real Sacrifice** is that in which, in pursuance of this Love, all things—body, mind, position, welfare, and even life itself—are sacrificed.
4. The only **Real Renunciation** is that which abandons, even in the midst of worldly duties, all selfish thoughts and desires.
5. The only **Real Knowledge** is the Knowledge that God is the inner dweller in good people and in so-called bad, in saint and in so-called sinner. This Knowledge requires you to help all equally as circumstances demand without expectation of reward, and when compelled to take part in a dispute, to act without the slightest trace of enmity or hatred; to try to make others happy with brotherly or sisterly feeling for each one; and to harm no one in thought word or deed, not even those who harm you.
6. The only **Real Control** is the discipline of the senses to abstain from low desires, which alone ensures absolute purity of character.
7. The only **Real Surrender** is that in which poise is undisturbed by any adverse circumstance, and the individual, amidst every kind of hardship, is resigned with perfect calm to the will of God.⁵³

Notes

- ¹ Darwin Shaw, *As Only God Can Love* (Myrtle Beach: Sheriar Foundation, 2003), p. 22.
- ² Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., p. 1908.
- ³ Kitty Davy, *Love Alone Prevails* (Myrtle Beach: Sheriar Foundation, 1981), p. 470.
- ⁴ *Love Alone Prevails*, p. 372.
- ⁵ SC Information Highway, <http://www.sciway.net/hist/indians/geo.html>
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