

# Meher Baba – The Silent Master

## My own silence.

Since this website opened I have been thinking I should try to say something here about my relationship with the Silent Master Meher Baba. I also feel perhaps that I should try to explain why I myself have been relatively silent about him for the last twenty years.



In 1980 my solo album *Empty Glass* was released, the inner sleeve bearing a quotation from Meher Baba: ‘Desire for nothing except desirelessness, hope for nothing except to rise above all hopes, want nothing and you will have everything’. This was one of the last public statements about Meher Baba I made.

Prior to that I had respected Meher Baba’s wishes that his followers did not try to evangelise on his behalf; he had suggested we simply tried to love him, and obey the spiritual guidelines handed down to his own close disciples in his Discourses<sup>1</sup>. But I had always spoken about Meher Baba when questioned by journalists: I’d published some pieces about Meher Baba in the press<sup>2</sup>. Once or twice I even appeared to discuss the nature of my faith on a religious TV shows<sup>3</sup>. From 1976-1980 I funded a pilgrim centre in London (Meher Baba Oceanic) which allowed short-term residencies. So I had been

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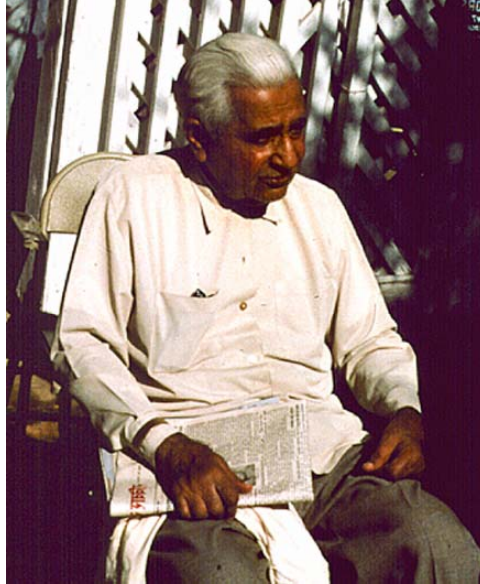
<sup>1</sup> ‘Discourses’ by Meher Baba. Sufism Reoriented. CA. 1967.

<sup>2</sup> ‘In Love With Meher Baba’ *Rolling Stone* Nov 1970.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The Timeless Moment’ 17 July 1970. BBC-2. BBC TV; ‘How Can You Be So Sure?’ 27 March 1972. BBC-1. BBC TV.

accessible to those who were sincerely interested in Meher Baba, and a fairly open target for those who just wanted to meet a rock star.

During this time Adi K. Irani was one of a group of disciples who guided me. Adi had been Meher Baba's secretary for a time, and attended the opening of Oceanic in July 1976, and continued to visit and stay for long periods whenever he travelled to the West.



Adi K. Irani  
1976

My centre for Meher Baba had also been blessed by Mehera - Meher Baba's spiritual 'opposite', and the principal female disciple. She sent a beautiful pink silk coat once worn by Meher Baba which became the centrepiece of a small collection of precious artefacts that were touched, used or worn by the Master.



Mehera - 1976

Delia DeLeon who had met Meher Baba in England in 1931, and who was a devoted disciple all her days, was a driving force behind my efforts to do some work in Britain for Meher Baba. Mani Irani, Meher Baba's younger sister, and head of the trust in India that administered copyrights, was also encouraging.



Mani Irani with Delia DeLeon  
1976

Murshida Ivy Duce, the head of the Reoriented Sufi movement in California that Meher Baba had sanctioned with his own unique authority, also pulled heavily behind me. One thing they all warned was that my Oceanic centre would only happen if Meher Baba wanted it, and when it had served its purpose it would end.

Everything began well, and I greatly enjoyed being a part of the constant ebb and flow of international visitors. I also enjoyed hosting musical concerts<sup>4</sup>, plays and film shows as well as the more usual talks and devotional gatherings. I produced a dozen small films related to Meher Baba, and even directed one myself – *'Delia'*. From 1976 until the middle of 1979 I was (blessed by all but self-appointed) very much in the forefront of all activity in the U.K. surrounding Meher Baba.

During 1979 I fell foul of life and was drinking very heavily indeed. By February of 1980 I was plunged suddenly into what felt like rank hypocrisy (by my own judgement). In that month I turned again to drugs.

When I had first heard about Meher Baba in 1967 I had been immediately engaged, but I had postponed any serious commitment to his teaching. In 1968 it was pointed out to me that when Meher Baba proscribed the continued use of hallucinogenic drugs for his sincere followers - even if they had come to him through some degree of experimentation with such drugs - he also censured the smoking of cannabis. From that moment on, I

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<sup>4</sup> 'The Oceanic Concert'. Pete Townshend with Raphael Rudd. Rhino Records. To be released 2001. Will be available [www.eelpie.com](http://www.eelpie.com)

stopped using cannabis, the only drug I had ever really enjoyed. I had tried LSD with inspiring but disastrous results, but I'd managed to avoid cocaine and heroin. Until then I had just smoked the occasional joint. I became drug-free.

As a rock star in a band like The Who, with Keith Moon so openly using any and every drug available, I often found myself in what felt like a spiritual testing ground. Keith may have fallen off his drum stool a few times because of drug abuse, but he also seemed to have a truly wonderful life. I was often envious and wondered whether my own abstinence was going to last. Meher Baba's most famous quote was, after all, 'Don't Worry, Be Happy.' One of my best friends in the music business, who also followed Meher Baba, was Ronnie Lane. Ronnie drank like I did, but when I wasn't around I knew he still smoked grass. I respected his spiritual ideas very much. I often wondered whether I was being too puritanical with myself with respect to drugs.

My abstinence from drugs in that period did last twelve years, and looking back it is clear that I had managed most of the time to avoid making severe moral or critical judgements about those around me who continued to use drugs. Sometimes a measure of censure or disapproval came out in my creative work – as with songs like *Acid Queen* from *Tommy*. Indeed *Tommy* in its entirety could be said to carry an anti-drug message. What made my abstinence from drugs easy was that I loved alcohol. I didn't get into trouble with alcohol until I got into trouble with life itself in the early '80s. Perhaps trouble-with-life and trouble-with-alcohol intertwine, but for many years, while family life and career and my efforts for Meher Baba ran smoothly I drank purely for pleasure not necessity. But I drank a lot. It may be no coincidence that I had been in a group with Keith Moon. He drank like I did, but he had also taken drugs. Lots of drugs, in unmanageable and dangerous amounts. I am certain that as a result I underestimated the long-term effect of my own drinking – I seemed quite normal when compared to Keith. I lost my handy barometer for decency versus self-abuse when Keith died in 1978. When eleven Who fans lost their lives in a stampede at our concert in Cincinnati in 1979 even alcohol failed to ease the pain.

So in February 1980 - with Keith long gone, and life delivering me its usual problems - I picked up cocaine. I wasn't crazy about cocaine, but I enjoyed the way it focussed my social life. I hope that doesn't seem disingenuous – I mean that when I had cocaine I had 'friends', and life was like a 'party'. By 1981 my quite restrained cocaine use had nonetheless allowed the quantum increase in my intake of brandy to around three bottles a day. I drank it neat; I loved it so much I used to sometimes sleep with a Remy Martin bottle in my arms like a pet cat. Predictably, I started to become ill. Briefly I fell victim to *Ativan*®, prescribed to me to help me stop drinking, and finally heroin. This may seem bizarre to anyone who hasn't used the very effective (but addictive) Hoffman-La Roche anti-depressant – but I used heroin to help me try to get off *Ativan*®. On Valentine's day 1982 I checked myself out of a month's treatment in California and went home to my family and The Who, and tried to pick up life where I had left off. I quickly made some crazy mistakes in my life. I was drug-free and alcohol-dry and remained that way for a further eleven years. (In 1993 I started to drink again for a year, never returning to drugs. But that story belongs elsewhere).

What was clear to me in early 1980 was that I could no longer stand as any kind of public representative for Meher Baba with such recent alcohol and drug-abuse problems. Meher Baba Oceanic, the pilgrim centre I had run, had in any case slowed down to a

crawl while I descended into self-obsession. Several of my employees there had gone through problems of their own, and some time in 1982 I impolitely sacked everyone. I then shut down the living quarters and confined the Meher Baba Association to a single room in the building. They moved within a year to new premises they still occupy in Shepherd's Bush in London<sup>5</sup> – very near the Goldhawk Road, an area very important in The Who's early career. I concentrated my efforts as a follower of Meher Baba on developing a complete and secure archive of the majority of the extant movie film of him that needed preservation and archiving. That work continues today under the auspices of a new company called MEFA (MeherBaba-European-Film-Archive).

So one way or another, fair and foul, I have been following Meher Baba for thirty-four years. Today I avoid making public pronouncements about his status as a spiritual master. He claimed to be the Avatar (another word for 'Christ'), but so do other self-appointed masters in India and elsewhere. I have my own conviction, and I enjoy a very intimate and special relationship with him that – because he passed away in 1969 (two years after I started to follow him, and before I had a chance to meet him) – is entirely spiritual in nature. I enjoy his sense of humour if that doesn't sound too daft. I often feel that I can see mischievous signs of his presence in my daily life, coincidences or delightful moments.



Meher Baba's chair in Meherazad.

But I feel Meher Baba too in the darker side of life we all face today. My own journey required that I learn some true humility, and also not to take myself so seriously. My drinking and drug crash would have meant little had I been content to be just a rock star, it might even have helped my career. But, as someone who had vaunted so often the spiritual power of music and audience congregation, I fell further when I crashed. I am

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<sup>5</sup> The Meher Baba Association, Flat 1, 288 Hammersmith Grove, London W6 7HG.

thus - I hope - more tempered and less melodramatic about spiritual matters. I hope too that I am in a better position now to speak about what it is that really makes me continue to follow Meher Baba.

It is quite simply that I have come to love him unconditionally. That might seem dangerous, but I am asked to give no money; I am asked to make no public statements on behalf of those who carry out the work of carrying his message to the world. I am asked for nothing, except sometimes my presence in India to say goodbye to the remaining older disciples who fondly remember my musical visits in 1972<sup>6</sup> and 1976. I remember my friends in India fondly too, and I miss them. I hope it is true humility and not lost pride that prevents me from running back like some kind of Prodigal celebrity. I concentrate my efforts now on the MEFA film archive project, and in finding Meher Baba in the rhythm of my daily life.



Sunset over Meher Baba's tomb - 1976

A little later this year, when I have processed some more of the images, I would like to post some of my film and photographs of my two pilgrimages to India. I would also like to be able to write here a decent biography of Meher Baba, and to help elucidate his message and teachings. But there are many terrific books available that will do that job better than I can. I mention a few below that I myself particularly like; they may lead you to others<sup>7</sup>. They may indeed lead you to other spiritual pathways, but Meher Baba is mine. I follow him carrying in parallel a powerful residual childhood love for Jesus. But that love does not embrace organised Christianity I'm afraid. All my life Christians I respect have proselytised to me, and I am happy to be their target and to know they are secure in their faith. But I will reciprocate with no scriptural sallies of my own. I follow Meher Baba and I do so quietly, if not completely silently.

Pete Townshend  
London. July 2001  
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<sup>6</sup> In 1972 I sang O'Parvardigar by Meher Baba's tomb. The recording is available at [www.eelpie.com](http://www.eelpie.com)

<sup>7</sup> 'The Ocean of Love' Delia deLeon. Sheriar Press. (SC). 1991; 'Much Silence' Tom and Dorothy Hopkinson. Gollancz (U.K) 1974; 'The God-Man'. C.B. Purdom. Sheriar Press. (SC) 1964.

