

THE MEHER CENTER
Master Plan Project Video 1

MASTER PLAN PROCESS with John Leiter

Hello, my name is John Leiter and I'm the presiding officer of the Board of the Meher Spiritual Center. Thank you for taking time to consider with us the future of the Meher Center.

The Meher Center is a timeless gift given to humanity by the Avatar of the age, Meher Baba. It was created at His direction by His disciples, Elizabeth Patterson and Norina Matchabelli in 1944, and with the assistance of many people, it was prepared for His arrival first in 1952 and again in 1956, and then again in 1958. Baba said of all the places He has visited in His lifetime, He loved the Center the most. He also said, "Remember this, I never leave." So the Center is His home, a home in which He welcomes all those who love Him and want to know more about Him.

It is a place of retreat for renewal of the spiritual life. He has blessed the Center with His unique presence and He has assured us that He never leaves the Center. So it is a place that is open and welcome for all and for all time.

He has also entrusted the care of the Center to those of us who love Him. It is under the direct responsibility of the Board of Directors. Everything that is done on the Center is done according to the Vision, Mission and Values of the Center as agreed upon by the Board of Directors.

The Vision of the Center is:

The Meher Spiritual Center, Meher Baba's Home in the West, where all who come can experience His love.

The Mission of the Center is:

Maintaining the intimate and unique atmosphere of Meher Baba's home, a place of retreat, rest, contemplation and renewal of the spiritual life;

Providing a safe and welcoming experience for all;

Offering information about the Avatar's teachings and His life of love and service without supplanting anyone's religious convictions or beliefs;

Creating the shared stewardship opportunities that best serve the purposes of the Center;

Ensuring the preservation and maintenance of the Center: all of its grounds, buildings, archival treasures and its natural environment;

Developing the physical, human and fiscal resources in ways that best serve the purposes of the Center; and

Developing or supporting programs based on Avatar Meher Baba's example of love and service to those in need.

The core Values of the Center are:

A focus on Avatar Meher Baba, His teachings and His life of love and service, underlies all we do to uphold His wish that the Meher Spiritual Center be for those who love beloved Baba and for those who know of Him and who want to know more.

By welcoming all who come to Avatar Meher Baba's home in the West, we fulfill our responsibility to be genuine, loving and receptive in all our interactions.

We share a sense of stewardship of Avatar Meher Baba's Home in the West by carefully and responsibly engaging in a cooperative effort to ensure that the Center flourishes for all time.

We create harmony by embracing our individual and shared responsibilities, putting ourselves aside in service to Avatar Meher Baba and His Home in the West.

Through our attention to detail, we remain alert and responsive to any condition, action or inaction that may enhance or detract from the unique atmosphere of the Center.

We embody integrity by attempting to align all our behaviors with our vision, mission and values.

The vision, mission and values are carried out not only by the Board, but also by the twenty or so staff members along with at least two hundred volunteers and the countless number of guests who come here and are dedicated to Meher Baba. It is the role of all of us to do all we can to bring this vision, mission and values to life.

While the Center has the timeless quality of Meher Baba's presence, it also exists within the realm of time. And while a visitor would find the essential quality of their experience of Meher Baba's presence unchanged over the years, the Center continually needs to adapt to changes that occur within it and surrounding it.

The Center, which was created in Myrtle Beach at a time when there was very little development nearby, is now located within an extremely popular tourist destination

and is surrounded by the encroachment of development that inevitably accompanies such a populous spot.

There have also been important physical changes that have impacted the Center, some being major environmental stressors and some being the consequence of the passage of time on structures, the forest, the lake and the ever-present wildlife populations.

Finally, there are continuing changes in the ones who come to visit and live by the Center. These numbers have grown and are anticipated to continue to grow and their needs and interests are also changing. So while the Center is fully committed to preserving its unique atmosphere and qualities, it also has the delicate task of balancing this preservation with meeting the challenge of change.

It is for this very purpose that the Board determined, in its Strategic Plan, that the Center must undertake an effort to anticipate the changes and prepare for what we believe will be a future where interest in Meher Baba grows considerably. The vehicle through which the Center plans to do this is what is called a Master Plan.

Organizations all over the world regularly do master planning to ensure that the development of their organization is undertaken in a holistic way rather than simply making decisions without considering their short-term and long-term implications. The purpose of the Center's Master Plan is to ensure that there is an overall vision for the future and that decisions that are made for the Center all fit within that vision.

There are already a number of Master Plans in the Baba world. A number of years ago, Meherabad created a Development Plan for the future of Baba's Samadhi that includes pilgrim accommodations, program facilities and preservation. Many of the Meherazad mandali, including Mani, Eruch, Mehru, Mehera and Bhau, and others, helped create a Master Plan for Meherazad. This was done with the understanding that to accommodate for the growing community of pilgrims, Meherazad will need to change, and that it is incumbent upon them to be proactive in anticipating and laying the groundwork for that change.

In like manner, the Center established a Master Plan Committee composed of nine individuals who have been working since the spring of 2013 on preparing three different scenarios for the Center's Board to consider as possible frameworks within which key decisions can be made about needed changes.

In the spring of this year, the Board reviewed these scenarios and believes that they are all viable options. However, we also know that there are many people beyond the Board who care deeply about the Center and who would want to know about these scenarios, and have the chance to offer their perspectives, before the Board actually decides on the Master Plan.

Therefore we are reaching out in various ways to the Meher Baba community to inform you about the Master Plan, share with you the scenarios, and ask for your feedback. Once we have received the feedback, we will review it all, incorporating those ideas which we believe would best serve the interest of the Center.

In past efforts to get feedback, the Board has learned a great deal and has been able to incorporate ideas that strengthened our plans. Naturally, we will not be able to act on every single piece of feedback, but it is important that we know how the broader community feels about the scenarios so we as a Board can make the best-informed decisions possible.

Baba has entrusted us, His lovers, with the care for various objects of His and one of the major ones is the Center. We do attempt to do our planning with the full knowledge and surrender that it is Baba alone who has already determined the future of the Center. But as He said "My work is your opportunity." So now is the opportunity for all of us to participate in a very important part of His work, the planning for the future of the Center that He established as His universal center, the Meher Spiritual Center.

In the next videos, you will hear about the three different scenarios. These are the scenarios to guide the long-term future of the Center.

The Board is also acutely aware that the Center has more immediate and pressing issues. There are critical gaps in our infrastructure that need to be shored up and the condition of our precious natural environment, including beautiful Long Lake and the forest, are in need of immediate attention. The Center is in the process of taking concrete actions in all of these areas. We know there are many concerns about these immediate and pressing issues.

However, for the purpose of the master planning process, I want to encourage you not to focus on these more immediate issues. The Master Plan is our attempt to take a much longer-term view, to create the framework within which we can place all of the various decisions that are to be made over the coming years.

So please, join us as we attempt to look into the future, a future that beloved Baba has assured us is already fully planned, and discover what is the part we can play in bringing about that future of the Meher Spiritual Center.

On behalf of the Board I want to thank you for taking the time and, more importantly, for sharing with us the responsibility we all have for the future of the Center. Meher Baba said, "Be true to the trust I repose in you." We all feel that responsibility deeply and part of fulfilling that trust is for each of us to do what we can to preserve and protect and make available those sacred places of pilgrimage that He has left as His gift, as the God-Man, to His lovers for all time.