

The story of Ruth Carrie Ben Shammai, the story of the translation of the Discourses of Avatar Meher Baba into Hebrew, and some other stories.

Dear lovers of Avatar Meher Baba. We tried to bring some details about one dedicated lover of Baba. We don't know exactly what happened in her early life and part of it is a guess work, but what we know well that she was a fearless lover of Baba and an example of dedication and one pointedness in her service for Him.

Caroline Ruth Ben Shammai was born in Germany, Frankfurt A/M on December 9th, 1902. She was the daughter of one of the most respectable Jewish Ultra Orthodox families in Germany. Her father, Rabbi Yaacov Rozenheim was a man of spiritual and religious perfection, a man who excelled in the sciences as well. He was the founder and first president of World Agudat Israel, and greatly respected by the community even today. His grand father was a famous saint and a "wonder man". It was said that non-Jewish German soldiers went to pray at his grave during World War 1, and all of them returned home! Even during the Nazi regime, German soldiers would sneak into the cemetery to pray at his grave...

Carrie found Orthodox Judaism too narrow and confining; Carrie told the story of asking her father why the family's servants did not eat their meals together with the family. Not satisfied with her father's answer, Carrie chose to have meals in the kitchen with the servants. She was driven by her free, independent rebellious spirit to seek a broader, universal vision of reality; consequently she left home (we believe in her twenties) searching for spiritual answers and traveled for many years throughout the world. By profession she was an English teacher, and thus she made a living. She spent eight years in Egypt where she became fluent in Arabic. Finally she found in Lao-Tzu and Taoism what she had been searching for her whole life, a universal spiritual philosophy and way of life that was non-exclusive and non-dualistic. Carrie was a manifestation of the newly awakened modern woman. For a woman to launch herself so independently into the great world, particularly a woman from such a highly respected Orthodox family, where all your life span is well arranged from the beginning till the end, well protected from the cold world as well as the prospects of getting the best match, indicated the depth of her free and courageous spirit.

During 1935 Carrie immigrated to Palestine (Israel), and at the same year her family had to flee Germany; Carrie's father went to the Vatican with other Jewish leaders to discuss with the Pope the prospects of Germany winning the war. This came to the knowledge of the Gestapo, and a family friend, who was a S.S. official, warned them to escape immediately or get arrested and be sent to a concentration camp. The family went to England, from there to U.S.A., N.Y.C., and finally during 1952 to Israel. Carrie got married during 1948, (presumably) to Dr. Meir Hilel Ben Shammai, a very fine scholarly person, expert in ancient Hebrew, teacher and editor. He was a member of the Hebrew Linguistic Academy. He had one son from former marriage, and Carrie raised him like her own son. Carrie herself was childless. Meir agreed to live as a vegetarian according to her wish (or as a condition for her consent to be married).

During 1956 Meir won the national lottery; the money was just enough to buy one ticket to the United States. Carrie went to New York City to visit her family, and there, through Fred and Ella Winterfeldt she was told about a great spiritual Master who was visiting New York at that time – Meher Baba!

When Carrie met Baba for the first time she simply fell madly in love with Him. She immediately recognized Meher Baba the "living embodiment" of what she had found

in Lao Tzu, the end goal of her heart's longing. On meeting Baba Carrie fell at her Beloved's feet saying that she wanted to serve Him and spend the rest of her life with Him.

Carrie's photo with Meher Baba appears in the photo album "Love Personified", on page 135, bottom right, and in Lord Meher, page 4988. She met Baba at the Longchamps Restaurant at Delmonico Hotel in New York City, on July 22nd, 1956. I believe that this is her very first meeting Baba; her body language tells so, it conveys total surrenderance to Him. She almost fell into the candle's flame, and Baba is pointing at the candle as a warning not to get burnt. "I wanted to be consumed by His fire!" she told me; and she did.

According to Adele Wolkin, Baba told her to stand outside the restaurant and to request from the people to help Carrie to travel to Myrtle Beach, because she didn't have the money for that, the situation in Israel was most austere during those days. Adele collected at least twice as needed, and Baba was very happy.

From New York Carrie followed Baba to Meher Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. There, by Baba's permission (or order) she stayed in the Lagoon Cabin; the only person who ever stayed there. As Jane Haynes commented about this: "It had some significance, certainly we can know that it was a great blessing".

Joyce Byrd of Chigwell Essex, England told the story that during 1958 Baba asked the women present to carry him in His chair to the Ocean. Joyce remembered that among the women were Margaret Craske and Carrie. She shared her opinion that in this concrete action Meher Baba was "...raising the status of women in the world".

Carrie started to spread Baba's name in Israel unceasingly and fearlessly, in spite of hostile surroundings and religious prejudices.

In a letter which Mani sent to Adele Wolkin on 8th April 1960, by Baba's approval, Adele was being instructed how to help Carrie financially in obtaining books which Adi K. sent to Carrie. Quote: "The sum however, should NOT be paid fully by you, but should be a joint contribution of as many Baba-lovers as convenient, and desirous of helping for this purpose, (and so that no one donor is burdened with a heavy contribution)."

During the early sixties Carrie persuaded her husband to translate some of Baba's Discourses into Hebrew; her knowledge of Hebrew was not enough to do the translation, and Dr. Ben Shammai consented to do so. For an Orthodox Jew the idea of God descending on Earth to live as man amongst men is nonsensical, if not blasphemous; even though Judaism anticipates the coming of the Messiah to redeem the world. But Meher Baba works through the medium of love, and because of his love for his wife, Meir eventually translated into Hebrew six of Baba's Discourses: Love; God Realization; True Discipleship; The Search for God; The Problem of Sex; The Sanctification of Married Life. It is a small, lovely hardbound book entitled "Meher Baba Says", with an introduction by Carrie on "who is Meher Baba?" The book won a prize for excellence at the annual Jerusalem Book Fair of 1964. The book was sent to Baba who was pleased by her effort. Baba signed one book, which was sent back to Carrie.

Meir kept on working on the Discourses with Ilan Weig, who found in a library the book "Meher Baba Says". Eventually they translated the first version of the Hebrew translation of the Discourses.

Later on Carrie published the leaflet "Universal Message" in Hebrew.

During April 22nd, 1966, Adi K. Irani sent a letter to Carrie in which Baba indicated that she was “His jewel”. A rare and special compliment from Baba; but Baba was well aware of all the obstacles that Carrie had had to face, and what was yet to come. Carrie was a dynamo of energy, exuberance, enthusiasm and love for Baba. She was very zealous about Baba. She had no fear whatsoever in declaring Baba’s divinity from the rooftops of Jerusalem. Being fluent in Arabic, Carrie would enter the Arab section of Jerusalem where she would enthusiastically greet Arabs by exclaiming, “You and I are brothers!” She also distributed Baba cards to them.

She had also a center in Tel Aviv and in the Upper Galilee.

The way Carrie was treated by her community was mixed. Some appreciated her high idealism and some simply saw her as a mad woman. But she didn’t pay heed to all this. She would give Baba literature even to the Orthodox people.

I met Carrie during 1972 through Ilan, whom I met in a spiritual meeting, and one day he suggested that I should meet a woman in Jerusalem. As soon as I entered her lavish Baba-room and gazed at Baba’s picture, He made me know in a split of a second who He is – The Highest of The High, my ultimate Beloved.

During 1979 Meir died and Carrie’s health was deteriorating. She ordered me to take her to India where she met her loved ones the last time. The fire of her love for Baba was consuming her body; soon after her return to Israel she stopped walking. Something was consuming slowly her body from bottom up, and no medical treatment helped. This jovial, fiery dancing person became confined to a wheelchair till the end of her life. I spent a very intense year with her till she was forced to leave her apartment because her legs became paralyzed, and she was admitted to an old age home, an Orthodox institution, of course. When I came to collect the contents of her Baba room to my place, her adopted son ordered me to take all that stuff right away or else he would throw it all to the street!

Unfortunately the book that Baba signed got lost, or maybe was given away. It felt like a great loss – the closest remnant of Baba’s Presence second only to His very personal Presence.

There was no one with whom to share Baba’s love, for all the people she shared Baba’s love with disappeared; and to sum it all up, Ilan, who introduced me to Carrie, and helped me so much at that time, because I didn’t know English, as soon as he heard that Baba’s Center came to me, he called and asked me to come to his flat in Tel Aviv. Then he gave me all his Baba material, indicating he needed a living Master and couldn’t do with a departed one!

So what was left to be done? What I was capable of was to translate Baba books and deliver them to the public. So, during 1982 the first book was published, it was a part of Sobs and Throbs where I concentrated on the story of Ali, an example of dedication to the Master no matter what. This was sent to all the libraries in Israel, and a few people were touched by it.

Meanwhile I was visiting Carrie quite often in her home, and while Baba allowed her to gulp the cup of suffering to the brim, her slightest wish was being fulfilled promptly, as Baba Himself said: “I dare not care not for my lovers”. Again and again we talked about the discourses, and she gave me a few instructions concerning them. I read the Discourses many times, I checked Meir’s translation which was done in a very archaic Hebrew, and I came to the conclusion that it is not possible to translate it into Hebrew and it is best the people study it in English in order to read the Discourses!

But finally during 1984 I decided to give it a try; but it was such an ordeal, as if I had to plough a field that is strewn with heavy boulders. So I cried to Baba and said to Him: “Baba, it is impossible; greater men than I tried and did not succeed”. Then Baba turned His Key and “said”: “you can translate three words a day; translate them literally as they come”. Sounded crazy to me, but when I tried to escape His three words, He let me feel His displeasure. The worst types of hell are but a shadow of Baba’s displeasure; but why displease Love? So on I went slowly but surely, and the three words became three sentences and even more, and the big boulders were grounded slowly and became small rocks, and during the years the rocks became smaller and smaller till they became like fine sand, and the work itself became real fun.

During 1986 I saw Carrie for the last time, two months before she passed away. It was almost impossible to communicate with her, till the topic shifted to Baba. Then, all of a sudden, Carrie became her old self again, fully present – fiery and radiant as always – to my utter astonishment. Dear Carrie passed away on October 27th 1986, a brave Baba soldier till the end.

I continued the translation and it was accomplished during 1991. According to Carrie’s instructions I had to find a professional editor to compare the Hebrew translation with the original English, and this was required also by Don Stevens. A few experts gave me their estimations, but they were very high, over \$10,000. Finally my old editor, Dr. Yoram Beck agreed to do the job for \$5000. Very high, especially after the Gulf War, when the entire country was in a severe depression. But Baba’s work must continue, even slowly. So we started with one chapter each month, and jokingly I said to them that maybe I’ll build them a room instead of paying with money. Then after three months or so, Dr. Beck asked me to look at something under his house. It is a big stone house on the slope of a hill. And under the house it was all dug out, so there was space for a 90 sq. meter flat. I did the job, and also the neighbors wanted the same kind of work. So what happened was that everything was fully paid within five months, and I had the chance to earn some money!

During 1994 all came to completion. Since Baba’s work became real fun I felt like continuing the momentum. I searched through the Baba library, and the first book which popped into my hand was “Stay With God”, by Francis Brabazon; I never opened it before, and when I started leafing through it, I discovered, to my utter astonishment – Baba’s original signature! What a cunning trickery! He kept His signature hidden all these years and revealed it at the right moment!

Since 1994 Baba has turned His Key for Israel and made Himself known throughout the country, Using all means of media, t.v., newspapers and personal inspiration.

The Discourses are coming these days to their final completion.

What else shall I tell you folks, living with Baba is a constant wonder. On each sentence above I can write a book. Serving Baba is a life long mission without ends, no moment of unemployment, not a moment of boredom.

Jai Baba, Etzion Becker. 1998

Also contributed: Max Seibert, memoirs, Tamir Basin computers, Michal Sivan comments, Kendra Crossen Bouroughs English editing.