

A Daily Study Guide

for the 2025-2026 Meher Center “Life and Message” Virtual Program Series

Meher Baba’s New Life From the Great Seclusion to Manonash: An In-Depth Review (16th October 1949 to February 1952)

On 16th October 1949, Meher Baba renounced the Old Life that He had lived until then, with all its trappings of Perfect Masterhood and followers and ashrams and so-called “spirituality,” and with twenty Companions set out on a New Life of “helplessness and hopelessness.” Cutting all ties with His Old Life disciples and devotees, for two and a half years Baba and His Companions wandered without fixed residence or headquarters around the Indian subcontinent, at times begging for food and sleeping under the stars. Baba’s activities encompassed the so-called Gypsy, Langoti, Begging, and Labor phases. He drafted three major “plans” for His Companions. He served the poor and worked with the masts, and He completed major seclusions. The New Life came to a head between October and February 1951-52 with what Baba called “Manonash” or the “annihilation of the mind.” And through this radical act Meher Baba drew the New Life to a close, stepping into a new kind of “LIFE” in which the Old and New Lives were both encompassed. This was the “LIFE” that provided the platform for His public declaration of Avatarhood in February 1954.

While the community of Baba’s lovers generally agrees that the New Life holds a special place in the progression of Baba’s life and somehow prepares the ground for a New Humanity in the ages to come, it remains profoundly enigmatic and often baffling. What exactly **was** the New Life? Most of Baba’s statements describe it in purely negational terms, setting forth rules and restrictions and prohibitions. Yet amid the impossible difficulties, in the years afterwards some of the “Companions” that we met said that this was the freest time during all their years with Meher Baba. How to reconcile such stark contradictions? How to fathom the essence of a life that exhibits no visible positive content and indeed eludes unequivocal terms of characterization?

And what are we to make of Baba Himself, and the roles He played, through this three-year interlude? During the Old Life, He generally presented Himself as a God-realized Sadguru. At the outset of the New Life He stepped down from this office and became an ordinary seeker of God. But through the course of Manonash He seems to have regained His divine station, and indeed, augmented it, to the point of establishing the grounds of His Avatarhood. What work was He engaged in through this strange process? Who was this Man? Was the Meher Baba of the New Life the same One that His lovers pray to today and relate themselves to as their Friend and Beloved and Master?

Segment One. The Preparation (Sessions 1–3)

After a decade of Baba's life that seemed focused largely around His work with the masts, from the beginning of 1949 Baba made remarks that seemed to indicate that a major change was in prospect. The Great Seclusion of June-July seemed to represent, as Francis Brabazon put it, a curtain between great acts in the drama of His Divine Life. This was followed by the great meetings in Meherabad in August 1949, when Baba made the shocking announcement of the inauguration of the New Life in October and the dramatic changes that it would usher in. Most shockingly, Baba gave His Old Life followers to understand that, after He set out on His New Life, they should never expect to see Him again.

Session 1. “An Overview of the New Life.” (i) The significance of the New Life in Meher Baba's greater Avataric Career. (ii) A brief historical survey of the New Life from 1949 to 1952. (iii) Several Major New Life themes.

Meher Baba's New Life transpired at about the mid-point of His Avataric career, between 16th October 1949 and 16th February 1952. Before the New Life, Meher Baba was widely recognized as a Perfect Master or Sadguru; while close disciples recognized him as the Avatar, he had never publically declared himself. During the New Life, however, Baba took the extraordinary step of dissociating himself from his God-state and becoming an ordinary man. Beyond this, Baba cut his connection with his Old Life followers and disciples and the ashrams where they had lived. At the conclusion of the New Life, however, Baba said that he had regained his Old life Meher Baba state, which had merged with his New Life state. Soon after that, in February 1954, Meher Baba declared Himself to be the Avatar of the Age.

Though Meher Baba never explained the New Life, this whole process seems to carry an archetypal significance within the course of his career and work as the Avatar of the Age.

Throughout the New Life Meher Baba moved and traveled throughout India almost continuously. The first two and a half months, from 16th October through 31st December, Baba and his Companions were passing through the “training period.” During the first five months of 1950 they were stationed in North India in the neighborhood of Dehra Dun. For several months starting in June they relocated to Satara, south of Ahmednagar. On 16th October 1950 Baba stepped back into the Old Life for four hours and met with two hundred of his Old Life followers. The early part of 1951 was marked by the Hundred Day Seclusion in Mahabaleshwar, during which Baba appears to have prepared the ground for what followed. At the end of June, in another meeting with Old Life followers in Hyderabad, Baba declared the “God-determined Step,” which he called “Manonash” or the annihilation of the mind. The Manonash phase began on 16th October 1951 in a cave outside Hyderabad, continued in a journey by foot and bus to Aurangabad, and came to its culmination in Meherabad in December and January, 1951–1952. In

February Meher Baba declared that his Manonash work had been completed to his satisfaction and that he had regained his old Meher Baba God-state.

Two of the best statements about the New Life are Dr. Ghani's "Song of the New Life," composed and published in October-November 1949, and the famous paragraph from the 10th March 1950 Circular, "This New Life is endless, and even after my physical death . . ." Meher Baba characterized it in terms of "helplessness and hopelessness," that is, the renunciation of all help and hope, and a rejection of conventional spirituality, with its Guru-disciple relationship and its aspirations and ambitions for spiritual advancement. The new life culminated in Manonash or mental annihilation. By February 1952 Baba had regained his Old-Life Meher Baba state, with its Knowledge, Strength, and Greatness, while retaining the "ignorance, weaknesses, and humility of the New Life." This wedding of the old and the new gave rise to "Life," and this was the platform on basis of which Meher Baba could declare his Avatarhood.

Session 2. "Early Adumbrations, and the Great Seclusion" (January–July 1949).

(i) Some characteristic themes of the Old Life. (ii) Adumbrations of the New Life, from the beginning of 1949 through the work at Mount Abu. (iii) The Great Seclusion of June-July 1949. (iv) The role of ceremonial occasions in the New Life.

Though the arrival of the New Life came as a shock to Baba's long-time followers, to those closely attentive to Baba's mood and remarks, from the beginning of 1949 He was giving out subtle indications that a great change, indeed, a true rupture, in the course of His life and work was likely to occur during that year.

The early months of 1949, from March through May, were dominated by a phase of most work during which Baba was headquartered in Mount Abu. After a brief vacation interlude by the coast, Baba returned to Meherazad and made preparations for what has come to be known as the Great Seclusion.

This was inaugurated in Meherazad on 22nd June and ran for forty days, until 1st August. During much of this time Baba was fasting. Its most critical phase took place between 1st and 9th July. In the middle of the month of July Baba shifted for about ten days to Poona, but He returned to Meherazad on the 25th and concluded His seclusion there.

Though Meher Baba never indicated what work He carried out in the Great Seclusion, it is widely assumed among students of His life and work that the seclusion helped to bring about the transition between the Old Life and the New.

Study Questions for Session 2

Study question 1. In a circular issued on 1st January 1949, Baba said, "The year 1949 marks an artificial end to an artificial beginning, and the Real beginning to the Real end!" What do you take this to mean?"

Study question 2. Where is Mount Abu? What are some of its religious associations? Might the fact of Baba's having worked with masts here just before the New Life have some relationship with the archetypal work He did with religion during the Manonash phase in 1951–52?

Study question 3. On 15th May 1949, Baba had a contact with Tilgur Swami, a Jivanmukta. Baba contacted him again during the Manonash work in 1951. What is a Jivanmukta, and do you think there might be any special significance to Baba's having contacted him just before the New Life and during its culminating phase?

Study question 4. During His brief holiday interlude in the coastal town of Vengurla in the third week of June, between His work at Mount Abu and the commencement of the Great Seclusion, Baba passed through a dramatic episode in which He fell into a tidal estuary and was pulled out of the deep water by Eruch. Relate this story, as best you know it.

Study question 5. Describe the major phases in the Great Seclusion. Though Baba never indicated what work He did in this seclusion, He did comment from time to time on some of the experiences that He was passing through. For example, He said, "My work by thoughts is going on during sleep and wakefulness throughout the 24 hours of the day and night. Thoughts of God come—thoughts of Maya come. Good thoughts come—bad thoughts come. Pleasant thoughts come—unpleasant thoughts come. Sacred thoughts come—unclean thoughts come." Now, if Baba was God in human form, why was He having to cope with thoughts, like an ordinary man in meditation? Does this seem to you to have some connection with the work that He was soon to take on during the New Life?

Study question 6. Francis Brabazon has characterized the Great Seclusion as a "Curtain between Two Acts of Old Life and New Life: curtain of author-actor/ Writing into the original sketch-plan the detailed parts of the next act." Francis seems to have understood this seclusion as a time in which Baba prepared and planned for the New Life that was to follow. Do you understand the Great Seclusion in this way? What is it possible for us to know about what work Baba did in this seclusion?

Session 3. "The August 1929 Meetings, and Preparations for the New Life" (August –October 1949). (i) The Meherabad meetings (15th–20th August 1949). (ii) The meetings with the women (16th August 1949). (iii) The "Circular of Conditions" (31st August 1949). (iv) Preparations for departure (early October 1949). (v) The verbal dueling of Ghani and Khak Saheb.

The great shock announcement of the New Life was given out at meetings of thirty-five close male followers and disciples at Lower Meherabad between 15th and 20th August. The purpose of the meetings was to outline the conditions of the New Life, to determine who would set out with Baba on October 16th, and to begin making arrangements for the closing of Baba's ashrams and the future of Baba's mandali. On 16th August Baba met separately with the women mandali, outlined to them the prospects for the up-coming New Life, and laid out for them their options. By 21st August Baba had drafted a basic

list of New Life conditions; and at a final meeting on 31st August, to which the thirty-five attendees of the earlier meetings were again invited, Baba presented a detailed circular which specified many of the rules and conditions of the New Life and required each of the men to signify their willingness or unwillingness to join Baba on the New Life with a simple “Yes” or “No.” This “Circular of Conditions” was foundational to the New Life that followed; its terms and provisions got restated and reincorporated into a number of the subsequent “plans” and “sets of conditions” and “oaths” that Companions and associates were called upon to assent to over the next two years.

Over the six weeks between the conclusion of the Meherabad meetings and the launching of the New Life on 16th October, Baba’s disciples and followers passed through a transition more traumatic than any they had experienced before. A general announcement of the impending New Life was sent out to Baba’s worldwide following in a circular dated 10th October 1949, and this created a considerable stir. Meanwhile, those who were to join Baba as Companions were warned in no uncertain terms about the extreme difficulties that they were going to face, while Old Life followers and disciples were told that they should never expect to see their Beloved again. During His New Life Meher Baba was stepping down from his former state as God-realized Perfect Master and assuming the role of an ordinary seeker of God; and his New Life Companions were to relate to Him on this basis. As it turned out, the tally of those who set out with Baba from Meherabad on 16th October came to twenty, including sixteen men and four women. All Baba’s properties in India were given away, and thus Baba left behind no home for him to return to.

The first two weeks in October were replete with memorable episodes as all concerned worked furiously to finish all preparations before the deadline. Almost on the eve of the New Life, Baba asked his longtime disciple and future New Life Companion Dr. Ghani to compose a ghazal in which he was to ventilate his complaints. This took the form of an Urdu poem entitled “Jeremiad to Saki.” But then Baba asked another longtime disciple and accomplished Urdu poet, Khak Saheb, to write a retort. This “battle of the bards” provided a moment of entertainment, as well as an occasion of deep poignancy, as Baba’s Old and New Life disciples prepared to say to each other in what they thought might be their final farewell.

Study Questions for Session 3

- Study question 1.* The first of the Meherabad meetings took place on 15th August; to this meeting thirty-five close followers had been invited out of a greater list of 1200. What were some of the major themes that Baba accentuated on this day? What did Baba mean when He said that He was going to be “hardened, callous, and penniless”? These meetings were open and frank and avoided secrecy more than had ever happened before. Can you give some examples of this?
- Study question 2.* How did Baba break the news of the New Life to the women? In what sense were their options different from those of the men?

- Study question 3.* The initial list of eleven conditions drafted on 21st August consisted almost entirely of prohibitions. Why was this? Was the New Life to be entirely a negative? Did it consist only of “thou shalt not’s”?
- Study question 4.* Review the “Circular of Conditions” which was given to each of the meeting attendees on 31st August (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, pp. 69–75). What are some of the dominant themes? The circular keeps insisting that “you and you alone will be held responsible before God.” How does this represent something new in the discipleship to Baba that these men had experienced?
- Study question 5.* Review Baba’s New Life “Oath” (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, p. 77). What are its main terms and provisions?
- Study question 6.* The poetic duel between Dr. Ghani and Khak Saheb, as expressed in Ghani’s “A Jeremiad to Saki” and Khak Saheb’s vigorous retort (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, pp. 91–98), pitted against each other two of Meher Baba’s earliest Muslim disciples, both of them accomplished poets. Summarize some of the themes in Ghani’s “Jeremiad” and Khak Saheb’s rebuttal.
- Study question 7.* Review the list of Companions who set out with Baba on 16th October (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, pp. 101–2). What do you know about each of them?
- Study question 8.* Review the list of personal articles that each of the Companions was permitted to take with him. What do you think about this list? Why does almost all of it consist of items of clothing? Do you find necessary items to have been left out? Why did Baba exhibit this trait of what we could almost call “legalism” in the detailed determinism and specification of small points like this?
- Study question 9.* A humorous episode in the final weeks before the inauguration of the New Life involved a swami who came to Baba for God-realization. What happened with regard to this swami? Did he get God-realization?

Segment Two. The Training Period (Sessions 4–6)

Though the New Life formally launched on 16th October 1949, Baba buffered the full shock of its onset through a two-and-a-half month “training period” in which certain minor mistakes and blunders would be forgiven as the Companions learned what the New Life truly entailed. The training got under way in a bungalow at Belgaum, about 450 kilometers south of Ahmednagar, from 20th October through 12th November. From there, the party shifted to Benares where they were accommodated and fed by a distinguished physician, Dr. Nath, and his wife and family. For the last two weeks in November they had their first experiences of the “Begging” and “Langoti Lives.” The month of December marked the inauguration of true gypsy-life wandering, as the New Life caravan—which included a veritable menagerie of livestock animals—made its way through the frigid winter conditions of north India toward Dehra Dun.

Session 4. “Training and Labor in Belgaum” (October-November 1949). (i) The final preparations (in early October, 1949). (ii) Setting out: the journey from Meherabad to

Belgaum. (iii) The labor phase in Belgaum. (iv) Stories from the early stages of the New Life. (v) “The Song of the New Life.”

The month of October witnessed frenetic activity as Baba’s ashrams were dissolved and all who had been connected with Him prepared for the revolutionary change about to overtake them all. Memorable anecdotes from this period include the visit of a swami seeking realization, and the highly entertaining poetic duel between Dr. Ghani and Khaksaheb.

On a raining morning on 16th October Baba with his twenty Companions set out from Meherabad, and for the next four days they traveled largely by foot, eventually taking a train to the bungalow that had been reserved for them in Belgaum. There the strict training began; among the many stories descending from this time, one of the most touching concerns Daulat Singh and his expulsion from Baba’s company. During the Belgaum period some of the most important New Life themes found their first articulation, such as **helplessness and hopelessness, satyanashi**, and the **enjoyment of suffering**. Under Baba’s direction Dr. Ghani wrote “The Song of the New Life,” a poem which was immediately published and circulated both in its Hindustani original and English translation. “The Song of the New Life” remains one of the most important literary expressions from the New Life period.

Study Questions for Session 4

Study question 1. What kind of items were the New Life Companions allowed to take with them, as this is set forth in the twenty-nine item list in *Meher Baba’s New Life*, pp. 110–111? What kind of items were excluded from this list?

Study question 2. Who were the “Arrangementwalas”? What was their role?

Study question 3. In a noteworthy message given at Supa on 17th October, Baba observed that, for those in the New Life, “There is no spirituality, no Master, no disciple, nor miracles, no key-turning business, no hopes and no thoughts of benefit or privation. Look upon Baba as a friend who will help and advise you. . . . By word and deed, you should in all faith avoid sincerely and seriously giving the impression that Baba is God, Master, Sadguru or the Avatar. I will be Master in one respect only—in demanding implicit obedience” (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, p. 123). How do you make sense of a statement like this? If Meher Baba was indeed the Avatar, how can the New Life lack “spirituality”? If He was just a friend, how could He demand implicit obedience?

Study question 4. Why was Daulat Singh dismissed from Baba’s company and sent back to his home? Why was Daulat Singh’s expression of genuine feeling prohibited when Ghani’s New Life “strike” was allowed? Is there something wrong with the expression of sincere feeling, that the New Life rules should have disallowed it?

Study Question 5. What does satyanashi mean (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, pp. 135 and 165)? Why did the New Life Companions dislike the word, and why did Baba insist on it?

Study Question 6. What is meant by the “enjoyment of misery” (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, p. 137)? How do you distinguish this from mere masochism?

Study Question 7. The New Life was characterized by hopelessness, aimlessness, and helplessness (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, p. 166). In worldly understanding, these would be associated with a state of extreme depression. Why were they not so in the New Life context? What states do these three words designate?

Study Question 8. In an important statement in Belgaum, Baba described the “three stages” of the New Life (*Meher Baba’s New Life*, pp. 168–69). Summarize these. The New Life was to have four phases: the Labor, Begging, Gypsy, and Langoti Lives. Define each.

Study Question 9. What are some of the major themes of “The Song of the New Life”?

Session 5. “The Benares Interlude” (November 1949). (i) The move from Belgaum to Benares. (ii) The Benares stay and the many outrageous requests. (iii) The visit to Sarnath. (iv) The four phases: the Labor, Begging, Langoti, and Gypsy Lives.

Although Baba and party undertook a term of residence in Benares without any provision at all for their own housing and food, in an extraordinary act of generosity a family of complete strangers, Dr. Nath and his wife, accommodated the group in an empty bungalow and provided them with needed food. Another family in the Benares medical community, Dr. Khare with his father Gaya Prasad and Gaya Prasad’s wife, played major roles. During their stay in the palatial Benares residence known as Nati Imli, Baba and the Companions made one outrageous demand after another; yet the Nath and Khare families satisfied Baba’s every request. One of these involved the acquisition of a veritable menagerie—a white horse, a camel with a cart, a cow, and two she-asses—which Dr. Nath bought for Baba and donated as *bhiksha*. While the stay at Belgaum saw the initiation of the Labor Phase, in Benares the Companion embarked in a serious way in the life of begging. At the end of this interlude, the New Life party moved to Sarnath, associated with the life of Buddha. In a cave in which Buddha gave one of his first great sermons, Baba and the Companions inaugurated the Langoti Life. A memorable personality in the Sarnath residence was a saintly gardener in the bungalow where Baba and party stayed. After Padri brought from Ahmednagar a vehicle known as the New Life Caravan, the group set out on foot on the long march to Dehra Dun five hundred miles to the north.

Study Questions for Session 5

Study question 1. Although the decision to visit Benares had been settled before Baba and party had made any contacts there, in the actual event they were lodged in palatial quarters (Nati Imli) and fed by cooks who came to Benares from Hamirpur specifically for that purpose. Relate the story, involving Babadas and Sadashiv Patel, Dr. Khare, Dr. Nath and his wife, and Gaya Prasad and his wife, by which this came to pass.

Study question 2. During the Benares interlude, Baba and party made a series of outrageous requests, every one of which the Naths and Khares complied with. Some of these involved the acquisition of animals for a gypsy caravan; others involved the food. Relate some of these memorable anecdotes. Why did the Naths and Khares cooperate in this way? Can you infer any general significance from this in terms of the meaning of the New Life?

Study question 3. The Benares interlude witnessed the inauguration of the Begging phase. What were some of the conditions that Baba laid down concerning how begging should be conducted? Baba begged first from the Naths' residence. What memorable incidents took place there?

Study question 4. At Benares, Ghani made one of his wisecracks: "The New Life means this much—to do routine things to odd times, to create difficulties where none exist, and to disturb an otherwise smooth situation. All these things make up what we call the New Life!" Later this gave rise to a major stir between Baba and the Companions. Do you think that Ghani's comments broke the New Life rules? To what extent did the New Life allow for criticism?

Study Question 5. For twelve days Baba and the Companions shifted their quarters to Sarnath; and there, in a cave associated with the Lord Buddha, the Companions seem to have played out the Langoti Life, something that they never did again over the next three years. On basis of this one episode, what can you glean concerning the meaning of the Langoti phase?

Study Question 6. An employee at the bungalow where Baba and party stayed at Sarnath was an old gardener, to whom Baba gave the name Sant Mali. Why did he deserve this title? Relate the story of the gardener's dealings with the New Life party.

Study Question 7. Explain, as best you can, the meaning of the four phases—the Labor, Begging, Langoti, and Gypsy Lives. How are they distinct from one another? Why these four and not others?

Session 6. "Wandering: The Begging, Langoti, and Gypsy Phases" (12th December 1949 through 12th January 1950). (i) The chronology and narrative of the journey from Benares to Dehra Dun, 12th December 1949 through 12th January 1950. (ii) The Begging Phase. (iii) The Gypsy Life. (iv) The New Life "strike" and other stories. (v) Utter impoverishment and the New Life hardships. (vi) The "vacuum" period.

Leaving Benares on foot, throughout December the party made its way through north India in the direction of Dehra Dun, which was to serve as their headquarters for the first half of the next year. For the Companions at least, if not for Baba Himself, the Begging Phase and the Gypsy Life seemed to reach their culmination over this month-long term of wandering and homelessness. Many extraordinary stories illustrate the generosity of the poor villagers and farmers and the spontaneous help offered by city-dwellers in some of the Companions' ports of call. Travelling with a large caravan of animals, the party drank deep of the gypsy experience of having no home apart from where they put up for the night. The men in particular endured considerable hardships, most notably on account of

the winter cold in north India and the lack of food. These conditions even led to a New Life strike! This and many other remarkable stories mark out this period as one of the most memorable in the entire New Life. By the end of the journey, the Companions had renounced the last of their personal funds and were truly penniless. The final ten days of 1949 marked the “Vacuum Period” with which the New Life training concluded; the New Life proper began from January 1st. This phase of wandering came to an end with the arrival in Dehra Dun and the setting up of a new headquarters at Manjri Mafi during the second week of January.

Study Questions for Session 6

- Study question 1.* What animals comprised the greater New Life cavalcade when the Companions set out from Benares on 12th December 1949?
- Study question 2.* What difficulties did the various animals create for the New Life party? Relate some of these stories. Do you think that the various kinds of animals that Baba assembled had a symbolic or archetypal significance? Explain.
- Study question 3.* What is the significance of the Gypsy Life? Why did Baba include it as one of the four major phases of the New Life? What does “homelessness” mean?
- Study question 4.* During their journey north, the Companions had to beg for their food. Relate some of the stories associated with this. Several times Baba sent small parties of Companions ahead to secure accommodation and provision of food and other amenities at cities that the larger party was soon to visit. What luck did these advance groups have in their efforts? Do these begging experiences of the Companions have some archetypal significance or meaning in the greater narrative of the New Life?
- Study question 5.* At Jaunpur, the hardships of the Companions had reached such a degree that they actually went on strike! Relate the stories associated with this. Why did this act of going on strike not constitute a violation of the conditions of the New Life that would cause their expulsion? When Daulat Singh was sent away from Baba merely for weeping at night, why was Dr. Ghani not expelled for strike instigation?
- Study question 6.* At the outset of the New Life Baba made provisions such that the Companions would be guaranteed some provision of funds in the event that they had to leave the New Life and go home. But during the journey from Benares to Dehra Dun, the Companions renounced their personal provision and donated their monies into a common food fund. Comment on the possible significance to the greater New Life of this utter impoverishment of the New Life Companions.
- Study question 7.* What was the “Vacuum Period”? Baba had indicated that the New Life training would conclude at the end of 1949 and the New Life in its true sense would begin on 1st January 1950. What does this mean? Do you mark any difference between the 1949 and the 1950 experience of the New Life?

Segment Three. Inauguration of the New Life Proper in North India (Sessions 7–9)

Shortly after settling in at Manjri Mafi in Dehra Dun, Baba created the three “Plans,” requiring each of his Companions to select one. Many selected plan I-C, according to which they would return to their home places and continue the New Life there, without Baba’s contact. In this way the number of Companions residing with Baba decreased by about one half. During the months of March and April, most of Baba’s work involved the Kumbha Mela at Hardwar, where Baba wound up contacting and bowing down to more than 10,000 sadhus and saints. In May, Baba formulated still another “New Plan” and wound up cancelling Plans I, II, and III. This New Plan entailed that His Companions perform gainful work under the Labor Phase, and this took the form of the New Life Ghee business, which they carried out in Delhi.

Session 7. “Manjri Mafi and the Three New Life Plans” (January 12 through March 1950). (i) The Manjri Mafi connection. (ii) The three plans. (iii). Living at Manjri Mafi. (iv). Baba’s fifty-sixth birthday.

After the conclusion of the “Vacuum Period” on 31st December 1949, the New Life in its full intensity began on 1st January of the next year. Twelve days later Baba and party arrived at Dehra Dun; and over the next five months a bungalow at Manjri Mafi, a few miles outside the city, became their new headquarters. Baba had arranged for the acquisition of a property there through the efforts of Keki Desai and Keka Nalavala; Kumar Shatrughna, a friend of a friend, proved instrumental in this process, and after the party’s arrival, Todi Singh, a wealthy businessman and supplier of cream for a leading Indian butter and cheese manufacturing company, provided food. Over this north Indian phase of the New Life in the first half of 1950, these men and their families became some of the principal players and outside supporters for the New Life.

On 21st January Baba brought about a major change in the New Life when He introduced three new plans, Plan I, II, and III; Plan I had three subsections, I-A, I-B, and I-C. Every New Life Companion was required to choose between these options. While the intricacies of and differences between these plans require close study (and will be a major focal topic for this session), all of the Companions wound up selecting either Plan I-B, I-C, or III. I-B was a group plan in which participants lived and worked cooperatively and formed a business. Companions choosing I-C were to return to their homes and continue the New Life there without external contact with Baba. Plan III was for Companions who wanted to follow the original New Life conditions unchanged.

Dr. Donkin established a medical clinic under Plan I-B, and Gustadji and Kaka joined him. Four Companions, Ghani, Anna, Babadas, and Adi, opted for I-C and left for their homes, renouncing all hope of ever seeing Baba again. Eight of the Companions, Nilu, Pendu, Baidul, Eruch, Murli, Vishnu, Sadashiv, and Aloba, chose to abide by the original conditions under Plan III.

For the next two months the New Life at various temporary residences and (after construction work was completed) at Manjri Mafi took on a routine characteristic of the New Life; the Companions underwent many rigors and challenges. Later in February

Baba engaged in two days of intense discussions with the Companions over the meaning of the New Life and its essential conditions; this resulted in the statement that remains probably the most famous of the New Life messages apart from the “Song of the New Life” itself. At the same time Baba and his Companions formulated thirty-four New Life “conditions” that were to become the foundation for the New Life that followed. All of these, the statement and the thirty-four conditions, were issued to Baba’s greater Old Life following on 10th March 1950 through the fifth New Life “Circular.”

Study Questions for Session 7

- Study question 1.* Before the New Life began, Baba made arrangements for the procurement of a property near Dehra Dun in north India to serve as the New Life headquarters. Why did Baba keep this secret from His Companions through the first three months of the New Life?
- Study question 2.* The discovery and purchase of the property at Manjri Mafi came about through some remarkable dramas and coincidences. Relate this story.
- Study question 3.* Who were Keki Desai, Keka Nalavala, Kumar Shatrughna, and Todi Singh? How did each of them come into Baba’s contact? What roles did they play in the New Life in the first half of 1950?
- Study question 4.* Why did Baba formulate the three New Life plans? At certain times Baba seemed to imply that the Plans came about because of the inability of the original Companions to live the New Life as it should be lived. How had they failed? And how did the three plans remedy this situation?
- Study question 5.* Describe the Plans and the differences between them. The first Plan had three sections—I-A, I-B, and I-C. In what sense are these three sub-plans part of the same Plan, as distinct from Plan II and Plan III? What is the distinctive feature of Plan II? Why was there a need for Plan III at all, when it simply entailed continuing with the New Life according to its original conditions?
- Study question 6.* The New Life at Manjri Mafi differed from what preceded it in that the Companions had a stable residence and had discontinued the Begging, Gypsy, and Langoti Lives. In what did the New Life consist, then, during this Manjri Mafi period? What were some of its most memorable incidents?
- Study question 7.* At the end of February Baba gave perhaps His most famous New Life message. Analyze it closely. According to this message, what defines the New Life? Much of the emphasis of the message falls on renunciation. After the renunciation has been completed, what positive content remains?
- Study question 8.* At the same time that the foregoing message was composed, Baba formulated thirty-four conditions. How do these conditions compare with similar sets of conditions issued on previous occasions? Is there anything new? Why were these sent out to the greater Baba community through a circular?

Session 8. “Meher Baba’s Work at the Kumbha Mela” (March and April, 1950). (i) Major thematic background no. 1: The Kumbha Mela. (ii) Major thematic background no. 2: Meher Baba’s work with the masts in the 1930s–40s. (iii) Meher Baba’s New

Life work at the Kumbha Mela in Hardwar. (iv) Major conflicts and a new New Life plan. (v) Baba's visit to Hardwar with the women.

Meher Baba's work through most of March and April of 1950 centered on the contacts with sadhus and other religious and spiritual seekers at the Kumbha Mela in Hardwar. Though Baba seemed to indicate that religion as such has nothing to do with his work, the history and mythological background of the Kumbha Mela figures into this story, as does the subsequent history of Meher Baba's work with the God-Man, as brilliantly recorded by William Donkin in *The Wayfarers*.

As the dates of the Kumbha Mela approached, Baba made arrangements for short-term accommodation in the village of Motichur, located five miles from Hardwar and thus usable by Him as a base of operations for his Kumbha Mela work. For about four weeks, from early March through early April, Baba devoted himself to seeking out and bowing down to sadhus and other spiritual pilgrims. By the end of this phase, He had contacted more than 10,000 individuals. This took a dire toll on his physical condition; as Nilu's circular diary records, Baba was reduced to a state of utter exhaustion, even though his radiance and state of inner exaltation was plain to see. Baba's few comments on the significance of this work indicate that it differed radically from his earlier work with the masts as recorded in *The Wayfarers*.

An episode in early April brought the fact into view that the understanding of the New Life held by the Companions was radically at variance with that of Baba himself. This led to the cancellation of the three plans and Baba's determination to form a New Plan. In the pursuit of this, Baba decided to shift the base of operations from the vicinity of Dehra Dun to Delhi; and He set plans in motion to bring this about.

The Kumbha Mela phase of the New Life came to a close when Baba took the women to Hardwar for a day's viewing of the crowd and processional from the terrace of a hotel along the Ganges River.

Study Questions for Session 8

Study question 1. What is the Kumbha Mela? What incident in Hindu mythology does it commemorate? In twentieth century India, how often does it occur, where, and by what form of commemoration?

Study question 2. Why did Baba move to Motichur, and who did He take with Him there? Where is it located, and what were the accommodations there like?

Study question 3. During the months of March-April, Baba contacted and bowed down to 10,000 Kumbha Mela pilgrims. What was the significance of this work? How did it differ from his work with the masts? Since in the New Life Baba had become a seeker of God himself and was no longer a Master, why did He take on this exhausting and grueling labor?

Study question 4. A disagreement between Baba and Baidul on 1st April led to a major discussion between Baba and his Companions ten days later (11th April). Baba indicated that a fundamental divide in understanding separated Him from his Companions. Explain.

Study question 5. The upshot of the 11th April discussion was that Baba cancelled the three plans and began to put in place a new plan. But Baba had just created these three plans three months earlier. What was Baba's purpose in creating a new plan? How are we to make sense of these constant changes and upheavals?

Study question 6. A communication from Dr. Ghani, who had returned to Poona under Plan I-C, brought into view a major misunderstanding concerning a house owned by Ghani's wife and the Rs. 35,000 for which He was asking reimbursement. Explain what this complication was about. How did Baba resolve it?

Study question 7. Could Baba's visit to the Kumbha Mela with the women on 12th-13th April be regarded as holiday and occasion for sight-seeing? Did the New Life indeed allow for holidays and fun?

Session 9. "Final Months in North India: A New Plan, the Labor Phase, and the New Life Ghee Business" (April 14 to early June). (i) Conflicts involving the properties of Dr. Ghani and Sadashiv Patel. (ii) The stay in Manjri Mafi resumed (14th April through early May 1950). (iii) The New Plan. (iv) The Labor Phase in Delhi and the New Life ghee business. (v) Closing out the stay in Delhi and the shift to south India (May-June 1950). (vi) An overview of the stay in North India.

After finishing his Kumbha Mela work, Baba resumed life in Manjri Mafi through most of the month of April. But his profound dissatisfaction with the manner in which the New Life had been led until then led to his cancellation of Plans I, II, and III on 26th April and his formulation of a New Plan, as detailed in the thirty-eight points and conditions spelled out and enumerated in Circular 8 (pp. 186–94). Thereafter those who stayed with Baba did so as life-long "servant-companions." It would seem that much of the burden of actually living the New Life in its true and strict sense Baba took upon His own shoulders from this time on.

From the conditions of the New Plan it became apparent that Baba wanted the Companions to undertake the Labor Phase by starting a New Life business. With the help and guidance of Todi Singh, they established a New Life Ghee business, with its headquarters in Keki Desai's residence in Delhi. In the hot summer month of May in Delhi, the Companions labored in the onerous task of creating ghee from cream, packaging it in tins, and selling it on the streets of Delhi. It turned out, however, that the commercial ghee already on sale in Delhi was highly adulterated; since the New Life ghee was 100% pure, the Companions had priced themselves out of the market. Since the business was failing, after just a few weeks the New Life ghee business was dissolved and its equipment and back stock of ghee sold off.

With the closing out of the Labor Phase, Baba decided to shift His base of operations to south India. Bungalows for the (separate) accommodation of the men and women mandali were rented in Satara, a moderate-sized town located about a hundred kilometers south of Poona, and in early June Baba with his mandali moved there.

Study Questions for Session 9

Study question 1. After Ghani's and Sadashiv Patel's opting for Plan I-C and return to their homes in Poona in January 1950, each of these men became the source of a major complication for Baba. And in both cases, the problem centered on property, in particular, houses that they owned. Explain the situations that arose and how Baba ultimately chose to resolve them.

Study question 2. What is the New Plan? Why did Baba create it? And why did He dissolve Plans I, II, and III, so soon after having established them a few months before? Under the New Plan, Companions remaining with Baba were to be His "lifelong servant companions." What does this mean? How does it differ from the New Life as they had lived it previously?

Study question 3. How did it come about that Baba's Companions entered into the ghee business? Why was Todi Singh involved, and what help did he render? What is ghee, and through what kind of process is it made? Why did the New Life ghee business fail?

Study question 4. Critics of Meher Baba might observe that His behavior in the first half of 1950 seemed very erratic. Having concluded the training period on 31st December 1949 and having inaugurated the New Life in real earnest the next day, it was only three weeks later that Baba developed Plans I, II, and III. Just three months after this, in April He dissolved these three Plans and created the New Plan. Under this New Plan the Companions embarked on a ghee business; but after only a week or two, the business was closed down. Might one not interpret this as a record of failure? Why did Baba keep inaugurating new plans and undertakings, only to dissolve and abandon them before they had been properly tried?

Study question 5. Why do you suppose Baba ended his connection with north India, had the Manjri Mafi property sold off, and shifted to Satara? How would you describe His New Life residence in north India as a whole? Can you find some significance in this phase of the New Life?

Segment Four. The New Life in South India (Sessions 10–12)

For about six months from June 1950 through the end of the year, Baba shifted the scene of the New Life from north India (Dehra Dun and Delhi) to the Satara district in the Deccan plateau, about a hundred miles south of Poona. The first three months Baba was largely centered in the town of Satara itself. One of the great events of the New Life took place on 16th October, when Baba stepped back into the Old Life for a few hours and met with some of his Old Life followers. The events of this meeting had major ramifications. During the last few months of the year Baba traveled around India, largely in the course of his work with the poor. Some of the most memorable and touching stories of the New Life come from this phase.

Sessions 10. "The New Life Shifts to Satara" (June-July 1950). (i) A survey of the thirty-four New Life Circulars. (ii) A review of the New Life diaries of Dr. Abdul

Ghani (16th October 1949 through 21st January 1950) and Dr. Nilu (mid-January through 1st May 1950). (iii) An introduction to the Satara District. (iv) The stay in Satara. (v) The New Life on the women's side.

Throughout this study program, two of the major primary sources that we have relied on are the *New Life Circulars* and the New Life diaries. The *Circulars* were drafted under Baba's own direct supervision, printed through Adi's office in Ahmednagar, and sent out to a substantial list of Baba's Old Life followers throughout India. During a period when Baba had virtually severed all contact with Old Life followers and disciples, the *Circulars* represented the link. Numbered sequentially, there are thirty-four of them, issued between the dates 28th October 1949 and 1st February 1952.

For the first eight months of the New Life, detailed diaries were kept, first by Abdul Ghani, and after his departure on 21st January 1950, by Dr. Nilu. Nilu's diaries comprise the main substance of the first eight circulars. Ghani's diaries were never printed at the time, but they provide the major source of information about the New Life up through the start of the residence at Manjri Mafi. The practice of diary-keeping was ended on 1st May 1950, and after that date, our information about the New Life becomes much scantier, less detailed and intimate.

At Satara, Baba and the women moved into Mutha's Villa," while the men resided in Bhurke's Bungalow, half a mile away. During his weeks there, Baba had many occasions to share time with the women. To please Mehera, Baba procured a mare named Begum. Very sweet-natured, Begum became a favorite, and many amusing stories concern her. For several weeks in July, Kitty and Rano, Old Life disciples, were permitted to live with the women mandali, as were Khorshed and her mother Soonamasi. Much of Baba's activity on the men's side centered on Ali Shah and other masts, who had been brought to Satara. For several months Baba had been suffering from a gritty feeling in his eyes; but an eye doctor in Satara was able to solve this problem. This episode is the subject of Circular 11, sent out to Baba's Old Life following on 23rd June.

On 23rd June Baba issued an important statement about a major change in the New Life to take effect from that time. Circular 12, dated 27th July, actually called an event on the 25th, two days before, the "most eventful day of my New Life"! After reading out a previously composed message, Baba sent all his Companions from the room and privately reconfirmed the oath that He had personally sworn at the outset of the New Life. When the Companions returned, there followed a series of prayers. Baba concluded the meeting by serving lunch.

In late August Baba shifted the scene of the New Life, first to Poona, where He stayed from 21st to 28th August in a bungalow found for him by Meherwan and Papa Jessawala, and subsequently for two weeks in the Mahim district of Bombay. He returned to Satara on 14th September 1950.

Study Questions for Session 10

Study question 1. When you survey the thirty-four New Life circulars, do you notice a change after the conclusion of the eighth circular? To what do you attribute this? In view of the fact that the Circulars were practically the only source of news about Baba that the Old Life disciples and lovers received, how do you find them as news reports? Amid the radical differences in style, genre, and length between one circular and another, what consistencies can you find?

Study question 2. Nilu's diary, as reproduced in the early circulars, are detailed and replete with vivid descriptions of local color and Baba's moods. Dr. Ghani's diary, which provides the main source of information for several of the early chapters in Bhau's book, constitutes an equally rich source. But after the discontinuation of diary-keeping on 1st May 1950, the window we had been given into the intimacies of the New Life got closed. Our information after that time is far more remote and scanty. Why do you think Baba brought about this change?

Study question 3. The accounts of Baba's residence in Satara over the monsoon months of 1950 provide us with many episodes of what we could call "home life." Some examples of this involve the mare Begum and the short visit by Kitty and Rano. Relate a few of these stories. Once again, can we identify anything distinctive of the New Life in stories of this kind?

Study question 4. Baba said that 25th July was the "most eventful day of the New Life." In your understanding, what singles this day out as one of special importance? Baba had certain messages read out, reconfirmed his original New Life oath, and participated in prayers with his Companions. But He performed actions like this on other occasions. What made this particular occasion special?

Study Question 5. During his week in Poona, Baba permitted Eruch to stay with his (Old Life) family members, while in Bombay, Baba had contact with Old Life disciples like certain members of the Dadachanji family. Meanwhile, in Satara, the women Companions associated with Kitty, Rano, Khorshed, Soonamasi, and Naja. Do you think that Baba was relaxing some of the original severity of the New Life conditions?

Study Question 6. In Satara as in Manjri Mafi, we get glimpses of how the New Life was experienced by the women Companions. In fact, the women did not, in general, participate in formal events or in sessions in which the conditions and plans were discussed and negotiated. Nor did they participate in Baba's work with the poor or the masts. Much of their New Life experience seems to have been very homespun and familial. Yet though their roles were so radically different, both the women and the men took part in the New Life. How would you define and explain what the New Life was on the women's side?

Sessions 11. "The Meeting at Mahabaleshwar and Work with the Masts and Poor" (September–December, 1950). (i) Baba's message of 11th September 1950. (ii) The meeting at Mahabaleshwar on 16th October 1950. (iii) Baba's six-week whirlwind tour and His work with the masts and poor. (iv) Back in Mahabaleshwar for the Christmas season.

In a circular dated 11th September 1950, Baba conveyed to the general public His dissatisfaction with the way in which the New Life had been lived until that time, which had led to his decision to abolish the three Plans; after 1st October, the Companions had the choice of staying with him as lifelong servant-companions or returning to their homes. This circular features the immortal message about the New Life that is probably the most important of all declarations on the subject. But in addition, doubtless to the astonishment of his Old Life followers, Baba invited a group of them to a meeting in Mahabaleshwar on 16th October in which He would step back into the Old life for four hours.

That meeting of Baba with 200 of his male followers at the Aga Khan's bungalow in Mahabaleshwar stands as one of the most memorable occasions of the New Life. A sequence of events led to Baba ordering two of his followers to administer to him a hard slap; witnessing this led Parameshwari Nigam, who had come to the meeting with the possible intention of exposing Baba as a fraud and a sham, to surrender to him and become his devotee. Two of the great messages of the New Life, "Baba's Sermon" and "Baba's Message—16th October 1950," were read out. After resolving several problems among his Old Life followers, Baba confirmed his original oath and stepped back into the New Life. Eleven Companions decided to follow him; the rest returned back home to their old lives.

Over the next six weeks, Baba with a small group of Companions engaged in a whirlwind tour in search of masts and poor people; they traveled to Orissa, Nepal, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Madras, and Bombay. Some of the stories of Baba's work with formerly rich families who had fallen into destitution are among the most touching from the entire span of Baba's Avataric ministry. During his nine-day stay at Nariman and Arnava's apartment in Bombay in late November and early December, Baba was joined by certain Old Life disciples, including Ramjoo, who wrote an account of the period in his booklet *Meher Baba and the God-determined Step*. His deeply insightful comments there on Baba's appearance and aspect in the New Life and the person Baba seems to have become during this phase of his work merit close study.

On 6th December Baba returned to Mahabaleshwar, and the women mandali had opportunity to enjoy his company for several weeks. Over the Christmas holidays a group of young singers-devotees from Poona, led by the outstanding singer-songwriter Madhusudan, were given an opportunity to pour out their bhajans of praise before Baba.

Study Questions for Session 11

- Study question 1.* Though Baba had already expressed his dissatisfaction with the manner in which the New Life had been carried out until then, does it not seem impolitic and inconsiderate of Baba to have informed the entire Old Life community of this by broadcasting it in a circular? What does this tell you about the spirit of the New Life?
- Study question 2.* Why did Baba meet with Old Life followers on 16th October 1950 when He had so sternly warned that they would never see him again? What was the point of his actually "stepping out" of the New Life? Is not the New life itself compromised

when Baba performed actions like stepping out of it and associating with Old Life disciples, as He increasingly began to do from this time on?

Study question 3. “Baba’s Sermon” must surely claim a place as one of the most outstanding of all of Baba’s messages. What is its subject and theme? Would you consider it to be a message from the Old Life or from the New Life?

Study question 4. Over the six-week whirlwind tour of India, Baba made many contacts with masts. What are some of the differences that you can identify between his work with masts during the New Life and his work with masts in the years before that?

Study Question 5. A special kind of work during this phase involved the seeking out and serving of poor people who had previously been wealthy but who had fallen on hard times. Relate one or two of these heart-rending stories. Why were people of this kind especially hard to identify?

Study Question 6. Ramjoo’s description of his days with Baba in Bombay (in *Meher Baba and the God-determined Step*, pp. 5–20) include some deeply insightful observations on the relation between the Old Life and the New Life Baba. Comment.

Session 12. “The Great One-Hundred-Day Seclusion and the Move from Mahabaleshwar to Hyderabad” (January–May, 1951). (i) Preparations for the move to Hyderabad and more work with the masts and poor. (ii) The one-hundred-day Mahabaleshwar seclusion begins: the first forty days. (iii) The second sixty-day phase of the Mahabaleshwar seclusion. (iv) A short period of rest in Hyderabad.

At the end of December, New Life Circular No. 20 announced Baba’s intention to undertake a 100-day seclusion in the Aga Khan’s bungalow in Mahabaleshwar starting on 13th February. Since Baba intended to shift his base of operations to Hyderabad starting June 1951, in mid-January He paid a brief visit to that city for the renting two bungalows. During that visit, and on the way back to Poona, He contacted masts and the poor, work which He continued in Bombay at the end of the month.

The first forty days of the 100-day seclusion were carried out by Baba in a straw hut which Padri constructed in Florence Hall in Mahabaleshwar. Circulars 23 and 24 gave detailed information about Baba’s program, which included, strangely, the alternation between complete darkness and the glare of intense light, created by petromax lanterns. During and after this forty-day phase, Baba seemed utterly exhausted, as was commented on by Kitty Davy at the time. In a major “Statement” published in the twenty-fifth New Life Circular, Baba described His work in this phase as “crucial” and “important”; “without the help of God,” He said, He “could not have gone through this ordeal successfully.” Baba hinted that this seclusion work was connected with an “extraordinary revolutionary change in my life and the lives of the servants” which God would bring about starting in June. Later Baba called this a “God-determined Step,” which turned out to be the Manonash phase.

During the remaining sixty days of the seclusion, Baba traveled to Poona and other places. The accommodation which His Old Life disciples found for Him in Poona was Guruprasad palace, which became one of his major places of residence for the next two

decades. Some of his Old Life followers who met him during this time were shocked by his emaciated condition.

The hundred-day seclusion ended on 23rd May, and immediately thereafter Baba shifted his seat to Hyderabad. There He enjoyed a brief time of rest, as He prepared for the major meeting at the end of June.

Study Questions for Session 12

Study question 1. Several of the Circulars provide extensive information about Baba's work with the masts and poor in January 1951. It seems that the second year of Baba's New Life centered extensively around this kind of work. Are you able to make out what significance this might have?

Study question 2. During the first ten months of the New Life, much of Baba's attention seems to have been focused on his Companions; and Baba found much to criticize on that score. But after the October 1950 meeting in Mahabaleshwar, Baba has little to say about them. Can you explain this? Might it be that the New Life increasingly centered on Baba himself, and the servant-companions became largely ancillary to the main work of the New Life?

Study question 3. Part of Baba's work in the first phase of the hundred-day seclusion entailed alternation between complete darkness and glaring light. What do you make of this?

Study question 4. Though at the time of the hundred-day seclusion Baba had said nothing about "Manonash" as such, in retrospect it seems that this seclusion served as a preparation for the Manonash phase. Comment.

Study question 5. At the end of one of the most intensive days in the early part of the hundred-day seclusion, Baba asked Eruch to provide him with some relief by telling a story. What Eruch related was what we could call the "secret history" behind the building of the Taj Mahal. Can you relate this story?

Study question 6. How was Guruprasad secured as a place for Baba's accommodation during the latter part of the hundred-day seclusion?

Study question 7. Mahabaleshwar provided the major scene and venue for Baba's New Life from August 1950 through May 1951. What were the major phases of his New Life work during this period?

Segment Five. Manonash (Sessions 13–15)

In June of 1951, Baba embarked on what proved to be the last phase of the New Life, i.e., Manonash. This began with a momentous meeting in Hyderabad at the end of the month in which Baba explained to the seventy-five Old Life follower and disciples whom He had specially invited what the "God-determined step" entailed. Manonash itself was launched on 16th October 1951 with a seclusion in a cave outside Hyderabad. Essential tools which Baba took with Him and made use of during this seclusion were alabaster models of the places of worship in five of the great world religions. Wrapping up this seclusion in nine days, Baba with His Companions set out on a journey, partly on foot

and partly by bus, from Hyderabad to Meherabad, where Baba secluded Himself again, first in a cabin on Tembi (now known as “Seclusion Hill”) and later in the same cabin reconstructed on Meherabad premises where it still stands today. Baba stepped out of the cabin and ended His forty-day seclusion on 1st February 1952. He issued a major message on the subject of Manonash on 6th February; and on this same day, the New Life came to an end.

Sessions 13. “The Meeting at Hyderabad” (June, 1951). (i) Early arrivals: 20th–27th June. (ii) The main gathering of the seventy-five men, 27th–30th June. (iii) Baba’s “Declaration” with its “Corollary: What God Has Determined,” 28th June. (iv) Baba’s discourse on the mind, ego, and the paths to God. (v) Closing the meeting with the comic talent show.

Along with New Life Circular 25 sent to His Old Life followers on 1st May, Baba included an invitation to certain select male followers to attend a meeting at Hyderabad at the end of June. For this purpose, Baba had rented a palatial bungalow for the accommodation of His guests and for the actual meetings. A handful of special invitees arrived on 21st June, and a handful more on the 23rd. The main group of seventy-five men gathered on 27th June. Over the next three days, Baba described the God-Determined Step, known as Manonash, that turned out to be the final phase of the New Life.

During the preparation for the meeting, Baba even went so far as to say that, through the course of this new phase, He was “going to see the Old Meher Baba or go blind.” From that time, Baba’s reestablishing Himself in a state that integrated His Old Life and New Life states began to emerge as one of the goals of Manonash.

The real business of the meeting began on 28th June with a major “Declaration” and “Corollary” setting forth “What God Has Determined.” Through the course of thirteen points, Baba explained that the “God-determined Step” entailed “complete and absolute annihilation.” Either this would be accomplished by 16th February, Baba said, or any one of several unfortunate consequences would ensue. Baba explained that Old Life disciples and followers could offer to join Him in this undertaking, though they should realize the seriousness of this and not act on an impulse. Among these applications, Baba would select those whom He wanted. At the end of the session, Baba had read out a “Declaration” in which He pleaded to “take this step of Annihilation on October 16th of this year.”

In the afternoon, continuing on into the next day, Baba delivered an extraordinary discourse that Ramjoo entitled “Man-nash, i. e. Annihilation of Mind, or Khaatima-e-Nufs.” The first part of this discourse talked about mind, the ego false and real, impressions, and the need for annihilation. In the second part, Baba reviewed the three great paths to God laid down by the Masters—that is, action, meditation, and love. Yet each of these paths is so difficult as almost to be impossible. Though Baba Himself did not make the point, the implication emerges that only through the Avatar Himself accomplishing the annihilation of the mind could the path to God become open to seekers and lovers of God again.

After all these discussions, Baba interviewed the twenty-one men who had offered to join Him on the Manonash phase, and in the end selected six. To provide relief after all the intensity, Baba called for a humorous talent show, in which various of the men played out comic parts. After a tour on 30th June in which the attendees got to see some of the sights of Hyderabad, all returned to their homes.

Study Questions for Session 13

Study question 1. In view of the fact that renunciation was central to the New Life, why did Baba host the June 1951 meeting in a palace? Does this not undercut the very point of the meeting?

Study question 2. From the beginning of the Manonash phase, Baba began to hint that, in some sense, He would return to His Old Life Meher Baba state. How do you understand this? In view of such an outcome, what was the purpose of His having renounced this Old Life state in the first place?

Study question 3. When Baba was given God-realization by Hazrat Babajan in 1913, presumably she must have brought about the annihilation of His mind at that time. Why was there a need for Him to annihilate His mind again in Manonash?

Study question 4. In point two of his “Declaration,” Baba outlines four outcomes that could result from His effort to annihilate the mind by 12th February. What are these four outcomes? How do you understand the fact that Baba did not seem to be sure that Manonash would be successful?

Study Question 5. Why do you suppose Baba opened up this last phase of the New Life to the possible participation of Old Life followers who had not been admitted into the New Life until then?

Study Question 6. In His two-day discourse, Baba explains the almost insuperable difficulties that face the aspirant on the paths of meditation, action, and love. Explain what these difficulties are.

Study Question 7. Although Baba set out to lead the New Life in 1949 with twenty Companions, He embarked on Manonash alone, in the sense that, although servant companions accompanied Him, none of them attempted Manonash. Why? Does this mean that the fulfillment of the New Life is impossible for everyone except Baba Himself?

Session 14. “The Inauguration of Manonash” (July–November 1951). (i) Preparations for Manonash. (ii) Seclusion in the Manonash Cave in Hyderabad. (iii) The journey from Hyderabad to Aurangabad. (iv) The significance of Khuldabad and Ellora.

After the conclusion of the Hyderabad meeting at the end of June, Baba began to prepare for the onset of Manonash, whose inauguration was scheduled for 16th October 1951. In preparation for this, Baba outlined three phases, the first encompassing a seclusion in a cave outside Hyderabad for thirty to forty days, the second an on-foot journey from Hyderabad to Aurangabad, and the third a seclusion at Pimpalgaon (at the fringe of Meherabad).

Baba's seclusion at the cave outside Hyderabad entailed his use of five alabaster models representing the religions of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Baba made use of an Islamic *dargah* on the summit of the hill, the Manonash Cave itself, and the Krishna temple below.

Completing His seclusion work sooner than expected, Baba with his servant-companions—Eruch, Pendu, Baidul, Gustadji, and Daulat Singh—set out on an expedition from Hyderabad to Aurangabad, which was accomplished largely on foot and in part on bus. Some of the memorable moments on this journey included a feeding of 101 poor people at the town of Warangal and the meeting with Tilgur Swami, one of the Jivanmuktas of the age.

Study Questions for Session 14

Study question 1. How did Baba's servant-companions find the Manonash cave? Relate the story.

Study question 2. Describe the landscape of the Hyderabad Cave. Where was the cave in relation to the *dargah* and the Hindu temple?

Study question 3. During this seclusion, Baba worked with five models, evidently representing five of the great world religions. What was the significance of this?

Study question 4. Why did Baba undertake an expedition on foot from Hyderabad to Aurangabad? What does this have to do with Manonash—the annihilation of the mind?

Study question 5. Do Hyderabad and Aurangabad, as places, have any special relation to Baba's work of Manonash? Explain.

Session 15. “The Culmination of Manonash” (8th November 1951 through 6th February 1952). (i) Manonash at Aurangabad. (ii) Baba's work on Tembi (Seclusion Hill) and the shift to Meherazad. (iii) Baba pays respect to His departed ones. (iv) The final month of Manonash.

The journey from Hyderabad culminated on 8th November with the entry into Maharashtra; and for the next two weeks Baba worked in the neighborhood of the city of Aurangabad. Three places especially rich in history were the village of Khuldabad, associated with the memory of many great Sufi masters, the Ellora Caves, with their extraordinary carved temples and statuaries, and the fortress of Daulatabad.

Again, much of Baba's time was devoted to mast contacts and service to the poor. Several memorable New Life stories derive from this period. One involves the search for an old, venerable Catholic priest; another concerns a seclusion that Baba carried out in a cemetery. But perhaps the most outstanding incident from this period took place at a mosque at Imampur during Baba's journey from Aurangabad to Meherazad. Baba's anger at being disturbed at night by the fluttering of birds, and the penance which He imposed upon Himself the next morning, stands as one of the most iconic stories from this entire phase of Baba's life.

Arriving at Meherazad, Baba began His seclusion in a cabin which Padri had constructed on Tembi, now known as Seclusion Hill. Since strong winds disturbed his work there, however, at Baba's directive Padri reconstructed the cabin at Meherazad below; and from mid-December the "Manonash Cabin," as it is now known, along with the Blue Bus, became the venues of Baba's seclusion work. Much of this involved the use of the five alabaster models, along with pictures of the Avatars. Over the next month the mandali were involved in this process through the recitation of prayers. Baba worked with a number of masts brought to Meherazad by Baidul.

On 24th December Baba conducted a ceremony devoted to devotees and disciples who had passed away. For this purpose, a list of 124 names was compiled by Adi. This provided one of the bases for the names on the Memorial Tower recently constructed and inaugurated at Lower Meherabad. After this event, Baba began to sleep once more in His old bedroom upstairs in the Meherazad bungalow.

31st January was a particularly memorable day, that featured the recitation of prayers and, at sunset, the lighting of a dhuni, into which Baba had Eruch throw a piece of paper with the writing, "The ceremonies, rites and rituals of all the religions of the world are hereby consumed into flames." The next morning Baba stepped out of the Manonash cabin, ending His seclusion. Five days later, on 6th February, Baba declared that Manonash and the New Life had reached its conclusion.

Study Questions for Session 15

Study question 1. As perhaps at other times during Manonash, the last phase, from Baba's arrival in Aurangabad until the end of conclusion in February, seemed to bring **religion** and **religious practice** into the foreground of attention. Can you give several examples of this?

Study question 2. Why might Aurangabad have served as a suitable place for Baba's Manonash work? In the vicinity of Aurangabad, the village of Khuldabad and the fort of Daulatabad are associated with the history of Islam, while the Ellora Caves feature Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples. Does this seem significant to you?

Study question 3. Relate the story of Baba's night at the mosque in Imampur. In what ways does this incident illustrate some of the major themes of the New Life?

Study question 4. Baba's seclusion on Tembi used cabins which had originally been put in place there several years before. Relate some of the history of this Hill. Why do you think Baba began His seclusion work there? Can you think of other hills that featured in Baba's seclusion work in the years preceding?

Study question 5. In the middle of the final forty days of Manonash, Baba shifted the site of His working and relocated into Meherazad itself, where He had carried out the Great Seclusion in June of 1949. Why do you think Baba chose to end Manonash—and the New life—in this place?

Study question 6. What significance do you attribute to the slip of paper and its burning in the Dhuni on January 31st? Comment on the significance and appropriateness of Manonash and the New Life ending in this way.;

Segment Six. “Life” (Sessions 16–17)

With the closing of the Manonash phase and the wrapping up of the New Life, in early February 1952 Baba inaugurated what He called “Life,” that encompassed three phases, the Complicated Free Life, the Full Free Life, and the Fiery Free Life. While it is unclear precisely when the Fiery Free Life came to an end, all of this seems to have culminated with Meher Baba’s declaration of His Avatarhood and His message “The Highest of the High” given in Dehra Dun on 7th September 1954.

Sessions 16. “The Free Life” (February 1952 through April 1953). (i) Baba’s first Life Circular on Manonash. (ii) The three phases of the Free Life—the Complicated Free Life, the Full Free Life, and the Fiery Free Life. (iii) A brief review of the history of the three Free Lives, March 1952 through April 1953. (iv) Life Circular no. 9 (28th March 1953) and Baba’s messages on Freedom, Divine Love, the Purpose of Life, and Honesty. (v) “The Highest of the High” (7th September 1954).

The first of the so-called “Life Circulars,” whose content was dictated by Baba on 6th February 1952, constitutes one of the most important of all the messages of Manonash, and it conveys some notion of the merging of the Old Life with the New Life in what Baba now simply called “Life.”

This gave birth to three sub-phases, which He explained on 21st March 1952 in Life Circular no. 5. In the first of these, the “Complicated Free Life,” binding would dominate freedom. In the second, the “Full Free Life,” freedom would dominate binding. And in the Fiery Free Life, both freedom and binding “will be merged into the Divine Life.” Baba gave March 21st, July 10th, and November 15th, 1952 as the starting dates for each of these Free Lives, respectively. It is unclear exactly when the Fiery Free Life came to an end, though at one juncture Baba indicated He wanted to wrap this phase up in April 1953.

These three phases map in a most interesting way on the history of Baba’s life and activities over this period. On 24th May 1952, right in the center of the Complicated Free Life, Meher Baba met with the first of his automobile accidents, in Prague, Oklahoma. During much of the Full Free Life, when Baba was recuperating from his injuries from these accidents, He was dynamically engaged in the establishment of new links and relationships with His worldwide following. During the Fiery Free life, Meher Baba conducted a darshan tour of Hamirpur and Andhra Pradesh, and it was during this period, when His love was spreading like wildfire, that His first large communities of lovers within India began to take shape.

From the Fiery Free Life on, Meher Baba began to emerge more and more on the public stage. This culminated with His public declaration of Avatarhood in February 1954. His great message “The Highest of the High,” delivered in Dehra Dun on 7th September 1954, represents a high point in this process. Thus we can see the culmination

of Baba's renunciation of this Old Life Meher Baba status in October 1949 in His ascendency and occupation of the office of the Avatar of the age.

Study Questions for Session 16

Study question 1. What are some of the major themes of the first of the Life Circulars (6th February 1952)? As explained in this circular, what is "Life"? How does it combine and integrate the Old Life and the New Life?

Study question 2. The "Life" period subdivided into what Baba called the "Complicated Free Life," the "Full Free Life," and the "Fiery Free Life." Define and explicate each of these.

Study question 3. After the culmination of the New Life in the achievement of Manonash, why were these three Free Lives necessary? If Manonash had achieved the annihilation of the mind, why did the first of the Free Lives have to be "complicated"?

Study question 4. What correlations do you see between the "Complicated Free Life" (21st March through 9th July 1952), the "Full Free Life" (10th July through 14th November 1952), and the "Fiery Free Life" (15th November 1952 through April 1954) and Baba's life and activities during these periods?

Study question 5. Might the Free Live and its three sub-phases have played a role in Baba's self-establishment in the office of Avatar?

Session 17. "Review and Summary."

There are two additional sessions planned for LIVE Q&A:

First is planned mid-series after Session 8.

Second is planned at the end of the series after Session 17.