

"Avatar" Comes to Myrtle Beach

Part One

Kenneth Lux, Myrtle Beach

On December 16, 2009, the film "Avatar" opened in the cinema complex at the Myrtle Beach Mall, right across Highway 17 from the Meher Spiritual Center in South Carolina. Immediately I felt that this was significant. I knew that many Baba-lovers here might discount the importance of this event, seeing this action film as "not spiritual," having nothing to do with Baba, and viewing it merely as another Hollywood production. But I thought that such a reaction would miss the most special nature of this occurrence.

When the Meher Center was established in 1944, it's safe to say that almost no one in this country had ever heard the word "Avatar." In the glossary of *Infinite Intelligence*, a recently discovered and published book by Meher Baba, the definition of this word is given as follows: "Avatar (adj. Avatic) (in *Discourses* and *God Speaks*): The total manifestation of God in human form on earth, as the eternal living Perfect Master; the direct descent of Reality into illusion; the Savior, the Highest of the High, the Ancient One. Also called the God-Man, the Messiah, the Buddha, the Christ, the Rasool, the Saheb-e-Zaman. Language—(from Sanskrit) Indian: *avatar*: a descent or alighting; the descent of a god on earth; the incarnation of Vishnu. Derived from the Sanskrit verb *avatarna*, to descend." Then somehow, through a process that would make an interesting academic study (if it has not been done already), the word has slowly come into the culture.

First, I believe, the word entered in literary contexts in which certain figures were said to be avatars of something. An example of this would be a statement that "Agatha Christie is an avatar of mystery writers." Then the word branched out into other contexts and uses. There is a spiritual training that people can sign up for in which they become "avatars," and this movement has a journal called "Avatar." More recently, computer games were developed in which players can choose a figure to represent them in the game, and this figure is called their avatar. A similar device appears in online chats and other

Internet uses. Now with this movie, which is heading to be the biggest moneymaker of all time, the word "Avatar" is spread around all over the country and the world. And so it has come to Myrtle Beach, playing in the Myrtle Beach Mall, with the marquee reading "Avatar" directly across the highway from the Meher Center.

Now let us remember the sadness that some of us felt when we heard that in the past Elizabeth Patterson had sold off land across the highway that belonged to the Center to a corporation, and that sale led to the building of a mall on that site. The reason for her doing this, of course, was that this money would become part of the Meher Center endowment. And so the mall was built, first called the Briarcliffe Mall, then changed to Colonial Mall, and most recently to Myrtle Beach Mall.

But with this event of the movie playing directly across from the Center, these two phenomena come together in a most interesting way. The mall being there, built on what was 300 acres of natural woodland and once part of the Center, becomes the setting for this word "Avatar" now being displayed high on the marquee for all on the highway to see, and if approaching drivers glance across the road, there they can see the entrance to the Center (and coincidentally, this gated entryway was moved several years ago, making it even more visible to motorists heading out of the mall). So what the Center is, the Home in the West of the Avatar of the Age, is now labeled for a period of time in big marquee letters. We might even imagine in a fanciful way that the reason for the mall's coming into existence and the word "Avatar" moving into a prominent place in our culture is so that this confluence could happen, and who knows where this may eventually lead?

And so Greg Butler, while I looked on, took his video camera out into the mall and under the marquee and panned from the word "Avatar" on it, across

Route 17, and to the entrance of the Meher Center. As he did this, I found myself bothered by the designation "3D" after the word "Avatar." Somehow it seemed a little too "media-centric" and took away from the plain majesty of the word "Avatar."

But then, a few days later, I attended one of Adele Wolkin's informal talks in the Original Kitchen at the Center. At one point she said, "As good as the paintings of Baba are, I prefer photographs. In the photographs Baba sometimes can come out of the picture in 3D." OK, Baba, I get it. And then I thought that the Avatar could be understood as abstract God appearing on earth in 3D. But as far as the film itself goes, it still seemed to me that on the level of its content it had little or nothing to do with the idea of Avatar as we know it. But then I spoke to Richie Blum, who takes over at this point.

Part Two

Richard Blum, Myrtle Beach

The film "Avatar" is considered by many as the most important movie of the decade in terms of advancing the technology of filmmaking. James Cameron, the director, created new technologies in order to make the movie, which resulted in the most expensive film ever shot. As we have seen, the movie is also very important from a spiritual point of view, because of the use of the word "Avatar." As I see it, the word "Avatar" has three distinct meanings in relationship to the content and creation of the film.

The first meaning refers to the title and how the term is used inside the body of





Photos by Greg Butler



the film. The story takes place 150 years into the future, when science has progressed to the point where it can create artificial, genetically engineered life. An avatar is a genetically bred test-tube creature who contains a hybrid of human DNA with the DNA of the humanoids living on a distant planet called Pandora. The humanoids, called Na'vi, are 10 feet tall, bluish in color, and have a tail. In most other respects they are like humans from Earth.

When it is "born," a test-tube-bred avatar looks just like a Na'vi humanoid of Pandora, but it has no mind of its own. Its body is simply an empty vessel. It requires an Earth-born human to enter into the body and control it.

To do this, a human controller lies inside an MRI-like machine. When it is turned on, the human driver loses consciousness of his own body, and his consciousness enters the body of the avatar. Living inside the avatar, the human is able to breathe the air of Pandora, move, run, talk through

a savior to the Na'vi race of humanoids. Their planet is being invaded by Marines from Earth, and the Na'vi, in order to survive, need help to counter the attack. Jake, a former Marine, and now a controller of an avatar, comes to their rescue.

But more than that, Jake fulfills an ancient prophecy. The prophecy concerns the ability to ride a wildly dangerous but beautiful red flying dragon called a Toruk. There have only been five riders of a Toruk throughout the history of Pandora. Each of them possessed special powers. When Jake flies the red Toruk dragon, not only does he win the respect and trust of the Na'vi, but they also look upon him as a spiritual personage. He rallies them, designs a strategy, and defeats the Marines, saving the Na'vi from extinction.

In the end, Jake undergoes a final transformation of consciousness from his human form to live permanently in his avatar body. To do so, he must pass through the Na'vis' God, the holy tree. Thus Jake ful-

fills the prophecy of a recurring savior, and plays the role of an avatar to the people of Pandora.

fills the prophecy of a recurring savior, and plays the role of an avatar to the people of Pandora. The third meaning of the word "Avatar" concerns the actual making of the movie, and not the story itself. All of the characters on Pandora, and the entire world, are computer generated. In order to control characters, James Cameron employed a motion capture technique. Motion capture is a means by which actors' movements are captured by video cameras and used to move computer-animated characters. Motion capture has been used before to make films and video games, but Cameron took it to a new level. I won't get into the technical details, but suffice it to say that the computer-animated characters looked so real, and displayed so much human emotion, that there was no difference between live characters and animated characters. Also, the fantastic world of Pandora looked incredibly realistic. These effects represent a major breakthrough in filmmaking.

his avatar—basically do everything that a Na'vi of Pandora can do. The human's consciousness remains inside the avatar until his avatar goes to sleep. Then the human wakes up in his body back inside the MRI-like machine.

The second meaning of the term "Avatar" relates to the fact that the hero, Jake, ends up becoming a savior to the Na'vi race of humanoids. Their planet is being invaded by Marines from Earth, and the Na'vi, in order to survive, need help to counter the attack. Jake, a former Marine, and now a controller of an avatar, comes to their rescue. But more than that, Jake fulfills an ancient prophecy. The prophecy concerns the ability to ride a wildly dangerous but beautiful red flying dragon called a Toruk. There have only been five riders of a Toruk throughout the history of Pandora. Each of them possessed special powers. When Jake flies the red Toruk dragon, not only does he win the respect and trust of the Na'vi, but they also look upon him as a spiritual personage. He rallies them, designs a strategy, and defeats the Marines, saving the Na'vi from extinction. In the end, Jake undergoes a final transformation of consciousness from his human form to live permanently in his avatar body. To do so, he must pass through the Na'vis' God, the holy tree. Thus Jake ful-

fills the prophecy of a recurring savior, and plays the role of an avatar to the people of Pandora. There is also the common use of the word "avatar" meaning a computer-generated character inside a computer game that represents a player. Often players create their own avatars. They may look like themselves, like other people, or even like fantastic creatures.

The point is that motion capture, and the way Cameron employed it, is the same as using an avatar in a computer game. In other words, the actors acted, and as they acted they controlled a computer-generated character. They controlled an avatar. Thus we have the interesting, and I consider genius, use of the word: using avatars to make the movie, and avatars as the theme of the movie

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Avatar

Harry Thomas, Los Angeles
February 10, 2010

Part A

Firstly, I am deeply indebted to Kenneth Lux and Richard Blum for their articles on the movie “Avatar.” Without their written expressions, I wouldn’t have generated this piece precisely because their articles inspired me, and from that inspiration, ideas flowed accompanied by the desire to write. In this article I want to explore ideas not presented in the other two essays and to approach certain of their themes in novel ways. As an example, I will highlight select numerical correspondences that to me indicate a conscious and intended effort on the part of Meher Baba. The label that I’ve affixed to this occurrence is: *Avataric time signature*. In other words, the numerical patterns, in my estimation, are indicative of Baba manipulating events at a high level for a specific work-related purpose.

I agree with both of their sentiments that the film “Avatar” coming into our midst at this time is significant and may indeed carry a partial charge of Baba’s Manifestation in its presentation and wake. It’s important to bear in mind that Meher Baba is still operative as the Avatar and will be for another sixty years or so. In this sense, the film “Avatar” is screening while the actual Avatar is still working within a non-corporeal capacity.

I want to repeat Meher Baba’s profound statement that He made to the film world in 1932, which was highlighted in Richard’s article. “I do not need to tell you who are engaged in the production and distribution of moving pictures what a power you hold in your hands.... He who stimulates the imagination of the masses can move them in any direction he chooses, and there is no more powerful an instrument for stimulating their imagination than motion pictures” [Lord Meher 5:1656].

At this point, I want to display the numerical correspondences that I’ve labeled as *Avataric time signatures*. I have done Baba-related numerical reckoning before and it came to my attention during this session that *Avataric time signatures* (within my realm of observing the phenomenon) come in triplets—namely that

three distinct numerical correspondences are connected to a given event.

Richard stated that in 1932 Baba visited Hollywood. He toured several studios, met with luminaries of the film world including certain stars of the silver screen, directors and producers, as well as provided poignant words about this powerful medium. Baba returned to Hollywood in the latter part of 1934 and early 1935. He once again toured numerous studios but His primary focus on this trip was advancing the film project. He met with a multitude of film personnel to propel this endeavor forward.

The year 1932 prominently stands out as Baba’s initial contact with the Hollywood filmmaking industry; therefore it was an auspicious year in Baba’s planetary and universal working, at least from an observable standpoint. And it’s precisely here that we encounter the first *Avataric time signature*. By the time Meher Baba visited Hollywood for seven days in the latter part of May and early June of 1932, He was quite close to the seventh anniversary of His observing silence.

Doing basic math, from mid-1932 until late December of 2009 when “Avatar” was released comprised a span of seventy-seven years. Those familiar with Baba’s life are aware of the significance of the number 7. Citing an example, Baba delivered a magnificent discourse entitled: *The Seven Realities*. In the master work “God Speaks,” there are seven kingdoms of evolution beginning with the stone state and through immense episodes of successive unfoldment, culminate at the human level, the seventh and final kingdom.

This evolutionary expression eventually delivers the fortunate soul to God-Realization, which happens upon the seventh plane. Highly significantly, Meher Baba is the seventh Avatar beginning with Zoroaster in our present historical cycle of Messianic appearances. In my estimation, 77 serves as a significant number correspondence between the two events.

We now move into the second *Avataric time signature*. Those who know of my previous numerical work would be familiar with a tool I use which is the Chinese 60-year calendar. I will not ex-

plain its working here, but to be succinct, it traces a 60-year cycle in which each of the 60 years has a unique designation. Therefore, at any given 60-year progression, the exact sign of 60 years previous will reappear. In the Chinese system, this is a noteworthy event and marks the completion of a 60-year cycle.

On October 16, 1949, Meher Baba set off on the New Life with twenty companions. December 18, 2009—when “Avatar” was released—was 60 years later, exactly two months and two days afterwards. Astoundingly, the exact same sign (yellow earth ox) existed for both the New Life and “Avatar.” From my perspective, this constitutes the second *Avataric time signature*, for I find it utterly inconceivable that this precise overlay resulted entirely from chance.

I will now highlight the third *Avataric time signature* that cascaded into my mind this morning, upon which I realized the timing was superbly perfect. On February 10 (I’m writing this article on this date in 2010) in the year 1954 in Meherastana, Meher Baba spelled “Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai” on His alphabet board, thereby formally proclaiming the distinction he gave to this title, and henceforth the term “Avatar” was affixed to His legacy.

If we write February 10 in abbreviated fashion, we get 2-10 (at least in America; India and England would write it 10-2). “Avatar” was released in the year 2009 but as of this writing, 2-10-2010, it is still drawing huge audiences worldwide. In the 56 years since this monumental declaration, this year initially marks the near-synchronous match between the day of declaration (2-10) and the calendar year (2010). By adding a zero between the month and day in the declaration date, a perfect numerical match will ensue—(2010 / 2010). This marks the first appearance of such a correspondence. Additionally, had “Avatar” been released in December of this year, there still would have been the aforementioned match; however, it wouldn’t have been playing on the February 10th Avataric declaration day. As of this writing of February 10, 2010, “Avatar” is stunningly playing to worldwide audiences.

Part B

Now I wish to focus on other aspects of the film in which parts of Kenneth's and Richard's previous assertions will be reiterated. I, too, firmly believe that Meher Baba is using this film as a vehicle to advance His Manifestation, which, examining the historical record, is steadily advancing. The year 1932, in my observation of Meher Baba's history, marked the first instance of Baba's extending His advent into the greater world—one beyond His immediate spiritual family and those close to this group. In a Paramount newsreel shot in London, Baba's lovely image was featured and He delivered His visionary message of bringing the world's religions together like, "beads on one string" [Lord Meher 5:1554].

Meher Baba also appeared in Time magazine, and several newspapers recorded parts of His journey both in Europe and America. In England especially, several newspaper articles raised the notion of Baba's being the Messiah (which would be the Avatar). The Daily Herald opened its article: "Revered by many as the Messiah, Shri Meher Baba, the Indian Mystic, gave a children's party in his bed-sitting room in South Kensington yesterday" [Lord Meher 5:1576].

Also in 1932, Baba stated repeatedly that He would break His silence in the Hollywood Bowl on July 13, an event in which His liberated human voice would have been carried by radio and reported in newspapers worldwide. This didn't happen, for Baba did not return to California as expected. In early June of 1932, Baba and His mandali sailed for Honolulu en route to East Asia, whereupon in China Baba effectively completed the spiritual cable linking the East with the West. Baba and mandali likewise walked the streets of several Japanese and Chinese cities. Most certainly in numerous ways, Meher Baba boldly reached out to the greater world in that auspicious year of 1932.

I would ascertain that Baba's extending His nazar (glance) to the greater world advances to the year 1956. In July of that year, television crews were on hand to film Baba's dedication of the Barn and other celebratory acts at the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This event was scheduled to be broadcast nationwide but never occurred; however, earlier in New



Jake as our Avatar (thanks to the talents of Marc Librescu)

York, a TV crew filmed Baba and this footage was shown locally. Also, television personnel attempted to film Baba while He was in Washington, D.C., but He avoided them. Although there was no nationwide TV broadcasting of Baba from the Meher Spiritual Center, nevertheless this filming (at Baba's "Home in the West") seemingly indicates a time when his Avataric message will be conveyed far beyond His immediate circle.

Starting in 1964 and continuing for several years, Amar Singh Saigal transmitted the Beloved's words and prayers over All India Radio, and Baba on several occasions heard these broadcasts. Additionally, towards the end of the Avatar's illustrious advent, Baba commissioned a small group of advocates from America to advance His anti-drug message. On Baba's behest, they were to appear on radio and television in order to broadcast this admonition to avoid the use of dangerous drugs. However, as a consequence of this action, Baba's name, words and image (when television was the medium) were transmitted over the airwaves. Undoubtedly, millions by means of radio and television received this message.

I would then jump ahead to the year 1988 when Bobby McFerrin released

"Don't Worry Be Happy," a bouncy tune that traveled the world rhythmically singing one of Meher Baba's oft-repeated messages within a catchy melody and lyric base. With this uplifting song, what the Beloved so often told His lovers reached a global audience.*

I will therefore posit that with the release of "Avatar," Baba has again extended His spiritual reach into the greater world, far beyond the present parameters of His lovers and devotees. It's important to realize that the word "Avatar" is a part of the Beloved's title: Avatar Meher Baba. Additionally, any one of these three names can link an individual or group with the Lord, so the word "Avatar" is extremely powerful.

As Kenneth pointed out, the lower-cased word "avatar" is used in numerous diminutive aspects; additionally, since the founding of the Meher Spiritual Center in 1944, the word has steadily spiraled outward, and now with the release of the film "Avatar" the word has woven itself into the planetary lexicon. This occurrence of global acquaintance with the word "Avatar" could only be the result of Baba's Divine Will.

We must acknowledge that the role of avatar has also been claimed by or for a number of other figures on the spiri-

tual scene, and people will see the word used in these contexts as well. Genuinely great souls of the past such as Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramakrishna have been called avatars by their followers; and today there are others who falsely claim the title of Avatar, as Baba warned they would (He once said, “In the world today, there are about seventy-five persons who claim to be the Avatar of the age, both in the East and in the West—and God help them all!” Lord Meher 11: 4057). There are even people who regard Meher Baba as only one of several spiritual masters *sharing* the role of Avatar (this does not conform to Meher Baba’s teachings or statements about Himself). All this confusion will one day be cleared up as people come to understand Meher Baba’s explanations of the spiritual hierarchy.

Recapping the succession of expanding Avatatic reach: In 1932 a Paramount newsreel gloriously captured the flowing image and message of our Beloved. Additionally, Baba was featured in several newspapers and Time magazine. In 1956, NBC studios dispatched a TV film crew to record Baba dedicating the Barn among other activities at the Meher Spiritual Center.

Starting in the mid-1960’s, All India Radio broadcast the Avatar’s words, and by the late 1960’s, appearing on radio and TV were numerous anti-drug messages delivered by Baba’s chosen missionaries. In 1988, the song “Don’t Worry Be Happy” dispersed Baba’s precious words on a planetary scale. Finally, with the release and continued running of “Avatar” the motion picture, a global acquaintanceship with the Beloved’s spiritual title has marvelously blossomed. What’s extremely interesting is that all of these events, with the exception of the All India Radio transmissions, had a connection with America. These spiraling-out occurrences would seemingly be indicative of the fulfillment of Baba’s proclamation that America would serve as the epicenter of a destined spiritual renaissance upon a planetary scale.*

Part C

As Richard pointed out, one of the uses of an avatar in the film is that Jake Sully became a Messiah—a saving Avatar—rescuing the people of Pandora from both physical and cultural destruction at the cruel and indifferent hands of

marauding Earth-dispatched militaristic and economic forces. In this capacity, it appears that Jake is not only an Avatar, but specifically, the Pandora equivalent of the Kalki Avatar.

Interesting, too, is that the Na’vi have blue skin, reminiscent of how Lord Krishna is traditionally depicted in sacred art. Jake became only the sixth person to master the majestic Toruk, a fiercely powerful winged creature, and by doing so, joined a succession of great personages, in this way indicating Avatatic succession, as Richard previously highlighted. Bear in mind, too, that the Kalki Avatar is depicted as mounted upon a magnificent creature, in this case a white steed.

A sincere question arises as follows: are there important messages embedded in this movie? My honest speculation posits yes for an answer. Jake’s actual name would have been Jacob (which means “persevere with God”) and within a biblical context, Jacob was a Hebrew patriarch who was renamed Israel. Jacob and his younger twin brother, Esau, were the sons of Isaac. Jacob’s sons and grandsons were the founders of the tribes of Israel. With Jacob Sully, one can ascertain the founding of a new society.

The name of the Na’vi’s planet was Pandora, who in Greek mythology was the first woman sent to earth as punishment for Prometheus’s crime of stealing fire from the gods. Zeus gave her a box which, when opened, let loose all human misfortunes, but Hope remained in the bottom of the box to comfort mankind.

Masked behind a gossamer-thin veneer of motion picture splendor, our dear Earth is the planet Pandora. Worldwide militarism, environmental destruction, terrorist acts, financial instability and other maladies grip our precious and fragile globe. Is Meher Baba as the Kalki Avatar (a role which He subtly indicated on several occasions was His to assume) poised to inaugurate a world-changing role? My deepest sense tells me that if such an appearance is waiting to materialize—which would be connected to Baba’s Manifestation and the breaking of His silence—it is close at hand. The implication is that it’s not decades away but soon, within a few years of this writing. This is purely speculation, but it’s deeply rooted in how I view things.

Are the negative forces on our own planet as threatening to our material

and spiritual well-being as they were shown as taking place on Pandora? Perhaps from Baba’s vantage point of omniscience, they really are. Perhaps soon, we on Earth will be in dire need of being saved by Lord Meher as the Kalki Avatar—a role one would assume is filled extremely infrequently and one always initiating a world into a totally new, spiritually charged dispensation.

In closing, it appears to me, based on the numerical matches and the message of the film “Avatar,” that Avatar Meher Baba is still busily and diligently engaged in His universal work. Is the real Avatar telling us through the medium of this film that humankind must shed the destructive practices, institutions and mind-sets that are currently debilitating our spirits and ruining the planet?

Jake Sully as the Na’vi Avatar helped the people of Pandora defeat the vicious colonial forces of Earth and later (logically assumed) quite possibly became the patriarch for a new world dispensation. Will Meher Baba as the Kalki Avatar heroically assist us in a similar transformative and redemptive act, afterwards serving as the Divine Patriarch upon which the New Humanity, a wondrous, spiritually centered civilization, will be based? Time, that great mystery, will surely tell.

*See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don't Worry, Be Happy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don't_Worry,_Be_Happy):

“Don’t Worry Be Happy” is the title and principal lyric of a song by musician Bobby McFerrin. Released in September 1988, it became the first a cappella song to reach number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, a position it held for two weeks. On the UK Singles Chart, the song reached number 2 during its fifth week on the chart. At the 1989 Grammy Awards, “Don’t Worry Be Happy” won the awards for Song of the Year, Record of the Year, and Best Male Pop Vocal Performance. The song’s title is taken from a famous quote by Meher Baba.

