

Meher Spiritual Center, Inc.
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Winter 2017

Dear Center Family and Friends,

Jai Meher Baba! This winter newsletter comes to you with much love, as it has for more than thirty-five years. Jane and Kitty began sending annual newsletters in the early 1980s, and they often included a jewel—a quote from Elizabeth about the Center, reflecting her great inspiration, her wisdom and her devotion to Meher Baba. This was included in January 1987, drawn from a letter Elizabeth wrote to Meher Baba in the early '40s, describing the beautiful land near Myrtle Beach, and offering it to Him saying: “It is my one desire to give the property to you forever for your spiritual cause.... You may be sure it will be given from the heart, as I am pleased to say that Father gave it to me from the heart, and knows the fact that it will be used for your spiritual and humanitarian purposes eventually. It would be the dream of my life for you to have a great Center here. I can only hope you find it useful for your universal cause.” Meher Baba accepted Elizabeth’s gift and, in 1952, personally opened Meher Center as a “place of pilgrimage for all time.”

Many voices have contributed to this winter newsletter—staff, volunteers, Board members—to share once again, more than seventy years after the “dream” of Elizabeth’s life began, highlights of the past year, and a glimpse of the year to come.

2016 Special Programs

- All year: Wendy Connor, Bill LePage, and Tom Riley all gave regular afternoon talks when they were in town and able to.
- January: Tom Riley spoke on Amartithi night; Cathy Riley gave a special concert earlier in the month.
- February: Three short plays by Joe DiSabatino were performed for Baba’s birthday.
- March: Naosherwan Anzar, guest speaker
- April: Shridhar Kelkar, guest speaker, Chairman of the Trust in India
- May: From May to October, Bill LePage gave numerous evening talks in the Meeting Place. Kavaz Arjani spoke about his family’s long association and his own Baba experiences.
- June: On June 24, Charles Haynes and Christopher Wilson gave a presentation about Norina’s life of service to Baba and her contributions to the development of the Center. Youth Sahavas, June 28 to July 3.
- July: Ward Parks presented a three-day program focused on the book *Stay With God*, July 22–24. Wendy presided over the Silence Day Eve program, with memories of Kitty and Elizabeth. July 15, Hardeep Hanspal spoke about meeting Baba.
- August: August 27, Community Picnic: remembering Kitty’s birthday. Mid-August, two concerts by young performers: Jason Homan and Adrienne Shamszad.
- September: Afternoon talk by Vinod Khilnani, sharing stories of being with Baba. September 10, reopening gathering in the Barn!
- October: All programs were cancelled while the Center remained closed October 7 to 17 following Hurricane Matthew. Nearby Community Day, October 23: Meher Abode open in the morning; community lunch in the Refectory; meeting with the Board in the afternoon to hear individual Board members share about their backgrounds and their work on the Board; tea and sweets at the end.
- November: George Eaton spoke on Thanksgiving, sharing stories of life with his father, Frank, the first caretaker for the Center under Elizabeth’s direction.
- December: Early in the month, Naosherwan Nalavala shared stories of his times with Baba. The reading program in the Reading Room every Saturday afternoon began *The Joyous Path*. There was a wide variety of holiday programs over Christmas and New Years with much participation!

Future Dates to Remember

February 25: Wendy Connor to speak on Baba's Birthday.

March 11 and 12: The annual gathering (twenty-first year!) for Evening and Overnight Caretakers and Gatekeepers, the volunteer team that keeps the Center safe and attends to guest needs while the day staff is not there.

June 20 to June 25: Youth Sahavas. Registration forms and staff applications will be sent out at the end of February. If you have not received one by mid-March and are interested in participating, call Jane Brown (843-272-8793).

October 13, 14, 15: Ward Parks program: "The Divine Theme."

From the Board of Directors

Ann Edelman, Presiding Officer for the Board

Jai Meher Baba. I am writing on behalf of the Board to let you know a little of what is going on with us. As of December 31, 2016, two Board members rotated off the Board. Arsenio Rodriguez and Wendy Connor both served the Board and the Center for many years, and although no longer on the Board, plan to continue serving the Center in many ways. Their voices and perspectives will be greatly missed—and in fact were missed in January at the Board's first weekend retreat of the year. However, we have three new Board members to celebrate! Buz Connor, Linda Hansen and Michael Tych have joined the Board. Michael has served on the Board in the past, Buz has been intimately involved with the Center for many years in numerous capacities, and Linda and Buz are primary in planning and implementing the Youth Sahavas. It is wonderful to have all three on board and we all look forward to working together. So like Baba to take away with one hand and to lovingly give with the other. In November, the Board also held election of officers for this new year. I was elected the Presiding Officer, Bruce Felknor the Treasurer, Anna Lena Phillips Bell the Secretary (it is a luxury to have a professional editor to be secretary!), and Daniel Stone the Board member at large to serve (along with the officers) on the Executive Committee. Among many things on our plate this year is continuing to work on the Master Plan, which Daniel is facilitating. We are moving steadily forward with this, and of course I think Baba delights in watching us cope with the complexities He brings to anything and everything having to do with His Center. We all look forward to serving the Center for another year, moving forward in this time of transition at the Center and seeming upheaval in the world. We feel privileged to be asked to do this work.

Annie Hall, Board member and member of the Board's ad hoc Environmental Management Committee, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Sciences at Emory University, reporting on the importance of **the Center's ecosystems**:

"You feel happy here [in Myrtle Beach] now, and I do, too. I will tell you why you are happy here. For two reasons: those who are connected with me ought to be happy here because this place [the Center] was ages ago where I moved about, stayed and visited. Secondly, the lake, ocean and woods—this combination gives it a unique atmosphere."

Meher Baba

In experiencing the beauty that is Meher Center, so suffused with His Presence, the beauty of the lake, wetland, and forest ecosystems are part and parcel of our experience. An *ecosystem* is a community of animals and plants, and includes the soils, water, and nutrients that support these organisms. Physical beauty is one of the many *ecosystem services* that the Center provides, not only to Center guests, but also to the region. In addition, the Center's forests and wetlands help to purify the air and the water, moderate weather extremes, cycle and move nutrients, and provide a variety of habitats for diverse organisms. The Center's atmosphere, so rich with Baba's presence, is also a recipient of the oxygen and water vapor passing through its forest and wetland vegetation.

Though ecosystems are always undergoing change—from daily changes in temperature and light, to seasonal changes, to long-term climate change—healthy ecosystems are resilient and can adapt to change. However, since the 1940s when the Center was established, the surrounding growth in Horry County has been astounding. With the evidence of encroaching development—one need only click on a Google satellite image of the region—and with the review of recent scientific studies of the Center's environment, it is apparent that we have entered a new stage of environmental change. Ecologists respond to these complex challenges in the field of *resilience science* by recognizing that human and natural systems are strongly linked; we are at the point where ecosystems, such as the Center's five hundred acres, will need active adaptive management to maintain their functioning and health.

The Environmental Management Committee has been established to track the health of the Center's ecosystems, and, with guidance of experts in a variety of fields, to recommend management strategies to cope with the continued stress of environmental change. Just as we, the staff, Board and volunteers, strive to maintain the buildings and sacred places of Meher Center, we are also dedicated to the even more complex task of maintaining the health and well-being of the sacred living environment that has been entrusted to us all.

News from the Gateway

Meher Center Messages: We are trying to build our email list so that when important things occur at the Center, we can keep you more fully and quickly informed. Meher Center Messages is a brief monthly email update about Center work and happenings, with quotes from accounts of Meher Baba's visits to the Center in the 1950s, and weekly postings of program information, upcoming events and special announcements. If you would like to begin receiving Meher Center Messages by email, just let the Gateway know—call (843-272-5777) or email (gateway@mehercenter.org).

Tours and outreach: The Gateway has increased the number of volunteer tour guides in an effort to meet the greater need. There is at least one tour guide on call every day, and during busy times there is often more than one tour scheduled daily. In 2016 886 guests and visitors were given tours of the Center. The number and regularity of group tours has also increased, which provides a wonderful opportunity for interfacing with our city and county neighbors. Here's a list of some of the groups that came for a tour and visit in 2016: the Horry County Historical Society, the Sons of Norway, a religious study group from the College of Charleston, a Hinduism and Comparative religion class from Coastal Carolina University, a group of women from the Temple Emmanuel Synagogue, and the Board of Directors of Burroughs and Chapin Company.

The primary increase in **numbers of people coming** to the Center over the last ten years has been in day visitors—from 10,200 in 2006 to 14,200 in 2016. The number of nearby community entries in our mailing list has gone from 326 to 422 over the past 10 years. There has been little change in overnight guest occupancy, and no significant change in the numbers of new people coming—even a little drop, probably due to the hurricane, storms, and extremely hot summer. It is clearly the increased number of Center folks moving to this area that keeps the overall guest/visitor totals slowly rising, from 29,340 in 2006 to 30,643 in 2016.

A change in Gateway Coordinator: Carole Kelly, who has worked for the Center since 1987 and been the Gateway coordinator for the past twenty-seven years, has turned over the responsibility to **Judi Schoeck**. Judi has worked at the Gateway since 2004, and side by side with Carole over the past year to prepare for this shift. Carole remains on Gateway staff, working half time, which is so important and helpful in this transition. She has been a soldier in her work for the Center and in her masterful management of that hotbed of activity, pressure, and the widest variety of occurrences happening every day. We sometimes refer to the Gateway as the “speed bump,” where all the baggage of the world is dropped off so that guests can step into the Center's restful and renewing space unencumbered. That's what Carole has managed so beautifully all these years, and now Judi has stepped up to the challenge. We are all with her!

Yet another reminder about the **beach gate**: please remember when you come to the Center, the beach gate is kept locked at all times. For directions on how to access it, please check with the Gateway when you arrive.

Center Work

Long Lake: The Board's Environmental Management Committee, a team of staff and volunteers, and the research team from ECU are all working to further identify the sources of excess nutrients that caused the Chara algae bloom, the most effective ways to control those sources, and feasible processes to deal with the resulting build up of detritus (muck) in the lake. The yellow barrier, stretching across the water out beyond the Boat House, which has kept the Boat House and lagoon area clear after the suction dredging project was completed in 2015, has to remain in place until further research is completed and remedial steps can be taken to address the algae bloom and the detritus it has created.

Maintenance and grounds work: 2016 was a very challenging year for all staff and volunteers. But there were several large events and circumstances that cast an extra burden on the maintenance and grounds crew this year: the Barn vandalism in January, Malcolm Clay's retirement after forty-five years managing the grounds, the storms in late spring, the water line project and it happening during the Youth Sahavas, an extremely hot summer season, terrible mosquitoes, and some of the work crew having extended medical issues. Every day was a stretch. But things got done! The new water line and four standard fire hydrants were installed in strategic places on the property, the access ramp at Baba's House was completed, increased security procedures and equipment improvements were put in place at the Barn, the beach, and around the Center's perimeter, fence repairs were done, roof repairs were completed for Meher Studio and the porches at Baba's House, the exterior woodwork at Baba's House was painted, those huge dewatering bags left behind from the suction dredging project on Long Lake the year before were finally able to be removed, another round of fuel mitigation work was completed around every Center structure to remove foliage and flammable materials, and a massive clean-up effort has been ongoing since Hurricane Matthew. We are just at the beginning...

Cabin Crew: The cabin crew's focus during the fall and winter months, when it is cooler and quieter, is always on intensive cleaning of all the buildings. During the rest of the year, it is on keeping up with rapid turnovers and dealing with other elements that impact their work—heat, humidity, mosquitoes, mildew, and a Center that is always full. Some good news is that fourteen new mattresses were purchased and installed in 2015. Add to that the thirteen purchased in 2013, and it makes a total of twenty-seven new mattresses in the last three years. We plan to replace eight more in 2017, which will bring the new total to thirty-five. Now that's change!

Archive work: The focus this year has been on restoration work on Barn furnishings, and all of the photos, Sahavas Sayings, and other historic items that were damaged last January, using professional help wherever needed and possible. There is still much to do. In other areas, more archival photos were displayed in the Meeting Place than in previous years, much enjoyed and appreciated by guests and visitors. They are such beautiful images. Listening copies of audio tapes from the 1960s and '70s were put on CDs for guests to enjoy in the library, including talks by Elizabeth, Kitty, Margaret Craske, Darwin Shaw, Charles Purdom, Fred Winterfeldt, and others. And the project of reformatting Center program videos continues.

Donations and Memberships: In this annual letter, we always include a brief financial report and the membership and donation forms for the current year. Please be sure to let us know if your contact information has changed, if you have new additions to your family!, and make sure we have the birthdates of your children for our Youth Sahavas mailing. So many of you have committed to a monthly pledge, which is so helpful. And since our planned giving appeal a little over a year ago, many of you have committed to a testamentary gift. For this we are most grateful. We want to remind you how important donations and memberships are to the financial stability of the Center, and how critical they are in maintaining the level of public support the Center needs to protect its nonprofit status. Thank you for all that you are doing.

Another donation opportunity: If shopping on Amazon, you can sign into your account from this web address and one half of one percent of your purchase will be donated to the Center by Amazon: <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/57-0422620>

In closing, we want to simply send you love and gratitude, and our hope that you are well and might be able to come to Meher Baba's Home in the West again soon. It is His love that sustains this beautiful place. It is His gift to us, this space of refuge and rest and renewal, filled with His abiding Presence which He said would always remain. Every day, He waits with open arms to receive our love, to challenge us, to hold us close. May our efforts be to please Him—to work together, in harmony, to honor Elizabeth's dream and Baba's wish that the Center remain a place of pilgrimage for all time.

In His Love,



Ann Edelman, Presiding Officer, Meher Center Board of Directors
Buz Connor, Bruce Felknor—Treasurer, Meherwan Irani, Annie Hall, Jo Taylor, Anna Lena Phillips Bell—Secretary,
Daniel Stone—Board member at large on Executive Committee, Adi Blum, Linda Hansen, and Michael Tych

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Meher Baba ~ History of the Center ~ Visitor Information ~ Current Programs
Your comments and suggestions are always welcome