

Goher's Grief

When I first visited Meherazad in January of 1974 the dream of my childhood had come true—I found myself walking on the sacred grounds of paradise. The moment my foot touched the ground in front of Mandali Hall as I alighted from the rickshaw, my heart skipped a beat. I knew I had arrived. It was not so much about the physical nature of the surroundings, or even the visual attributes of the compound that told me this. *It was the feeling of tender, divine beauty that enveloped me.* It was exactly as I had imagined paradise to be in childhood. When I was young, I often lived in my mind and heart. I created a safe place, I pretended I lived in heaven. As a child I had an unquenchable desire to go to heaven, born from a longing I had to go visit God. I knew as early as I can remember that God was walking on the planet and all I had to do was find Him. I used to tell people that one day I would meet God and have cake and ice cream with Him.

I grabbed my bag out of the rickshaw and as I turned around, I could peek into Mandali Hall through the open door. I knew this to be where the Seat of the Lord was. It struck me that I could touch things that were divine in Meherazad. I even stuck the tip of my tongue out into the air to see if I could taste it. *I could!* Then I had the strangest urge to get down and roll in the dirt! The Mandali laughed about this when I told them later. Something about the dust left me awestruck! As I walked around Meherazad, it was overwhelming to think that God had walked on each speck. My feet literally were covered by blessed earth!

In those early days, ten pilgrims visiting Meherazad was considered a crowd. I do not remember if anyone else was there my first day, but somehow, I felt free to let my imagination dance in Meherazad, and it continued for several weeks. His Grace must have touched the ache in my heart for me to feel so blessed that He had invited me to fall into a mystical awakening after a long and deep slumber. I felt as if I was walking through a Maxwell Parrish painting that went on forever; it was dream-like. Everything and everyone seemed to have a divine glow. I believed the fruit from the Meherazad garden had His Blessing. The platters laden with

seasonal fruit, such as mangos, papaya, ramphal, sitaphal, coconuts and bananas most certainly were handpicked by Baba, and had His divine Kiss to be so sweet and tasty. Unleavened bread shared with pilgrims surely had been baked and crisped by a fire lit by the hands of the Lord. I imagined the towels the chapatis and bakhari were wrapped in had been used to dry His hands! I loved walking up and down the veranda while running my hand across the door latches as I imagined Baba's hands grasping the clasp as He entered the room. If I were alone on the men's side, I would walk up and down the veranda several times, back and forth, gliding my hands across those latches, over and over again. It was electrifying, intoxicating really.

On days when there was no clinic I would sit quietly and listen to the breeze that rustled through the trees. It had to be Baba's Breath that caressed my face. Crows cawing from the treetops brought a smile to my face. Could these be the same crows that broke the silence Baba needed for His rest and that were shooed away at times? Bullock carts rumbling along dirt paths on their wooden wheels, brass bells clanging on the bullocks, had a rhythmic flow that matched the cadence of the hooves. Had Baba heard them, too? These sounds and thoughts all had such a soothing effect on me. What a joy to share something that my Beloved had experienced too!

Village life went on in the distance. Girls dressed in blue skirts with flower-printed blouses ran alongside boys wearing white pants and shirts as they sang songs while tending herds of goats along the Meherazad boundary. Their melodic voices carried into the compound from the surrounding fields, permeating it with the innocence of children. I enjoyed the laughter of women as it rippled through the air while they walked along narrow foot paths. Some balanced large metal pans filled with cow dung they would later use to make patties; after drying them in the sun, they were used for fuel. Others carried brass or copper containers filled with water they had drawn from the well. The containers were positioned on a piece of cloth atop their heads that had been twisted into a circle which served to balance their cargo. Sunlight sparkled in the droplets of water

that at times splashed out of the container and trickled down onto their heads while they walked back to the village. It was all so peaceful.

As I took in the ancient nature of village life, unstained by Western culture, it slowed the rhythm of my heartbeat and uplifted my spirit—I felt a sense of calm and safety. I marveled at the great fortune these people had to be born alongside the outskirts of paradise, and I liked that heaven had a casual nature to it. But most of all it was the atmosphere of Meherazad, the divine fragrance I could not see but felt deep down. Yes, I was seated in heaven, and I loved it.

I found the guileless manner of Baba's close ones to be intriguing. They had no pretense, wore no robes; there were no beads hung around their necks. I sensed their humility without anyone acting pious or humble. I laughed at the thought I had found a home filled with all my favorite aunts and uncles! The Mandali seemed to me to be so loosely bound by the world, almost untangled from the yarn-ball of life, yet they could still be so engaging with others. A collection of loose strings, they openly and freely shared the beauty of each magnificently colored thread, claiming no ownership. Each implored us pilgrims to take a thread in hand and tug on it and encouraged us to explore where it led. I took full advantage of such an offer, and on special days when I was lucky to find a gold thread in my hand, I knew the day was going to be like no other. I knew the threads had all been loomed by the Master Weaver. He had created the masterpiece tapestries that were His Companions, and this put me in a state of jubilation. All around the Meherazad compound, threads and strings could be found in abundance. Each perfectly spun thread led to divine discovery without fail.

I always took a thread or a piece of string with me when I left in the evening. I quickly learned the threads were offered from an open hand without expectation of being returned. I had no shame to grab onto two or three when needed which was often. I could not resist tucking these exquisite pieces of divinely loomed silk and cotton threads into the special pocket in my heart as I headed out, cycling down the approach road back

to town on my bicycle. All these lovely treasures were attached in some manner to the Mandali. I knew each thread was part of a swaddling in a divine cradle within their hearts and no one would be denied the opportunity to gently rock that Divine Baby.

As exquisite as these Meherazad moments were, I also felt palpable pain. I could feel it when I sat quietly and opened my heart, expecting something else to come. It lingered even though it was invisible. The pain I sensed had an innocent nature to it and remained hidden from sight in the beginning. Neither dark or foreboding, I was not overwhelmed emotionally, but when I stilled my mind and sat with closed eyes, I could feel it. The grief and pain ran deep, and each possessed a spiritual strength strong enough to cut through rock, like spring water does as it finds its way out of the mountain. And just like a spring flows from within the mountain to its release, grief must flow outward from within the heart in its own unique purifying process. I wondered—could the purity of the spring water quench the thirst of so many aching hearts?

As days became weeks, I learned that each of the Mandali had their special time and place where grief was expressed, so bits of their pain could be released. In the early years of the 1970s Dr. Goher used to go into the Blue Bus just after sunrise—it was here she found privacy and would weep for Baba. Sometimes she shed soft tears, other times you could hear her anguish as she spoke to Him. She lamented what she believed were her lack of skills as a doctor to care for her Beloved. She begged His forgiveness, apologizing for not being able to help with His physical suffering. She wept as she told Baba how sorry she was for her (mistaken) belief that she had not been able to diagnose Him properly and had prolonged His agony. It was heart wrenching to hear. Several days during the week I would reach Meherazad at sunrise. By the time I had secured my bicycle and reached the edge of the veranda by the kitchen in front of the dispensary, I might hear her at times. I took my cue from the men who always remained aloof when she came to the Blue Bus, to give her the privacy she needed; I would turn around and go sit on the parapet at the bridge by the Meherazad Gate. I waited to return to the veranda until I

heard the voices of the men, as this was a sign Goher had returned to the house.

One day Goher saw me sitting down on the bench at the end of the men's veranda as she was opening the Blue Bus door. I was horrified! I had not seen her bicycle and thought I was being discreet. When she called out to me, I froze. I thought for sure she was going to scold me for being an intruder and was shocked when she called out, "Come help me up the steps. I want you to help me move the stretcher in the Bus so we can clean." I had a moment when I did not know if I should turn and run away or go to her. Without thinking I replied with a shaky voice, "I'll go sit on the parapet, Goher. I don't want to disturb you." She extended her index finger, and shaking it at me, exclaimed, "Are you mad? I am an old lady, and my legs pain me. Come help me up the stairs and bring your giant body over here and let me put you to work!"

I was taken aback. When Goher came to the men's side in those early morning hours, we all retreated from the area of the Blue Bus out of respect and to provide the privacy she deserved. But on this day, I found myself at her side; I opened the Blue Bus door and helped her up the steps. Once inside, Goher showed me how to clean the interior of the Blue Bus—she was meticulous with every detail. I am ashamed to admit this, but I did not feel cleaning the Blue Bus as a privilege to serve Baba. Instead, I saw it as an opportunity for an intimate moment of shared love with Goher because it comforted my own pain. At the time I was barely 23 years old and struggling to remain tethered to the planet. I was so self-absorbed in my own misery that I carried out such a sacred duty with ulterior, selfish motives. I would have cleaned the Blue Bus ten times over just for those few minutes alone with Goher; it was the only reward that meant anything to me. The magnitude of the lost opportunity to be gracious in those Baba moments of His Grace did not hit me until years later. I now know that I squandered so much at Meherazad because I so often lost focus on Him when I wrapped myself in the pain I had not yet let go of. I trust in His Wisdom that there was a reason for this cavalier attitude I was trapped in.

In the beginning of my time at Meherazad, I was possessed by my own survival needs; it was a constant struggle to behave normally and hide my upset from the Mandali and others. I have so many regrets about some of my sentiments in those early days, especially the time spent in Baba's Blue Bus with Goher. My focus was on myself and Goher—I squandered His Grace in those sacred moments. Now, in my waning seventy years of age, I return to those times of staying in Meherazad, and Baba allows me to relish them anew. His Grace allows me to relive the comfort He gave me, and I cherish each memory. I give thanks to Baba for all that He poured into a cracked vessel even though He saw so much of it leaked out at the time. I now realize that He showered His compassion on me despite my careless nature and spiritual immaturity. He did not punish me for the cavalier attitude I had about His Grace! Instead, Baba picked up my broken spirit, repaired the chalice that held my life, and made it strong and whole. He knew I would eventually come to my senses! His Love helped me overcome my weaknesses as He blessed me with His Grace through His Mandali, even when I did not recognize it as *His Gift*. Best of all He made sure that in due time I would understand the lesson and would be able to eventually feel its sacred nature. *This is how tender Baba is with His Lovers!*

Later in the day Eruch and I were sitting outside Mandali Hall on the bench to the right of the entry door. I was reviewing some clinic paperwork and he was reading the newspaper. When done, he placed the paper to his side, laying it on the bench. He then reached over and gave my knee a tight slap. With a wad of pan tucked in his cheek (a special leaf that is folded into a pouch after being filled with spices, digestives, and a white lime paste) he began to chuckle. "What's so funny?" I asked as he continued laughing. "You are such a child, Vesta. But a truly fortunate child," he replied. We sat for a moment in silence; the pause was pregnant. I had learned to wait quietly and to not speak when I sensed Eruch was going to say something profound—or make a statement that would shake me up a bit. "You are quite a naughty child, yet He showers you with presents!" He had my attention. He was looking out in the distance before

he turned and looked into my eyes and said, "Goher trusts you. *Don't ever let her down.*"

Tears were in his eyes. He placed his index fingers near each of my ears and with his thumbs, wiped my tears ever so gently. A few tears had started to overflow from the moat that my lower lid had become, and he never let them drop to my chest with this kind gesture. Then, holding my chin in his hand, he stared into my eyes with so much love. Tears continued to well up and began trickling down my face, but he caught them all. Several seconds passed before he got up and went to his room, leaving a faint scent of roses trailing behind him. Nothing more was ever said about this between us.

After Eruch's comment, my understanding took on a deeper meaning. Now, when I arrived at Meherazad before Goher would come to the Blue Bus, I sat on the cement bench and waited for the sound of her bicycle pedals and for the kickstand to scrape on the stone. I sat there in case she called me again. When I saw her, I retreated to the Dispensary and pattered around. (The old Dispensary was in what had been Kaka Baria's room at the opposite end of the veranda from the Blue Bus.) After a few minutes, I would come outside and go down and sit on the bench opposite the Mandali Hall door. When Goher exited the Blue Bus, I would help her safely down the steps. Sometimes she would smile; other times she would say thank you as she squeezed my hand. She would then hop on her bicycle and ride back to the women's side for Arti. At this time, in early 1974 I was not staying at Meherazad so I remained on the men's side and would have tea with them after taking Darshan and saying prayers in the Hall at His Chair.

As I sat on the bench one morning, it so happened that Goher came to the Blue Bus but did not look over to me. Her posture was more bent over this morning as if she were carrying a satchel of rocks on her back. She climbed the stairs and went into the Blue Bus and closed the door. I quietly went into the Dispensary to work. A few minutes passed and I began to hear Goher sobbing, making it hard for me to concentrate on my

work. Her sobs grew louder, heart wrenching, rolling like thunder. I was confused. Should I go to her? Should I stay inside the dispensary and give her privacy? As soon as the thought crossed my mind, Eruch came through the door and told me to go to her and offer some comfort. "Just sit with her. Maybe hold her hand," he said as we walked swiftly to the Blue Bus. I will never, ever, forget the moment I opened the door and her sobs echoed out into the yard. Seated on the floor at the edge of the foot of the cot that had been used by Baba during His illness, Goher's head was buried in the crook of her left arm as she leaned on the mattress. She looked so small. I quietly entered and sat next to her and gently rubbed her back. A few moments passed and then she lifted her head, turned, and fell against me. I wrapped my arms around her and held her for a long time while she sobbed. I was deeply moved, and this time my tears fell out of the empathy I felt for her grief and not my own pain. Because of the deep love I felt for Goher and by His Grace, I experienced a paradigm shift in Baba's Blue Bus while He showered us both with unconditional love. My own pain was now seated in the back seat and not at the wheel of the vehicle I had been trapped in as I rambled down the road of my life! I will never forget the intimacy of this moment, ever.

It was in 1975 Goher's moments of outward anguish began to lessen. She could go inside the Bus to dust or to look at His images and bow her head in surrender without becoming overwhelmed with grief. Tears might flow but sobbing became infrequent. When I gently opened the Bus door, I often saw her sitting quietly, contemplative, head bowed at the foot of the cot inside. Sometimes she would ask me to come inside to help move items to clean. While we swept and dusted, or used a moist cloth for cleaning, she would tell me in a soft, reverential tone, of the times He was ill or how Baba suffered uncontrollable and painful body jerks. One story she always told of in a hushed tone was about the 1952 Prague, Oklahoma Automobile Accident when Baba suffered severe injuries. She told me how His tongue had been split up the middle, cut in a jagged manner from the back of His throat out to the tip; blood had poured from the wound. In detail she told me how she held Baba's hand while the doctor did the suture repair. During the entire procedure, Baba was furiously signing to Goher to

not let Him utter a sound. “Don’t let me break my Silence,” He kept repeating. She said there was an urgency in His gestures. The awe I experienced each time she told me this story never lessened. Instead, it increased with each retelling. There were times after her visit in the Blue Bus when we would walk back to the house for morning Arti when she spoke with such sadness in her voice about Babas’ suffering for humanity. As I learned about the suffering the Avatar takes on for us it was humbling—most certainly an exquisite example of His Divinity.

Even now I can hear Goher's voice crack as she spoke to her Beloved in the Blue Bus; sometimes her affect was flat, resignation to the pain that was hers to bear. At times I felt embarrassed to witness what was unfolding. I felt at a loss about how to provide the comfort Goher deserved versus the privacy she may have needed. I had quietly mentioned to Arnavaz what was happening, so she would know I felt inadequate at times. She advised me to just be with Goher and to trust I would know when she needed gentle and quiet comfort or wanted privacy. “You’ll know when she needs to be held. Trust your heart, *mara bacha*,” she’d say. “Your heart is already guiding you. Goher invited you to be at her side right now.” Arnavaz told me she was glad Goher could talk about the medical difficulties she felt while treating Baba because it seemed to lessen the burden of guilt she felt. Arnavaz thought this helped move her through the grief she was feeling after Baba left His form. She would often kiss my cheek after encouraging me to be gentle with Goher. The love and respect these two women had for each other was beautiful to see.

When I first came to stay at Meherazad, Arnavaz explained to me about Baba’s Order to the Women to protect Mehera’s mood, telling me the women did not openly share the grief they felt over Baba dropping His physical form. They purposefully never spoke with each other of the sadness and pain they felt to avoid the possibility Mehera might overhear their conversation and cause her pain and sorrow. Instead, they dedicated the rest of their lives to the obedience of Baba's request to protect Mehera. They found private moments to grieve in solitude so Mehera would not see or hear them weep for Baba. Mehera was to live her life with as little upset

as possible and Baba expected them to keep the atmosphere light, free from distress and upset. This was Baba's Wish, and they took this surrender to His Pleasure as a sacred duty. Arnavaz then took my hand in hers and told me, "We expect the same of you, *mara bacha*. Don't argue with Mehera, don't ever ignore her, and watch what you say so you are not a source of any upset."

Each of the women found their place of privacy that allowed them needed time to grieve for Baba without upsetting Mehera. Goher found her respite in the Blue Bus.

With each passing day Goher was able to share her life with Baba without becoming overcome by the anguish she felt. When the men no longer scattered when we came over early in the morning, I took it as another sign she felt better; the men went about their morning activity but were quiet when she was there. As we tidied the Blue Bus, she told me that when pilgrims asked endless questions about life with Baba it helped the Mandali heal from the shock of losing His physical presence. This made me happy. And I saw how perfect His plan is for His Lovers, how perfect His care and compassion are for each. When we share His Love with each other, the benevolence of the gift increases.

One night while chatting on the men's side with Mani, Goher, Arnavaz, Naja, Rano, Pendu, Bhau and Aloba about Baba dropping His physical form, in passing I said how lucky they all were to live with God. I had told them that this was my childhood dream, to live with God and eat cake and ice cream. Holding his arms stretched outward, both hands with palms facing upward, Eruch commented, "We took care of the *Man* who was *God*." He paused before continuing. "Too often all of us took Baba's status for granted. You pilgrims come to His Home already knowing Baba was God. You all accept this without question." After another pause, he continued, "You have the conviction Baba is the Avatar, even though you never saw Him." His voice had a slight break in it, and he again paused to regain his composure. "You ask so many questions and look to us for answers. And your questions are significant. We didn't have time for

questions with Baba.” He glanced out into the distance. “You want to know how we felt and what we thought. You ask about His eyes, and demand we describe them in detail. We never sat around and talked like this about Baba.” He cleared his throat before continuing. “You want to know what was it like for me to be with Him and to look at His Hands as I interpreted His gestures and not get to look at His face? It is all of you who made me realize I was looking at His face to understand how to express His message and what emotion He wanted to convey. I knew Baba’s expressions, the lines on His face, the various looks in His eyes. And I have to remember the details and find the words to share with you about what I saw during those times. You all bring these gifts to us.”

Eruch seemed to have traveled back in time, to be held captive by those sacred moments with his Beloved. We all sat quietly, waiting for him to continue. “You ask about the scent of His body, the shape of His fingers as He tapped the arm rest or gestured. You want to know what it felt like to steady Him in those later years. You want details about the daily life of the Man whose human form embodied the Lord. You force us to remember Him in a manner we did not really think about when we served Him.” Again, he struggled to compose himself; we all were struggling for composure, sniffing, and clearing our throats. Eruch had touched each of us in this telling. And then he turned to look at me, and said, “Our duty was to the Man, and you all want to know about the Man who was God. *Maybe it is all of you who brought God to us!*”

Just then the clock struck nine. “There now. It must be true,” referring to the chime of the clock.” In typical Eruch manner, he turned to me, tears gently trickling down his cheeks. “Thank you. You all are His Gift to us.” He brushed the backside of his hand on my cheek and then took my chin and held it for a few seconds. He looked directly into my eyes and said, “Baba was our companion. You all see Baba as God and you know He is your companion as well. And you ask us about the Man who is the Lord of all creation and we are reminded that Baba is the Avatar. I ask myself at times, who are all of you? It is through all of you we feel His compassion and mercy. His Love for you is unmatched. Never forget this.”

I was 24 years old and had found Spiritual Wisdom in a shared Truth that empowers us all.