

Suffering Is the Covering of Bliss

An interview with Ward Parks on his compositions for *This New Life*

by Anne Haug

Coming from Montana, it felt daring for me to ask to stay at Meherana after the *Discourses* study course for a few weeks until Sahavas, but I was warmly assured that there would be plenty to do. Little did I know what delight awaited me! I signed up to sing in the choir (which turned out to be a quartet) for *This New Life* and experienced joy beyond anything I could have anticipated. I loved the rehearsals as well as the comradery. The performance was a blissful experience where a veil was lifted and Baba was palpably present. It was the perfect finale to my three-plus week visit to Meherana. I returned home with a full heart.



Once I was home, the opportunity to help with the *Meherana Messenger* was presented to me, and I immediately knew I wanted to interview Ward on this life-changing music. I had many questions and he was so willing to share, giving us this in depth interview.

AH: I am so taken with the haunting beauty of many of the pieces, as well as the incredible diversity of the feeling tone of

the various songs—from Mehera’s tender love song to Baba “Precious Beloved” to the rousing “The Gypsy Marching Song” and the broad range of emotions from lamentations to praises that the songs evoke. As a singer for the performance at Meherana last fall, Baba’s New Life came much more alive for me.

WP: Oh, I’m so happy to hear that because that was very much the purpose.

AH: I would like to ask you about the lyrics “Suffering is the covering of bliss,” a line from the song, “The Enjoyment of Suffering.” It had a profound effect on me. I don’t

remember hearing these words before—are they from Baba?

WP: I don’t think so. I can’t remember where Baba ever said that exactly. He talked about the enjoyment of suffering—that was his phrase. So I was just trying to develop on that theme.

AH: That’s beautiful. What a wonderful way to look at suffering, remembering that bliss is always present underneath suffering and therefore always accessible.

So then to move on to a general question, I would love to hear about your process of composing. Did you get the script for *This New Life* first and then begin composing? Or were the songs already alive in you from your knowledge of the New Life?

WP: I had studied the New Life. Actually way back in the early 70s I was myself thinking of writing a play on the New Life, and that came to nothing, but the result of that effort was that I had

We lovingly dedicate this issue of the *Meherana Messenger* to the memory of our dear ones, Khayla Rose Choi and Christina Lynne Jarrett. A tribute is on page 8.



read a lot about it way back then. And over the years, of course, I read lots of other things about the New Life so I was well acquainted with it.

Ralph and Greg and I came up with the idea to do this play in 2014. They were working on it in Meherana and I would get drafts of the script from time to time and I would read through it. I didn't have the time to be studying those drafts closely, especially in the knowledge that they were going to be revised a lot. I would have had to have been there to say, "Do you want a song here? What should this be about?" All that kind of thing and that couldn't happen because I was in Australia and I knew that I had to do it then or never because once I got back to America I'd be too busy. So I got up every morning at five and would work for two or three hours on songs and music. So I looked at the script and I had a real

good idea of what they were doing—that much I could see. So what I thought was, I can't write songs very well that are meant for particular parts in the script because it's not definite enough for that. So what I'll try to do is write a group of songs expressive of different fundamental themes and fundamental moods. You know, that aren't different from each other—sort of a palette of colors giving a wide vision of what the New Life is. Yes, in some of its ideas—that was part of it—but more fundamentally, a sort of an empathetic feeling engagement with it as best I could do. So I tried to find very different, sort of inner spaces in that way and write songs out of it. And I just sort of hoped that when we all got together we could fit these songs in somewhere. I had no idea whether other people would like them or not—I had no idea.

AH: Oh, you're so easy to interview.

You've really conveyed what I was so interested in knowing—just that process.

WP: Yea, well, you know the songs well so it's so easy to explain this to you because you know what I'm talking about. So like, "I Am Free"—that was really trying to give that inner liberation and joyous feeling of the New Life. Or "Hear the Silent Words of Meher Baba" was kind of the theme song based on "The Song of the New Life" melodically and in its ideas. Those are completely different feelings from each other. More than anything else, I was trying to—at a feeling level—touch into what I would imagine the New Life to have been.

I probably said this to you before but in terms of actual ideas and lyrics of the songs, what was so challenging is that the messages that Baba gave about the New Life are almost entirely negative, and I'm not knocking them. But I mean, "don't do this, don't do that" and I would read through them looking for some kind of an expression of a positive ideal and they're hardly to be found. The only thing would be total reliance on God—that

The individual who has complete detachment is not at the mercy of the opposites of experience; and being free from the thrall of all desires, he no longer creates his own suffering. —MEHER BABA



theme would be there. There aren't even many messages expressing love for God for heaven sakes.

AH: I was able to experience what was going on much more deeply in *This New Life* precisely because the music was conveying its essence beyond those rules—it so beautifully expressed letting go of this world and the joy of that.

WP: Right. This is what I came to feel and Ralph seemed to come to the same thing. The New Life is about what the messages of the New Life never express. All those messages and rules and conditions and all that is the framework to make the New Life possible. But what the New Life was, was something beyond all of that that's almost impossible to put into words.

AH: Which is why the music helps so much.

WP: That was what the music was trying to do.

AH: The feeling tone is so evocative. It's always the case with magnificent music and lyrics that it's going to take us to another level of our being.

WP: Like that song which you would know well, "Drifting" for example. A lot of the songs are on the externalities—like "The Gypsy Marching Song." That was meant to be evocative of that phase of the New Life. But with "Drifting" and maybe one or two others, I was really trying to discover within myself what that essential experience of the New Life was, that's beyond the rules completely, where you really don't have any goals or purposes or ambitions or expectations. There's no spirituality in it as such. There's no master in it. It's not like you're trying to achieve anything in a spiritual way. Where are you then? And "Drifting" is trying to express some of that.

AH: Yes, and the words that come up for me from my past spiritual studies that

best express that quality is that state of pure existence.

WP: Yes.

AH: And that's really what the New Life represents I think.

WP: Absolutely. For people who aren't yet God realized, it's living in that existence as much as you can do, where really all aims are gone, not just false desires, but even spiritual desires.

AH: Baba speaks to that so clearly when he talks about being hopeless and helpless. I've thought about hope a lot because in the past I'd thought of it as a

positive thing. But I can see why it's good to not have hope. And that's where you get to that pure existence that is beneath thought and feeling. That reality that's always here if we can surrender.

WP: That's right, because how can you live in that existence if you are hoping for anything? Hoping means you're refusing to accept the present moment because you're hoping for something better. It goes so much against the grain of all our conventional wisdom. Hopelessness and helplessness sounds terrible, but really speaking, it isn't at all. It's the condition of real happiness, to tell the truth.

continued on next page

Thoughts on *This New Life*

by Elaine Munson

The New Life play in Meherana started a new creative journey for me. The script was multi-faceted with narration, music, multimedia and acting and helped me to better understand Baba's New Life, of which I'm sure most still remains a mystery at the deeper levels to all but Baba.

It was a pleasure to read Baba's words and sing Ward's lyrics and music. New friends came together to praise Baba in song. The New Life play affected me deeply and I thank Ralph, Michalene and Greg for writing the play and Ward for the music.

The wave carried us further to perform a shorter version of the play in Los Angeles. The LA Group is now preparing for another play *Baba in Hollywood* to commemorate Baba's visit to Hollywood in the 30s and 50s.

Meherana is my home away from home: I hope to be a permanent member of play casts or musicians. It was a joy to work with everyone.

by Greg Dunn

Working as a playwright really had not been on my radar before the idea for the play came up. But like many people, I was keenly interested in finding or creating highly participatory Sahavas activities to replace the old occupation of sitting and listening to speakers. A play seemed to fill that bill beautifully, giving scope for many people with different interests and talents to take an active role in shaping the Sahavas experience. For me the project not only provided an opportunity to exercise skills in writing and music, but also became the perfect motivator for a year of research into one of the most intriguing phases of Meher Baba's work. I wanted it to come to life within me.

We all love to see and hear stories — and what richer subject for a story than the God-Man Himself? But there aren't any dramatic productions about Meher Baba on Netflix; so if we want them, we'll have to bring them into being ourselves. What a sweet opportunity Baba has thus provided!



AH: And I believe by virtue of having this play we experienced the joy and it felt to me that both the participants and the audience had a profoundly transformative experience.

WP: I do too.

AH: We were all lifted up, and it was something that was beyond words. So let's move on to another question: Is there a pattern in your creative process whereby either the music or lyrics come first?

WP: I've generally opted for writing the music first and I went that way in the mid-1980s—I used to do it both ways. But what I came to feel—because I was a professor of literature—I have a lot of intellectual knowledge about the lyrics and words and ideas and rhymes and rhyme patterns and all of that. And if I started from the words it would be more likely to be determined by what I knew and I wanted to not have that happen. So I instead start from finding a melody and then I'm forced to come up with words that match the melody. That's usually been how I've done it...and I did it with the New Life songs that way.

AH: In "Dawn Song" the first line of the chorus is, "No praise can limn the lineaments of God's Glory ..." Did that just come to you easily?

WP: Without too much difficulty. But I had that melody line (hums the line) so I knew how many syllables I had. When I have the melody as a way of putting off the trauma (laughs) of writing words, I'll go through and tap it out—I'll count the syllables stressed, unstressed and then try to get a feeling for what the idea should be. And that's a song of praise, all humanity in awe and gratitude singing to the eternal Ancient One for the work he did in Manonash. That much I knew from the start, because the melody is that kind of a melody. In fact, that was a big thing for the Manonash which was going to be the culmination of the play really. I was thinking, well what to write for that. And of course I'm just a gross conscious soul. I don't know what the Avatar is doing. But I would imagine that from Baba's point of view, it would be clashing—tremendous violent clashes as the mind is destroyed—and tremendous suffering and your mind would be totally blown. It would be quite terrify-

ing. And I did try to write some melodies that were along those lines. But I was really thinking about it and I thought that for this point in the play, that's not what we really need actually. This is to build up to something glorious. So I thought, okay, I won't write a song—this was before the melody too—I won't write something really trying to enter into Baba's experience of Manonash, as if I could—a lot of violence and clashing and dissonance. I won't do that. So what I'll do instead is step outside and look at it for all humanity for all ages, looking at the work that he did—in awe and wonder and gratitude and singing his praises. So I thought, okay, that's what we'll do instead. So the melody was of that type. And so I knew that it was a song of praise. "What words can limn the lineaments of God's Glory" is a praise line.

AH: Well, I was getting my vocabulary education through some of your lyrics and actually I was wanting to ask you if you grew up in an environment where you heard these kind of words as a part of your daily life?

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Reflections on Sahavas

by Ellen Van Allen

When “speaking” to those who came for the 1955 Sahavas* programs in India Meher Baba introduced the concept of sahasavas thus:

“The meaning of sahasavas is physical proximity, to meet one another, mingling together like members of the same family. But my staying with you and your staying with me do not mean the same thing. For ages past, Baba is with everyone; but here, you all have to be with Baba and forget everything else. Thoughts may come and thoughts may go. We cannot control or check them. How to control them? By losing yourselves, trying to be engrossed in Baba’s “sahasavas” [company], so that they may come and go automatically without your being conscious of them.”

During this precious (time), try at least to forget everything else so that your hearts will remain clean and open for me to step in. Do not notice either your failings, weaknesses and shortcomings, or your prestige, position, learning and so-called knowledge of spiritual things. Try to forget what you think you already know.

*I have come to receive your love from you and to bestow my love on you. I have descended to your level for the one purpose of bestowing my love on you so that you may love God and become God. The rest is all illusion. Do not expect anything from me except my love for you.”***

For many years Baba’s lovers have been gathering in Sahavas without his physical presence, perhaps relying on Baba’s statement that when his lovers are gathered together in His name He is present ~ and that has certainly been my experience!

It has been such joy over many years to gather together and let the world fall away in His love as we listen to stories of Him, watch movies and plays on His life and love, sing songs of Him, share one another’s company and work together to make this possible.

As the time for another Sahavas approaches my heart overflows with gratitude for all those past and with anticipation of the upcoming time together! I find myself sharing with friends, “Are you going to be at the Meherana Sahavas?” and feeling joyful when they say “yes!” or show interest.

I never know what to expect from Baba at a Sahavas. I have gone, thinking “Well, I have heard this guest before” or “I am not really interested in what that person has to say” and been totally overwhelmed by the flow of Baba’s love and the insights gained. Other times, the greatest love and presence have been in the quiet times; stopping with friends and turning out flashlights just before the bridge to see the stars, an unexpected solo moment in Baba’s cabin, an old favorite song sung at the Dhuni after most have left.

For me, it is also a joy to camp on the land, living simply for a few days, and remembering Baba in the New Life and the Blue Bus tours when Westerners were privileged to join in that very basic life. I have felt special joy in the years when families with children are camping as well and the morning begins with children’s voices and laughter. Such a sense of being part of Baba’s family!

So, as the time for this year’s Sahavas approaches, once again, I am looking forward to joining together and sharing in the oneness of Baba’s love and sahasavas, with His lovers, on this piece of the earth dedicated to Him.

Jai Meher Baba! ♥

* Sahavas is capitalized when referring to a gathering and not capitalized when referring to what Baba gives when we are in His company.

** The first quote is from Lord Meher online, Volume IV, 5/987. The second two are from Listen Humanity, pages 12, 13, and 14. As there were four groups for this Sahavas, presumably the introductions varied slightly, so I felt free to select paragraphs from both sources.



Meherana Update 2016



Meherana MESSENGER

Issue 2016

Meherana is a universal center for spiritual renewal dedicated to Avatar Meher Baba and His principles of active love and service to both the Meher Baba community and all humanity. It is intended for the enhancement and strengthening of spiritual life, without supplanting professed religious convictions or beliefs.

The center is to be made available for Sahavas, meetings, and retreats, both group and individual; and for the development and support of service projects. It is to be organized and implemented according to democratic principles.

The Messenger was created to provide a forum for contemporary accounts of life with Meher Baba as guide; to keep all who may be interested informed about Meherana Spiritual Retreat Center; and to encourage an interest to participate in, nurture, and help shape the Meherana organization, center, and community.

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Contributors: David Bradley, Peni Choi, Greg Dunn, Elaine Munson, Ward Parks, Ellen Van Allen, Therese Williams

For more information regarding Meherana, visit our website at www.Meherana.org or email: info@meherana.org

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Report from the President

To the members of the Board, active members, ladies and gentlemen, Jai Meher Baba! I have the honor to present my annual report for 2015-16.

I awoke the morning following last year's AGM with an overwhelming and anxious feeling that I was not confident that I could live up to Christi Pearson's president role that she had performed at Meherana for over 25 years. Fortunately, none of these dire forebodings proved to be correct because the board was more than willing to assist me. I feel reassured with their support, the support of active members, associate members, the wider community and our Master Meher Baba who is in charge, that Meherana continues to thrive. How blessed we are to offer our service to Meher Baba—that is a true blessing. As we come to the close of this board I pray that this year has brought us closer to the presence of God within.

It has been a busy year at Meherana, plenty of old and new projects taking place, such as the site committee with the help of the caretaker committee busy

preparing the caretaker house for our new caretakers. Meherana is excited to welcome Eric and Marianne Ashelmen, the husband and wife team who moved in on the 1st of April. They are settling in the community very nicely while warmly welcoming guests. We have had lots of rain (hooray!), visitors streaming in (including wildlife!), two well attended Sahavas in the spring and fall from people as far as Australia and as close as San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Looking at the year ahead, we will have new board members, more maintenance and improvement projects and a play about Francis Brabazon performed at the fall Sahavas.

To perform duties and maintain the land Meherana is always in need of volunteers. Please know that no matter what your abilities are we can use your help. We understand and appreciate the importance of volunteers, for without them Meherana would not function.

In closing, Meherana's Mission Statement remains our purpose and focus "Meherana is a universal center for spir-





itual renewal dedicated to Avatar Meher Baba and His principles of active love and service to both the Meher Baba community and all humanity. It is intended for the enhancement and strengthening of spiritual life, without supplanting professed religious convictions or beliefs. The center is to be made available for Sahavas, meetings, and retreats, both group and individual; and for the development and support of service projects. It is to be organized and implemented according to democratic principles."

I hope that the loving and embracing spirit of Meher Baba's presence at Meherana makes each second here a treasured gift and each visit full of His love. I look forward to another thriving year ahead at Meherana. ♥

*Nothing is real but God,
nothing matters but love for God.*

MEHER BABA

In His warmest love,
Therese Williams

OPPOSITE PAGE: Activities at the Children's Pandal

ABOVE: Jane Brown and Alan Wagner, our Spring Sahavas guests; and special visitor, Sridhar Kelkar, Chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust (AMBPPCT).

BELOW: The dinner line at Sahavas; and a musical treat from Will Sherwin and Ron Greenstein





Khayla Rose Choi

Christina Lynne Jarrett



A highway accident on March 14, 2015, took the lives of two beautiful Baba souls, Khayla Rose Choi and Christina Lynne Jarrett.



Khayla was born in Makati, Philippines, and later moved to Torrance and then Meher Haven in Mariposa, California. Khayla died at the scene of the accident at the age of 13. She was a lover of God, animals and nature, as well as a talented artist, actress, director, photographer, crafts-woman, flautist, equestrian and figure skater. Khayla was a being of love; every moment shared with her was blessed with life and laughter. She was filled with light, humor, and peace. She never had a mean word to say, and always saw the very best in people. Often she spent her free time writing stories, or in her journal, or to God. She pondered how humanity and nature could come to live in harmony. She was a unique and understanding person, a river of insight and wisdom. Khayla truly lived for love and believed so deeply in it. For a glimpse of this love and joy read her own words at <http://www.mehergutta.com/khaylas-diary/>.



Christina, a lifetime resident of Mariposa, passed away on March 16, 2015, two days after the accident, at the age of 19. A woman of loving resilience and steadfastness, she tamed untamable kids via inspiration and motherly reason. More than just a lover of nature and a fan of fantasy and sci-fi, Christina was a singer, writer, artist, photographer, gardener, homemaker and friend. She lived a life of integrity, passion, and sincerity, with a fiery resolve tempered by no worldly obstacle. A fountain of love that came in contact with sorrow, drowned it, and overcame it with hope.

Aaron Choi, her companion and love, said "Christina is my pillar of strength, my beacon of light, my definition of beauty, and the bottomless well of sweet, pure, innocent love. I'm honored to have known her. And to have shared dreams with her. She's my inspiration. She's my everything."



We at Meherana felt such joy in the companionship of these young people. Our hearts remain full with the love they shared.



"Being free and happy is the only way you can truly learn."
– Khayla Choi



FROM THE CHOI FAMILY Thank you for dedicating this issue of the Meherana Messenger to Khayla and Christina. Meherana plays a very important part in our lives here in Mariposa and both Khayla and Christina looked forward to all the Sahavases and gatherings here. Being part of the Meherana family and sharing life experiences with kindred spirit, light-hearted, creative and free-spirited lovers of Baba, made a big difference in the lives of both our girls. That she felt so much appreciation, encouragement and support for her unschooling, her thoughts, ideas and her craft, touched Khayla and all of us very deeply.

Words cannot express how grateful we all are to be part of the Meherana family. You were there for us during our darkest hours and very literally helped us get through it. The numerous hospital visits, the dinners you brought over, taking over feeding our animals, ready to help with whatever was needed - you'll never know how much comfort and strength we drew from your outpouring of love and care. From all of us at Meher Haven and from our two angels beyond - thank you so very, very much.



What Does the New Life Mean for Us?

by Greg Dunn

After spending most of a year researching Meher Baba's New Life in conjunction with co-authoring the five-hour play staged at Meherana last fall, many questions had presented themselves to my mind about the New Life. I thought a discussion on its meaning would make a good wrap-up for the Sahavas, and I was personally interested to hear others' thoughts on the subject, so I took a few minutes to write down some of the questions that had occurred to me so they could be used as ticklers in a participatory discussion.

By Monday morning when the discussion workshop was held, almost all of the out-of-town visitors had already departed for home; but at least 20 people still attended, and we had a great discussion.

There are many ways the questions (which are provided below) could be used, but what we did, which worked well, was as follows: sitting in a large circle, we first read out the entire set of questions, each participant reading a question in his or her turn. Then we simply opened the floor for discussion. Occasionally during the discussion someone would request that one of the questions to which a reference was being made be re-read. That's it!

The questions do not comprise a test, and there are no right answers. They're intended only as an aid in engaging with the New Life for those who feel drawn to thinking about it in this way. Enjoy!



Questions for the Workshop

1. What aspects of the life that Baba had the New Life companions lead can you imagine yourself trying to incorporate into your own life? Why would you want to?
2. Baba did quite a bit of work that seemed religion-related in the New Life – especially in the latter stages of it. For example,
 - a. in the famous New Life statement given on His 56th birthday, He says “the New Life ... will be kept alive by those who ... give no importance to caste, creed, and religious ceremonies.”
 - b. During the New Life, Baba went into seclusion in a cave associated with Mahavir, the founder of Jainism; bathed the feet of, and gave money to, an assemblage of 74 Muslims; begged at the homes of Hindu families; sat in seclusion in a Roman Catholic cemetery that paradoxically included a shrine to a Muslim saint; and had a carefully selected Catholic father bless Him.
 - c. During the program held on October 16th, 1950, which included many Old Life followers, Baba had prayers read from the Hindu, Zoroastrian, Muslim, and Christian traditions.
 - d. During the first phase of Manonash, Baba assembled the companions atop a hill at Khojaguda and had a Mohammedan priest offer a prayer. He then sent Vishnu, Dr. Nilu, Donkin, Kaikobad, and the priest away with instructions to offer prayers at places of worship for Hindus, Catholics, Zoroastrians, and Muslims.
 - e. In the Manonash seclusion which culminated Baba's work in the New Life, among the very few things He kept in His cabin were five religious models He had had made in alabaster to His specifications: a Hindu temple, a Muslim mosque, a Christian church, a Buddhist stupa, and a Zoroastrian fire urn.

During the final phase of Manonash, after a ceremony that involved reading passages, reciting prayers, and repeating names of God associated with different world religions, Baba had Eruch read out loudly and forcefully these words: “The ceremonites, rites, and rituals of all the religions of the world are hereby consumed in flames!”

What do you make of this? How have you seen attitudes toward religion and the behaviors of religious institutions change over the course of your lifetime? Why do you think Baba focused so much attention on religions and their practices?



3. The New Life companions were enjoined by Baba to have no contact with those outside the New Life – even family members – except by His direct order, which generally came only for reasons related to absolutely essential New Life arrangements. This proscription against contact applied even in the case of gravely ill family members, and even in the event of a death. For example,

a. At the beginning of the New Life, Baba and the companions were traveling by bus when He ordered Murli to get down at a town called Wait and then take the next available bus. Murli immediately followed Baba's order, but was nervous because his elder sister, whom he knew to be seriously ill, lived there and he feared he would accidentally see her (violating the conditions). This came to pass, and both Murli and his sister immediately averted their eyes (to meet the conditions), but not before Murli could see that his sister's condition had seriously deteriorated. A short time later, after rejoining Baba and the men, Murli learned that this sister had died. He remained calm and cheerful (meeting the conditions), and was grateful that Baba had given him this chance to see his sister one last time.

b. On April 14th, Baba asked Eruch if he would feel upset to learn that his mother had died, to which Eruch answered he would remain unaffected, according to the conditions of Plan III. Next Murli was asked how he'd feel if his father passed, to which he replied, "I wouldn't feel anything, let him go!" After this Baba asked Vishnu if he would be disturbed to hear his mother had died and when he replied "No", Baba gently told him that in fact she had passed. Vishnu remained calm and serene and received Baba's embrace and His words, "Vishnu is courageous...." His mother, Kakubai had been with Baba since 1918 .

Do you feel there is any lesson for you personally in this part of the New Life discipline? How might you apply it in the case of learning of the illness or death of a family member, an old friend, or just someone in the Baba community whose family or friends you know?

4. Baba enjoined the New Life companions against criticizing each other unfairly. What would you consider unfair criticism? Fair criticism? When is criticism appropriate, and how can it be done in a way that is pleasing to Baba?

On a related note: Eruch made a distinction between backbiting and "backbarking". What do you feel constitutes each? Why do you think he made this distinction?

5. Which conditions or rules of the New Life do you feel you would have had the greatest difficulty with? Why? Which do



you feel might not have been as great a challenge for you? (Remember, Meher Baba said: "Modesty is weakness: humility is strength!")

6. How do you feel about Baba's injunctions to the companions to control their moods, and not to give expression to angry, greedy, or lustful thoughts? What do you see as the alternatives, if there are any, to the indulgence in or repression of such thoughts and actions?
7. One of the trendy prescriptions of modern spirituality and/or pop psychology is to "live in the present". Baba seemed to give this idea a huge endorsement in the New Life. Why do you think He made it such a priority? Would you like to "live more in the present"? What would that look like for you? What would you do differently?
8. Do you think it would be fair to view the New Life as the climax of Baba's Advent? Why or why not?
9. Baba had the companions start two different businesses during the New Life. There was Donkin's medical clinic, which though it had a number of medical successes curing



There is no sadhana greater than love, there is no law higher than love, and there is no goal that is beyond love – for love in its divine state becomes infinite. God and love are identical, and one who has divine love already has God. – MEHER BABA

patients previously considered incurable, operated at a loss; and the ghee business run from Keki Desai's house, which resulted in very fine ghee, almost no sales, and negative profits. Both businesses were disbanded before becoming viable, sustainable enterprises.

What lessons do you take from these examples? What might Baba have been doing in causing these businesses to be started, run for a short time, and then summarily cancelled?

10. Discuss Baba's rules and conditions for the New Life as a multifaceted program for the removal of attachments. What were the various facets of that program? Are there parts you could imagine taking on in your own life? Why or why not?

11. Baba repeatedly emphasized to those who accompanied Him on the New Life that, in exchange for enduring the complete loss of contact with their families and Old Life friends, and in addition all manner of deprivation, discomfort, and illness, they would receive absolutely no spiritual or material benefit. He said this to them many times in very emphatic terms. For example,

a. in a circular distributed at the final meeting held before choosing the New Life companions (on August 31, 1949), Baba said:

"First and foremost, all those who accompany Baba must take it as an absolute and unqualified certainty that they will not receive even the slightest spiritual or material benefit, or indeed any benefit whatever. On the contrary, they must be prepared for every kind of disappointment and adversity."

On the next page of the same circular he repeated the statement, and added "This condition will stand for all time and will never be changed or nullified by Baba."

b. In January, 1950, shortly after the end of the New Life training period and when the New Life had begun, as Baba

described it, "in real earnest", He repeated the same statements in a circular He had prepared announcing the various Labor Phase plans.

c. In Manjri Mafi on February 20, 1950, in a circular prepared for the occasion of His 56th birthday; and again at the Mahabaleshwar meeting on 16th October 1950 (which included many Old Life disciples), Baba repeated these statements. Then during His preparations for the Manonash phase in late 1951, he told those who were to consider whether they wished to accompany Him that they "should expect to be facing 400 deaths in four months", and that, in contrast to material or spiritual benefit, they should expect physical deprivation.

Now perhaps your mind tells you, as mine does, that the companions must certainly have received at least spiritual benefits from participating in the New Life. For example, it's hard for me to imagine that simply the enormous effort required to bear the various difficulties would not result in the development of extraordinary mental and spiritual strength and resilience.

So why do you think Baba told the companions they would receive no benefit? Why did he make such a point of it? Do you think He was speaking the Truth?

12. Baba placed quite an emphasis on individual responsibility for the companions in the New Life. For example:

a. In the first New Life Circular, which outlined the conditions of the New Life, Baba said "The responsibility of deciding whether to accompany Baba or not does not rest with Baba, but wholly and solely with each and every person who receives this communication. Everyone receiving it must therefore make his decision and inform Baba of this decision with a clear and simple 'YES' or 'NO'."

b. In the same circular, He said "The responsibility before God for anything that may happen to those who decide to accompany Baba rests wholly and solely with them, and not with Baba. In order to make this paramount condition of individual responsibility absolutely clear, Baba wants each one to consider the following points", and He went on to describe in no uncertain detail that the conditions of the New Life would be very rough indeed, and that any and all consequences to a companion's business affairs, family affairs, and personal health and safety would be the responsibility of the companion and not of Baba. Then He said, "It must, in addition, be absolutely clear that Baba will also never give any order

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Baba Is Still Smiling

Study Course 2015 reflections by David Bradley

Last September I sat in Ward Park's intensive on Meher Baba's *Discourses*. Baba's oversized photo smiled down at me. Ward expounded on one of the many topics with study guides he had meticulously prepared. Afternoon sun shone in through the window. The rays traced their way through the light dust suspended in the dry California air. Happiness burned in my heart hearing this talk.

Years ago, decades ago, I had read *Discourses*. As a 19-year-old I responded almost immediately to the voice of knowledge that presented itself so authoritatively in those three little blue books. But I'd been plagued with guilt when I read Baba's call to purity and chastity. My mind scratched at the text on violence and non-violence, trying to discern Baba's guidance about fighting in the Vietnam War. In reading *Discourses* I learned to think about spirituality and how to take my first steps towards the God-Man. Large foundation stones of understanding slid into position.

Now, with so much of my life lived, I revisited these books that had been central to me with guidance from a real scholar. Rarely in my experience had I felt such an insistent joy from deep intellectual engagement.

Ward is one of the great authorities on Baba's words. He has the approach of a professor, but is empowered by his firm conviction in Baba as the source of truth. In this seminar on *Discourses*, other sources like *God Speaks* and the *Tiffin Lectures* were cross referenced. This is important philosophically. Traditional academics might say of a teacher or theorist that "she or he developed the idea that..." Ward understands Baba to be all-knowing. All of Baba's teachings came from the same fresh ocean of knowledge. Ideas presented at different times revealed different aspects of the truth for specific purposes. Baba also used concepts and vocabulary from older traditions such as Sufism,

Advaita, and Buddhism as a way to unfold new understanding.

The topics presented could be daunting. For instance, "How does the distinction between 'ultimate reality' and 'empirical reality' bear on the problem of good and evil?" In the class, we entered into a rich discussion of topics like this, while relating this topic to others that had been presented earlier. Participation was encouraged, and every question was taken seriously. Even when I asked something that sounded silly as I heard myself, it was dignified by Ward's reflective response. Discussion was open whether the topic was great or small. If you ever wondered but were afraid to ask why the all-knowing One misspelled "infinite" in writing the text that became *In His Own Hand*, you would receive Ward's tentative answer. To other knotty questions might come the response, "I don't know. What do you think?"

Every morning I'd climb out of my tent and clean up, and then fix myself some breakfast. It was a delight to have so many good companions with whom to eat and talk. Sometimes I'd go to Baba's cabin for Arti, sometimes not. On every full day there was a morning and an afternoon session, with a nice lunch break between the two (thanks for the deliciousness, Christi!). Then each evening another great meal made by members of

the group, and finally a quiet fade into the evening to reflect on the One who made it all possible. One night we were particularly blessed with the wonderful members of the Meherana community.

Baba's *Discourses* is a work of genius. We studied in depth the nature of reality; reincarnation, sanskaras and karma; the ego; good and evil; heart and mind; the new humanity; and violence and nonviolence. Knowledge and Love commingled. Truly tavern talk...

I am far away in Michigan months later, and Baba is still smiling. ♥





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that will absolve any of those who accompany him of their individual responsibility before God for any consequences that may follow. Thus, if you decide to accompany Baba, you must do it as an absolute certainty that the responsibility before God for each and every consequence rests for all time wholly and solely on you and you alone, and that Baba will never give an order that will change or nullify this responsibility.”

He reiterated similar statements at various points during the New Life itself. So the questions are:

- Do you think that when you or I do our best to obey Baba within, Baba takes responsibility for the consequences of our actions?
- If not, then why do you think anyone, including you and I, would follow a Master who promises not to take any responsibility for any sort of calamity that may befall us, whether of our own or others’ doing, or the result of an act of God? ♥

INTERVIEW with WARD from page 4

WP: Well a little bit. My dad was an academic, but he was a scientist, so language and words wasn’t particularly the thing. But I myself worked on it for a long time. You know I was an Old English professor.

AH: Yes. Could you briefly share a little about your early life in relationship to music?

WP: From as early as I can remember I always had the desire or natural urge to work in music and writing—those two right from the start—from when I was a little kid. I took piano and I used to write and when I came to Baba those were immediately right there. I was eighteen years old at the time. So right off I would write songs for Baba. And actually a very big part of that is I went to India and would sing a lot for the mandali, and especially Mehera. And Mehera was very supportive. She really encouraged us—and she encouraged me very much. And she would always listen and she would seem to really like the songs. When I look back on it, I know now the mandali heard some of the greats. And those of us who were there were kids for heaven sakes and

obviously they would have known that, but they never showed that and they really, really encouraged. So that was a big factor. And in Mehera’s case it was quite an experience singing for her because she wouldn’t listen in the way I would have imagined. I mean for me, I’m kind of monkey see, monkey do. I’d read Hafiz or Rumi and I’d know that these are great ones and I’d wonder what would they say and sort of imitate them, and try to find feeling within myself corresponding to it, knowing full well that I’m not a soul on that order. But, you know, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. And then trying to come up with things, and with my inner gauge cultivate a sense of what Baba would like. But when Mehera would listen, it was not like that at all. She was always courteous, but actually when she would listen to words it was like she would actually be living that--the reality of it, and you could see it. I could see it real clearly and it was a bit humbling. I had just written these nice words and have a feeling for it—sometimes a feeling of love would come after writing a song—but I was actually just trying to write words and music. She wasn’t in that space at all. She was actually living in the real love of it.



AH: Yes, and I feel like your music did that for me—and I'm sure I speak for others—in *This New Life*. Every day we rehearsed was such a highlight for me.

WP: You know, I think that's one of the gifts that Baba gives us. In writing those songs I don't start at all having a depth of feeling about it—not at all. I'm trying to do this ultimately for Baba—I'd like to make it sincere as much as I can. *This New Life* has the drifting theme I would think through and it needs to somehow express this. How do you express this anyway? And then just sort of feeling around on the piano and then there's a little bit of an idea and then developing it. So the whole process of writing these songs, I never would have had the kind of experience that I would have had when it was done. Isn't that funny? It's not as though there was some deep mystical revelation. No, it's just kind of working a little bit at a time and when the whole song is done I come to experience it for the first time just like other people do. And so I really feel that that is Baba's gift.

AH: I couldn't imagine that you wouldn't have been experiencing what I was experiencing, and I'm sure others...so during the performance at Sahavas were you able to be immersed in it?

WP: Yes, I certainly was. It's really working with other people that for me is where I start to experience it. I don't fully before that. From my selfish point of view the huge gift is when I can finally see and experience what these songs are, which I really hadn't done before. Isn't that a funny thing?

AH: I have a similar experience in terms of being with other Baba lovers—there's something greater that happens. And I believe it's Baba's wish that we come together and love him this way. It's easy for me to be a recluse and yet there's something that drives me to come to-

gether with other Baba lovers and I know it's because that's what Baba wants.

WP: Yes, I really feel that too. I think he likes it when his lovers come together and try to work together and work for him.

AH: Yes, we all have our egos and the reflections I can get by being with others show me my strengths and my weaknesses. It does help me to continue on in my journey of coming closer to Baba.

WP: I agree and with these songs on that very matter, these songs never really come to life for me until doing them with others. That's really what does it. I really don't actually experience them. You know when you're writing something like this, there's no scope to enjoy it, because to enjoy it would be like blowing it—blowing the energy—when actually that energy has to get always channeled and directed towards completing the song. There's no scope to take enjoyment in it at all. I know from experience that if I start to enjoy something, it spoils it and then I usually don't finish it properly. So there's no scope in writing a song to really to enjoy the song. That only comes when other people are in the picture.

AH: I wonder if that's true for other composers.

WP: I wonder too.

AH: I'm thinking of my own creative process how I can get absorbed or merged into the painting and same thing with writing poetry, but when you take on a project and you're responsible, maybe that's what puts more pressure on—I don't know.

WP: Well, there certainly is pressure—I mean that's the thing—I had to finish it in time and hope that it was something people would like. There's no guarantee of that at all.

AH: I'm sure you got positive feedback

everywhere, right? At Meherana as well as In L.A. and Meherabad.

WP: Yes, and we did a much shorter version at Meherabad.

AH: So speaking of time, I want to honor the time that I requested of you. So my last question is --now that we know your next study course in the fall at Meherana is on Francis Brabazon's book, *Stay With God*, and that a play on his life is currently being written to be performed at the Sahavas—have the music and lyrics started coming to you for that?

WP: This year has been unbelievably busy so I've actually only gotten to the point of starting.... But one thing that hopefully makes it simpler is that I think these are going to be mostly Francis's own lyrics. So there's just the musical side of it. And I greatly admire his poetry....*Stay With God* is a masterpiece—Baba did say that...it's really quite spectacular.

AH: Ward, thank you so much for making the time to give this interview and for sharing the beautiful creations that manifest through you in your love for Baba. ♥





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Kebi Brown:
 Phone: (209) 742-5053
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Welcome to Meherana

A Spiritual Center
 for the Awakening of the Heart



www.meherana.org

Meherana's website has information about Avatar Meher Baba, a calendar of scheduled events, how to visit including driving directions and accommodations, how to support Meherana.

Upcoming Events 2016

- ◆ Spring Sahavas with Merwan Dubash and Jim Meyer – Memorial Day Weekend, May 27-30.
- ◆ 9-Day Study Course on Francis Brabazon's *Stay With God* led by Ward Parks – September 17-25.
- ◆ New Life Sahavas play on Francis Brabazon – October 7-9.