

On Rainbow Flags

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Since coming to Baba in 1986 I have been aware of Meher Baba's rainbow flag. When Baba first started working as a Spiritual Master at Meherabad, in India, he lived in an extremely small dwelling (just large enough for him to lay down inside) known as a Jhopdi¹. This was in 1924, before Baba started keeping silence. According to Bhau Kalchuri, it was proposed that a flag be flown near the Jhopdi and, on April 23rd, a debate ensued about it. The Hindus said the color of the flag should be red, but Ramjoo objected, saying that red reflected only Vedant, and that green was better. Then the Hindus took objection, arguing that green was typically a Mohammedan color. The Parsis and Iranis disapproved of both colors, and to bring about accord, Baba proposed, "The flag should be of seven colors." Naval prepared a flag accordingly and, after it was sewn, it was hoisted near the Master's Jhopdi in the evening. As the flag stirred, Baba remarked, "Do you know why I suggested a seven colored flag? The seven colors represent the seven planes of consciousness."

Meher Baba had specified the positioning of two colors: "Red should be at the bottom of the flag and sky blue at the top. Arrangement of the other five colors is your decision."

Meher Baba later added: "Besides representing the seven planes of consciousness, these colors also represent sanskaras—impressions. The colors in the flag signify man's rise from the grossest of impressions of lust and anger—symbolized by red—to the culmination in the highest state of spirituality and oneness with God—symbolized by sky blue."²

As a result, a rainbow flag was sewn according to Baba's wish, and it is still flown at Meherabad today. I recently purchased a Baba rainbow flag at the Meher Baba Trust bookstore in Ahmednagar, India, see the description below.

In November 2004, I took a road trip with my beloved wife Lilly and our daughter, Aspen. Our travels took us through Massachusetts, and we visited Northampton, Amherst and Salem. Northampton is perhaps one of the lesbian capitals of America, and while we walked around that gorgeous and inspiring town, Aspen happened to be wearing a rainbow-flag-bag which she had purchased in India, which is based on Meher Baba's flag. This was her favorite bag to wear at the time. Then she saw all the rainbow flags hanging up in Northampton, on houses, in store windows, outside of stores on the streets. The gay pride rainbow flag has become ubiquitous. So she asked me immediately and with the naivety of a nine year old child, "Did they put up Baba's flag?"

Honestly, I didn't know what to say. I had heard stories through the years from my homosexual friends in the Meher Baba community of some connection between Meher Baba's rainbow flag, and the rainbow flag of the gay pride movement. But one hears so many stories, and many of them are Baba-urban-legends. So rather than answer Aspen's fine question directly, I waited and instead entered a prominent gay bookstore I saw as we walked together. I asked a young lesbian woman who worked there if she knew where I could find out information about the gay pride rainbow flag. She took me straight to

a book entitled, *Completely Queer, the Gay & Lesbian Encyclopedia*.³ Upon researching the rainbow flag then and there, and taking notes in the bookshop, and then researching Meher Baba's rainbow flag for this piece, I found out some fascinating information about the contrast between these two flags. Namely, a rainbow flag was created by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker for the June 25, 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade. That original flag for the parade had these colors with the following meanings assigned to them by him:⁴ hot pink—sex, red—life, orange—healing, yellow—sun, green—serenity, turquoise—art, indigo—harmony, violet—spirit

When we see the two flags side by side, it is clear that they are essentially reversed. In Baba's flag there are only two colors that he specified the location: Red at the bottom, and sky blue at the top, as Baba wanted "the highest state of spirituality and oneness with God" to be raised above all else. In the gay pride flag, violet representing "spirit" is at the bottom of the flag.

Meher Baba was clear that red was representative of "the grossest impressions of lust and anger" and wanted them at the bottom of His flag. However, in the gay pride flag we see that two colors are given the highest place, pink and red, pink to symbolize "sex," and red meaning "life." Also, Baker created a rainbow flag of eight colors, and Baba was clear that there should be seven colors in His flag. Based on all of this research, I can see no way anyone can declare that these are the same rainbow flag, or that one is based upon the other. There are two completely different

Meher Baba	TOP	Gilbert Baker
<i>Sky blue</i> — the highest state of spirituality and oneness with God		<i>Hot pink</i> — sex
<i>Purple</i> — plane of consciousness, sanskaras, impressions ⁵		<i>Red</i> — life
<i>Indigo</i> — plane of consciousness, etc...		<i>Orange</i> — healing
<i>Green</i> — plane of consciousness...		<i>Yellow</i> — sun
<i>Yellow</i> — plane of consciousness...		<i>Green</i> — serenity
<i>Orange</i> — plane of consciousness...		<i>Turquoise</i> — Art
<i>Red</i> — the grossest of impressions of lust and anger		<i>Indigo</i> — harmony
no 8th color		<i>Violet</i> — spirit
	BOTTOM	

versions of the rainbow colored flag, with dramatically different inspirations.

I understand that Gilbert Baker was asked by a homosexual Baba lover if there was any connection between his version of the rainbow flag created for the gay pride march, and the one created by Meher Baba decades earlier. He responded that there was no connection. All in all, this has been a valuable project for me personally. I believe the most important thing to remember regarding rainbow flags is simply that whatever version of the rainbow flag one is drawn to, it should be flown without fear, and with pride that one is a part of a special movement on this glorious planet, whether that is a gay pride movement, which I wholeheartedly value, or a Meher Baba movement of which I am a part.

One early morning at home, with my new son on my lap and contemplating all that I had discovered above (still not clear about what it all means) I turned to Master Rumi and stumbled upon the words of the poem below:

No Flag by Rumi

I used to want buyers for my words.
Now I wish someone would buy me
away from words.

I've made a lot of charmingly
profound images,
scenes with Abraham, and Abraham's
father, Azar,
who was famous for icons.

I'm so tired of what I've been doing.
Then one image without form came,
and I quit.

Look for someone else to tend the shop.
I'm out of the image making business.
Finally I know the freedom of madness.

A random image arrives, I scream,
"Get out!"

It disintegrates.
Only love.

Only the holder the flag fits into,
and wind.

No flag.

¹This dwelling of Baba's is still present at Meherabad, and one of the most important points of significance for those visiting. It is right near the fire pit where Meher Baba ordered the Dhuni to be lit on the 12th day of each month.

²From *Lord Meher* p.618 (Seven-Colored Flag)

³*Completely Queer, the Gay & Lesbian Encyclopedia* by S. Hogan and L. Hudson (New York : Henry Holt & Co., 1998)

⁴In 1979 the colors were changed to a rainbow flag used today by the gay pride movement.

⁵For more about planes of consciousness, and sanskaras (impressions) see Meher Baba's seminal book, *God Speaks* (Walnut Creek, CA: Sufism Reoriented).