

THE NEW PHASE

OF

MEHER BABA'S LIFE

1949

By Ramjoo Abdulla

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The Beginning

“ This is the beginning of my end and the end of my beginning ” is one of the recent esoteric references from Baba to the New Phase of his and his people’s life to be commenced from October ~~next~~. It has also been aptly described by Baba the other day in a matter of fact way as ‘ Vanvas ’ (exile) for himself, ‘ Sanyas ’ (renunciation) for those going with him and ‘ Satyanas ’ (ruin) for all concerned.

Everything in existence under the law of opposites is both significant and otherwise according to how a thing or an event is looked at. For those who have been close to Baba during these 28 years of his life of ‘ the one in the many ’ nothing is important or unimportant by itself or for itself. It is for Baba to lend colour to a most colourless thing or to give no importance to any developments however great they may be in magnitude. It is just like Baba to spend hours in discussing about a thing like a cabbage or dismissing in a few words the question of the whole of creation by just saying that it is made up of nothing, is the outcome of nothing and is altogether nothing by itself.

For Baba’s Mandali, each and every year of his life can easily be remembered to have been significant in one respect or another and therefore when on the eve of the New Year 1949, the Circular “ For My Disciples and Devotees—1949 ” dated 1st January 1949, was first distributed amongst those present at Khushroo Quarters on 31-12-48, its full significance was not fully realised at that time in spite of the extraordinary nature of the message that it contained.

From January onwards, the new trend of Baba's occasional remarks became all the more pronounced. Some such remarks that could be noted down upto the time Baba left for Mount Abu on February 15th are as follows:-“(1)....I do not feel like caring for anything as to whatever that remains and whatever that goes....(2)Tomorrow is to be cared for in 1949.... (3)...I will finish once for all, all the existing arrangements by December end, perhaps earlier at June end, may be by March end(4) An Immediate reduction of 50% must be made in all expenses right now...(5) From July you will begin to see and hear things for yourself....(6) 90% of the Mandali will have to leave me and only 10% will remain with me.. (7)....In 1949, I have no trust left in and for anyone including myself....(8)All are pardoned by me and God will also pardon me, but henceforth no pardon possible....(9).... You people have been with me for so many years and I am therefore responsible for your continued weaknesses but I do not want to take advantage of your weaknesses. I am therefore warning you not to succumb to these and avoid everything being washed away during 1949....”

Before leaving for Mount Abu on 15th February, Baba instructed the Mandali to keep themselves absolutely aloof from the opposite sex to the extent of even avoiding a formal handshake or any conversation with each other except as between the nearest relations or when dealing with outsiders in the course of one's duty. In case of death, the wish of each and every member was also obtained by Baba in writing as to their respective individual desire about their last rites and accordingly instructions were left for the burial, cremation and removal to the Tower of Silence as the case would be.

Activities Intensified

Making Mount Abu as the pivot of his activities for the next four months, Baba undertook many whirlwind 'Mast' trips to far-flung places under exacting conditions and according to rigidly-fixed timetables. One more Circular in continuation of the one dated January 1st was issued about the second week of May adding partial fasting for those who were asked to observe silence during the month of July. On May 26th, a telegraphic reminder was received at Ahmednagar from Dr. Donkin from Mount Abu under orders from Baba reading as follows: "The last two strenuous midsummer 'Mast' trips done during his (Baba's) illness has severely told upon his health but this is not even the shadow of the 1949 personal disaster stop Inform Mandali at Nagar, Meherabad and on the Hill".

The Momentous Meetings at Meherabad

Elaborate arrangements were made days in advance for certain of the Mandali members to meet Baba at Meherabad every day at appointed hours on and from the 15th of August to deliberate upon the changes and the consequences of the New Life that Baba was going to decide for himself and for those who would elect to keep company with him or who would choose to remain under his guidance from October onwards. Those asked to attend the meetings were strictly warned neither to leave the station nor to accept any other local appointment from 15th to 20th of August. Because of his public duties on the Independence Day, Sorosh was the only one who was exempted from attending the first meeting. Baba also expressly desired a full and faithful record to be made about all that he did and said during

these meetings so that others who were not there should also know how the discussions were held and what the decisions were arrived at. "Stick to me like a leech and try not to miss anything that I say to anyone during these days" was the order that Baba gave to Faram. And in spite of his indisposition, Faram began to make short-hand notes diligently on the spot which has made it possible for this narration to be continued on the basis of his verbatim reports including for the interviews granted by Baba to individuals who had happened to call on him from far-flung places at the time of the meetings.

The weight of the *internal* work done by Baba during his last seclusion from June 22nd to July 31st was said to be terrific even before Baba was half through those 40 days. That had to be believed, since there was nothing tangible to the eye as to what the actual work done was and as to why it was undertaken. But those who have been near Baba during the last few weeks are bound to find the word 'terrific' to be too mild for all that Baba has said and done *externally* in and through these meetings. Not only that, more than fifty persons have been set thinking and working furiously day and night at breakneck speed but that almost each one of them is made to feel and find that Baba is all the time maintaining a continuous touch with what is being done and how both individually and collectively by one and all. The slightest slackening, a little slip or just an oversight on the part of anyone, be that in word or deed, is next to impossible to remain unnoticed by Baba who in spite of passing sleepless nights is also keeping himself intensely active from morn to eve over and above his present completely soundless silence.

Apart from his usual insistence upon discipline and thoroughness, Baba is manifestly dead earnest in the matter of the Mandali's attendance at the meetings, the attention to be paid by them to all that he says and does, and above all, the seriousness and *finality* which he expects the Mandali to attach to his plans and intentions.

“However busy you may be otherwise, do not fail to be present all the time....I will not be available afterwards....there will be no more chances like these...I will need no further work to be done by anyone...Take all that I say with the utmost seriousness....I mean all that I say these days....May God help all those who may take anything lightly or allow themselves to be misled by their own individual fads and fancies” are some of the warnings that Baba has passed so often and so very gravely to those around him.

Immediately on his arrival on the first day of the meeting at Lower Meherabad, Baba embraced Gustadji and Kaikobad and then entered the hall in the new quarters of the Ashram. It was nearly 7-15 A. M. and yet some of the members required to be present were found to be absent. Only when Baba was satisfied that this was due to a bonafide mistake made in showing the time for the meeting on the notice-board to be 7-30 instead of seven o'clock as originally fixed that he became inclined to commence the proceedings for the day. A warning was all the same given to the participants to be present in the hall punctually at seven the following morning. “Be present in the hall even if you find that I have not arrived by seven o'clock” said Baba. In order to enable all those present including Don to follow Baba's say which was mostly expressed in Guje-

rati and other mixed dialects, Ramju and Vishnu were asked to translate there and then in English and Marathi what Adi Senior and others near Baba began to read from the alphabet-board.

Baba's Own Decisions

The fact that Baba had once again become absolutely silent since the statement he had made about intensifying his silence at the time of retiring into the last seclusion became all the more prominent when Baba's fingers began to flick swiftly over the board as these used to during the first 20 years of his silence: "Listen to and pay full attention to all that I am going to tell you. Whatever that we are going to discuss and decide these days is to be made known to all plainly, exactly and truthfully. Today we shall have a general talk about the basis and the lines on which we have to start making the ultimate arrangements and adjustments in order to facilitate the final decision or decisions that have to be arrived at. There are three points that I have already decided upon most definitely about myself. What I want from you is to help me to help all to adjust themselves as best as they can to fall in line with my own decisions in one way or the other. These three points are- (1) Firstly, I will be absolutely helpless in the true and literal sense of the word on account of some personal disaster to me and that before that happens to me after October 1st, I want to make whatever arrangements that are possible to be made for the Mandali under the limited means at our disposal, because I will then have to stop and shall stop looking into the material affairs of anyone. (2) Secondly, I will allow only such persons to remain with and near me who are in every

respect completely ready on their own responsibilities to fulfill and carry out the conditions that will be laid down by me during these few days for that purpose. I will be beyond the reach of all others. (3) Thirdly, Meherabad and Pimpalgaon Ashrams will be disbanded as I am going to wipe these off my map.

“ I thank God that the time for which I have been waiting so long has arrived at last. The whole world will know how and to what extent I become helpless and I will come to know as to how far the Mandali will go with me. And that is the gist of all that we have to discuss and decide about.”

Material Arrangements & Spiritual Benefits

In the meetings or outside, when addressing individually or collectively, the central theme of the New Phase appeared to run as the one thread through all that Baba said and did about anything and about everyone. Usually everyone is allowed to address Baba in the language in which one is most familiar. Accordingly, when Ali Akbar got an opportunity to ask Baba something about his personal matters he began as usual in Persian. He was at once stopped. “ No, you try to tell me everything as best as you can in Hindustani ” Said Baba, “ because I want everyone, whether actually present here or not, to know all that I say these days ”. On another occasion when Pappa tried to say something confidentially in writing in the matter of his own household affairs, to the surprise of everyone present, Baba got that letter read openly in the meeting and said “ Nothing is to be kept secret ”.

In reply to advices sought from Baba by anyone about external matters, the gist of all his say used to be.

“Dispose of all that you can dispose of. Provide whatever you can provide for your dependents. Arrange whatever you can arrange on these lines and wait and see for yourself all that is finally decided in the meetings and then decide yourself for yourself whether you can or cannot remain with me in the future. There was absolutely no question of spiritual relations and spiritual benefits. No one will be left out spiritually, if I am spiritually perfect myself.”

Baba appeared to be as such concerned with those who would go with him as with those who would not be able to do so and more particularly with such of them who were also depending upon Baba for their material requirements like household needs and family maintenance. During the daily discussions that went on for days together with the men-Mandali at Lower Meherabad and the women-Mandali up on the Hill, emphasis in different words and from different angles was repeatedly laid upon the costs and the consequences involved for those going to remain with Baba and those who will be away from him including the number of those who depended upon Baba or were connected with him and his work in some way or the other.

From the very first day of the meetings, Baba had also started making a vigorous and decisive approach to questions like the disposal of all his moveable and immoveable properties, payment of promised amounts and making provisions for dependent families and those who may not be able to remain with him in the future “Now how to adjust”, began Baba, when he started to arrive at the number of arrangements that have since been made about different matters, “I have no cash excepting a certain amount which is kept aside for a certain

work. Everything that I own and possess including Ashram buildings, fields and houses, etc., both here (Ahmednagar, Arangaon and Pimpalgaon) and elsewhere, and all furniture, fixtures, cars, power-plants, cattle, chattels and in fact each and everything that belongs to me is to be disposed of. Nothing is to remain as my property and in my name excepting the Meherabad Hill premises on which the tomb for my bodily remains has already been built by me and you all should always remember that when I leave my body, it has got to be buried here." According to a dictation from Baba, Ghani then offered a prayer as follows:

"OH GOD, MAY BABA NOT GIVE UP
HIS BODY SOON",

and all those present said Amen. Resuming his say Baba continued as follows: "All the proceeds from the sale of all my properties are to be used in paying off promised sums and to provide for the immediate needs of those whom I have myself made to depend upon me. Nothing is required for me and those who go with me. We have therefore to see what best could be done for those who will not be able to accompany me and to remain with me after October 15th. I do not want anyone depending upon me to be suddenly left in a lurch materially. The question about spiritual benefits does not arise at all. That in turn depends upon the question whether I am or I am not perfect. As it is we have, so to say, one rupee in hand against ten rupees to be spent at the least in order to provide for the immediate and minimum requirements of all concerned. Be absolutely honest in giving your opinions, answers and suggestions. Keep sentiments apart. Don't be vague. Say exactly what you think and how you feel. You should not say, 'Baba, your will'"

Only a few of us are here to arrive at the decisions that concern many of us. Women Mandali is also going to be disbanded. Whatever we decide here is therefore also going to be followed by the women Mandali and will affect everyone who is connected with me in some way or the other. I am going to decide everything within these ten days. Do not get misled on account of my apparently eccentric habits and customs upto now. For example, I have definitely decided to give up Meherazad (Pimpalgaon) in October and have yet given instructions to Padri to fix up about the lights as early as he can. That is because of my custom of maintaining an old order of things right upto the moment that I actually start upon anything new. It may be madness, it may be method, but that has been my habit. Now I am also going to put an end to my habits and customs. Therefore when I say the "end" now it will mean nothing but an end. Do not remain any more under any impression that it will be otherwise. I want to be absolutely free from everything and everybody. There will be no compromise now about anything. I am becoming "ghutt" (hardened), "naffat" (callous) and "naked" (penniless). Remember the proverb "Nange-se-Khuda-bhi darta hai." (even God is afraid of the callous.)"

A deadline of October 15th has been fixed by Baba for the disposal of everything and for the completion of all arrangements. These include for the cancellation of Baba's Last Will made in favour of the Mandali since 1940 as well as the cancellation of the Wills made in favour of Baba by men Mandali members. These have already been torn one by one by Baba (excepting the Wills of the Westerners) with his own hands in the presence of the respective executants each of whom was

given back the relative torn pieces to be kept as souvenirs. The Meher Publications as a firm has also since been dissolved and the copyright in respect of all the literature has been declared to remain vested in the respective authors individually.

Sarosh, Meherji and Nariman, foremost amongst few others in India who have rendered valueable service to Baba, appeared to be the most concerned over Baba's decisions. Sarosh was the first to offer to Baba to undertake the sole responsibility of maintaining indefinitely all the men and the women Mandali now staying with Baba. The way Baba smiled he was no doubt very happy to hear this from Sarosh, but told Sarosh, "You have missed the whole point. Can't you see that all the expected sale-proceeds of all my properties have been earmarked for those not going with me? The question of the maintenance of those who will remain with me after October 15th is neither provided for nor is to be provided for. I and those who are going with me are going to suffer. We are going to start without any protection. We will have to go a-begging."

Meherji and Nariman similarly rose to the occasion and have already accepted to take over the Meherabad and Meherazad Ashrams, lands, buildings, etc. It is a sheer sacrifice on their part made on account of the sanctity and sentiments attached to these sacred places, because when Baba advised them not to hesitate to re-sell the properties if and when they received good offers, Nariman said, "If it were the question of selling off, we would not have involved ourselves." Baba replied, "These properties are now yours, not mine. I can have no objection to your keeping them or selling them."

Responsibility Before God

On the third day (August 17th), Baba offered the following three alternatives to the men Mandali :

- 1 " Those who will find themselves able to fulfill the Conditions that I have laid down and accept the same, will go with me."
- 2 " Those who cannot accompany me will have to earn their living and if they can spare out of their earnings, give the savings to the dependent families and continue to carry out the orders already given to them by me or any orders that I may give them again."
- 3 " Those who can neither go with me nor can support others and carry out my orders will have to go their own way."

Before discussing anything further, Baba asked Ghani to offer a prayer which he did offer solemnly as follows:

" May God give good ' Buddhi ' (sense) to the Mandali, and full ' Suddhee ' (discrimination) to Baba."

Baba then gave a few examples about the alternative offers and said, " Even if Ramju did not accompany me and remained in Nagar, he would go on doing the duties entrusted to him and follow my orders and so his spiritual connection with me will remain to be as it is today. Similarly, suppose Padri did not go with me. In that case, I will ask him to seek out a job, maintain himself out of his salary and give the remaining for the families. If Padri will carry out my orders, his spiritual connection with me will also continue to remain as it is today. Likewise, if Baidul happened to accompany me, well and good; if not, he will have to serve in Kaikhushru's restaurant."

The 4 alternative offers that were given to the women Mandali the day before were also disclosed to be as follows:

- 1 If any of them can have some member of her family provide for her financially, she can stay on in Meherabad Hill Quarters; but there would be no members of the men Mandali down the Hill to help in any way at all.
- 2 They can work for their living and put anything that can be spared for families that have so far been depending on Baba.
- 3 They can do what they like and have nothing more to do with Baba.
- 4 They can leave everything to Baba and do exactly as Baba says accepting with full faith whatever decision he makes for them.

Explaining the difference between the two sets of alternatives, Baba said that the concession that he had allowed to the women-Mandali in respect of making a decision for them himself, will under no circumstances be applicable to the men-Mandali, each of whom will have to arrive at the final decision by himself for himself. "But in either case", said Baba, "each person, man or woman will have to affirm sole responsibility on oath before God in my presence for their respective decisions whether arrived at directly or through me."

Describing the Ladies-meeting on the Hill further, Baba made particular references to the families of Kaikobad and Baidul. "When I suggested to the members of Kaikobad's family" said Baba, "to consult with him first, each one of them told me that they belonged to me and would do what I tell them myself. Similarly, when

I enquired of Baidul's family, if I should ask them or ask Baidul about them, they went so far as to say that Baidul had no concern with their future and that they would fully accept my decision for them." Referring to the proceedings at the meeting held on the Hill on August 16th, Baba said, "After carefully pondering over all the 4 points, each and every person present there promised to abide by the fourth point to do what I tell them. As a token of their sincerity and promise, I asked them to kiss my hand. After that I told them to be careful so as not to let the kiss to be the kiss of Judas but to maintain it as the seal of obedience."

Baba's present repeated prayers to God and the responsibility to be borne as before Him by each and every person in any case and under all circumstances was brought to a climax on the 18th of August. The first thing on his arrival that day at 6-50 A. M. that Baba did was to ask Donkin, Khaksaheb, Kaikobad and Kalemama to be ready with their respective Bible, Quran, Avesta and Gita, after taking bath, in case any of them had missed it that morning. After finishing an interview with Meherji and Nariman, Baba called the four Mandali 'Mullas' (priests) and made them stand on his right. Kaikobad was the first to whom Baba asked to perform 'Kusti' and to read the usual prayer audibly for five minutes. Donkin was the next to be called and he read from the Bible "The Crucifixion of Jesus from the Gospel of St. Mathews". Khaksaheb was then asked to offer Namaz and he silently performed two "Raqats of Nafil". Kalemama was made to end the prayers by repeating seven "Shlokas" of the tenth "Adhyaya" from the Bhagvad Gita. There was pin-drop silence throughout these performances when Baba

was also all attention and every time the particular prayer came to an end, he used to take over the respective scriptures and keep them on his own lap one by one and rested his fingers on each book. After the last performance was completed, Baba collected all the four holy books from his lap and then spread them on an adjoining table with his own hands. His present prayer-mouthpiece Ghani was then asked by Baba to cover all the four Divine Messages with both of Ghani's hands and solemnly offer a prayer which Ghani read according to a dictation from Baba over the alphabet-board as follows:—

“MAY GOD HELP BABA TO DEFINITELY MAKE THIS STEP, WHICH HE WAS TAKING TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING AND TO GO AWAY IRREVOCABLE SO THAT FROM OCTOBER 16TH WHEN HE ENTERS THE NEW LIFE, THERE WILL BE NO TURNING BACK.”

This was the first prayer for HELP ever before heard from Baba to God during the last 28 years and the Mandali was so taken aback and confused that no one could think of or dare say Amen!

Those Going With Baba

As and when the circumstances demand or at times according to his pleasure, Baba occasionally gives sharp pin-pricks of chastisement to the Mandali as well as extols them liberally and generously. Accordingly later on that day (August 18th), Baba happened to eulogise Ali Akbar for his devotion and services to Baba which proved too much for the poor fellow to digest. Knowing full well that since a long time Baba has made it a strict rule not to allow anyone under any

circumstances to touch his feet, take his Darshan (bow down before him) or even to offer him Namaskars (fold hands in salute) from a distance, Ali Akbar who happened to be sitting near Baba's chair at the moment simply could not help stretching his hands unnoticed by anyone and touching Baba's feet just once. Instantly the whole atmosphere became charged as Baba suddenly went grave and the rest of the Mandali got speechless with shock. Contrary to the expectations of witnessing an expression of strong displeasure from Baba, he quietly made Ali Akbar stand erect and warned him not to move at all. Baba then suddenly got up from his chair, went near Ali Akbar and bent himself down to touch Ali Akbar's feet. No one can clearly remember how it all exactly happened beyond the fact that there was an immediate scream and Ali Akbar was seen to jump clean off his feet and he had to be saved by a number of hands of those around him from falling down violently on the stone flooring of the hall. The way Baba then began to carry one of his arms, it was evident that he had also received some injury, but without paying any attention to that or to some injuries that Ali Akbar had also received, Baba once again insisted upon him to listen to Baba's order and eventually Baba touched Ali Akbar's feet.

After that it was found out that the whole brunt of Ali Akbar's fall was borne by Baba's right hand fingers which had to be carried in a sling for a number of days in spite of all possible first aid given by Donkin and Nilu on the spot as well as for all the different treatments that were continued for days together. Besides his complaints of the throbbing pain that the fingers gave Baba at nights, the extent of the inconvenience and

trouble to him could be easily seen even a week after this incident when Baba tried to set his hand on a letter that Ramju had prepared to be sent to the District Registrar, Nasik, in order to get back Baba's Last Will for cancellation as decided upon earlier. Baba had to make great efforts before he could bring the injured fingers of his right hand in line with the paper and before he could hold the pen sufficiently to write his name. Even so, Baba had to scribble a few scratches on a piece of paper before he could eventually complete that one solitary signature. But no sooner the immediate excitement subsided that day (18th), Baba told Ali Akbar that he was pardoned and that he should not any more dwell upon the incident or blame himself in any way for all that had happened. Addressing all those present at the time Baba said, "Carrying out my orders was the all important thing and compared to that there was no importance at all to my falling at your feet. How would it be possible for you to accompany me if you were not fully prepared to completely fulfill the conditions? Possibly, one of the Conditions may be to the effect that the first thing to be done every morning by the Mandali would be to spit on my face or that every morning I will be touching your feet!" Then addressing Ali Akbar particularly, Baba asked him if he would in that case accept the Conditions. "That", replied Ali Akbar, "was a question of going to pieces." "No", said Baba, "it is not that. It is only a question of carrying out the Conditions", and then suddenly asked him to twist his (Baba's) ears. This time it was with a smile that Ali Akbar carried out the command promptly, but then Anna 104 was found to have raised his hand to draw Baba's attention. When asked by Baba he said that he was also ready to twist Baba's ears! Baba smiled and said, "I only asked Ali Akbar to do that and to none else; but if any of you feel

like giving vent to your pent-up feelings in order to settle old scores with me, I will not mind at all to have my ears twisted this day by any of you without any fear of my displeasure," and amidst the roar of laughter that followed, Baba added, "twisting my ears was easy but carrying out my orders was difficult."

Those going with Baba were expected to be prepared to look upon themselves as already dead in the sense that the dead have no more material connections or concern with anything or anyone or the dead who ask no questions and need no provisions. "I am going to see", said Baba, "as to who was out to die for no particular reason by going with me."

While inviting the Mandalis whole-hearted, sincere and honest co-operation and opinions in arriving at the number of decisions that were made generally, they were warned again and again to discard all fads, fancies, notions and vagueness, particularly in respect of spiritual leanings and beliefs and were asked to look upon the prospect of going with Baba without the least expectation of any reward whatsoever. Explaining further, Baba said, "It was not merely a question of hardships and difficulties like those encountered in 'Mast' trips. The most difficult thing now was the need to control emotions and feelings and to have absolute readiness for split-second and on-the-spot obedience to whatever I would ask you to do or not to do. I do not expect anyone of you to be free from your respective reactions of good or bad impulses like that of anger, displeasure, likes and dislikes, but what I would expect of you is not to make the least show or give any direct or indirect expressions to your feelings and reactions. I will be free in every way and you will be bound in every respect.

I will live amongst you as one of you like a brother. I may even fall at your feet or ask you to spit upon me. That is why I have been saying that the Conditions will be such that very few would remain with me to the end. But at all times and under all circumstances you must continue to look upon me as your Master and to obey me implicitly. Scrupulous care shall have to be taken all the time by those going with me so as to avoid creating any occasion or situation by word or deed whether directly or indirectly that may be capable of inviting or encouraging any homage or reverence to be paid to me or to any of you by anyone else. If by any chance any respect or homage happens to be paid unsolicited to anyone, that action of respect or homage must be instantly met with an identical action on the spot by the Mandali concerned except when I happen to touch the Mandali's feet or fall at their feet or salute them or so on. Above all, I shall no more be taking care of anyone's health or have any concern with anyone's moods and likes and dislikes as I have been doing so far. Under all these circumstances, those of you who really succeed in remaining with me to the end will become worth to be worshipped by me. I will therefore be glad to have as many more of the Mandali as can go with me, but looking to the difficulties ahead and to the Conditions I have in mind to lay down in order to meet all likely situations and circumstances, I have my own doubts if five would be able to stand to the end even if 500 were to accompany me."

According to the points given to them by Baba, Donkin drafted the Conditions with the assistance of Ghani, but before these were read out on the 21st of August, Baba dictated to Ghani and accordingly he solemnly offered the following prayer at about 10-30 that morning:

“MAY IT PLEASE GOD TO GIVE HIS ABSOLUTE STRENGTH TO BABA TO ADHERE TO EVERYTHING THAT IS IN HIS CONDITIONS TO THE VERY END.”

In order to clarify the points further, as a result of the discussions that took place after the prayers concerning different interpretations of the Conditions, Baba asked Don and Ghani to retouch the draft. All the same, Baba continued to dwell upon the gravity and finality involved under the New Life and the irrevocable and unchangeable nature of the Conditions that were going to be solemnly adopted on August 31st. Baba said, “There was going to be no change in the decisions that I had taken. I am not going to return to Meherabad or Pimpalgaon. That fact has been made permanent by the oath-taking ceremony performed through the four Mandali members the other day. I was also very glad to receive injuries on my hands that I had rested upon the religious books. That ought to be an eye-opener for the Mandali that those who would go with me will have to face sufferings.”

Just as in the beginning so at the tail end of the meetings it was Nilu who could again interrupt Baba and said, “Everything will be easy.” But this time Baba’s rejoinder was of an entirely different nature: “There is no difficulty at all. There will be difficulty if at 2-0 P. M. tomorrow the work entrusted to Ramju is not completed by him in time.”

Baba also kept on expressing his doubts very often as to the ultimate number of those who will be able to stick to him to the last. “It is all the more surprising that those of you who should know and understand best,

keep on asking questions that betray a very poor appreciation of the full implications and of the nature of the New Life and Conditions. The other day Chhagan asked me if he should accompany me or adopt the alternative? Ghani also could not help saying that I will 'nibhav' him (help him to stick to me). The fact is that I will not be responsible absolutely about anything and anyone. I shall bear no responsibility even for Gustadji, although he will be the only one whom I shall try to keep with me because Maharaj (Shri Upasani Maharaj) had transferred him to me but that will also depend upon the fact that Gustadji will continue to listen to me, otherwise there will be goodbye also for him."

In the course of some discussions, Baba also pointed out to his injured fingers in the sling, and said, "This, plus my complete silence and the things I have to do and will have to do can better be left to your imagination than described by me. If later on, the other arm is paralysed, it would mean that I would be almost helpless physically. In that case, those who remain with me may have to live and subsist on water only, because according to one of the Conditions, when food is received or obtained by anyone, it is to be brought to me and cannot be eaten unless I distribute it myself."

At first, the Conditions were expected to be sent to all the Mandali members in and out of Ahmednagar as well as to all others connected with Baba and his work in one way or the other. Later Baba said that no one below and above the ages of 25 and 60 will have any place in the New Programme. As the days went by, the field of the prospective companions of Baba in the New Life was begun to be narrowed down more and more. Instead of

extending a general invitation, Baba later said that the Conditions would be posted to only those persons that he would select himself. The list of signatories, i. e., the persons who have in the past given an undertaking to follow Baba's instructions at the cost of their lives was later gone through by Baba personally and only 32 names were selected out of the total of 1,200 names in the list.

The Women Mandali

From the 25th of August, Baba began to give the whole day to the ladies on the Hill. At about 3—0 P. M. that day, some of the men Mandali were called over the Hill, and Baba informed them as follows:

“ You know about the 4 points given by me to the women Mandali. Accordingly, it was left for me to decide about them unlike the men Mandali who are to decide for themselves. I have now decided about them all today. I have called you to hear their decisions because we first decided that no one from the Mandali was to stay at Meherabad down the Hill or up on the Hill. We have since made an exception about Lower Meherabad. A few of the men Mandali are to stay there for one year and some of them can also stay there permanently. Likewise, under my decision for the ladies, some of them are going to stay on the Hill permanently. Before giving my decisions, I had allowed the ladies to give me their own suggestions according to their own judgment in spite of the fact that it was I who would give my own decision. One of the suggestions made was by Kaikobad's family and Mansari, viz., to be allowed to stay on the Hill. I approved of the idea on my own, but hesitated to give my decision because of one point, that has

also now been cleared. These five persons now can stay on the Hill for all times subject to the following two understandings:—(1) Not to expect to ever again see or meet me or to entertain the least idea that I would ever return to stay on the Hill. (2) To abide by all the conditions laid down under the arrangement made in respect of their staying on the Hill ”.

The conditions of the arrangement were repeated in the presence of all present and these were confirmed to be correctly understood and agreed to by Mansari and Kaikobad when expressly asked by Baba to do so. It was also made clear by Baba once again that in spite of the decision in the case of the women Mandali having been made by Baba, like everyone else, the individual responsibility for the women Mandali including Mehera for the respective decisions was their own before God and each one of them had agreed to assume the full responsibility for themselves before God in Baba's presence for the decisions made for them by Baba. Mansari repeated the oath that the women Mandali had taken as before God in Baba's presence to the above effect. The individual decisions given by Baba in the case of the 25 persons who had accepted the point four were read out and according to that, only four of the women Mandali were to go with Baba on the 16th of October to wherever he goes and different arrangements were made by Baba for the rest of them in certain groups.

Extracts from the notes dated August 25th as prepared by the ladies about their discussions and understanding made and arrived at are reproduced here. “Baba will give each individually her special order. Though we are separated physically from Baba, we are sharing in a way Baba's New Life by living the life that Baba

has chosen for us, by not possessing money or buying or accepting new things, or going to cinemas, and only accepting food, shelter, and toilet necessities (from the parties with whom each group has been fixed to stay).

Those who are definitely not to be with Baba must give up hope 100% whole-heartedly and sincerely of ever seeing Baba or meeting him again. By giving up hope entirely and carrying out his orders we shall be sharing his NewLife.

Baba continued to say that all the trouble was from hoping. Where there was no hope, there can follow no disappointment.

Baba made it very clear to all that whatever may happen in the way of personal ill-health or disaster to any of us after October 15th is no longer his responsibility. Each is to hold herself responsible for whatever may happen. If we accepted this whole-heartedly and willingly, we were to swear before God our acceptance of this responsibility.

Baba then told each to wash her face and hands and to take this oath before the Impersonal God in the presence of Baba, which each one did in turn.

Baba said all this was a very serious matter—no laughing matter, but that if we could take it seriously and still laugh that would be very nice indeed. The ceremony of taking the oath by Baba himself and the Mandali on August 31st would be a very serious matter indeed. »

It transpired later on as a result of the discussions between the men Mandali among themselves that even

the most stout-hearted and the least sentimental amongst them had also to make an effort to remain unmoved when they saw the things and the lists of the personal costlier belongings like jewellery, etc., that the women Mandali living with Baba had surrendered to be disposed of lock, stock and barrel.

Similarly, a collection worth approximately ten thousand rupees was made absolutely unsolicited in cash and kind by the poorer women devotees of Baba in Bombay merely on hearsay. Some of the contributors were reported to have given up all that they possessed. Baba accepted the whole lot as a gift from each of the contributors and then arranged each and all the contributions to be returned to the respective parties as Prasad from him. "There are such persons too," said Baba while expressing his very great appreciation of the spirit of devotion and sacrifice on the part of his Bombay Mandali. "D. has not only given up all that she possessed and all that she has been able to save all these years, but has insisted upon me to make some use or the other of the entire proceeds. About K., I know that it is with the greatest difficulty that she can make the two ends meet. In fact she is half starving and yet the wonder is that somehow she has managed to slip in four hundred rupees in a cover which has been sent to me on her behalf."

The Final Meeting

On the eve of August 31st everyone was instructed to be ready in the hall at 8-0 A. M. sharp that morning after taking a bath and putting on fresh, clean clothes. The hall was also washed thoroughly in the early hours and all were forbidden to enter the same before the appointed hour.

Arrangements were also made for the selected ~~32~~ visitors to be able to finish bath well in time. Afseri was the only one who arrived by the morning train from Bombay via Dhond at the nick of the moment. No sooner he was spotted in the train which passes through Meherabad, a car was specially rushed to the railway station and in order not to miss the appointed time, the car was taken straight to the bath-rooms because Baba had declared that no one would be allowed admittance in the hall after 8-0 A. M. In fact, Behram (Baba's brother) who arrived from Poona after the meeting had commenced was made to wait outside the hall. At exactly 8-0 O'clock Baba was the first to enter the hall and asked the Mandali to follow him.

For a few minutes Baba stood at the opposite end of his seat in the hall and asked Padri to walk across the hall to and fro before him and said, " I don't mind a cat to cross my path, but I do not want any man to come in my way ". After taking his seat and as usual after making sure that all those who were expected to be present were there and that there would be no disturbance or intrusion from anyone, Baba first briefly explained the purport of the gathering, more particularly to the visitors who were expressly reminded to the fact that they were ~~the 32~~ persons that Baba had selected out of a list of 1,200.

Forgiveness For All

The four patent priests were then asked to recite audibly passages from the Avesta, Bible, Quran and Bhagvad-Gita as Baba said that he first of all wanted to invoke the forgiveness of God for himself, for the Mandali and for all, through all the four, Zoroastrian,

Hindu, Christian and Islamic approaches to God. At the end of the recitations and referring to Khak's 'qiraat' (melodious recitation of Quran) Baba remarked that if God cannot be moved with such a beautiful performance, then God must be either deaf or dead. Baba also said that this was the last ceremony that he had arranged to be performed for the last time and added, "Henceforth there will be no ceremonies at all" After an interval of a few minutes allowed to all so that everyone may remain at ease for the next couple of hours, the business of the day was resumed.

Ramju was asked to give a brief narration for the benefit of the visitors about the plans and arrangements that were being made to wind up everything in order to start on the New Life from a scratch. After that Don read out rapidly the Conditions in English with a few interjections from Baba emphasising upon the main significance and the far-reaching implications involved under the Conditions for the New Life. Baba then declared that after taking the oath, a copy of the Conditions will be given to everyone, excepting to a certain number of the Mandali according to his own choice, and that each of the recipients shall study the contents, weigh the pros and cons of their own decisions thoroughly and return the respective copies within four hours with an unequivocal and plain 'Yes' or 'No' by way of their decisions. For those who could not read and understand English well, translation of the Conditions was also kept ready in Marathi.

Baba's Last Oath

The text of Baba's last oath in respect of ending the old and beginning the new order of life for himself and his

people which was prepared in advance was then read out solemnly by Donkin at a signal from Baba. Baba rose for the first time from his seat on this occasion and remained standing for a while facing the wall in front of the scriptures and with his back to the Mandali. After that once again, Baba warned one and all that his decision and the decisions that others would arrive at that day shall be irrevocable and binding for all times and that those who would not take it at all 100% seriously will have to bear the consequences. Those whom the Conditions were not given were afterwards also separately made to take an oath to carry out the arrangements decided upon and about which a separate list was kept ready in advance detailing each and every item as to how and when all these were to be carried out and by whom.

In the meantime, the Mandali were allowed to take their meals though Baba said that he will not eat until he got in his hands the replies from each of the recipients of the Conditions.

The Three Groups

Within two hours, all the decisions were in Baba's hands containing many surprises for all those present as well as for Baba. It so happened that on account of a mix-up of names, Jal Kerawala whom originally Baba intended to include amongst the 'Arrangement-wallas' happened to get the Conditions and he was one of those who said 'Yes'. Later on before going for his meals, Baba got the mistake rectified by accepting Jal Kerawala's decision in the affirmative and then under a special recitation made him free from going with Baba and to remain doing his present duties. Baba also expressed surprise at the decision of 'No' given by

Padri. He said that he would have very much liked Padri to go with him and therefore he felt sorry at this negative decision, but added that he was also glad because Padri happened to be, what Baba is used to call, one of the four 'pillars' of Meherabad, viz., Vishnu, Pendu, Adi Sr. and Padri. "In case the three 'pillars' said Baba, "who were going with him fell down, at least one would be left in reserve." Amongst those who had said 'No', Baba particularly referred to the cases of Gadekar and Deshmukh. For the former, Baba said, "May God always keep Gadekar in my heart"; and about the latter, he added, "Deshmukh will always be near and dear to me." After all the replies were sorted out, the whole gathering became divided into three groups who then automatically began to be called and referred to as the 'Yeswallas', 'No-wallas' and the 'Arrangementwallas'.

The general instructions given to the 'No-wallas' by Baba were to the effect to continue their lives as they were living so far. With one exception made in the case of Manek Mehta, who is permitted time upto 31-12-1950 to wind up his Meher Jap Mandal and sever all his connections concerning the same and join Baba definitely on 1st January, 1951, all the 'Yeswallas' were required to be present at Meherabad between the 1st and the 5th of October completely ready and prepared to turn their back for all times on their existing life and affairs.

The Details Unfolded

Until the 31st of August, Baba used to say that he did not know himself where he was going. From the 1st of September, he began to formulate and unfold the details one after the other. The first main point brought out was that he had started to arrange to acquire a

piece of land somewhere near Rishikesh, as he intended to make that place as the pivot of his future life of helplessness. Ramju and Dhake were asked to think upon a plan whereby the land at Rishikesh, when purchased in the name of any one or two of the 'Yeswallas' may be taken over under some such legal deed so that automatically at the end, the land should neither belong to or revert to Baba or any of his people. The new centre of the New Life was to be reached on foot so as to arrive there not later than November 1950. Before starting on this tramp to the North, Baba at first said that he would leave Pimpalgaon with all the 'Yeswallas' on the 16th of October on foot towards Aurangabad and pass the first $2\frac{1}{2}$ months at Khuldabad and Paithan and said that Khuldabad was the place where Sai Baba of Shirdi had started upon his spiritual career. Later on, on some practical considerations, Baba decided to walk from Pimpalgaon to Ghodnadi, from there in bus to Belgaum and stay on a piece of land there. "This place," said Baba, "has already a small out-house in which the ladies will be able to remain, and the rest of the space is more than enough for the men Mandali to live under the sky. There is also a good well containing nice drinking water for them. Belgaum will also provide the opportunity of enabling me to get those going with me to get used to the future life of service, begging, helplessness and so on, involved under the Conditions." Baba has also arranged to get a four-wheeler, caravan-like vehicle to be made ready and delivered together with two bullocks at Belgaum by the 15th of December, 1949, in order that the women Mandali accompanying Baba may be provided with the minimum of shelter and the means to complete the journey on foot to the North.

Even in the matter of details, Baba continues to judge and decide everything in keeping with the Conditions. Therefore in the matter of effecting the delivery of the "Caravan", already very elaborate arrangements have been fixed according to which Vishnu and Nilu have been instructed on the strength of the Conditions that they have accepted to note down right now and be present without any further reminder at the entrance to Belgaum of the road from Poona from five in the morning upto midnight on December 15th. Those who will be bringing the "Caravan" will arrive at the entrance any time before or on December 15th and wait there.

The Preliminary Training

Baba has already started insisting upon those who have decided to go with him to begin to behave and do things in the spirit of the Conditions, although a literal following of the same is expected to commence after October 15th. Explaining further, Baba said, "I am trying my best to help you all as much as I can so that all of you may be able to stick to me till the end. There is absolutely no question of any tests or trials. What is there left for tests and trials after all these years that you have been with me? It is a fact that the New Life is going to be very difficult, hard, exacting and in certain respects disastrous. It will be foolish on the part of anyone to presume that I will purposely create any situation or situations that will compel anyone to leave me. Why should I do that? For example, I could have easily asked Donkin to go to the West and do a particular duty to me there and he would have had no reason to be dissatisfied in doing that. Once we start on the New Life, everyone will have to bear the consequences of one's weaknesses if not

checked and controlled in the way these are expected to be checked and controlled according to the Conditions. Although I have absolutely made it clear that I will bear no responsibility of any kind for anyone, still, as already stated, I desire that those who have said 'Yes' remain with me to the end and by way of helping them concretely, I have decided to look upon the first 2½ months' stay at Belgaum as for the purpose of the preliminary training of the companions for the ultimate way of life of complete renunciation".

When a reference was made about some money which will be carried with him by Kaka, Baba said, "We have got to make a provision for the dumb animals that will be in the party and therefore after the 1st of January, 1950, no one should expect a single pie to be spent for anyone under any circumstances by Kaka, excepting for fodder for the animals and for absolutely unavoidable repairs to the "Caravan."

Over and above all these serious matters, Baba continued to remain his usual keen self to enjoy indoor games, hear jokes, and also take part heartily in games like 'Lingorcha,' etc., during suitable intervals amidst the meetings and the grave activities connected with the New Plan and programme of life for him and his people. Appreciating the good humour and good cheer consistently displayed by the Mandali, Baba once said, "THANK GOD, WE CAN STILL LAUGH."

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Published by—ADI K. IRANI
King's Road, Ahmednagar-India.

Printer—L. S. Chinchorkar
Mohan Printers, Station Road, Ahmednagar