

Nights With Adi

In 1974, Heather Nadel, Lindsay Reiter, and I shared living at "Pop's House", a compound on the outskirts of Ahmednagar, located along the road to Meherazad. Erico sometimes was there as well when in town from his work in Madras. Formerly in the Military Cantonment of Ahmednagar, it was located down the lane from the tomb of the Muslim Saint buried at the edge of the Aurangabad Road. We would turn left off the road and ride our bikes down the lane and enter the compound through the large gate. The house was called "Pop's House" because it was the home where Goher's family lived; her father Rustom ("Pop") Irani continued living there until he passed in the early 1970s. The family had moved to Ahmednagar from Quetta in 1932 on Baba's orders after the great earthquake. The Women Mandali had also lived here, and Baba stayed at times while the Main Bungalow was being built at Meherazad in 1948.

Lindsay worked in the Dispensary at Meherabad and Heather worked in the Trust Office helping Mani; at times Heather would go out to Meherabad for Trust work. I was out at Meherazad daily, helping in the Dispensary and doing chores at Meherazad. Several times a week after our workday was over, the three of us would rendezvous at the Trust Compound to spend the evening with Baba's Secretary, Adi K. Irani, in his office. We were usually joined by Jacko, Bob Street and Erico when he was in town. It was a 'spicy' group, and tall tales were shared. Bhau was a frequent participant in these evening visits and would sometimes tell us stories from the 'Book That Can't Be Written'! Such an odd tribe we were. We would order Rosey Pelican Beer from the Canteen, Godrej's famous snacks and goodies, and oftentimes dinner.

But the nights we spent with Hafiz, Qawaali songs, Rumi, and the love of the Divine that burned so hot it singed your eyelashes—well, these nights were fondly referred to as a visit to "The Tavern." They taught me that once you understand the true meaning of baptism, you crave another, and another and full immersion is a must.

Adi was helped by a man named Laxman, who served him with grace, respect and so much love. I always took note of the devotion and attention Laxman gave to Adi—it was worthy of study. A lot can be learned by watching the exquisite nature of a true servant to one held in high esteem. I remember thinking I hoped to have the fortune to serve my Beloved with the humble and silent grandiloquence Laxman exhibited. Even before the chill of the night had crept into the room, Laxman would bring a shawl for Adi and so tenderly place it around his shoulders. He anticipated a need before it presented itself. And best of all when Adi would cry out, "Time for a peg!" Laxman would appear with a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label, as if from out of thin air!

Ah, the Tavern Door had been swung wide open and the Inn Keeper was in a good mood! Adi would look up and tell Laxman, "Ah cha! Thank you! What a good man!" And then with a twinkle in his eye, he would ask Laxman, "What? No fag

(cigarette) tonight?" And just as he did with the magical appearance of the Johnny Walker Bottle, Laxman would disappear for a moment and return with a packet of English cigarettes and a box of matches on a small silver tray and place them on the table in front of Adi.

Right on cue, without being asked, Laxman would again take leave, returning with a tray of beautiful shot glasses, one for each of us. Adi would pour, and when we would see he was doing so with a 'heavy hand', we knew he was alerting us that tonight the "Lane of Love" was going to catch fire and burn us to a quick. He would ask, "Are there any moths here tonight?" And in his inimitable Adi manner, he'd tease, "Huh! Any moths here?" And we'd all eagerly chime in "Yes! I am a moth!" Then in an ever-so-serious tone, almost in a whisper, he would ask us, "Are you willing to be burned in the Fire of His Love tonight?" With eagerness (and a bit of spiritual naiveté) we'd all chime in with a hearty "Yes! Yes, Adi, catch us in the Flame of His Love!" It was at this moment the curtain on the stage for this One-Man show would slowly begin to rise.

With a wry smile on his face and anticipation in his dark eyes, Adi asked us, such a serious tone to his voice, "Can you be like a moth, even for a moment? Do you have such courage? Are you willing to succumb to uncontrolled frenzy and unite with the Flame?" Adi chuckled at our conspiratorial silence as we smiled, looking at each other, leaning in with eager anticipation, elbows on the table; we all knew of the joy to come! The curtain rose a little higher. Adi lit a candle. We watched it flicker and then dance with arms flaming upward, casting shadows on the walls. Some nights those shadows were bouncing off the ceiling. The breeze made the flame dance and twirl like a dervish. The candle's light glimmered onto the glass bottle, penetrating the golden-brown liquid held captive inside. Its graceful dance was reflected inside the bottle, igniting the Scotch Whiskey into a spiritual bonfire of divine nectar waiting to be imbibed. This penetrating reflection of the candle's flame was a profound symbol to me because I "saw" that the spark that ignites the flame not only comes from a source outside of oneself but from 'within' as well! Such a simple image conveyed to me that not only do we *receive* the Lord's Grace, but we also *contain* it. We can never really let go when we are so in Love with Him; it is an impossibility. I bore witness to how the Divine *envelops* our hearts in that Grace which is given to us in great abundance.

These nights with Adi were a special time we enjoyed to the fullest. Adi would recite Hafiz or interpret the lyrics of the songs that Begum Akhtar sang. He loved *Qawwali* songs, their sorrowful, sometimes woeful lament. Oh, those pitiful cries, the complaints to the Beloved, the yearning of the holy, the demanding for God's presence. And oh, how Adi would complain that the English language was woefully inadequate to explain such deep spiritual meaning, a heavenly glory that made angels weep! Yet, the words which he chose to convey the beauty of what he wanted us to experience conveyed such deeply moving emotion—we sat there, tears streaming down our faces.

What a sight to see when Adi would close his eyes, lean back in his chair, and gesture so beautifully with his hands. They would move so gracefully, in time with the lyrical, mystical poetry of Hafiz, the tenderness of Rumi. You could almost hear the sitar or the harmonium accompanying the Qawaali singer. Sometimes his hands danced wildly in the air with Divine Ecstasy as he would recite, by heart, these most sacred words. Our cheeks burned and were washed with cool tears. Adi would pause for just a moment and the effect made our hearts pound. You could see that he himself was sipping from his own chalice, overflowing with Divine Wine from the hands of the Inn Keeper. After such a pregnant pause, allowing the stars in the heavens to adjust their skirts from their frenzied dance as Adi recited, he would lament that we did not know Urdu and Persian. He told us it was such a shame we could not hear these couplets, these words of Hafiz' love for his Beloved in Urdu or listen to the Qawaali songs and their lyrics in their native language. Even so, how fortunate we all were that Adi's presence made it impossible to not sit in awe of the tender love expressed by Rumi. The manner of his recitation was magical, the flickering candle cast a spell over us. In our mind's eye we glimpsed in some mystical way, the script of these great poets whirling across the parchment paper and ink dancing from their pens. There were moments when I felt the tips of their pens touch my very soul, etching these holy words directly in a sacred chamber of my own heart. It was comforting when Adi told us that the language of love is universal and exposure to the Divine is never lost. So, even with deficient language skills, we caught fire and burned!

One night after we had witnessed Adi pour his heart out to His Beloved, as the book of Hafiz lay open on the table in front of him, we sat, spellbound. In this rapture, our hearts were begging for more, like hungry chicks in a nest. I am sure the angels in heaven could hear these chirps and smiled, although jealous of our fortune! Silence rang out, pounding like a cathedral bell at Notre Dame. A few moments passed and Adi raised his left hand; with his crooked and twisted arthritic fingers, he gestured to us to give him our shot glass for one more pour. Again, Laxman appeared. He, too, knew Adi was on fire. Laxman opened the bottle and offered it to Adi to fill our glasses. It was rare to have more than two pegs but the air, so light, was charged with His Presence. The room had filled with the aroma of the Divine—one barely needed to breathe. After all, only mortals had to breathe and, in this moment, we were immortal! This was a night worthy of a third pour and a third cigarette—we could have lit it with our very breath.

We lifted our glass to our lips at the same time, and without hesitation called out, three times, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" and drank down. Laxman came around to those of us who had cigarettes and lit them. Silence again embraced this room of drunken companions, intoxicated with the Divine. In the distance we could hear drums and chimes, bhajan singing coming from the little temple on the other side of Godrej's Canteen. A few dogs barked off in the distance. A lorry traveling through town honked its horn. Adi put his glass down; we followed suit. He glanced at each one of us, looking deeply into the soul hidden in our eyes. He went around the table from one to the other,

all gathered in His Love, a king in his court. He was happy and we were filled with such joy.

And then he asked, "Who is Meher Baba?" Silence.

"Who is Meher Baba?" he again queried; his gaze caught in the flicker of the candle that had now burned quite low. In unison, we all replied, "He is the Avatar! Our one, true Companion!" This put such a big smile on his face. He leaned back in his chair, took a drag on his cigarette, and blew the smoke out and upward. The smoke formed an angelic ballet to be swallowed in the night air. He sat there like a king on his throne, such a comfortable pause. We were spellbound and Adi was cherishing the moment, enjoying to the fullest. "Ahh! You are right!" he said, speaking to no one in particular. He let those words dangle for a moment to embrace the fragrant pause, as if a moment in time, held up, could make it last just a tad longer.

Then he asked, "How do you know this?" We all agreed this was our conviction and just like we knew the sun would rise in the morning, every morning, we all knew Meher Baba is the Ancient One, the Lord, the Avatar, and our Companion. We all chimed in! "Meher Baba is the Lord of Lords, the beginning and the end!" His smile widened and he opened his eyes. We were tipsy on our own words as they echoed through the room and danced with the shadows cast on the walls and ceiling from the candle. What a moment of giddiness!

What Adi said next, so matter of fact, felt like baptism with my Beloved. Adi K. Irani, Meher Baba's Secretary, announced, "This conviction you have about Meher Baba is nothing less than God Realization in disguise!"

He said this so calmly, in such a solemn timbre. Each word was framed in lightening only the gods can create. It was a moment of power, a moment of divine sovereignty. Although lifted to the heavens it was humbling as well.

Adi's pronouncement was even more poignant because just that morning Eruch had told me, in response to a question I had about the Path, "Why do you bother about the Path now? You have found Him!" He moved his arm in a semi-circle manner, pointing to the Hall and His Chair. "My child, you have reached the destination and now the Path follows you!"

What an atmosphere enveloped the room as we prepared to order dinner and to break bread in companionship with Him and each other. Adi was truly one of a kind! His love for Meher Baba and conviction he is the Lord of Lords was awe-inspiring. I honestly believe there is an 'Adi' in each of us if we look deeply inside and embrace the joy of knowing the Lord.

Quite a day for a 25-year-old, incredibly young woman!