

DRAFT OF STRATEGIC ISSUES AND GOALS

December, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Directors of Meher Spiritual Center has been entrusted with the core responsibility to ensure the overall well-being and development of the Center in fulfillment of the Charter that Meher Baba approved in 1959. In fulfilling this responsibility, the board initiated a strategic planning process in early 2007.

A strategic plan is analogous to a road map that will lead an organization from where it is now to where it would like to be in a given number of years. It is the process of determining an organization's long-term goals and then identifying the best approach for achieving those goals. The result of the Meher Center Board's current strategic planning effort is expected to be completed in Spring 2008. It will be a document to guide the development and preservation of the Meher Center over the next ten years.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE PLAN:

The board has identified four core principles that serve as the foundation for the strategic plan and the guiding force for the planning process:

1. The focus on Meher Baba is first and foremost. The Charter states that Meher Spiritual Center, Inc is "devoted and dedicated to the name and spiritual purposes of Meher Baba, and to the dissemination of his teachings, without supplanting professed religious convictions or beliefs, but for the enhancement and strengthening of the spiritual life."
2. As Elizabeth Patterson, who Meher Baba sent from India to found the Center, said, "the real work of the Center is people". The Meher Center is Baba's home where we have the opportunity to serve together for the enhancement and strengthening of the spiritual life through serving his guests and one another.
3. The entire strategic plan is our attempt to determine the best way to fulfill the Meher Center's mission over the coming 10 years.
4. The strategic plan must reflect the Meher Center's Charter as established by Meher Baba on November 10, 1959, and the board governance document's interpretation of the Charter as stated in the Meher Center's Corporation Ends (goals).

Ends (goals):

1. Insure availability of a retreat experience focused on Meher Baba and reflecting his directives that such retreat be for rest, meditation and renewal of the spiritual life, by:
 - a. Providing facilities, amenities/conditions conducive to a retreat atmosphere dedicated to Meher Baba, b. Providing programs for all guests and visitors focused on Meher Baba, his life and message, and c. Preserving the buildings, structures and grounds in 100% repair, ready for his return and conducive to serving the purposes of the Center as given by Meher Baba.
2. Disseminate Baba's teaching through a publicly accessible library, programs in the Center and other vehicles beyond the Center.
3. Render service to others—the corporation will implement and/or support programs which provide service to others with particular attention to basic necessities for the poor and needy.

To date, the Meher Center board has met with and gathered input from a number of sources including: all of the Meher Center emeritus board members, Meher Center staff, key committees, volunteers and long-time associates of the Center. Many letters and e-mails have been received in response to our request for input in the August Newsletter. There have been several open meetings held at the Center recently, including one for young adults. This collective input provided a basis for the document that follows.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT:

This document contains the primary strategic issues and goals now identified by the Board. As you read them, please note:

- The issues represent those essential areas that the Meher Center needs to address in order to fulfill its mission over the coming 10 years; while there are other issues facing the Center, the strategic plan's focus is on those that require special emphasis at this time.
- Some issues represent ways to address potential threats to the Meher Center's well-being, others represent ways to take advantage of unique opportunities to enhance the Meher Center's well-being.
- The strategic goals describe what specifically needs to be accomplished in addressing each issue. Following this period of gathering more input, the board will shift its focus to developing action plans to reach the goals
- While there are eight different strategic issues and goals, all are inter-related, and it is important to read these issues and goals as an entire set rather than as isolated issues.

NEXT STEPS:

As the board moves into the next phase of the strategic planning process, we are committed to the following steps:

- (1) Gathering further input from the community in response to this working document
- (2) Reviewing and finalizing the issues and goals
- (3) Developing action plans
- (4) Again gathering input and feedback from the Meher Baba family
- (5) Finalizing the plan
- (6) Implementing and monitoring action plans

GIVING INPUT:

Throughout this process, the board is committed to developing and maintaining close communication with Meher Baba's lovers who have a keen interest in the well-being of the Meher Center. As the plan is being formulated, this is an opportune time to again share ideas with all of you, to see if there are any additional thoughts or perspectives that you may want us to consider. Therefore, your input is most welcome and will be used to ensure that our plan is the best possible approach to protecting Baba's western home, which we all love and care for so deeply.

To facilitate this process we are posting this and future strategic planning documents on the Center's website (www.mehercenter.org) to access the strategic planning information. Simply click on the button marked "Strategic Plan Survey" on the home page, or go to the "Past, Present & Future" section, then click on "Planning & Support." there, under the heading "strategic planning", you will find a description and links to the strategic planning reports and to a survey through which you can send your input back to the board. To sign up for on-going e-mail communications from the Center, go to the "Past, Present & Future" section of the Center's web site (www.mehercenter.org), then click on "Staying in Touch."

ISSUES & GOALS

ISSUE 1:

The Meher Center is likely to face increasing stresses and challenges to the Meher Center property due to:

- Environmental changes—natural and man-made
- Aging of buildings and structures
- Anticipated increase in the number of visitors coming to the Meher Center

Issue Description:

The Meher Center faces an ongoing challenge to the health of its fragile natural environment due to potential natural disasters as well as man-made environmental disturbances, both from within the Meher Center property and from without. Some of these challenges include the encroaching deer population, invasive plant species, air pollution, disturbances to the water table levels as well as water quality, increase in outside noise and light levels, and continued threats of fire requiring the maintenance and expansion of fire safety roads and fire breaks.

All of the buildings on the Meher Center, especially the original buildings that were used in Baba's time, face an ever-present challenge of preservation due to their age and the constant, heavy use by increasing numbers of Meher Center visitors. Baba himself stated that Baba's house, the Barn and the Lagoon cabin, should be preserved as they originally were in his time, as much as it is practical. In addition, as time passes, the other buildings (such as the original Meher Center cabins) have now also taken on historic significance, thereby requiring a significant level of attention for their preservation as well.

Goal:

To protect the Meher Center's physical property (structures and ground) by:

- Minimizing fire and other safety hazards
- Protecting against aging/natural deterioration of buildings
- Minimizing environmental stresses
- Mitigating impact of development of surrounding properties
- Ensuring appropriate development and utilization within the Center

ISSUE 2:

More people want to come to the Meher Center than the current facilities can physically accommodate without impacting the retreat atmosphere.

Issue description:

It is anticipated that, given the history of Avataric advents in the past, a great number of people will be drawn to him. Meher Baba himself said that the Center would one day become a place of world pilgrimage. While the number of day and overnight visitors is gradually increasing, a clear tipping point has not yet been reached. However, at peak times, there are waiting lists and, at such times, the Meeting Place is also overcrowded.

In the face of demand exceeding capacity, the challenge then becomes finding ways to maintain the retreat atmosphere and preserve the physical property, while at the same time ensuring that the Meher Center is adequately prepared as it evolves into a place of world pilgrimage.

Goal:

To ensure continuing availability to increasing numbers of visitors while maintaining the Meher Center's unique fragrance.

ISSUE 3:

Policies and administration regarding programs, activities, and ways to engage in the life of the Center will need to be adjusted appropriately to reflect the changing demographics and interests of Meher Center visitors, while at the same time maintaining 100% focus on Meher Baba.

Issue description:

The Meher Center is witnessing not only increased numbers of visitors, But also an increase in demographic variations of visitors. These changes bring with them significant challenges and opportunities in the area of programming. Observing trends both at the Meher Center and at Meherabad in India, we anticipate that the future will bring individuals of even more diverse backgrounds coming to learn about Avatar Meher Baba.

At the same time, it is of primary importance that the focus of all Meher Center programs and activities remain focused 100% on Meher Baba, his life and message, first and foremost.

Goal:

To adjust and expand, at the policy and administrative level, opportunities for Meher Center visitors to engage in programs and activities that meet their diverse needs, while keeping 100% focus of all programs and activities on Meher Baba, his life and message.

ISSUE 4:

There are many unrealized opportunities to include and maximize the involvement of the Meher Baba family in providing resources and support to the Board of Directors in its role of guiding the Meher Center's current and future operations.

Issue description:

It is anticipated that, as time passes and the Baba family served by Meher Center expands, new challenges and opportunities will arise on many fronts. These opportunities and challenges will increasingly rely on the collective wisdom of the Meher Baba family as well as its active support.

Therefore, it is essential that the board's decision making process and visioning for the future is informed and supported by the involvement of the larger Baba family at various levels. This commitment to actively engage and use resources of the Meher Baba family to help inform the decision making of the board represents a significant and substantive shift in the way the Meher Center has operated relative to the overall Baba family at large.

Goal:

To develop, at the Board level, meaningful opportunities for the participation and involvement of the Meher Baba family, and to provide for increased input from the Meher Baba family to inform decisions on emerging issues in support of the well-being of the Meher Center.

ISSUE 5:

There is a wide range of human resources that could be tapped and more fully utilized to enable the Meher Center to maintain and expand its operations.

Issue description:

The Meher Center currently relies on the performance of 15 paid staff and a cadre of 150 volunteers to perform the key functions of maintaining and fulfilling its mission. We anticipate the retirement of many of the current paid staff over the next ten years.

Meanwhile, there is a growing community in the nearby area eager to offer their talents and time to serve the Meher Center. There are growing possibilities of participating from a distance through the use of internet technology and periodic visits. There is also an increasing number of youth who have expressed an interest in serving in some capacity at the Meher Center. Given these trends, there is a clear opportunity to increase the reliance on volunteer workers.

Goal:

To transition into becoming an organization that makes extensive and effective use of volunteer services and takes full advantage of the wide range of interests and abilities within the broader Meher Baba family.

ISSUE 6:

One of the Meher Center's chartered purposes is to render service to others, yet in recent years this has not been given prioritized support by staff, volunteers or funding.

Issue description:

The Meher Center currently dedicates a relatively small portion of its annual budget and a small amount of staff time to supporting programs in the local area that provide emergency help to people in need.

Goal:

To expand the Meher Center's commitment in the arena of service to others.

ISSUE 7:

The Meher Center is likely to face continuing and increased developmental and legal challenges, and will need to rely on strong and supportive relationships with key individuals and groups within the community including at local, city, county, state and national levels.

Issue description:

The Meher Center is an oasis of pristine ocean front undeveloped land in the midst of burgeoning and intense coastal development and rising real estate values. As a nonprofit organization, the Meher Center has acquired tax exemption privileges in accordance with state and federal laws.

Given the extraordinary growth pattern of the Myrtle Beach economy, it is essential to develop and implement a strategy to strengthen relationships with the key decision-makers in nearby communities, Horry County, and South Carolina in order to obtain their support and convey to them the value of the Meher Center as a unique asset. Furthermore, the legal contexts that protect the Meher Center from taxation, encroachment, eminent domain for public access roads, etc. are always changing. The Meher

Center must keep alert to changes and trends that might affect its tax status or the ways that it functions.

Goal:

To ensure that the Meher Center is protected from any developmental or legal actions that would undermine its integrity and mission.

ISSUE 8:

The Meher Center at present does not have an adequate and sustainable base of financial support to provide for the Meher Center's annual budget and to support its future plans and activities.

Issue description:

The issues facing the Meher Center, as well as the goals established to deal with these issues and the action plans that are developed, will require increased financial support. In addition, there are current strains on the Meher Center's annual budget, which are likely to increase.

The board is committed to keeping cabin fees low. At this time, the Meher Center has a limited fundraising plan that relies primarily on its annual newsletter requesting donations. The Meher Center has a regular donor base that contributes significantly, but this is not a large number of people. As operating expenses increase and future needs become substantial, the necessity for additional income from donations is clear.

Goal:

To ensure the Meher Center's financial stability in order to meet current and future needs.