

# **Oneness in the World**

*Craig Ian Ruff*

**Booklet III**

**The Service:  
Work For The Spiritual Freedom Of  
Humanity**

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Photo of Avatar Meher Baba through the courtesy of Raju  
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## PREFACE

Think about it! Can we live without being of service to someone or something—a person or an ideal? Each thing in creation serves a purpose, a function that necessarily links it to something else. Ideas are directed to some activity; people are employed in some activity; things are used for some activity— all serving a purpose beyond them. We might not think of our thoughts and actions as service, but it seems to me that to exist is indeed to serve. If such is the case, then it is important for us to recognize that what we serve describes our lives and moreover, the manner in which we serve gives our lives meaning.

Today humanity is interconnected as never before. Because of this, humanity is being forced out of its regional isolation, out of its instinctual parochial focus, to witness the plight of others. Through modern technology, life's fabric is no longer woven loosely with room for the threads to breathe, but is tightly intertwined, so that to move one part of the fabric is to move all of it.

As such, this closely knit social fabric has necessitated the creation of a plethora of organizations in order for society to function. Among them is the overabundant development and growth of service organizations that serve almost every purpose. At this time when service is a worldwide phenomenon, we are fortunate that by following Meher Baba, our impulse to serve is directed toward Him—God in human form, who is the source of everyone and everything.

So we set out with great enthusiasm at the thought of serving Meher Baba, combining our own instincts of service with what Baba has said about selfless service. Yet within a short while, and regardless of our good intentions, we begin to experience obstacles we never could have imagined would arise and which even shock us when they block our service.

For example, we often find that our simple intention to be helpful is misunderstood by others. Sometimes people even think we are being selfish and are only serving because we are trying to assert ourselves or our point of view. We may start to brood that our efforts, which seem wholehearted to us, are worthless. As such obstacles continue to arise, we may even feel bitter at the way others react to our attempts to serve and we may finally reach a point where we decide it is too difficult to serve Meher Baba; we may resign ourselves to thinking that since He is no longer in human form, it is not really possible to serve Him and that it is impossible to serve Him in others.

It is likely that each of us has already come to this critical point—maybe even several times. We may have been able to swallow our frustrations and continue to serve. Yet in order to serve without anything harming our wholehearted desire to serve, there is a very practical solution. We can choose to review our own ideas of service in conjunction with Meher Baba's words about service, especially those in the *Discourses*. Through the process of seriously comparing His words with our ideas, we will definitely gain a deeper understanding of service according to Baba.

When I have gone back to the *Discourses*, I invariably come upon some point that Meher Baba makes that I had missed previously. It feels like being exposed to the Truth once again. Then I am challenged. Do I change or do I maintain the old understanding? When I think about it more deeply, I can see that my old understanding kept my spiritual life stagnant and the resulting inertia was the reason I felt obstructed in serving Baba.

As an example, let us say in a specific situation we think we are serving selflessly, yet we find that we also feel blocked. This makes us uncertain how to continue to serve. Looking in the *Discourses*, we will find that Meher Baba explains that something more than selflessness is required in our service. I know I was stunned when I read that. He goes on to say what may be lacking on our part at those times is “spiritual understanding.” Putting spiritual understanding into action gradually removes obstacles because we are now looking at things in a different way.

Another challenge to our old ideas of service is Meher Baba’s definition of selfless service in the *Discourses*. I think many of us still act upon the world’s ideas of selfless service and not on Meher Baba’s. I know I still get caught every day. So it is worthwhile to review how He defines it. For that matter, it is important to understand why we should perform selfless service at all. Doing so gives us the momentum to act differently in our service by trying out new understandings, thus allowing us to grow spiritually.

Meher Baba dictated several discourses on service. They are “Selfless Service”, “Qualifications of the Aspirant – Part III – Readiness To Serve”,

“Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity”, and “The Task for Spiritual Workers.” He also discussed elements of service in other discourses: “The Removal of Sanskaras Part II”, “The Deeper Aspects of Sadhana”, “True Discipleship”, and “The Avenues to Understanding.”

If we ever have an opportunity to gaze at a box containing nothing but precious jewels, I imagine we would be dazzled and overwhelmed by their beauty and value. If we were to take one of the jewels out of the box and place it in a setting, we then could better admire and appreciate it. Meher Baba’s words in the *Discourses* are similar—a box of jeweled words from the Source of Truth. We can make a general acclamation that the *Discourses* are unique, invaluable and beautiful. And yet at the same time, to admire and gather the significance of Baba’s words, reading them in a different context gives us an additional opportunity to really see their beauty. As we read His words anew, we may exclaim, “Oh, I didn’t know Baba said that! I never read that before.” I still find myself saying that now and again, for example when I see quotes from the *Discourses* on the Meher Baba calendar.

Recognizing how important a life of service is to us, what I have done in this booklet is taken Meher Baba’s words from different discourses concerning service and brought them all together, so we can see them in different contexts: what makes service selfless; why we should perform selfless service; how it is to be done; the kind of selfless service to be done; and how that kind of selfless service is to be performed. I believe when we look at Baba’s words on service from these points of view, we will find some surprising, perhaps neglected and even disregarded elements concerning selfless service.

I cannot be more emphatic than to tell you that if I had not chosen to reexamine my life of service through careful exploration of Meher Baba's words, my life would be the poorer and far different. In fact, I can say I'd even be imprisoned by my own preconceived notions of a spirituality based on the religion of being "Craig." There is no doubt about it. After thoughtfully reflecting upon many of His statements, they have become fundamental to my life. They have provided me with newer understandings that have invigorated my life with direction and inspiration. And yet, of course, at the same time, the daily struggle remains to continue to put them into action.

Let me add further that it seems to me that Meher Baba's discourses on selfless service are not just about selfless service. They also are a guide to living and being happy in the midst of an active life.

I hope you will find going through this material as enriching as I did. Perhaps you too will find that it gives you the opportunity to reexamine yourself, your actions and your life, so you are better able to make changes that will bring you closer to the truth of what already lies in your own heart.

### WHAT MAKES SERVICE SELFLESS?

Throughout the world, people are engaged in what they think is selfless service. But what exactly makes service selfless? More importantly, what makes it selfless according to Meher Baba? He tells us in the discourse "The Removal of Sanskaras," service becomes selfless when there is:

1. No thought of reward
2. No thought of result
3. No thought of name and fame
4. No concern for being misunderstood
5. Disregard of one's own comfort
6. Disregard of one's own convenience

Most people in the world and probably even those involved in some service activity would not pick these six items as characterizing selfless service. It is more likely that their list would concentrate on the principle of "doing something to help others."

So why did Meher Baba focus on these six? Because Baba is concerned only with that part of service which is genuinely "selfless." He explains in this discourse how service that is selfless removes *sanskaras*—those little mind-bytes of limitation that keep us identified with the false separative self. And it is through selfless service that the false separative self is lessened because it has not been rewarded or reinforced.

It may not be instantly apparent how these six characteristics actually relate to diminishing the false separative self. But once we try to perform service consciously, while being unconcerned with the results of our actions or seeking rewards from them, our false self reacts immediately. Like a wild horse that does not want to be ridden, it is used to unbridled direction. But if we continue to ride the mind, and in this case I mean observe it without being maneuvered by it, we will begin to perceive that the desire for results or name and fame, and so on, is not a casual demand we make, but the very foundation for most of our actions.

We will take a brief look at each item on the list and consider how each characteristic of selfless service, when put into action in our attempt to serve, makes us confront the separative self and lessen it when we refuse to give in to its demands.

The desire for rewards is so ingrained in us that it is impossible to gauge to what extent it motivates us. It drives us to calculate “what do I get out of this action,” making the false separative self the reason for the action. Because we want some kind of reward for the energy we spend in an action, our energy is a type of currency. We decide all day long how it will be spent. And like money, we only try to spend it on the reward we seek, making us like animals on the hunt. The desire for rewards concentrates our focus on the false separative self and not on the service itself. That is why one of the major requisites for selfless service is no thought of reward.

Of course, some may counter that people are not so self-centered—just look at all those who do volunteer work, expecting no reward at all. Let’s say you are feeding the poor, you judge success by some criteria you establish—how many people you fed, or how well you fed them. This seems like common sense and something to be applauded. But the fact is there is another, more subtle kind of reward dynamic taking place here—the desire for a certain result. All too often the end result of success is a feeling that “I have accomplished something.” This only strengthens the separative ego, and hence the desire for results must be renounced if the work is truly to be selfless. (We will look at the problem of chasing after results at length in a later section).

Even if we are not expecting rewards for our work, and even if we somehow manage to not get caught up in the desire for specific results, we still tend to want people to notice how "selfless" we are in our efforts. We want the world to shower "name and fame" on us. Name and fame let us know how we are valued in the world. Without them, we usually feel valueless. But again, that is only true as long as we look to maintaining the narrow separative self for fulfillment. Running after name and fame is not simply a question of being famous with the general public. It also involves our desire for name and fame in our daily lives within our own circle at work, and among friends and family. Here too, we seek some kind of distinction that separates us from others. Disregarding name and fame decreases the false sense of separation from others. And that is why another necessity for selfless service is no thought of name and fame.

Because we often see ourselves through the eyes of others, we want others to think well of us. And so we create an image of ourselves in order to get this reflection. When we are misunderstood, we don't receive the desired reflection and we struggle even harder to maintain and even enforce upon others what we think is the correct image of ourselves. Yet these images of ourselves are invariably false. How can anyone ever "understand" us correctly when we don't even understand ourselves? We wrongly try to uphold an image of ourselves surrounded by a multitude of good qualities. But the truth is we are actually even greater than anything we can imagine ourselves to be. Meher Baba tells us we are infinite and eternal beings. And for that reason, any appraisal by the world that doesn't make us remember this truth has to reinforce a false image of ourselves. So any

concern with the opinions of others can only reinforce the false self. Therefore another major essential for selfless service is having no concern for being misunderstood.

The last two items on the list, having to do with our comfort and convenience, affect our more primary selves. Seeking comfort is our ingrained habit of self-preservation—a primal urge. When even small bits of our comfort are taken away, we react aggressively. And when they are taken away in a large measure, see what beasts arise out of us, dominating our characters! Finally when we insist upon the day's activities occurring at our convenience, it is simply an acute manifestation of a self-centered life, in which we expect everyone and everything, including God's Will, to adjust to us. Therefore when it comes to service being selfless, it is necessary to disregard one's own comfort and convenience in order to begin to overcome these drives.

This basic analysis of the six characteristics that make service selfless highlights the fact that when they are put into action, we experience direct confrontation with our false separative selves. If we carry out this confrontation in our daily lives, it will allow us to observe and from time to time be astonished at how the false separative self manipulates us.

We are not spared from this confrontation when we are serving God. We still have to confront the rewards, results, name and fame that are derived from it. Although we may feel good about some service we have performed out of our love for Meher Baba, if it does not weaken the false self, then it is not selfless service. ultimately, we need to be aware of how our actions are manipulated when we

do not implement the six characteristics. Each and every time we do not put them into action, we quietly yield to the dictates of the false separative self. But when we do act upon them, then for sure we will be in for the ride of our lives!

### WHY SELFLESS SERVICE?

Challenging the false separative self is no joke! We all know that. Sometimes after trying to tame the wild horse of my mind and getting nothing but bruised from the effort, I limp away wondering how to train my mind so I can ride it, rather than it riding me.

Undoubtedly by concentrating on following Meher Baba's six guidelines, the false separative self is confronted. And if we persisted in our efforts to not seek rewards, or results, or name and fame, etc., in our actions we would even find a gradual loosening of the separative ego's grip on us. But when we uphold these guidelines when we are focused on performing selfless service, it has a special effect as Baba explains in "The Removal of Sanskaras":

Since the soul is now centering its attention and interest not upon its own good, but upon the good of others, the nucleus of the ego is deprived of its nourishing energy. Selfless service is therefore one of the best methods of diverting and sublimating the energy locked up in the binding sanskaras.

What nourishes our egos, according to Meher Baba, are the following binding sanskaras that separate ourselves from others:

- Craving for power
- Craving for possessions
- Self-pity
- Jealousy
- Evil deeds actuated through selfishness

These actions and reactions demarcate the boundaries of our separate selves. Yet according to Meher Baba, there is a way to rid ourselves of this confinement—by gradually removing the barriers that maintain the illusion of separation from another. This can be achieved through selfless service.

Meher Baba makes this very clear in the discourse “The Deeper Aspects of Sadhana,” when He states that the primary significance of selfless action is that it “contributes towards the dissipation of the illusion of separateness.” Therefore selfless service by its nature accomplishes the critical thing in spiritual life—lessening the illusion of separateness. And thus the six characteristics of selfless service are the means to fulfill this purpose and not an end in themselves.

Moreover, Meher Baba gives a further explanation of why selfless service should be undertaken and explains the subtle results of it when He says,

The real justification for a life of selfless service is to be found in this intrinsic worth of such a life and not in any ulterior result or consequence. The paradox of selfless action is that it actually brings to the aspirant much more than could ever come within the purview of ignorant selfishness... What a person has may be lost and what he desires to have may never come to him, but if he parts with

something in the spirit of an offering to God, it has already come back to him.

Meher Baba's words remind me of what He had told Eruch. "It is not what we gain that counts but what we lose." These words certainly apply to selfless service. Although it apparently takes place at our own expense, what we are trying to lose is the false self in all its relentless display of contrasting itself with others and its continual acts of self-preservation.

There is also a subtle but powerful process at work in selfless service that revolves around the principal of "good will." Naturally, in order to perform service that is not done with a reluctant sense of duty, we need to start out with a feeling of good will to those we are serving. And if we are able to render service without instilling a sense of obligation in those served, we are often the recipients of their good will. In "The Removal of Sanskaras," Meher Baba says, "Through their thoughts of gratitude and good-will you actually receive more than you give." The giving of good will is an underestimated commodity in the world because it takes place, for the most part, in the unseen, inner world of the heart. The world ordinarily looks at good will as a nicety, a courtesy. But Baba informs us that we do indeed benefit from it.

In fact, I feel that establishing active good will for others is a first step to reducing the illusion of separateness, because the sense of self begins to expand beyond the usual selfish self and incorporates others. As difficult as it is or as impossible as it may seem to incorporate others, I really have found that by confronting the false separative self through selfless service, I become increasingly aware of our spiritual oneness. As a

result, my ordinary understanding of comfort, convenience and happiness changes and my heart can unpretentiously include others as not separate from myself.

Then, I can begin to feel the genuine possibility of Meher Baba's explanation of what can take place through selflessly serving others: "Their comfort is your convenience, their health is your delight, and their happiness is your joy. You find your life in losing it in theirs." In addition, it also becomes understandable that the depth of feeling for others can ultimately reach the level where, "You live in their hearts, and your heart becomes their shelter. When there is true union of hearts, you completely identify with the other person."

So the point of selfless service is to weaken the illusion of separateness by losing ourselves, and in doing so, gaining a sense of oneness with others. Yet when we perform a service activity, how aware are we of trying to diminish this illusion? I know many of my daily problems arise from lack of that focus, which unnecessarily creates further difficulties between me and others. One thing that will definitely make me lose my focus is insisting on being right or justifying my actions. As soon as I do that, the other person immediately becomes more adamant in his or her position, and thus the veil of separation becomes thicker between us. Therefore we have to ask ourselves how we should direct our actions in order to keep them based on lessening the illusion of separateness.

## WHAT KIND OF SELFLESS SERVICE?

In the discourse “Selfless Service,” Meher Baba categorizes various kinds of service according to the kind of well being each provides: “Ministering to the bodily needs of others is service; cultivation of the intellect of others is service; feeding the hearts of people is service; satisfying the aesthetic requirements of society is service.”

Usually we think that as long as we serve selflessly in any of these categories, it does not matter what kind of service we do. But in this discourse, Meher Baba informs us this is not true. He says, “All these forms of service are not of the same value, even if they are all accompanied by a spirit of selflessness.” And He continues to explain to us that, “the kind of well being which is sought through service will depend upon the vision of the person.” Knowing this, we have to choose the kind of well being we are going to offer through our service.

Meher Baba takes this theme a step further by telling us that not only the individual, but society in general, chooses who it serves according to what it values. He explains this in the discourse “Readiness to Serve,” where He once again characterizes each kind of service as serving the body, the mind, culture, the heart and the spirit. He also explains how different societies offer different kinds of well being, forming the basis for their ways of life. I have italicized a key word in each sentence because it reveals an interesting progression of human behavior in offering different kinds of well being.

In a society which is *dominated* by merely material conceptions of life, service is interpreted in terms of providing for bread or clothes or other physical amenities.

In a society which is *responsive* to the value of intellectual culture, service is interpreted in terms of spreading learning in different forms.

In a society which has *developed* taste for beauty, service is interpreted in terms of organizing the production and distribution of works of art.

In a society which is *responsible* to the ineffable values of the heart, service is interpreted in terms of constructing those channels which will facilitate the culture and expression of the heart.

In a society which is *alive* to the supreme importance of the spirit, service is interpreted in terms of imparting spiritual understanding.

Meher Baba concludes this explanation of the different categories of service by stating,

Of these different types of service, the service which is concerned with spiritual understanding is the highest, because spiritual understanding includes the right perspective to all human problems and promotes their solution.

We are familiar with the way governments, public and private service organizations and individuals carry out services for the well being of the body, mind and culture of humanity. But when it comes to service which imparts spiritual under-

standing, we naturally have to wonder what that has to do with us. In the past, when I read Meher Baba's statements about the highest service, I would just ignore them as if they had nothing to do with me whatsoever. I simply thought that only the Avatar, Perfect Masters and genuine spiritual masters are capable of imparting spiritual understanding, which affects the fundamental well being of others.

But as I again reread the *Discourses*, I started to recognize that although the phrase "spiritual understanding" seemed alien, Meher Baba uses it quite often to explain how to follow Him. When I think about it now, it is a bit peculiar that during all the years I previously read the *Discourses*, I never considered why Meher Baba consistently uses this phrase. So for the first time, I began to look seriously at His statement and at last asked myself: What is spiritual understanding and how exactly does this give us the right perspective to solve all human problems? Answering these questions may significantly affect how we view service.

So what is spiritual understanding according to Meher Baba? In the discourse "The Avenues to Understanding," He explains it this way:

Spirituality does not consist in intellectual knowledge of true values but in their realization. It is this knowledge of inner realization that is worthy of being called spiritual understanding, and this is far more dependent upon the heart than on the mind.

In other words, it is not our intellectual knowledge that counts, but our realization of it that brings spiritual understanding. And how do we real-

ize what we know intellectually? We do this by putting what we "know" into practice. Then we transform it from an abstract concept to a powerful dynamic of our everyday life. As Meher Baba says, "what counts is practice and not mere theory." Our theories, our conceptions, change our everyday lives when put into practice. In fact, we grow to understand that our favorite theories and conceptions are far different in action than imagination.

Therefore by putting our concepts of spirituality into the practical situations of everyday life, we become aware how different spiritual perceptions are from spiritual concepts. We see for ourselves that the concepts leave us unchanged while perceptions give us authentic spiritual momentum towards the truth.

Naturally as we put our sincere belief of these spiritual concepts into action, sometimes we will make mistakes. But Meher Baba comforts us by saying, "even a mistake in a practical direction may have its own valuable lessons to bring." These lessons, if faithfully carried out, will become perceptions of the truth which are spiritual understandings. In short, spiritual understanding is something that we can indeed acquire. This topic is so important that it is the theme of my next booklet, which is entitled "The Awareness – Spiritual Understanding, Not Intellectual Information."

We learned in the previous section that the primary significance of selfless action is that it contributes "towards the dissipation of the illusion of separateness." As we weaken the illusion of separateness, we naturally become aware of our inner oneness. This and not our separative self is the real Truth of which Meher Baba said, "Selfishness repre-

sents ignorance, while selflessness is a reflection of the Truth." This simple indicator helps guide us in the right direction—it is a signpost that directs our actions toward dissipating the illusion of separateness, allowing them to reflect the Truth.

So the perspective that spiritual understanding gives us is the truth that we are not separate but are essentially one. This is the perspective that promotes solutions to our problems. When we no longer judge everything from the perspective of our separative ego but focus on a universal oneness of spirit, our service begins to reflect this truth. And, as such, we also are now able to begin, at least nonverbally, to impart this feeling of oneness to others, which is the first step towards imparting spiritual understanding which Baba says is the highest form of service. This answers the question posed earlier about how Spiritual Understanding gives us the right perspective to solve all human problems. It also clarifies how Spiritual Understanding applies to our lives, as well as the importance of rendering selfless service in the first place.

Later we will see that Meher Baba Himself exhorts us to bring home the truth of the unity of all life to humanity. For now, just understanding that it is essential for us to view our service as imparting spiritual understanding through the perspective of oneness is important. But oneness is tricky when we are overwhelmed by our false separative selves. There is a way out of this conundrum, however, if we understand who it is we are trying to be one with. Once we know this, it will help us understand how to impart spiritual understanding.

## WHO ARE WE REALLY SERVING?

As was stated in the preface, life is service, because all actions serve some purpose. So, basically our actions end up being either separative-self serving or Soul-self serving. The foremost spiritual principle throughout the ages has always been to love God and to love one's neighbor as one's self. The problem is that when we try to lovingly serve others, we sometimes find ourselves unable to break through barriers that we and they impose. We can become frustrated by our inability to feel for others as if they are our near and dear ones. This is especially true when those whom we are serving seem ungrateful, or hostile, or even unworthy of our service. If we do not feel love toward them to begin with, our service might begin with a sense of duty and end in despair or bitterness.

Meher Baba assures us through His authoritative statement, that it is He who is the One who resides in every heart, that there is a way out of this painful dilemma. Therefore instead of serving others, we can serve Him in others. Yet even so, we often hesitate. Although we believe that Avatar Meher Baba is within everyone, we still habitually see only the other person in front of us. This is because our belief has not become a living faith — the kind of faith that enables us to act as if we already experience the truth that by serving others we are really serving Him.

Therefore it is critical to uphold the belief that Meher Baba is the One who resides in every heart. Otherwise we will frustrate our spiritual life by not fulfilling the basic spiritual necessity of loving one's neighbor as one's self which maintains the truth that we are all one. Our loving Him in others not

only carries our service into their hearts, helping to impart spiritual understanding, but it also leads us to experience the Truth of Baba's words, that He is THE BEING of all beings.

Time and again throughout the years, people would come and greet Eruch at the Trust Office. Out of consideration for him, especially as he aged, many people would say, "Don't get up just to embrace me." And Eruch, as he got out of his chair, would respond, "I am not embracing you, I am embracing Him in you."

When Eruch would say this, I would sometimes chuckle a little bit to myself. I discounted his words, thinking that he was just being his old lovable self. Only later did I come to understand that through such a simple action he was upholding the Truth—the Truth that Meher Baba is the One residing in everyone.

To serve Meher Baba as the One residing in every heart, I feel we must do two things: (1) accept this on faith, even though we don't experience it; and (2) keep reminding ourselves of this truth whenever we become uncertain of how to proceed in our service. If we do not accept this truth as a fundamental principle upon which our service rests, we will surely feel conflicted. We will always be at odds with ourselves and with others—irritated that we may be serving the false separative selves of others and upset that we have lost sight of the One we should be serving.

Meher Baba gives us the assurance that we can serve Him in others, when He says, "To serve the Master is to serve your own self in every other self." His words help us answer the question, "Who

do we serve—Meher Baba, others or ourselves?” And as we can see, He has included them all because in truth there is no distinction. All are one because there are no distinctions in the eternal soul.

If we can resolve who we are trying to be one with, it will help us understand where we can begin to impart spiritual understanding. First, when our focus is on the oneness of the spirit, which in itself is a spiritual understanding, it greatly aids us to put the six items that characterize selfless service into action. So as we disregard the rewards, results, name and fame that separate us from each other, we dissipate the illusion of separateness, making our service truly selfless. Then because we have faith that we are actually serving Meher Baba in others, our responses to others will naturally be more loving. And so we can begin, even without saying a word about the unity of all life, to offer a feeling of oneness through our actions, which on their own convey the spiritual understanding of the truth of the spirit.

Furthermore once our service is focused on the oneness of the spirit, we can then choose to serve the material, intellectual, emotional and cultural needs of others. But it will be done through the approach of spiritual understanding. In addition, and more critically, we will be seeing to the spiritual needs of their souls. We will have the opportunity to help others come to their own understanding of the oneness of the spirit, diminishing their illusion of separateness. This highest service gives, as Meher Baba says, “the right perspective to all human problems and promotes their solution”.

If the focus of our service is not on spiritual understanding, then it is reduced to serving the

mundane needs of others, which are not only short-lived but ultimately have no meaning. We may be serving selflessly, trying to lessen the notion of separative self. But if we are not serving in the way that offers others “the right perspective to all human problems and promotes their solution”, which according to Meher Baba is the highest service, then our service is lacking.

Now that we have a beginning point from which to act, how do we put the spiritual understanding of the unity of all life into action and how do we impart it?

#### SERVING INTELLIGENTLY THROUGH SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

I suppose that most of us would have loved to serve Meher Baba directly. Since Meher Baba was no longer in the body, I longed to serve His Mandali. I moved to India in 1978 and began to serve at the Trust Office. I thought that just being a Baba Lover was enough. But I found selfless service was not at all what I thought.

I call my own method of service at the Trust Office for the first 15 years the shotgun method. I just did whatever I could and hoped for the best. There was no guiding intelligence in it. There was the desire to serve; there was the longing to serve, but there seemed to be something missing. Eruch would continually have me keep my external world of service in order. He never seemed to care about my internal world, other than my being focused on the service and being determined to be His. But after fifteen years of “slogging,” to use one of Eruch’s words, something began to change within

me. It seemed the external alertness I inculcated in my actions had reached a point where it spontaneously became refocused toward the internal world of my mind. I began to find authentic internal awareness.

No longer was I totally at the mercy of my subconscious. The habit patterns that I had ignorantly maintained as if they were born out of Truth, began to wither under the eye of perception. Understanding started to dawn as my own lies were revealed against the backdrop of growing clarity of my mental and emotional states. What to uphold became my conscious choice. I would say that in my life with Meher Baba up until the present, this has been the turning point in my consciousness.

Although my yearnings to serve Meher Baba were genuine, sometimes I would plunge ahead into the work like the proverbial "bull in a china shop." By this I mean that I would be so certain that my approach to the work entrusted to me was correct, that I was not at all mindful of anything else. I simply felt justified that I was serving Meher Baba and that was sufficient for me. But this is not the way to serve Him, as we will see. Sometimes I was so intent on achieving a specific result, which I thought the Mandali wanted, that I neglected to really see what their deeper consideration in the problem was. Often times, the Mandali were not so concerned with the result as they were with how the problem was handled. Work is accomplished all over the globe. There is nothing new or special in that. But the basic problem is how the work is done.

Moreover, I would often take the plunge into some action like someone who dives into a pool of water, seeing only the surface and not thinking about the possibility of the dangerous rocks be-

neath. Those dangerous rocks were my own ego tendencies. Without my realizing it, they prompted me to act and I didn't understand the reason I was doing things as I did. I only had the simple justification that I was doing it all for Baba. Unfortunately when you don't know what is underneath the water and just jump in, you can hurt yourself. And because I did not know my own subconscious mind, I would hurt myself by not remaining happy in His service.

After many years, I finally began to discover that my service to Meher Baba had to be accompanied by something other than mere sincerity of purpose. Perhaps in my over eagerness to serve Meher Baba while trying not to use my mind, I did not understand that the use of the intellect is not the same thing as the use of one's intelligence. And Baba has given many indications about how to serve Him intelligently in His discourse, "Selfless Service." I will focus on two very important ones here.

The first of these statements is:

It is very important that service, even when it is utterly selfless, be guided by spiritual understanding, for selfless service, when unintelligently handled, often creates chaos and complications...When [one] renders service with spiritual understanding it not only confers spiritual benefit upon [oneself], but also promotes the material and spiritual well-being of others involved.

Meher Baba's statement may be a revelation to us. It was for me. Ordinarily we think we should aim for selflessness. But in this passage, He tells us that this is simply untrue. He explains that even if we serve Him with utter selflessness, chaos and

complications will result if spiritual understanding does not accompany the selfless act. His clear declaration should dispel any lingering doubts we still may have concerning the way in which spiritual understanding applies to us and our lives of service.

But how will Meher Baba regard our service if we are still unsure what spiritual understanding means and how to apply it? In such a case, He tells us, "There is no doubt that even when [one] renders selfless service unintelligently [one] derives some spiritual benefit thereby, but in doing so [one] cannot avoid causing much unnecessary suffering to others." The suffering we cause others in our service makes us the bull in their china shop. Yet regardless of this, Baba assures us that our service to Him is still acceptable even if it is at the cost of another's suffering.

Meher Baba explains at length what problems will result if service is not guided by spiritual understanding, and instead is "unintelligently handled," creating chaos and complications. Acknowledging that there are good people in the world who are ceaselessly active for public causes through social institutions, He asks the question, "What does that activity lead to?" (Isn't nice to have God make this analysis for us?) He reveals that such actions may solve one problem but create ten others through unforeseen and uncontrollable side effects. Moreover, He says that ordinarily when we try to overcome evil in the world through opposition, we often unconsciously create other evils. Again He emphasizes that we "may be selfless, but [our] actions create chaos instead of harmony because [we] have not learned how to render real and effective service without creating complications."

What then is the way out of this extraordinary predicament where even utter selflessness is not enough? Meher Baba tells us what is required when He says, “Those who come into contact with me should develop true understanding of life and cultivate that type of service which creates no complications.” Let us look at these two necessities in service.

The first part of Meher Baba’s statement makes us ask what He means by developing a true understanding of life. The second leads us to wonder what we need to cultivate in our service so we do not cause complications.

Meher Baba has stated that our service is to be guided by spiritual understanding, which means putting spiritual theory into action and actually experiencing its truth in our lives. We can surmise that if our service is guided by spiritual understanding, we would develop a true understanding of life. But what is a true understanding of life? And how does spiritual understanding give us this precious knowledge?

In *God Speaks*, Meher Baba reveals that the purpose of Creation is for the soul to develop full consciousness in order to realize God. At first, it has only the most finite consciousness. Then by incarnating from one form to another, the soul gathers experiences that increase its consciousness with each form: from gas, stone, metal, vegetable, insect, fish, bird, to animal. Finally, in human form, its consciousness is complete and it can realize its own true Self.

However because of the residue of gathering experiences—*sanskaras*—from the journey of consciousness, these *sanskaras* or impressions limit consciousness, making the soul unable to realize its own self.

We can gradually efface these limitations placed on our consciousness by wholeheartedly embracing the truth that all life is one. This effacement occurs when we put the spiritual theory of inner oneness into action. Through our consistent efforts, we can free ourselves from the illusion of the false separative self that assaults our minds and external senses, and we can begin to perceive inner oneness.

By replacing our ordinary understanding of the external world with the spiritual understanding of the unity of all life, our responses to life naturally go through remarkable changes. For no longer do we unthinkingly accept the dictates of the separative self that rationalizes our selfish reactions. Instead, because we sense underlying oneness, our primary response is to uphold the Truth of inner unity with those around us. To do otherwise is to knowingly harm our own selves. Furthermore there is also the accompanying faith that the destiny of every soul is the same—to realize the Eternal Soul.

In approaching life this way, we fulfill Meher Baba's wish, as He stated above, that "those who come into contact with me should develop true understanding of life." But Meher Baba also stated that He wishes us "to cultivate that type of service that does not cause complications."

Obviously, the type of service that does not cause complications is the one that promotes harmony. And we know from things the Mandali

have said that Baba put a lot of emphasis on harmony. At one point He even said to them, "Everything is in My hands except one thing—harmony. Harmony is in your hands. I cannot give you the blessings to live in harmony. Any and everything comes and goes. Know that I love you and give you My love but that which would please Me most is for you all to live in harmony. There may be differences but try not to incite differences. I beg you all to live in harmony and see that My love is spread among you all."

As we can see from what Meher Baba said, maintaining an atmosphere of harmony does not mean being in agreement with everyone about everything. It means that our acceptance of others is so fundamental that disagreements can not disrupt it. It is through harmony that we best reflect the inner unity of the spirit. And this comes about naturally as we uphold the truth of inner oneness.

So now we know that according to Meher Baba spiritual understanding must accompany our service. Being selfless alone is not enough! And by basing our actions on inner oneness, we develop a true understanding of life, which then naturally fosters a spirit of harmony, causing no complications in our service.

By putting these great truths into action, we will be better prepared to perform the highest service, imparting spiritual understanding to others so they can accept, have faith in and finally feel for themselves the truth of inner oneness.

## HOW TO SERVE WITH SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

This is a very big subject! So we will focus on only a few of the major obstacles to serving and even living with spiritual understanding. One of the biggest ones is the attachment to the results of our actions. Although we touched upon it briefly in the section entitled “What Makes Service Selfless,” we will now look at this basic problem a little more closely.

In “Selfless Service,” Meher Baba explains a principal fact concerning service from a worldly point of view. At the same time, He also gives us a noteworthy warning regarding our attachment to results. He says:

For most persons the idea of service is inextricably bound with securing certain definite results in the objective world. For them service consists in the removal of human suffering or illiteracy or other difficulties and handicaps which thwart the flourishing of individual or social life. This is the type of service rendered by aspirants, politicians, social reformers and other good persons. Though this type of service is of immense spiritual importance, it is in its very nature unending...Those who aim at sure and definite results through a life of service have an eternal burden on their minds.

For those who believe in trying to alleviate human suffering through projects that take place on a large scale, Meher Baba warns not to seek a permanent solution to the human condition. Although we may have the best of intentions, we need to accept what He says. If we do otherwise, we will carry a burden that will not go away.

What Meher Baba states here also applies to our individual daily activity. His guidance is critical in alleviating us of the burden of focusing on results. When I am in the heat of action, I try—and sometimes fail—to remind myself not to feverishly pursue some result that I imagine is necessary to serve Him.

In fact, Meher Baba's statement helps us gain what we can safely say is a spiritual perspective on our service. It allows us to shift our focus away from pursuing outer results and toward upholding inner truths. We know from our own experience that “as long as the idea of service is thus tied to the idea of results, it is inevitably fraught with a sense of incompleteness.” This sense of incompleteness is further aggravated in us when we use our minds and not our hearts in His service.

In “The Avenues to Understanding,” Meher Baba explains why this is so. “When a person has his eye on the results of actions instead of being concerned solely with their intrinsic worth, he is trying to tackle spiritual problems through the mind alone, and in doing so, is interfering with proper functioning of the heart.”

When we confront life and its activities from the mind alone, two things happen. The first is that we actually lessen the quality of our spiritual life. Why is this so? It is because we deny ourselves the inner glow of oneness. When we put any inner value like patience or loving kindness into action, our hearts have the opportunity to glow with a sense of oneness, generating well being for oneself as well as for others.

And the second is that because we're not using our hearts, our work will be weighed down with problems that restrain us from finding solutions. But when we perform service from the heart—which means being concerned solely with the intrinsic worth of the action—we serve with spiritual understanding which “includes the right perspective to all human problems and promotes their solution.” I will try to explain my perception of this process.

Normally in the pursuit of worldly results, we make hard, dry appraisals of the problems before us. However, when we do this, we have neglected the heart, not understanding what it can offer to solve problems. In fact, the heart's function is so little understood that we may never consider how the heart can aid with a solution.

The heart helps solve problems because it offers a real foundation upon which to build the solution. The mind will only let us build on the stage of Illusion, which is doomed to disappear. But the heart offers a foundation of truth that affirms that we are all one. That approach alone eliminates many of the problems, such as acute egotism, possessiveness, defensiveness, the need to be right and so on, which get in the way of solving problems to begin with.

When we are “concerned solely” with the inner qualities of an action, it is turned inside out. By this I mean that when we uphold the unity of all life, the heart has its say because an all-embracing attitude has been expressed, leaving no one out. In this way, the inner world of unity touches the outer world of separative existence and has the opportunity to weaken the grip the outer world has on us. Once the heart is allowed to lead, the mind can be applied to solve material problems, using its

analytical abilities. Yet the solution will be based on the truth that has come from the heart. When we use the heart and the mind according to their intrinsic and proper functions, then we act with spiritual understanding.

For many in the world, the solution derived by the heart may not apparently be the best one. But to the heart, because the solution has been based on the truth of the inner unity, it is the best solution because unity is expressed in the midst of diversity and the spirit triumphs regardless of results.

Therefore as the heart leads us, we become less attracted to results and less swayed by the mind. So our perspective on life and service changes from being mind-oriented, which entails viewing life from the point of view of the separative ego, to being heart-oriented, which upholds values of inner oneness.

Meher Baba explains what these changes in perspective are in "Readiness to Serve." He says, "worldly-minded [people] feel their separative existence through achievements...They grasp at the great things and avoid the little things." And because of this compulsion, "the scope of possible service to fellow beings gets artificially restricted to those things which are conventionally regarded as important." When we are mind-oriented, we harm the expression of life because "many things which are of vital importance to life are neglected, with the result that life is spiritually impoverished."

For the heart, little things do matter because Meher Baba is in everything and everyone. He says, "Life is made up of many such small things. If these

small things were ignored life would be not only unbeautiful but unspiritual.” Therefore as we change our perspective so that the heart leads the way, we attend to “little things with as much zest as to great things.” Such an attitude helps us maintain a mental poise that is less swayed by the opposites. When our spiritual understanding has deepened to this degree, we become the person Meher Baba describes as “the aspirant who is eager to serve without any desire for recognition and credit, everything that thwarts or perverts the release of full life is worthy of attention, irrespective of whether it is great or small in the opinion of world.”

This is a wonderful move toward being free; it is tantamount to keeping Meher Baba as a companion in all of our actions—from a trivial moment to a critical decision. It is taking a step toward the Eternal Now, where, Baba tells us, every moment is rich in significance. One way to begin to live such a life is to become more and more aware of the voice of intuition where He guides us both in our service and in our lives.

### HOW TO SERVE THROUGH INTUITION Hearing Meher Baba’s Guidance Within Us

In "The Deeper Aspects of Sadhana," Meher Baba points out that "fulfillment of the Sadhana of Karma Yoga [or the practice of selfless service] requires that action should spring from perception of the Truth." But what if we don't feel that we perceive the truth? Baba helps us out by clarifying that "Karma Yoga or the Path of Action consists in acting up to the best intuitions of the heart without fear or hesitation." For the longest time, I had no idea at all what Baba meant by "best intuitions of

the heart." But after years of my own effort to serve Him, I have at last a sense of what He may mean or at least what it means to me.

I recognize that anyone can receive intuitions, not only spiritually-minded people. It is just part of mental activity. There are all kinds of intuitions. Gamblers sometimes say they have intuition. There is the expression "women's intuition" which indicates the general acceptance that women do have this aptitude. Intuition can be as simple as intuiting who is calling us on the phone as it is ringing.

But when Meher Baba uses the expression "best intuitions of the heart," I feel He means those intuitions that lead us to the Truth. And by this I do not mean only those intuitions that have to do with upholding the truth of inner oneness. I also mean intuitions of a very mundane nature, when He leads us even in our daily circumstances. If we are alert to the quiet voice inside and unhesitatingly follow it without fear, then we are being led by Baba. And to me those intuitions that help us follow Him are the best.

I'll give one example of an apparently mundane intuition from my own life. I had newly arrived at the Trust Office in 1978 and I was working with Eruch. I distinctly remember that I was walking into one of the Record Rooms at the Trust Office and what I recognize now as intuition came to me. It directed me to do an apparently small action, which I did not do. I don't remember what it was. Later in the day, I mentioned this to Eruch and told him that I did not listen to it and that I just disregard such thoughts when they come. He uncharacteristically shouted at me, "THAT'S BABA!" You can imagine my surprise, per-

haps even horror that I was disregarding Baba. I was a youthful 28 years old when I moved to India and I had notions of some grand spirituality but when I heard that this too was Baba, it was really a shock to me. I had just never paid attention to such thoughts. Nonetheless, unfortunately for me, as of today, I am slow on picking up the subtle movement of my intuition and responding to it without hesitation. But I am working on it.

In “Readiness to Serve,” Meher Baba begins with a group of statements that we could consider guidelines to serving Him. I feel if these guidelines are acted upon, they will not only make our service more selfless but will also prepare us to be receptive to the voice of intuition.

These guidelines are:

1. “Be in readiness to serve the cause of humanity.”
2. “Select that portion of work which [you are] qualified to do by virtue of [your] individual aptitude and abilities.”
3. “Whatever service [you] can render by virtue of [your] capacity, render [it] even when the circumstances are most trying.”
4. “Determination to serve whenever possible must remain unshaken.”
5. “Service should spring out of the spontaneity of freedom if and when it is necessary; and it has to come in the cooperative spirit in which there is no insistence upon the claims of the limited ‘I.’”

As I typed this list, I was surprised to find that they described my attempts at serving here at the Trust Office for the first two decades. Without realizing it, I was trying to live up to these straightforward attitudes regarding service. This eventually led me to deepen my own understanding and prepare me for greater receptivity.

I found even more help in deepening this receptivity by looking at another group of statements Meher Baba gives in the same discourse "Readiness to Serve." These statements come from the paragraph entitled, "Service springing from love ensures harmony." They offer concrete actions we can take which will make our heart more responsive to intuit His promptings.

The paragraph starts off with this thought: "Even when the aspirant is rendering a service which is selfless, he keeps constant guard upon his mind." It seems to me in our attempts to love and serve Meher Baba that we have not understood or even considered the necessity of guarding our minds. There may be a variety of reasons why we have disregarded the importance of guarding the mind: we may feel that Baba simply tells us to love and remember Him; or such a notion was not stressed by the Mandali; or guarding the mind sounds "meditative" or "mechanical." Whatever the reason, Baba asserts its necessity even if our service is selfless. And I feel it is essential to guard the mind in order to hear the best intuitions of the heart. For if the mind is overwhelming us, how can we hear intuition and be guided by Him?

But what does it mean to guard the mind and how do we do it? Like anything, it is a learned art. Before we can guard the mind, there is a first step

that Meher Baba speaks of in Chapter VI on the types of meditation in the *Discourses*. He calls it “witnessing.” He says that it takes persistent practice. Some of you may remember that very often in the 1970’s, Eruch spoke in Mandali Hall of the importance of being a witness to the mind. I could never understand what he meant by it. Only when I entered my own process of self-awareness did I find that my mind naturally started witnessing its own activities.

What I found was that as I watched my mind, all kinds of thoughts came up. So I just started to observe them without judging myself. If I judged what was good and what was bad within me, it was likely that I would unconsciously repress what I did not want to admit about myself. I found that it was essential that I honestly recognize everything within me. And as long as I did not put the thoughts into action, I was not harmed. Moreover, through continual self-control, the force of negative thoughts eventually lessened and finally disappeared.

Usually we are so identified with our minds and their ceaseless activity, that we “think” we are our minds. But Meher Baba tells us that we are not our minds. We may have so many thoughts, both good and bad. But the truth is that we are not our bad thoughts or our good thoughts. Instead of identifying with our thoughts, He tells us we should identify ourselves with Him.

Witnessing the mind allows us to begin the process of not identifying with the mind. We take a step back from its convolutions and watch its “play,” so to speak. Once we are accustomed to the passive approach of witnessing the mind, we can move to the next step of actively guarding the mind.

In the discourse “The Nature of the Ego and its Termination:II” Meher Baba says, “All the problems of the ego can be tackled only through intelligent conscious action, and therefore complete annihilation of the ego is possible only when all the constituents of the ego pass through the fire of intelligent consciousness.” To me this “intelligent conscious action” is guarding the mind. And it seems to me that the part of the mind which has been witnessing mental activity becomes “intelligent consciousness” through perceiving with greater and greater clarity how mental activity can manipulate us into action of any kind.

Therefore let’s say we have thoughts of anger or greed or impatience. The witnessing mind observes this and then has the intelligence to recognize the harm it will cause us if we put those thoughts into action. It therefore guards the mind by throwing light on such crude ego expressions. Through intelligent consciousness, we can take care of the mind, guard it and tackle the problems of the ego. It then does not harm our selfless service, the focus of which is to impart spiritual understanding. By doing this, we are ever more ready to hear the voice of intuition and to follow Meher Baba. I feel if we take Baba’s words to heart and genuinely put them into action, they will lead us, as Bhau says, “to clearing the mind of unwanted noise, allowing us to hear the voice of His prompting.”

In the next sentence in this valuable paragraph, Meher Baba tells us that “the aspirant must be humble, honest and sincere.” We are so used to hearing such words that we don’t analyze what they really mean. At first, I thought these words had to do with being a “good” human being. But then I found as I witnessed the mind that the

kind of honesty, humility and sincerity that Baba is talking about has nothing to do with being “good”. It was kind of shocking to me, and continues to be as I watch how the ego continually tries to maintain separation from others.

So now after watching the mind for years and seeing the relentlessness of the ego’s assertions, I gauge humility, honesty and sincerity this way: it is a humility that recognizes that we really do not exist as a separate self; it is an honesty that says everything we do is really a lie; and it is a sincerity that perseveres in daring to try to put this into action and still live a normal, everyday life. This may sound outrageous and a far cry from just being a sincere, honest person. But as I said, after years of witnessing the ego and its relentless assertions, it seems to me that nothing short of such outrageous understanding will help us uproot it.

This reminds me of a prayer that Meher Baba gave that is not very well known. I only know of it because Eruch had written it to one of the Mandali and the paper passed through my hands. The prayer went, “I am not the body. I am not the mind. I am not this. I am not that. I am nothing but the living lie of that truth that is me, and unless the lie is dead, the Truth cannot be.”

So the mind is a living lie and it really cannot be trusted. And that is why I say we need to inculcate a humility that recognizes that we really do not exist as separate self, an honesty that says everything we do is really a lie, and a sincerity that perseveres in daring to try to put this into action.

How can we do this? As I said previously, I think we can begin by trying not to identify with our

minds, through witnessing, and then by guarding the mind. All our troubles basically come from identifying with our thoughts. So much of the disagreement and disharmony in our lives stem from the notion that we want to be “right.” Giving this up through the recognition that we really do not ultimately exist and that everything we say “in the real sense” is a lie, helps us let go of the mental battles we get into from time to time with others.

This allows us, at the very least, not to enhance the feeling of separation from others and also gives us the opportunity to uphold a sense of oneness with them. Although it is not possible for any of us to put this into action all the time, if we do so now and again, I feel it will help us hear the voice of intuition that allows us to serve in a way that lessens the illusion of separation.

Witnessing and guarding the mind is an inner activity, but we also have to watch our actions. Continuing with the next part of the paragraph, Meher Baba states that “the service he [the aspirant] renders must not be for the sake of mere show, and it should be an outcome of true love.” As was mentioned in the section “What Makes Service Selfless?”, one way to serve selflessly is to do so with no thought of name and fame. Let’s admit it, there is usually an element of show in our actions. The world is a stage and we want to play the main role. We may be concerned about the opinion of others. Or we may want to better our own opinion of ourselves. Both of these subtly affect our actions. Therefore we have to free ourselves of this need to perform an action, so that the action can be focused on serving for its own sake, allowing for the inner qualities of love, patience, and so on, to be expressed. Naturally, as we watch our actions, we

have more of an opportunity to hear the voice of intuition so that we may be guided in our service.

Meher Baba also states in the above sentence that our service “should be an outcome of true love.” I take this to mean that I should not have ulterior motives. The service I am rendering should be done for its own sake and not for anything else. My love may not be pure, but my desire to serve should be true.

When we have such a focus in our lives, it brings us to the point that Meher Baba speaks of in the next thought in this paragraph, “If the aspirant is inspired by love, his love will enable him to be in complete harmony with other co-workers without being jealous. If there is not complete harmony among the co-workers, the service which is rendered falls short of the spiritual ideal.”

Here Meher Baba tells us that if we truly are inspired by love in our actions then this love will enable us to be in harmony with others. Therefore He makes it clear that it is up to us to try to adjust and be harmonious. This means that we should not let misunderstandings create distance between us and our co-workers, and through the love we have for Meher Baba, keep them close to our hearts. This guideline is a built-in intuition checker. It allows us to determine immediately in the heat of action, if we are becoming overwhelmed by the dominating false separative self or if we are willing to bear the heat of misunderstanding, cooling it down through love and its intuition of the truth of oneness. As was pointed out in the section “Serving Intelligently Through Spiritual Understanding,” Meher Baba emphasized that the element of harmony is necessary in our actions in order for our service to be performed with

spiritual understanding. If our actions are not producing harmony then there is a good chance that we are not being guided by the heart but are being provoked into action by some selfish need.

Throughout all the years that I worked by the side of Eruch, one of the things that he consistently emphasized to all who served here was to act harmoniously. At first, I thought it was just an expression of his love for us, but as the years wore on and even now after he is gone, the importance of it is overwhelmingly clear. I have come to the conclusion that although our love is not pure, it may be true enough so that when the heart expresses harmony, the truth of inner oneness can be upheld. This offers the possibility of affecting the activity around us. The heart unites us while the mind divides us and therefore expressions of harmony are a triumph for the spirit, for they reflect the truth of oneness.

In summary, in order to hear the voice of intuition more often, which will allow us to serve Meher Baba with spiritual understanding, I feel it will be helpful to do the following: witness the mind and then guard it by passing its thoughts through the fire of intelligent consciousness; cultivate a real understanding of honesty, humility and sincerity; watch our actions so our service is rendered for its own sake; and finally, carry out our service in a spirit of harmony that causes a feeling of oneness.

All of these are personal, inner activities that help aid intuition. And although serving in a spirit of harmony has an inner aspect to it, its importance lies outside of ourselves by creating an atmosphere that helps impart the feeling of oneness. Therefore

we have to be aware of how we can help create this atmosphere. What helps us gain this awareness is to grow in our understanding of human nature, especially in its desire for freedom because harmony cannot be coerced from others—it can only be given as a consciously free deed.

Meher Baba explains the basic nature of freedom in the discourse we will look at in the next section. Through His words, we will also come to understand that the final significance of our acts of spiritual understanding is that it brings us spiritual freedom. We now are at the threshold of making our next big step forward.

## SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING LEADS TO SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Meher Baba begins the discourse “Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity” by stating that among the principal characteristics of man are the love of and search for freedom. He calls this urge for freedom in us a “burning claim,” fundamental to our being. This explains a lot about human behavior. He further tells us this “imperative demand for freedom” has always been with humanity no matter what race, climate, country or time period.

In our daily lives, the imperative demand for freedom may simply be expressed as, “I want to do what I want to do and nothing should get in my way.” That is, as momentary desires arise, we wish to assert them without any obstruction. When we are able to do what we want to do, our sense of being expands, which makes us feel happy. However, when we are unable to do what we want, we feel restricted and controlled by an outside force,

which makes us feel hostile. Therefore because of this simple expansion and contraction of our sense of being, whether we are conscious of it or not, we spend a large amount of time “arranging” things in order to feel the expansion and avoid the contraction. What are we arranging? We are busy arranging the conditions, setting, environment, situation and surroundings that help us feel free to do what we want without any obstruction. Meher Baba says that such activity illustrates one of the main problems in humanity’s search for freedom—we can only experience external freedom when we have gone through the trouble of creating the conditions that will allow for it.

Moreover, our experience tells us that when we seek our brand of freedom, whether political, national, economic, religious, sociological, cultural or personal, it often clashes with someone else’s. Meher Baba says this happens because “the freedom which an individual or community or state seeks must be consistent with a similar freedom for other individuals, communities, or states.” And because this seldom happens, our boundaries often expand into someone else’s.

Aye, there is the rub! This boundary rub causes the friction that lies behind much of the story of the life of the individual, the community and the state. And that is why harmony is so difficult to come by. For how can we expect harmony to take place when our desire for freedom is based on creating external circumstances that make us feel expansive, usually at someone else’s expense.

Now let us say that somehow we have been able to achieve some freedom that has not rubbed into someone else’s boundary. Meher Baba reminds

us that the inevitable is still bound to happen and that, "Even when it [freedom] is won through persistent effort, it cannot be a permanent attainment since the external conditions which have once been secured are not secured forever, but are capable of deteriorating in the course of time."

So the basic difficulty in our search for freedom is that even if all our subjective conditions for a free life were met, we would still be unhappy. Why? Because of two reasons: (1) those conditions, if asserted, conflict with others' notions of freedom; and (2) those conditions are external and therefore are bound to deteriorate.

Meher Baba tells us that because we do not understand what freedom really is we go about searching for it in ways that are impossible to fulfill. This explains why there is so much unhappiness in the world. Because without the feeling of being free, which Baba tells us is fundamental to our nature, we are miserable.

But there is a freedom that does not conflict with others' ideas of freedom and so maintains harmony. This freedom also does not have external conditions and so does not deteriorate. That freedom, Meher Baba tells us, is Spiritual Freedom.

If we are ever to experience spiritual freedom, we need to understand clearly what Meher Baba means by it. This will enable us to witness how our efforts to be free, based on our own definitions of freedom, are doomed to fail as we maneuver even in the smallest ways through our daily lives.

"Spiritual Freedom is grounded in the realization of the inviolable unity of all life and is

sustained by it.” Spiritual freedom cannot conflict with anyone or anything because it is based on the inner oneness of the spirit that includes everything. Therefore as we become aware of the inner oneness of the spirit, there is less need on our parts to insist on external conditions in order to feel free. We now feel free but in a different way—we feel free internally.

All other kinds of freedom are dependent upon certain conditions being present for its attainment. If the conditions are not there, freedom is not possible. But spiritual freedom is free of external conditions. Meher Baba says, “Any lesser type of freedom is comparable to a house which is built on sand, and any lesser type of attainment is fraught with the fear of decay.” Moreover, Meher Baba says that “when it [spiritual freedom] is won through persistent effort, it is secured forever.”

Attaining spiritual freedom, however, does have a condition, although it is not external. It is an internal condition—the gradual lessening of our desires. Because of this, the search for spiritual freedom seems restrictive, but only in a superficial sense. What we are restricting when we look from the vantage point of spiritual freedom are all the relative, conditional kinds of freedoms based on desires. And desire, by its very nature, demands that external conditions be met for its fulfillment. Therefore as we decrease our desires, we become less limited and less dependent on external things.

Because all people are searching for freedom, whether or not they realize it, it is important to help others understand this real freedom and how to begin to achieve it. By doing so, we are imparting spiritual understanding that brings real harmony into action.

Meher Baba combines the search for freedom with the highest type of service by explaining:

Therefore there is no gift greater than the gift of spiritual freedom, and there is no task more important than the task of helping others to achieve spiritual freedom...Those who have understood the supreme importance of spiritual freedom have not only to strive for it for themselves, but also to share the God-given duty of helping others to win it.

Meher Baba makes it clear that as we strive for spiritual freedom, it is also our duty to help others see its importance and strive for it themselves. This is another obvious indication that He wishes us to participate in the highest type of service—imparting spiritual understanding, which eventually helps others to win spiritual freedom for themselves. It is likely that few of us, including myself, had ever thought of Meher Baba’s message of love and truth in terms of spiritual freedom. But His words prove how emphatic He is about it.

#### WORK FOR THE SPIRITUAL FREEDOM OF HUMANITY

By the time Meher Baba reaches the end of “Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity,” He brings us to the point of not just inviting us, but directing us to share in His work of bringing spiritual freedom to others. He says,

In this God-willed divinely planned and predestined task of bringing spiritual freedom to humanity, you my devotees, have to help me, even at the cost of life. . . In your duty of

helping others to find God, you have to welcome every type of suffering and sacrifice. . . I have full confidence that you, my devotees, will share this burden.

Meher Baba's statement may seem extreme to us with its unfamiliar expressions of "at the cost of life" and "welcome every type of suffering and sacrifice" and "share this burden." But at the same time, Baba is letting us know the importance of helping Him in this work, emphasized again in the discourse "The Task for Spiritual Workers," in which He tells His followers to "share in my universal work of spiritualizing the world." He even declares that, "On the Path, the most important condition of discipleship is readiness to work for the spiritual cause of bringing humanity closer and closer to the realization of God."

It is unlikely that most readers of the *Discourses* have ever considered this as the most important condition for following Meher Baba. But He is speaking to those of us who have dedicated our lives to Him, whose hearts He has touched with His love and who truly accept Him and have begun the long journey to Him. Whether we call the journey a "path" or call ourselves "disciples" matters very little. But ours are the hearts that He is relying on to be in readiness to help His Cause.

By reviewing Meher Baba's words on service in the *Discourses*, we have come to see that He really does want our help. His own words testify to that! He explains how to impart spiritual understanding, encourages us to help others gain the greatest gift—spiritual freedom—and finally, even tells us to share in His work of spiritualizing the world, placing His confidence in us to do so.

In the discourse "True Discipleship," Meher Baba further elucidates the relationship we have with Him while doing this work. He says,

To serve the Master is therefore to participate in his cause, which is to serve all life. While sharing in the work of the Master, the disciple may be required to be in touch with the world; but though moving in the world in accordance with the work which is in store for him, he is in inward contact with the Master as Infinite Being. Therefore by sharing in the work of the Master the disciple comes closer to him and becomes an integral part of his consciousness.

The beauty of Meher Baba's message of sharing in His Cause strikes the heart very profoundly because we can share something that comes from the depths of our hearts. And when we rely on the intuitive guidance He gives us, His love and truth can touch other hearts.

Although the effort required must be genuine, we should not be too overwhelmed to start. We can begin with the little daily actions of our lives. When we are not distracted by other things, simple actions can contain genuine expressions of oneness that uplift the atmosphere around us. Too often we forget that life is made of these little moments, like just the right dab of color on a paintbrush that makes a painting turn out beautiful.

We are very blessed that Meher Baba has bestowed on us a sweet intimacy with Him, and given the delight of that relationship, and the difficulty of trying to work for the spiritual freedom of others, it is often tempting to just relax our efforts and enjoy the warmth of His presence. No

doubt we should settle into that warmth at times. However complacency becomes a problem if we prefer to roll along with this feeling to the extent of forgetting His Cause.

The funny thing about complacency is that it applies to everyone at times. As I was typing this, I remembered that one day in his cabin at Meherazad, Eruch told me that he had become complacent. I didn't believe him. But who knows? Maybe in that moment, he felt that he was complacent and meant it. After all, there is no end to serving Meher Baba. So if Eruch could feel complacent, what about us?

I know that when I become complacent, it makes me drift away from my life's purpose. But every time I seriously reflect on Meher Baba's messages on spiritual understanding and freedom and reabsorb their truths, I find myself reenergized and I strike out confidently once more on my journey to the Truth of Oneness.

## WORKING FOR OUR OWN SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

As we take up the duty to help others grasp the importance of spiritual freedom and strive for it themselves, we too have to continue to work on attaining our own spiritual freedom. Meher Baba says, "Spiritual freedom has to be won by oneself for oneself through watchful and unfailing war against the lower self and the lower desires."

The task is formidable, no doubt, the obstructions relentless, and certainly the way is not smooth. But I believe that Meher Baba's following message in "Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity," offers us a simple, clear-cut path:

The eternal truth that God alone is real has to be clearly understood and unreservedly accepted, and it has to be unequivocally expressed through words and deeds.

These words may, at first glance, seem intimidating and much too difficult for us to live by, but they deserve deep consideration. For the more we keep reverberating in our thoughts, “God alone is real,” the more we will be able to renounce the ego’s assertions which are plainly revealed as false.

Meher Baba says we have to clearly understand this eternal truth. He does not just say understand it, but clearly understand. Again, I think Baba is making the distinction between superficial beliefs or opinions and, as He calls it “living faith [that] has the most vital and integral relation with all the deeper forces of the psyche.”

Looking at my own life, when I began my search for God I readily accepted the words, “God alone is real,” at face value but I certainly did not clearly understand them. Instead all I did for years was interpret Meher Baba’s words in a way that allowed me to justify my prejudices and habit patterns. They were certainly not the product of spiritual understanding. Finally, I began to recognize that I was being manipulated by these patterns of thought which permitted my false separative self to hide in a jungle of spiritual jargon.

It’s not easy to get rid of this mental clutter. As mentioned earlier, if we become witness to the preconceived notions and habit patterns that make up our thinking, then we can subject these patterns to the fire of intelligent consciousness which in this case is the truth, “God alone is real.” Doing so, our

petty rationalizations for “spirituality,” which are nothing more than concealed egoism, begin to disappear.

As our understanding becomes clear of intellectual or preconceived ideas about the truth, we can begin to receive the intuitive perceptions of the truth that allow us to work for our own spiritual freedom. At present this is my battleground—whether or not I will uphold these perceptions in my daily life. But I have found that as I begin to act upon them faithfully, I gain a greater conviction of the truth, “God alone is real.”

I believe that when we finally reach the point where our conviction is unreserved, enabling us to express “God alone is real” in our words and deeds without hesitation, we are brought back to the point of life itself: for the soul to realize its true spiritual nature and attain spiritual freedom.

God-Realization may not be our destiny this life but gradually, as we put the truth of inner oneness into action, Meher Baba says we do achieve an “unassailable sense of universal fellowship.” For me the expression “unassailable sense” is a very interesting combination of words. Because Meher Baba unites something we have a sense of with something that is invincible. His words show us how strong the truth of oneness is. In spite of our inability to feel it, all we have to do is to begin to sense it and it becomes an invincible truth for us. Meher Baba further says that this “unassailable sense of universal fellowship [is] cemented by the ungrudging love for all.” And this is done, He concludes, because all are perceived “as expressions of the same reality.”

What more can we ask for than to live with a sense of oneness where love is freely given to others because of the awareness that all are different expressions of the same reality? And what greater help can we give to others than to help them see the value of living such a life?

But the question returns to us again: how do we impart, share or communicate the truth of spiritual freedom as we ourselves grow into it?

Meher Baba Himself brings to our attention that it is not at all clear how to take up the duty of “working for the spiritual freedom of humanity.” It is obvious that basic selfless service activities provide physical necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine. And in turn Baba states that needy people have only to eat the food or wear the clothes or live in the shelters that have been given to them in order to get relief from their physical privations.

But Meher Baba says, “There is no ready-made provision” to give immediate relief to those spiritually bound. Therefore to help someone in the fight for spiritual freedom, He says is “far different from the way of rendering other types of help.” In the final section of this booklet, we will look at “The Task for Spiritual Workers,” in which Meher Baba explains how to carry out this service.

## THE TASK FOR SPIRITUAL WORKERS

*“I have full confidence that you will not only inherit for yourselves the Truth which I bring, but also become enthusiastic and valiant torch-bearers for humanity, which is enveloped in deep ignorance.”*

*From “The Task for Spiritual Workers”*

Let’s briefly review four remarkable statements that Meher Baba has made about rendering selfless service.

In “The Deeper Aspects of Sadhana,” Meher Baba states that the primary significance of selfless action is that it “contributes towards the dissipation of the illusion of separateness.”

In “Selfless Service,” Meher Baba states, “It is very important that service, even when it is utterly selfless, be guided by spiritual understanding, for selfless service, when unintelligently handled, often creates chaos and complications... Those who come into contact with me should develop true understanding of life and cultivate that type of service which creates no complications.”

In “Readiness to Serve,” Meher Baba states, “The service which is concerned with spiritual understanding is the highest, because spiritual understanding includes the right perspective to all human problems and promotes their solution.”

And in “Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity,” Meher Baba states, “Therefore there is no gift greater than the gift of spiritual freedom, and there is no task more important than the task of helping others to achieve spiritual freedom...Those who have understood the supreme importance of spiritual freedom have not only to strive for it for

themselves, but also to share the God-given duty of helping others to win it.”

In the final discourse we will look at, “The Task for Spiritual Workers,” we will discover how these statements are united in a common way, revealing how we can serve in a very practical and yet beautiful manner that allows for the expression of the heart. In this discourse, Meher Baba once again states that, “The whole world is firmly established in the false idea of separateness.” But what differentiates this discourse is that He emphasizes that those who follow Him must “redeem the world from the throes of imagined duality by bringing home to it the truth of the unity of all life.”

This Truth—the unity of all life—is the spiritual understanding that helps others achieve spiritual freedom. It is the quiet light revealing the oneness of life. And Meher Baba wants those who follow Him to be torchbearers of this light for humanity by taking up “spiritual work” and becoming “Spiritual Workers.”

We all know what it is like to be in a dark room without even a glimmer of light. We stumble around groping for the light source. When we finally find it, we feel relieved and safe once again. To be a torchbearer in this dark world is no small task. It requires the concentrated efforts of our minds and the unreserved feelings of our hearts to help others come to understand the truth of the unity of all life. This understanding sheds the light that dispels the darkness of the false separative self.

Eruch was a great light in my life. He had been my major focus and it was not easy to watch him fade in the last years of his life. I relied on him

and I can say from what he told me that he relied on me for the work entrusted to me. But I was the one left behind. On occasion, I would playfully try to express my feelings about how I would continue my life without him. I'd say, in a sing-song fashion, "What am I gonna doooooooo when the lights go out?" One time he answered me by saying, "Well, you have a candle..." And he said this to me very seriously.

Though I may not have really understood what he was saying at that time, I have since come to recognize that the torch is lit within me. And through Meher Baba's grace, I rely upon it to guide me. His guidance has led me to feel that He wants more from me than just upholding His remembrance. He wants me to carry that remembrance and its truth actively into the darkness where the false idea of separation dominates the state of affairs, in order to uphold the truth of oneness. He wants me to be a torchbearer. Meher Baba wants all those who have dedicated their lives to Him to become torchbearers, in order to share in His universal work of helping humanity live a life of true spirituality.

Meher Baba tells us what we need to do to become torchbearers. First, of course, our lives should begin to reflect His message of love and truth. As we feel resolute in our commitment, then His message of love and truth can trickle out into our words and deeds, offering spiritual understanding to others in the midst of life's activities.

Yet we all know that the notion of "bringing home" the truth to others has been one of the most fatal flaws of humanity since time began. Too easily the heart loses out to the ambitions of the mind. Then we end up coercing others, instead of helping others as if they were our own dear family. When

coercion happens on a large scale, the result is religious war.

On this very point, Meher Baba gives us a warning that is indispensable as we carry out the duty of bringing home to others the truth of the unity of all life. In fact, His warnings are really His guidance. Out of recognition of this, I felt that one of this series of booklets should focus on His warnings. So the sixth booklet will be entitled *The Warnings – The Grace of God-Man’s Guidance*.

Returning to the warning He gives here, I will let Meher Baba’s words convey its critical value:

It is extremely important to remember that you can help others to gain spiritual freedom and to come out of the illusion of duality, only if you yourself do not miss this idea of unity while working for others who are inclined to create divisions where they do not exist and who allow no respite to spiritual workers.

From Meher Baba’s words, we can surmise several things to remember in order to do spiritual work.

- Withstand the separation that the minds of others will impose on us, without ourselves creating divisions.
- Do not insist upon oneness when we are confronted by the divisions that others create, because then we are using the mind to share the idea of oneness as an intellectual concept.

- Remember that the idea of unity can really only be communicated from our hearts because only the heart carries the spirit of oneness, which will lessen the divisions all of us create.

I feel if we genuinely remember these things we will be on safe ground to proceed to uphold and share the idea of the unity of all life.

Meher Baba further explains that divisions are created and sustained by our spiritual ignorance, calling it “perverse thinking and feeling.” Of course, we are not perverse but the way we think and feel can be described as such when we uphold the false separative self. We can observe this, as discussed earlier, by being witness to the mental activity of our minds. Then we can see for ourselves the extent to which we will go to maintain our conceptions and defend positions of separateness. Even when we attempt to overcome them, we find we are so attached to a way of thinking and feeling that there is great resistance within us to give them up.

Once we become familiar with how our own ignorant patterns of thought and feeling manipulate us, we are more prepared to try to uphold oneness in our actions with others. Meher Baba warns us that we will surely face opposition once we begin to do the spiritual work of trying to uphold inner unity. He says, “When you launch upon your spiritual work you will be entering into a field of divisions to which people desperately cling, which they accentuate and which they strive to perpetuate consciously or unconsciously.”

Meher Baba’s statement, describing our typical psychological responses to the divisions that

the mind creates, strikes me as quite powerful. It illustrates the complete identification we make with these divisions. And because of all the efforts we make to maintain them, Baba says, "It is by no means an easy task to persuade people to give up their selfishness and narrowness."

So here we have God speaking to us very directly about the difficulties we will be facing when we try to uphold the truth of oneness. This should console us because there will be a tendency to get discouraged when our efforts at being torchbearers sometimes produce hostile responses. But Meher Baba has already assured us that He knows this is not an easy task we have set for ourselves. Perhaps this is why He tells us that we need to be valiant and enthusiastic to do this work. My understanding of what it means to be valiant and enthusiastic in upholding the truth of oneness is this:

Valiant – when the notion of separation clouds a situation, to try valiantly to uphold the oneness of the spirit. That is at least within myself, so as not to create further separations between myself and others. And then if possible, try to add some words to help create a harmonious moment that decreases the tension of separation between those concerned.

Enthusiastic – because unless there is a wholehearted attempt to uphold the unity of life in my actions, my words merely come across to others as "preaching."

Moreover, Meher Baba makes it very clear to us that, "Mere condemnation of these divisions will not enable you to destroy them." Knowing human psychology, Baba warns us not to be led astray by our first reaction, which may be to condemn others

or their behavior when faced with the divisions to which they desperately cling. Such an approach will only create further separation.

So what approach should we take in lessening the illusion of separateness? Meher Baba says, “The divisions are being nourished by separative thinking and feeling, which can yield only to the touch of love and understanding. You have to win people to the life of Truth; you cannot coerce them into spirituality.”

What a remarkable statement! If only posterity will be able to follow it, there will never be a religious war again. If only we can follow it, we will be able to live and let live. Here Meher Baba explains what spiritual work is and what it is not. And it certainly is not accomplished through coercion. When I started serving at the Trust Office in 1978, one of the first things that Eruch told me was, “You have to win people over, brother.” At that time, I did not know what he meant. But now after 30 years I can still hear his voice telling me this, “You have to win people over.”

It is interesting to note that in knowing how difficult it is to bring home the truth of the unity of all life, Meher Baba gives us several critical warnings about what not to do, preparing us for what we will face. Yet He only points the direction when it comes to explaining how to actually do this—a phrase or two, and that is all. Maybe He does this because to win people over requires genuine love from the heart. Remember when people would ask Meher Baba how to love Him? He would respond by saying, “I am the Ocean of Love. It is for you to draw the love from the ocean.”

So I suppose the same thing applies here; the way to bring home the truth of the unity of all life cannot really be explained either. Perhaps the only thing we can do is to heighten our awareness that the false separations that others maintain “can yield only to the touch of love and understanding.” It is not possible to explain what the touch of love is. That is a matter of the heart. One clue is that Meher Baba uses a word that indicates something subtle—a “touch.”

It is more apparent what to do when it comes to applying the touch of understanding—it takes place through imparting spiritual understanding. But the touch of love is a different thing. It is something the poets try to speak of; it is something that reveals the truth of the unity of all life.

Meher Baba does give a little bit of concrete guidance about what we need to do to win people to the life of Truth. Baba tells us that to begin with, we need to create two qualities within our hearts, “unimpaired friendliness” and “untarnished good will.” These qualities develop when we have genuine faith in the oneness of life. How could we not have genuine friendliness and good will toward all when we firmly believe all are one? However, He tells us that having these qualities in our hearts is not enough. He wants us to put them into action and win people to the life of truth by bringing “home to them the faith and conviction that you are helping them to redeem themselves from bondage and suffering and to realize the highest, to which they are rightful heirs.”

This certainly is tricky because it sounds like we are preaching or teaching, and we are trying to do neither. What Meher Baba wants us to do is

really a very subtle thing. We need to be alive to the moment when the idea of spiritual oneness can be shared and maybe even accepted. Sometimes this happens right in the midst of the battlefield of life, and sometimes when we are off it, calmly recollecting a situation with others. Sometimes people can be passive recipients just by observing our attitudes; or sometimes they can actively accept that something different is motivating us and they wish to understand what it is.

In other words, we learn to do spiritual work by doing it. It is on-the-job training. We train ourselves with Meher Baba's guidance, through our heart's intuition. And there is no end to learning, no matter who you are. I found this out one day at the Trust Office when I went to Mani for some understanding over a difficult situation I was facing. She encouraged me with her kind words and sweet, sweet smile and then said something that totally surprised me. It was about herself. She said, "Don't you think we are still learning?" I was stunned. I refused to believe it! It never entered my mind that the Mandali felt that there were still things for them to learn. I just assumed otherwise, after surrendering their lives to Beloved Baba. But no, even after He passed away, there was Mani telling me that for them, Baba's dear Mandali, there were still things to learn.

## HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL WORKERS

Meher Baba gives a few basic guidelines on how to do spiritual work in "Hints for Spiritual Workers." I don't think such detailed assistance is given anywhere else in the *Discourses* the way it is here. The first three hints are of a general nature. In

the last hint, Baba gives us five points we need to remember when we are helping someone solve a life-problem.

Although these hints can be employed when someone asks for help, we have seen that much more is required of us. Meher Baba wants us to carry the torch into the darkness where ideas of separation prevail. No doubt our resolve to hold it high and maintain a sense of oneness will be tested in the heat of action. But as we rely on our hearts and the intuitive guidance Baba gives us, we will indeed be strong enough to hold the torch, communicating the truth of the unity of all life directly and indirectly.

Meher Baba wants us to have clear comprehension of four main points as we try to communicate the spiritual understanding of the unity of all life. We will analyze each of the following points individually.

1. Apparent descent to the lower level.
2. Spiritual understanding ensures all-sided progress.
3. Spiritual progress consists of the spontaneous growth of understanding from within.
4. Some questions are more important than answers.

#### *1. Apparent descent to the lower level*

This first hint surprises me. Meher Baba tells us that in order to help others, we should descend to their level of understanding, without losing our own. This is surprising because I had assumed that one could never lose sight of one's own understand-

ding. But since Baba warns against it, there must be situations in which we do forget our own level of understanding while relating to others.

We might feel a bit uneasy with the notion that we must descend to another's level. It may seem a little arrogant. But truth always descends in order to rise once again upon the vehicle on which it has fallen. Sunlight falls from the sky, which in turn gives rise to life in all its various forms. God descends into human form and His message touches our hearts and makes our spirit rise.

So what does it mean to descend to another's level? Meher Baba explains that in trying to share the truth of the unity of all life, we must do the following: (1) Talk in terms the other person understands; (2) Adapt to the other's capacity and experience; (3) Change our approach and technique as he or she gradually arrives at a deeper understanding.

An example of this apparent descent is how the Mandali related to the younger generation of Baba lovers who had never met Meher Baba. They shared their experiences of living with and for Baba without making us feel that they were on a different level. As Eruch would assure us again and again, "We all are in the same boat," meaning that all of us are still stuck in Illusion. And his statement pacified us, making us feel, "Yes, we are no different from each other." This also illustrates how the Mandali talked in terms that we could understand and adapted what they had to say about their lives of surrenderance with Baba according to our capacity. Theirs is the example for those who met the Mandali.

Yet whether or not we met the Mandali, we all need to grow in discernment to be able to share Baba's message of the unity of all life in a way that makes it approachable to others. Sharing His message is not so much voicing His words as applying the touch of love and understanding and relying on intuition to say the helpful thing at the right time.

That is why Meher Baba tells us that love is self-communicative. It is not so much our words but our actions that communicate His message of love and truth to others. If our hearts are set on trying to uphold a sense of oneness, then our actions will reveal this. And when there is a sense of oneness, there really is no descent to another's level, because all are One. That is the Truth. It is only when we use words to communicate Baba's message that we need to do so according to the level of understanding of the person in front of us.

## *2. Spiritual understanding ensures all-sided progress*

In the second hint, Meher Baba explains to us that life is not divided into compartments, such as politics, education, morality, material advancement, science, art, religion, mysticism and culture. Then He assures us that, "if you succeed in awakening spiritual inspiration and understanding, progress in all these departments of life is bound to follow automatically."

Moreover, Meher Baba tells us that, "as spiritual workers you will have to aim at providing a complete and real solution for all the individual and social problems of life." Quite a responsibility, isn't it? So how can we ever fulfill it?

Well, as we have already seen, to serve in the highest manner is to impart spiritual understanding, which includes having “the right perspective to all human problems and promot[ing] their solution.” Therefore His directive to aim at providing a complete solution to others’ problems should not overwhelm us, despite how overwhelming it sounds. The key word here is “aim.” We should aim to do this in our words and through our deeds.

And when our aim is true—by relying upon the heart—it offers a real foundation upon which to build the solution—inner unity. Once the heart is allowed to lead, the mind can be applied to solve material problems, using its analytical abilities. Yet the solution will be based on the truth that has come from the heart. Therefore in our discussions and meetings, whether individual or collective, we can provide a real solution as long as it comes from the perspective of spiritual understanding and is based on others’ level of understanding.

*3. Spiritual progress consists of the spontaneous growth of understanding from within*

In the third hint, Meher Baba reminds us that “as spiritual workers, you have also to remember that the spiritual wisdom which you desire to convey to others is already latently present in them, and that you have only to be instrumental in unveiling that spiritual wisdom.”

In what manner should we convey spiritual wisdom? Baba's hint helps remind us that we don't have to carry the burden of "teaching" or "preaching" or insisting "what to do" and "what not to do." We have only to be instrumental or actively involved in helping them, much as a waiter brings the food to the customer but does not eat it himself.

He serves the food and leaves. It is for the customer to eat and digest it.

There are many occasions when we are instrumental in helping people gain experiences that we ourselves have come to value. It is not a question of teaching them. In our daily lives, we may have found that a book or a movie that was uplifting and strongly recommend it to friends. On a spiritual level, we might suggest that they read one of Baba's books that addresses their problems or interests. Or we might encourage friends to visit places associated with Meher Baba, like Myrtle Beach, Meherabad and Meherazad, or Avatar's Abode, with the hope that they will feel something of Baba's presence.

The general nature of these first three hints lays the foundation upon which to do spiritual work. When helping others, we need to remember: to approach people from their level of understanding while retaining our own; as people awaken to spiritual understanding all aspects of their life will progress; and the truth is already latent in them. And while helping others who need guidance through their predicaments, there is something else we can do to facilitate the natural unfolding of their spiritual understanding. This brings us to Baba's fourth hint.

In the fourth and last hint, Meher Baba gives us several practical guidelines that we can use to help others grasp precious truths. Let me add that our efforts to share the truth of the unity of all life are not limited by these few hints Baba is offering to us. As our own spiritual life deepens, we will become more adept at offering help to others by relying on the guidance He gives us through intuition.

#### *4. Some questions are more important than answers*

When someone asks our help with a problem, it is always best first to listen carefully without judgment. That in itself is healing. Through the years, I have seen Eruch offer an extraordinary quality of listening to those (including myself) who spoke of something troublesome in their lives; they always left his company feeling comforted. Perhaps we can't achieve that yet, but we can listen sincerely to the one in need, who will know, or more importantly, feel our earnestness.

Then after we have listened wholeheartedly, we may try to use the following guidelines Meher Baba has given to help solve their problems from a spiritual perspective:

- a. "Set-up for others a new problem or...clarify for others the nature of the problem which they face."
- b. "Ask them a question which they would not ask of themselves when placed in a practical situation."
- c. "Put them in a searching and questioning attitude, so that they themselves begin to understand and tackle their problems along more fruitful and creative lines."
- d. "To give them a deeper point of view, or suggest to them a fruitful line of thought and action, may itself mean much more than thrusting upon them the results of your judgment."

- e. “The questions which you may help them to formulate for themselves should neither be merely theoretical nor unnecessarily complicated. If they are simple, straight and fundamental, these questions will answer themselves, and people will find their own solutions.”

We will look at each one of these guidelines through the example that most everyone has experienced some time in their lives—being depressed because of job dissatisfaction.

- a. *“Set-up for others a new problem or...clarify for others the nature of the problem which they face.”*

The situation is placed before us—job dissatisfaction accompanied by depression. Meher Baba states in “Readiness to Serve” that there are two kinds of service: (1) Adding to the lives of others that which is considered worthwhile; and (2) Removing from the lives of others those handicaps that prevent them from having things that are worthwhile. However when Baba speaks of something being “worthwhile,” He is speaking of that which leads toward the Truth.

So in our discussion, we will choose to set up the problem in terms of what needs to be added to or removed from their lives to make life worthwhile. Of course, most everyone will not define “worthwhile” in terms of the Truth. But we will get to that.

- b. *“Ask them a question which they would not ask of themselves when placed in a practical situation.”*

Putting aside solving material problems, the greatest problem is usually with our relationships

with one another. And in relationships, control is usually the key issue. Everyone wants control. In my first booklet, *The Relationship – Mastery In Servitude*, I discussed this in the section entitled “Control through Surrenderance.” The battle for control is ongoing whether it is with our partners, our bosses, our co-workers, our children, and so on. As long as the ego is present, it wants control. Therefore when someone is seriously interested in solving a problem in their life, he or she is often in a control battle.

Let me further say that just as the fight for control is common to us all, so too is the search for happiness. Meher Baba tells us that everything we do ultimately is about wanting to be happy. We just don't know how to be happy. We go about searching for happiness in the wrong way. This leads us into an ongoing “fight to be happy,” so to speak, because of the desire for control.

But in spirituality there is no need to fight to be happy. Happiness is a spontaneous part of the experience of the spirit because there are no boundaries. It is real freedom. No one controls the spirit. Helping others toward this understanding, as we read earlier, is what Meher Baba says is spiritual work and this spiritual work is not only the highest service, but is the real gift to give others.

Now having said this, let us return to the specific complaint of job dissatisfaction and accompanying depression. First, when we ask what needs to be added or removed to make their life worthwhile, we have set up a new consideration for them to reflect upon. It is likely that the explanation for the dissatisfaction will be that he or she is in a control battle with an employer or co-worker; what needs to be removed is simply the person who is trying to exert control!

At this point we may have a chance to redirect the conversation by asking what would really make life worthwhile. Removing an obstacle won't do that, although often we feel it would. It is our common misunderstanding that something external is to blame for what is missing in our lives.

c. *“Put them in a searching and questioning attitude, so that they themselves begin to understand and tackle their problems along more fruitful and creative lines.”*

To be able to be an instrument of change in anyone's life, as Meher Baba is suggesting here, is a great thing because change is not easy for any of us. We are used to our habits of thinking. They are almost our personal religion. And when we are confronted with an apparently unsolvable problem, we are stunned. It feels like we are in front of a wall. At a loss for what to do, we start banging our heads against the wall. The ego is so strong that it feels it can break through that way. But it does not happen.

How long does it take us to stop banging our heads against the wall in front of us? As long as necessary! What finally stops us from that continual head-banging against some problem that we are unable to solve? Is there a set time limit when the wall just dissolves, as the ego mind begins to after 8,400,000 births? I couldn't answer that, but I know from experience that I have been in front of some walls where I just refused to do anything else but bang my head against them, imagining that God must like that sound and therefore He would eventually relieve me.

Just as the Avatar descends into our lives to help awaken us, we can also, to a much lesser ex-

tent, descend into the lives of others to help them ask the questions that will lead to their gaining a better understanding of their problems, or point them in a direction where they will more likely find genuine solutions to their problems.

In our attempts to apply this guideline, everything is in the timing, like so much in life. If we say the right thing at the wrong time, it just won't work—it's like casting seeds on rocky soil. The ground has to be softened in order for the seeds to have a chance to germinate and grow. That softening usually happens when we feel helpless. Then there is the opportunity for us to hear something other than our own age-old prejudices. I feel that the ability to hear is connected to the heart. If we can hear, we can change. If we can hear, we can grow.

So a major component of change is waking up to the fact that what we have done before to solve our problems has not worked. And assisting someone to wake up to this fact is not easy. The ego-mind will resist because it is a defeat to the ego and its pride. Therefore it is no small accomplishment to help someone in this way. And to do so is critical to help the person find a creative solution to their problem.

*d. "To give them a deeper point of view, or suggest to them a fruitful line of thought and action, may itself mean much more than thrusting upon them the results of your judgment."*

Our first reaction to hearing someone else's problem may be to toss out our ideas about how it should be solved. It takes little energy on our part to do so and a good amount of restraint not to. Although our intentions may be good, solving the problems of life requires more creativity than that.

Let us return back to our example. As we noted above, the first step is to help the person see that what he or she has done in the past to solve the problem has not worked. When this is accepted, there is a legitimate chance to change. A wide horizon is now opened and the person is no longer bent over, just looking down at the ground they are standing on. At this point, we may try to suggest the question of happiness, why he or she has been unable to be happy, and how the search for happiness has been futile up to now. In the course of our conversation, we can point out how futile it is to link happiness with control. These are not easy matters to deal with. But if we can help people begin to think about the questions of happiness, control and their connection, then they will begin to sort out the problem in a practical way by observing their own behavior and that of others.

*e. "The questions which you may help them to formulate for themselves should neither be merely theoretical nor unnecessarily complicated. If they are simple, straight and fundamental, these questions will answer themselves, and people will find their own solutions."*

So given our example of job dissatisfaction accompanied with depression, we may have helped someone to formulate questions such as:

- Why does this happen to me? (Referring to the head-banging phenomenon)
- What can I do to change?
- Why am I not happy?
- Is control necessary for me to be happy?
- Can I be happy and still relinquish control?
- Is spirituality really practical in everyday life?

So let's say we have made a wholehearted effort to reach out and be there for someone. This effort may have taken place over time, either through serious discussions or momentary exchanges. And in our attempts we were able to help shed light upon the problem in a way in which the person began to consider a new direction creatively. Does Meher Baba value our efforts? Well, He says this, "You will have rendered indispensable and valuable service to them because, without your tactful intervention, they would not have arrived at the solution of their multifarious problems from the spiritual point of view." Now that is something, isn't it? By sharing in His work, we have gained appreciation from the Lord Himself!

But what if we were unable to be of any noticeable help? Every time there was a discussion, the person returned to the theme of blaming others for his or her problems and would barely consider what he or she may be doing to incite the situation. Through it all, we kept increasing our limits of patience, loving kindness, acceptance and tolerance, hoping they would eventually see a new approach to an old problem. But finally we had to recognize that our efforts have proven futile.

How does Meher Baba value our efforts when this happens? Very sweetly He comforts us and encourages us by saying, "You must do your work without worrying about consequences, irrespective of success or failure, but be confident that the result of work done in this spirit and with this understanding is assured."

Who knows how or when our efforts will hit the mark of someone's heart? I can say that because some things that Eruch told me decades ago have only just hit their mark now! He tried to

help me at that time but I failed to understand him. Yet I did register what he said in the back of my mind or the depth of my heart. And then when something in me changed and I was able to understand his words, they floated up into my understanding and confirmed a direction I was beginning to take. His efforts proved worthwhile after all. I could not understand what he said at the time, but he left it to Meher Baba. Similarly, we have to do the same; do our best in our spiritual work and then leave it to Baba.

In fact Meher Baba lets us know, regardless of the results, that there is always more work to do to help people understand the truth. He says, "If you are steadfast and one-pointed in your desire to help my cause of awakening humanity to the sole reality and the ultimate worthwhileness of God and God alone, you will get many opportunities for spiritual work."

I can say that by considering my service activities as spiritual work, I have a source of ready inspiration to uphold the truth of inner oneness in my daily life by trying to lovingly instill that feeling without being intrusive to others. Then my life itself radiates a signal to others that I am not in confrontation with them, that I am not after anything they have. If they pick up that signal, they know they are safe. And through the feeling of safety, they may also feel the strength to change. That signal is like a beacon in the night guiding ships at sea. It is a relief to the seaman to see it because it makes him feel safe. He knows where he is. He is nearing home.

I have lived and worked with the Mandali for 30 years, and it was not so much their words as

their actions that communicated the spirit of oneness. I felt safe in their company. Yes, it is true that their words enriched my life. But their words were comparable to memorable, breathtaking scenes from nature. What really transformed me were their actions; their lives created an indelible imprint on my mind and heart. Even today, after so many of these precious people have left us, their lives communicate spiritual understanding that continues to unfold in my life.

Of course, I have not yet realized the truth of inner oneness, nor do I feel it as an abiding glow in my heart. But with faith and understanding, I have found that this truth is a sweet reference point for all my activities. For the heart it gives the patient and warm understanding necessary for fellow-feeling. And for the mind it gives the practical inspiration necessary to confront problems creatively by basing solutions on internal oneness and not on external differences. Even if there is no response to my attempts to do spiritual work, it certainly lessens my false separative self and enhances my inner life by upholding the truth of the unity of all life.

## TWO REASONS WHY YOUR MIND WILL TELL YOU NONE OF THIS APPLIES TO YOU

Although we wouldn't discount Meher Baba's words on service, yet when it comes to the idea of serving from the vantage point of inner oneness, we might say, "Yes! Inner oneness is the Truth. But since I don't experience this truth, how can I uphold it in myself or share it with others? I would be a hypocrite if I tried to do so." And so saying, we have unknowingly ignored one of Meher Baba's main messages on how to serve and, for that matter, how to live life.

So it comes down to this. Do you think it is possible for the typical follower of Avatar Meher Baba to uphold the truth of inner oneness in daily life or do you think oneness is an impractical, utopian ideal that is futile to put into action? It's not surprising to think that many of us, including myself in the past, would feel that it is impossible for us to serve from the standpoint of inner oneness. The whole attempt sounds presumptuous. And even if it is remotely possible for us to do so, it would be futile and therefore impractical in today's world.

But remarkably, Meher Baba reveals to us that not only is it possible but it is even practical to promote the truth of the unity of all life. He assures us in the discourse "The Travail of the New World Order" that to uphold this truth is not unrealistic at all. He says,

To perceive the spiritual value of oneness is to promote real unity and cooperation. Brotherhood then becomes a spontaneous outcome of true perception. The new life that is based upon spiritual understanding is an affirmation of the Truth. It is not something which belongs to utopia, but is completely practical.

And thus, through spiritual understanding, we attain the New Life in which inner oneness is perceived and promoted naturally in the midst of life. If we are still uncertain about the importance of perception and spiritual understanding, Meher Baba's statement should remove all doubts. Moreover, it certainly grabs our attention how Baba uses the phrase "new life" years before He entered that phase of His life, revealing its eternal significance.

But let us continue to what may be a second lingering thought and that is, “Even if spiritual service were possible for me, I am too busy with my responsibilities to my family and business to do any extra kind of service.”

Because Meher Baba has emphasized service, we probably think it means we are obligated to be involved with some kind of specialized activity outside of our daily routine. But a large part of Meher Baba's work is to bring a spiritual life to humanity that naturally embraces all the aspects of normal human experience, so that the ordinary notion of one's life expands into the One life. That's why upholding and imparting the truth of inner oneness does not necessarily require us to be involved with a service activity. Our aim can be to try to uphold this truth in any and all of our activities.

Therefore, whenever our hearts make the affirmation of oneness, no matter what we are doing, that activity becomes elevated to spiritual work. What had once been ordinary and commonplace in the judgment of the ego becomes an expression of the truth to the spirit and is freed of the ego's critical separative nature. Our hearts become able to impart a sense of oneness wherever we are, no matter what we are doing.

#### FINAL COMMENTS FROM ME

What a game it is! I have to fulfill my duties and responsibilities and at the same time uphold oneness. Many times I have had to forego my work's success, which is necessary at the Trust Office, in order to uphold oneness, which is important for my spirit. Again and again, I have to keep reminding

myself that I find my heart and will be led toward the Truth of the One Soul by upholding the Truth, and not by completing my work as I assume it should be done!

To give up what is seemingly necessary for what is critically important is not easy. It basically means going against everything that I “know” because of my “faith” in everything that I am—One with the Eternal Truth. Although this can be painful, there is comfort when my heart is set on the Truth. For the actions I perform to uphold the truth is the comfort itself.

Let there be no doubts in our minds, for Meher Baba has authoritatively stated that the most important work, the most important freedom, the most important gift, the most important service are all one and the same: to bring home to oneself and to others the truth of the unity of all life.

#### LAST WORD FROM HIM

The last word goes to Meher Baba who ended His discourse “The Task for Spiritual Workers,” with these mighty words.

*Through the untiring activities of spiritual workers, humanity shall be initiated into a new life of abiding peace and dynamic harmony, unconquerable faith and unfading bliss, immortal sweetness and incorruptible purity, creative love and infinite understanding.*