

Bound to Love



EXPERIENCES WITH SRI BABUJI



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Saipatham, *Rose Petals*. 2011. www.saipatham.saibaba.com/rose-petals.

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Bound to Love

Experiences with Sri Babuji



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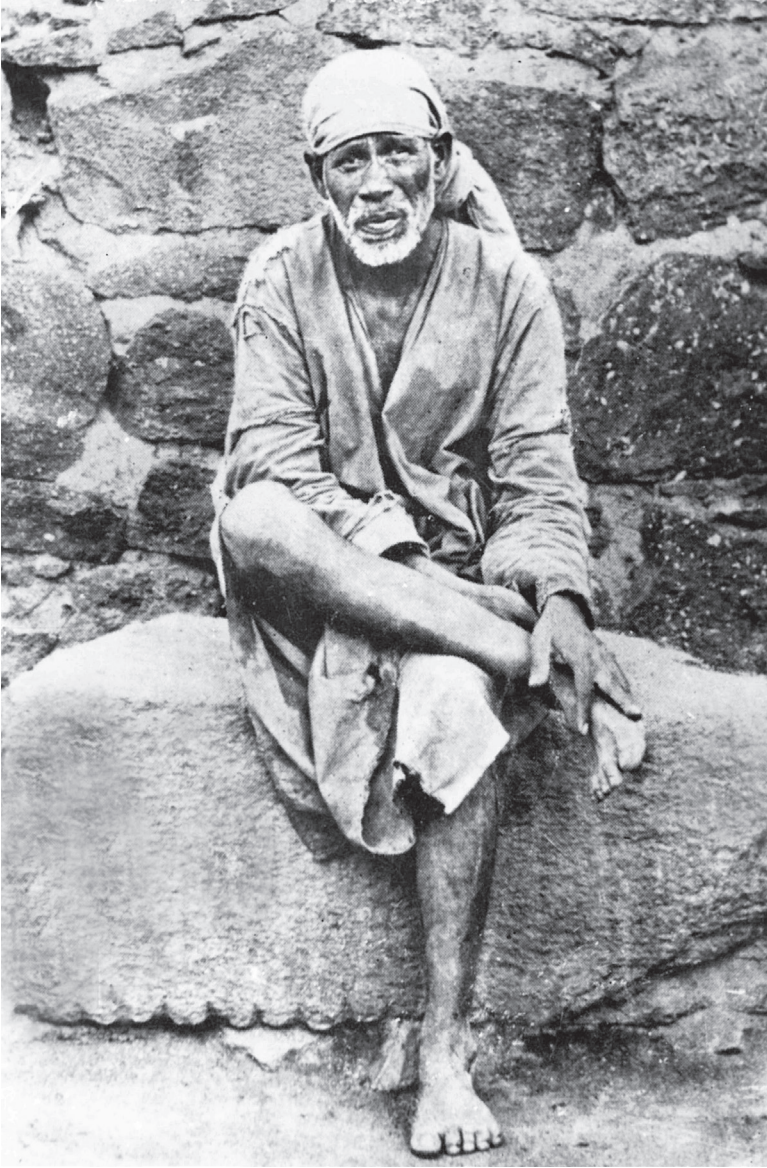


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We are grateful to our *gurubandhus* who initiated this compilation of experiences in Telugu, and to all those who, by Guruji's grace, came together to prepare it for publication and made it possible to offer it on the occasion of his first *aradhana*.

The English edition of this book owes an outstanding debt to Ms Purna Fauchaux, who worked on it until she passed away in 2004. The original concept for the book came from Purna who, fuelled by her deep devotion to Guruji, laboured intensively to bring it to fruition and give it shape and coherence. With characteristic thoroughness and persistence she checked and re-checked every detail of the accounts with the individual authors, and was able to bring forth the depth of each devotee's experience, revealing facets of Sri Babuji's life and the scope of his greatness.

For Guruji, well-spring of all blessings



Sri Sai Baba, Dwarkamai, Shirdi

Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi

Shirdi Sai Baba is one of the most universally loved and revered saints of modern India. Images of him can be seen across the length and breadth of the entire subcontinent and hundreds of temples have been constructed in his name both in India and abroad. He has acquired the status of an adored deity in less than a century since his passing. This is due to the divine qualities of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence that countless people across the globe experience in him: their prayers are magnanimously answered.

Sai Baba lived at the turn of the twentieth century in the small village of Shirdi in the state of Maharashtra in central India for around sixty years, although this was not his birthplace. He never revealed what that was, nor the time of his birth, his religion, caste, original name, nor the names of his parents. “Sai” means “Saint” and “Baba” means “Father”. The name expresses the love and reverence devotees feel for him and was coined by one of his first devotees.

In appearance, Sai Baba was a fakir (Muslim ascetic). He followed a life of holy poverty and renunciation, living on alms in utmost simplicity yet showering grace on all who turned to him. He said that he was here to “give blessings”. This was seen in numerous miraculous events that took place around him – healings, protection from accidents, offspring born to barren couples, financial prosperity, disputes resolved, employment secured, and above all, spiritual evolution and transformation in those connected to him. Baba did not object to people coming to him for worldly benefits as, he said, by getting these fulfilled people would follow him and progress further. He also said, “I give my devotees what they want until they want what I want to give.” The miraculous experiences that devotees have around him are his response to their needs, an indication of his love and capacity to take care of them.

In spite of his great spiritual stature, Sai Baba never publicized himself through discoursing, touring or preaching, and he did not give instructions in any general practice or rituals. Instead, he catered directly to the needs of each individual, whatever they were, while moulding him or her into something greater. His teaching was his own life and divine transforming presence; sometimes he talked symbolically or in parables. His spiritual perfection still draws innumerable devotees to him from all over the world. He himself said that his work would continue after he had left the physical body, and that he would be “active from [his] tomb”.¹

In Sai Baba, one finds the true essence of all religions. Beyond distinctions of religion, caste or creed, he is worshipped by some in the Hindu fashion, while others see him as Muslim. Sri Babuji comments, “Not identifying himself in totality with any religious community, by steering along an unbiased middle path of transcendence, seems to be the constant leitmotif of Baba’s lifestyle.”

Baba did not institute any religious order, organization, ashram or lineage, nor did he leave a successor. He blessed and served all equally. He said that he was the slave of God, but to his devotees Baba is nothing less than God. As one of his contemporary devotees put it, he was “...the embodiment of the Supreme Spirit, lighting the path of his devotees by his every word and action.”

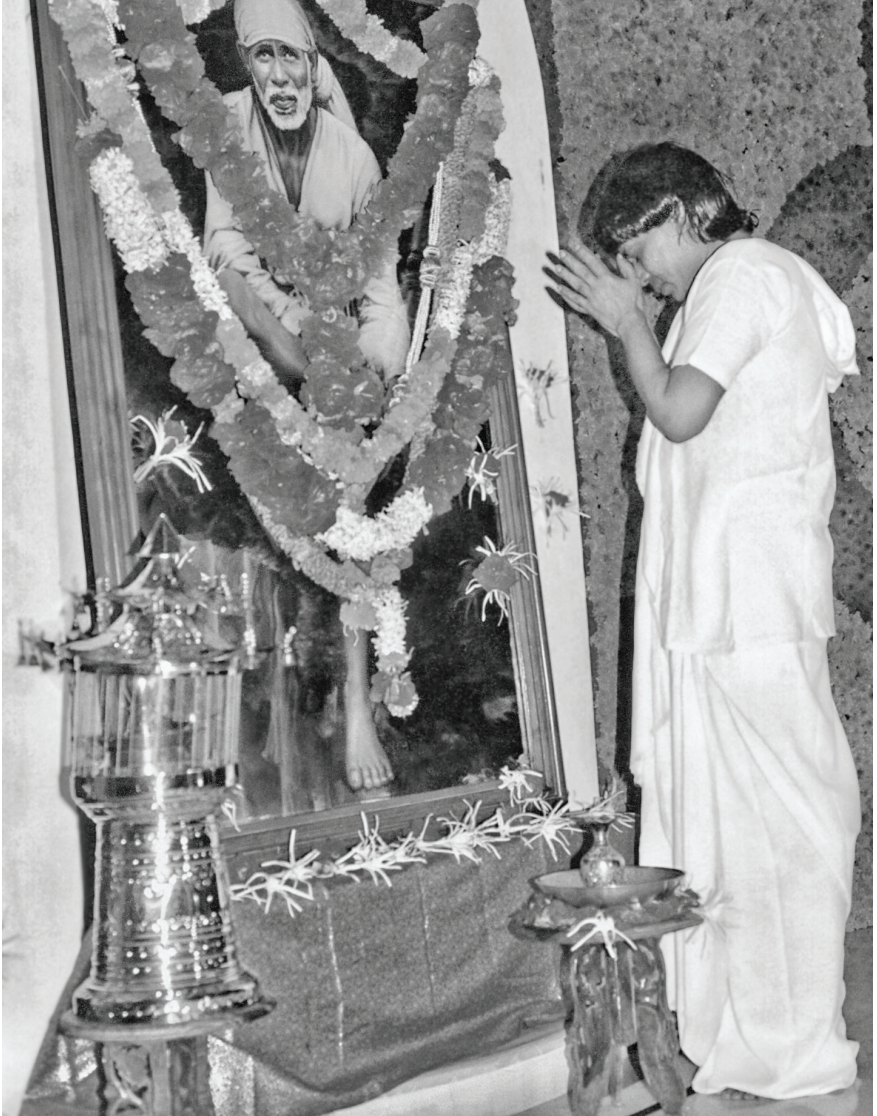
¹ Sri Sai Baba took *mahasamadhi* in 1918. His tomb (*samadhi*) is in Shirdi, in the Samadhi Mandir. It is the focus of worship for the thousands who visit it every day. *Arati* is offered here four times a day.

A devotee objected to people going to Baba for temporal benefit, e.g., employment, money, children and the curing of disease.

SAI BABA: Do not do that. My people first come to me on account of that only. They get their hearts' desires fulfilled and, comfortably placed in life, they then follow me and progress further.

I bring my people to me from long distances under many pleas. I seek them and bring them to me. They do not come (of their own accord)... However distant – even thousands of miles away – my people might be, I draw them to myself, just as we pull birds to us with a string tied to their feet.

Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings, No. 56



Sri Babuji, Saipatham, Shirdi, 1999

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

A renowned devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba, Sri Babuji lived and showed the beatific path of Sai to all who came to him. Thousands have been attracted by his great spiritual radiance and though he repeatedly said he was not a guru, they all found in him the divine qualities of love, power and knowledge, which together define a Satguru.

Sri Babuji's personal principle was to be dependent on nothing and nobody other than Sai Baba. Even his auspicious birth date signifies the mystical link with his beloved Satguru, for Sri Babuji entered this world on Vijayadasami, 7 October 1954, the 36th anniversary of Baba's *mahasamadhi*, and the very day the holy statue of Sri Sai Baba was installed in the Samadhi Mandir, Shirdi.

From a tender age Sri Babuji was driven by an intense quest to find meaning and fulfilment in life. Blessed by nature with a deeply enquiring mind and exceptionally sharp intellect, he followed a rigorous regime involving personal study, meditation, and service to his guru, Master Bharadwaja – a lecturer at the college where he took his degree and who had introduced him to Sai Baba. His endeavour bore fruit when he was barely twenty, and from then on, he was sharing his love of Sai with those drawn to him.

Sri Babuji's constant immersion in Sai-awareness, impeccable integrity and clarity of mind, coupled with his vast erudition and wisdom, have made him the inspiration and guide for thousands of Sai devotees both in India and abroad. He would urge us to be clear about our needs and to depend on Sai Baba to fulfil them. His approach, always practical and down-to-earth, sparkles with originality and shows the way to tread this path of Sai free of prejudice and superstition – that which he termed "Saipatham".

By their connection to Sri Babuji, numerous people experience the transforming power of his loving presence in their life – the relief of physical, emotional and mental troubles, a sense of protection

and security, a shift in attitude or outlook, and a flowering of their spiritual life. The wonderful and awe-inspiring experiences of devotees attest to the power of his spiritual presence. Sri Babuji, however, was adamant in always ascribing such experiences to Baba's grace alone.

Sri Babuji once said that the whole gamut of spirituality could be summed up in just a few words: the experience and expression of love. It was the love which he embodied and continues to emanate so palpably that binds so many to him.

From Andhra Pradesh, South India, Sri Babuji lived with his wife and daughter in Chennai and Shirdi, with frequent stays in Tirumala and Tiruvannamalai. He took mahasamadhi in November 2010. His tomb (samadhi) is in Saipatham, Shirdi and is a place of prayer and meditation.

*A Satguru uses his power with unconditional love and
compassion to help us reach our destination.*

Sri Babuji

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How this book came about

Among Sri Babuji devotees, one of the first questions they are likely to ask each other is, “What are your experiences of Guruji?” People delight in telling their accounts and hearing from others of how they have been helped and blessed. Sharing experiences tends to be a central part of any gathering of devotees, and a source of inspiration and encouragement.

Out of this long-standing passion, the wish grew for a book of people’s experiences with Sri Babuji, and in 1999 some of the devotees decided to act on it. They spread word of their intentions and travelled through Andhra Pradesh, Sri Babuji’s home state in South India, visiting regional *satsang* groups to explain their quest. They encouraged people to write down their experiences, whatever they might be – from the sudden and immediately tangible to the longer-term unfoldment.

Over the next three years, thousands of manuscripts poured in, and are still coming. Only a few dozen could be used in this first volume, so we have selected those representative of the broad range of people coming to Sri Babuji and the variety of their needs – those coming for the first time, and those who have been ardent devotees for more than three decades, those requiring relief from physical afflictions and material hardship, and those whose hearts were burst open in an overwhelming experience of unconditional love.

Interspersed throughout the accounts are some of Sri Babuji’s own words, chosen to illustrate or expand on aspects of the experiences. Since Sri Babuji did not give lectures or public addresses, few of his devotees have heard him speak. These words of his are taken from

the recordings of small gatherings (*satsang*), in which devotees would have the sublime opportunity to sit with him and ask questions.

Satsang with Sri Babuji was always personal and intimate, and usually took place at his home in a small group. He never advocated a set of beliefs or practices to be generally applied by everyone. He would respond to an individual in such a way as to meet their heartfelt need in that moment, and to bring about their transformation towards greater happiness and fulfilment, often by challenging an entrenched concept or conditioning. His response could be puzzling to others present, but to the one addressed it would strike deep in the heart – resonant, sweet, overwhelming. In selecting the extracts, we have sought to highlight Sri Babuji's principles and to provide a glimpse of the freshness and originality of his approach, and the creativity with which he would make his points. The extracts also reveal Sri Babuji's deep insight into the life and ways of his beloved Satguru, the saint of Shirdi, Sri Sai Baba. A third element of the book is the occasional inclusion of some words of Sai Baba, or incidents from his life, that shed further light on the significance of an experience or reveal Sri Babuji's own perfect attunement with him.

Notes on the text

Selections from the English adaptation of the *Shri Sai Satcharita, The Wonderful Life and Teachings of Shri Sai Baba*,¹ are given with the chapter number. Selections from *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*,² are indicated by the paragraph number. They have been lightly edited by the publisher to aid readability.

¹ Dabholkar, G. R., *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Wonderful Life and Teachings of Shri Sai Baba*. Trans. N.V. Gunaji. Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1999. Note that the title is often written as *Shri Sai Satcharitra*.

² Narasimhaswami, B. V., *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*. Chennai: All India Sai Samaj, 1999.

Dialogues with Sri Babuji have been extracted from transcripts of *satsangs* recorded between 1993 and 2004.

Most of the experiences were written by the individual devotee in Telugu, the language of Andhra Pradesh; in a few cases they were recorded then transcribed. The accounts have been translated into English and edited. As much as possible, the many Sanskrit and Telugu terms that remain have been explained briefly in the text or, in a few cases, in footnotes. The glossary gives somewhat more detailed information but is only intended to assist in understanding the text of this book; it is not a full explanation of often very subtle Sanskrit terms, or even the range of their general usage.

The year and place name at the beginning of each entry indicate when it was written and where the devotee was living around the time of writing; the place and occupation of the devotee given at the end of each entry correspond to where he or she was living at the time of the experience (and may differ from circumstances at the time of publication).

Please note that in Andhra Pradesh, names are given with surname first. People are usually known by the initial of their surname and their given name. However, with the exception of Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (*-ji* is an honorific suffix) and his guru, Sri E. Bharadwaja, we have given the names in Western fashion with surname last.

The Telugu version of this book is published under the title *Sai Deevana* ("Sai's Blessings").





INTRODUCTION

“Love is the Principle”

“I give my devotees what they ask for, until they ask for what I want to give them.”

Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi said, “My devotees come with different kinds of desires – maybe for health, for money, for a job, for a promotion, for children, for many things – and I draw them all with these pretexts!”

“Sai Baba never asks us to give up our desires,” Sri Babuji explains, “or to destroy our desires. Instead he exerts his influence and creates circumstances in such a way that the desires come to the surface and can be fulfilled – rather than suppressed or indulged – because once they are fulfilled they lose their pull. If we fulfil them by our own effort, they may intensify or give rise to further desires. But when Baba fulfils our desires, he does so in such a way that our nature is influenced in the right manner and the needed changes come about.”

The accounts that follow in the subsequent chapters are indeed awe-inspiring, but as Sri Babuji stresses it is not the fulfilment of the desire that is the purpose in itself; it is the transformation of the individual. “An experience should be succeeded by a transformation in the heart. We have to see whether an experience has brought about any change in our personality, in our outlook, in our fears, in our likes and dislikes, whether some complex disappears, whether some patterns which have been bothering us which we could not

give up, vanish, as if a burden had been lifted from our mind. How we look at the world, how we look at ourself, how people look at us and how we look at them and interact with them. That is what matters.”

On the path of Sai Baba, the experience of the fulfilment of desires fuels the development of a bond of love. Once the person knows that it is through the Satguru that their desires are getting fulfilled, he becomes very important in their life. Their attachment towards the cause of the fulfilment grows and the bond between them facilitates the transformation.

But what if an individual is not seeking any transformation but merely the fulfilment of a particular wish? Again Sri Babuji insists, “To them it may be like that; they may not even have any thought about transformation. But if Baba fulfils a wish, it is for their transformation. It doesn’t matter if the person is not aware of it. It is enough if they know that it is Baba who gave the experience.”

One need not begin by believing in the Satguru, nor simply take his words on faith. “Baba gives us different kinds of experiences,” Sri Babuji continues, “such that we come to realize that he knows what is best for us. From that sense of being cared for springs gratitude that develops into devotion. Then the love towards Baba slowly grows into a greater and greater fire, until it consumes all other emotions.” It is this fire of love, which he kindles and fans in the heart, that brings about the dissolution of the knots that bind our existence and limit our experience of happiness. And it is the power of love that leads to transformation and fulfilment.

The experience of having our needs met, whether lofty or mundane, works as a catalyst for our growth and transformation. When some insurmountable bureaucratic complication is suddenly resolved, when a physical problem that has long caused suffering is removed, when financial struggles are alleviated or a needed job appears, when the longing for love and guidance is fulfilled in a profound and dependable way – the effect is revolutionary. What

can seem, from the outside, a small thing, can turn one's world upside down.

Both the wonder of being shown that one is known, loved and will be cared for, and the happiness that this engenders, penetrate our defences and open the heart to an experience of love impossible to imagine until it happens. When the heart is opened in such a way, the natural response is love: one cannot help it, one is bound to love. It may develop gradually through numerous varied experiences or it may be triggered suddenly and then get strengthened by successive experiences. However it comes, in the hands of our Satguru, we are led along a path of happiness as the love and sense of fulfilment grow.

Sri Babuji encourages us to find out what we really need and to ask for that, so that our lives have a clear direction and meaning. He tells us to be very honest about this, and not to take up others' concepts unless they really answer to our own need. Our seeking should be personal, relevant to our own problems and concerns. The great ones found the solution that they needed and we may draw inspiration from them, but each of us should have our own path. "Unless we focus on that we can't evolve. Let us all make our own paths."

During Sai Baba's lifetime, the devotees around him did not approach Baba as a teacher, or as one with a philosophy to propound. He was so powerful that the very experience of being in his presence and the awe that engendered *was* the teaching. "The moment they went to him they saw the power, they were aware of their helplessness, they sought help and they got it. By getting the help they also got the message – the message which some other saints taught verbally. Nobody felt any lack that Baba did not teach, because they were so fulfilled. The only thing which runs throughout the gamut of his life and teachings, is love. Implicit love. Love is the principle."

Those who have been fortunate enough to come within Sri

Babuji's ambits feel wondrously blessed to be held in that principle. Love, power and wisdom were palpably manifest in his presence; yet when devotees would tell Sri Babuji their experiences, he would usually respond by saying, “Baba's blessings” or “It's Baba's grace.” He constantly pointed to Baba's greatness, to whom his whole life was dedicated and in whose love and grace he moved. And yet, when devotees maintained that it was their experience that the blessings came from him, he would respect their expression. After all, he said, it is *your* experience, and no one can refute another person's experience. Once when gently chiding us for a lack of focus, Sri Babuji humorously said, “What I do is make you aware of your need and how Baba answers those needs. If I put delicious dishes on the table and you are not at all hungry, what is the use? If somebody has said ‘eating is a good practice’, and you do it – you munch a few things – it would be meaningless. You should be hungry and you should be served with a delicious dish. What I do is give medicines for your appetite – appetizers! Or sometimes, even a purgative or laxative when it is needed! And then I show you: ‘Here is the delicious dish: Sai Baba.’”

It was Sri Babuji's aim to bring us closer to that which he himself was experiencing in every moment, that which he called Sai Baba. The numerous and wondrous experiences he gives, a tiny fraction of which are documented here, are one of the means of doing that – one of infinite expressions of the bond of love.



ONE

Being with Guruji

We had no idea

Shirdi, November 2002

In 1974 I was living in Nellore, where I had rented part of a house in Balaji Nagar that belonged to Guruji's grandmother. Occasionally Guruji's parents and their children would come to visit her. My wife developed a friendship with Guruji's sister Suchitra, who often spoke to her with great affection of her elder brother and mentioned that he was giving English tuition to college students. As tuition is normally given by elderly people, I imagined him to be considerably older than her. One day I saw her talking to a young looking boy. Later when I learned that he was her elder brother, Sarath Babu, I could hardly believe it. He seemed far too young.

I took little notice of him but became close friends with Venkateswara, the brother of Guruji's mother, whom everyone called V. T. In May 1976 I moved with my family to Venkatagiri where I got a job as a junior assistant in the Industrial Training Institute. Two months later Guruji's father was transferred to Venkatagiri to take up a post as headmaster of a high school. I happened to meet him one day in the bazaar. He invited me for a visit and mentioned that his eldest son had come home.

I immediately went to see the family, happy to renew the contact with them. How could I know that this meeting would change my life? From then on Guruji would come to my house frequently and often accompany me to the bazaar. I began to be intrigued by this young man who looked like a boy but whose perceptions and ways of expressing himself were far from boyish. He showed astonishing insight, seriousness and a maturity far beyond his years. I also liked his sense of humour and his naturally authoritative yet easy manner.

One day while we were discussing a problem that was troubling me he suggested that I pray to Sai Baba. He said that Baba would

certainly help me. I had my own family deity and therefore told him that I had no need of Sai Baba, to which he replied, "All right, do as you wish."

Another time when I was visiting him on a Thursday (the traditional day of the guru), he gave me a picture of Sai Baba and suggested that I get it framed, which I did. I placed it on our altar at home for daily puja. We have been doing puja to this picture ever since. When I first started doing this, something strange used to happen: whenever I looked at this picture a wave of peace and happiness swept through me, taking me by surprise.

SRI BABUJI: When you sit in front of Sai Baba something stirs in you, the love flows. You are very happy, jubilant. You forget about all your worries and your problems. You feel a sense of security. The one who triggers that love and fulfilment in you, he is your Satguru.

Guruji introduced me to his own guru, Acharya Bharadwaja, a remarkable man of tremendous love, intensity and eloquence who had become very well-known in our area. Sri Bharadwaja was a great devotee of Sai Baba of Shirdi. He often came to visit Guruji and on these occasions gave satsang in Venkatagiri, which I always attended. His appreciation and love for his devotee Sarath Babu were obvious. He told him to start giving satsang in Venkatagiri, and this is how I became acquainted with the life of Sai Baba.

Sri Bharadwaja's visits became more frequent. For every visit Guruji would prepare a grand welcome and invite us to assist in the arrangements. Finding these recurrent, time-consuming preparations rather odd, I once said to Guruji, "Acharya Bharadwaja comes here very often. Do we have to welcome him each time with such pomp and ceremony?"

Guruji replied emphatically, "Kondayya, remember this and never forget it! Even if my guru came every day instead of every week, I would still receive him in this manner!"

This answer took me by surprise and at the time I shrugged it off as eccentric behaviour. Slowly, however, I realized that he was creating a continuous thrill that made each meeting a fresh, exciting and uplifting event. He would not allow a dull, half-hearted and empty routine of ritual to set in.

SRI BABUJI: When somebody loves his child and picks her up and kisses her, it is a spontaneous expression of his love. But even when he is not feeling love, if he holds the child and kisses her, then the same emotion is triggered.

DEVOTEE: So the action triggers the emotion?

SRI BABUJI: Yes. And there lies the meaning of ritual. All ritual began like this, as an expression of love, an action that expressed some emotion. By re-enacting it, we seek to get the same emotion.

DEVOTEE: Sometimes rituals become just mechanical.

SRI BABUJI: If it becomes simply mechanical there is no meaning in it. But what sometimes happens is, by going on re-enacting a ritual even when it feels mechanical, it may start to trigger something in you. It is a way to elicit your emotions, to nurture your emotions.

When you understand this you will understand the meaning of ritual as an expression of love, and also the striving to experience love. The two are not separate: the more you express love, the more the experience of it grows; the more it grows, the more you long to express it. And there is no end to it. You don't want to have an end to it, in fact. You try to strengthen the love in order to experience and express it more and more.

You may call this a spiritual practice, a ritual or just a need. It is a natural way, an art of life.



In 1977 Guruji founded an English medium school in Venkatagiri. I was overjoyed because he seemed to be there to stay. On his Master's instructions he gave *satsang* every day, always dedicated to Sai Baba. He encouraged us to do *nama japa* of Sai Baba. Often he would tell us simply to look at Baba's picture or to sit quietly in the temple and meditate. He reiterated that the best thing was to rely on Baba for everything and let him take care of all our needs.

The efficacy of God's name is well-known. It saves us from all sins and bad tendencies, frees us from the cycle of births and deaths. There is no easier *sadhana* than this. It is the best purifier of our mind. It requires no paraphernalia and no restrictions. It is so easy and so effective. This *sadhana*, Baba wanted Shama to practise.

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XXVII)



At his Master's behest, Guruji wrote a biography of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great saint of Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai. Guruji showed me the handwritten manuscript and explained in great detail how he wished the pages to look: margins had to be even on both sides, paragraphs done in a certain way and no typing mistakes were permissible. It had to be perfect and aesthetically pleasing. We rented a typewriter for five rupees and I began to type each night at around eleven o'clock for about five hours. I was confined to a room to do this exacting task while just next door Guruji would engage in great spiritual discussions and crack jokes for hours with Sai Prasad, another *satsang* member and a friend of mine. I found this rather irritating, and felt jealous and left out.

When Guruji made one of his frequent cups of delicious, strong coffee, he would always bring one for me. He would then look at the work I had done and his eagle eye would immediately detect the slightest error; very rarely did he overlook a mistake. I tried to hoodwink him by nonchalantly placing my hand over any blunders

I had made, or rolling back the page to present him with an area of perfect copy. But soon I learned that it was impossible to cheat. He would always tear up any imperfect pages and tell me to type them again.

Though I was doing my government job in the daytime and working on the manuscript until four in the morning, I didn't feel in the least tired. I wondered at the enormous reservoir of energy sustaining me. Now I know who gave me the extra energy but at the time I did not suspect that Guruji was behind my remarkable stamina, nor did I see it as a form of *sadhana* given by my guru. Guruji was teaching me to do the work that I had been given to the very best of my ability, to do it with utmost concentration and attention to the smallest detail and to do it with reverence for the great saint whose life history I was typing. I found great happiness and fulfilment in work well done.



Guruji lived in a small, sparsely furnished apartment above the school that he founded. Opposite the school was a vacant plot of land which had previously served as a wrestling ground, with a dilapidated house standing on it. The land was disused and overgrown with shrubs and weeds. Guruji thought this was a perfect site for a Sai Baba temple.

We made enquiries and discovered that it belonged to a trust that was willing to let us have it. We cleared the ground and started to do some restoration to the building. Guruji participated in the work, supervised it and directed our efforts. Soon it was ready. We obtained a picture of Sai Baba and Bharadwaja Master came to inaugurate the temple. Guruji's delight at having a Sai Baba temple in Venkatagiri was infectious.

In 1982 Guruji closed down the school and began a period of solitude and *sadhana* never leaving his house, which was near mine. On my way to the office I would stop by and sometimes find him

asleep on his bed, a wooden bench covered with a jute bag and a sheet. He had a pillow but no mattress. I always had the feeling that, although asleep, he was somehow awake because his legs would move with the slightest disturbance from the outside. Sai Prasad, who also passed by every morning, had the same impression. When we met Guruji in the evening for *satsang* he would always ask us why we did not wake him up. We thought he must have been watching us while asleep.

Bharadwaja Master arranged Guruji's marriage to Anasuya, his wife's sister, in 1982. This was an astonishing event. We had known Guruji to be of a rather ascetic temperament, showing no interest whatever in women and marriage. But when his guru told him to get married, he followed this instruction with the same unquestioning surrender with which he followed all his Master's instructions.

He moved to Ongole where Sri Bharadwaja was living but he would frequently travel the two hundred kilometres back to Venkatagiri to visit us. Before his arrival he would often appear in my dream and I could thus inform Sai Prasad about it. I was happy in his presence, forgetting about my work and everything else, and was overcome by sadness each time he left.



Looking back on those days, I'm still surprised that we never suspected Guruji to be more than a spiritual seeker. He seemed to be one of us, a fellow devotee. Although we had many experiences in his presence that we didn't have anywhere else, we never thought they came from him. Guruji always insisted that all our spiritual experiences were due to Baba's grace alone. Only later did I understand that he adhered strictly to the tradition according to which a disciple, even if he achieves a high spiritual state, will never make known his attainments as long as his own guru is alive, or only if expressly told to do so by his guru.

Many of those who have come to meet him in recent years

are amazed at the level of intimacy and contact we had in those days, but I always say that then we had no idea of his limitless grace, power and love, which are now obvious to a multitude of people. We considered him to be a unique and extraordinary seeker on the spiritual path, someone who lived very much the life of an ascetic in the midst of a normal environment. The obvious differences between him and us were that he had extreme determination, seriousness and unflinching dedication to his spiritual quest. Because of these qualities he attained an unusual level of insight. We did not understand this in those days, when his physical presence was readily available to all who were drawn to him. He did everything to keep us unsuspecting in this regard by living a simple and unassuming life, never even mentioning, let alone boasting of, the state of grace he had attained.

Even now, when there are thousands of examples of people that have felt Gururji's power and grace, he will always say, "Baba will take care" or "Pray to Baba" or "Thank Baba for his blessings." And although many people experience him and Baba as one and the same, he is absolutely adamant in denying that he is an incarnation of Sai Baba. He always declares himself to be a simple devotee of Baba. "I am just a page in Baba's book," and "Baba is so great, he is the doer of everything," he tells us again and again.

Kondayya Bavana, born in 1947, is a government employee who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

Whose power?

Ongole, April 2002

I had heard about Sai Baba ever since I was a child but my love and devotion for him began to grow only in my teenage years. I was fascinated by the *Shri Sai Satcharita* and read it over and over again for about seven years. Yet I was still steeped in orthodox

Hindu concepts and used familiar customs and rituals to express my love for Baba. It never occurred to me to question whether what I was doing corresponded with Baba's teachings.

In 1991 Dr Reddy invited me to come and see Guruji. Dr Reddy had told me so much about him that my curiosity got the better of my reservations about meeting another guru. I already had a great Satguru, Sai Baba, so why seek out anyone else? It was the simplicity of Guruji's lifestyle and his undoubtedly great love for Baba that won me over. And I found his wonderful smile and overwhelming kindness immensely attractive.

I can honestly say that I came close to Baba only after meeting Guruji. I realized that, unknowingly, I had tried to make Baba fit the mould of the traditions known to me rather than seeing and understanding what he was trying to teach. For instance, I believed that fasting was good and necessary, especially on Thursdays, the day traditionally dedicated to gurus. Though I had read the *Shri Sai Satcharita* numerous times, I had simply overlooked those lines where Baba speaks against the custom of fasting and of abstaining from particular foods on certain days. This is just one example of how steeped I was in traditional concepts. Through Guruji I learned how foolish it is to insist on doing something that Baba never liked and, on top of it, to do it in the name of love for him.

Baba never fasted himself, nor did he allow others to do so. The mind of the faster is never at ease, then how could he attain his *Paramartha* (goal of life)? God is not attained on an empty stomach... If there is no...food in the stomach and nutrition, with what eyes should we see God, with what tongue should we describe his greatness and with what ears should we hear the same? In short, when all our organs get their proper nutrition and are sound, we can practise devotion and other *sadhanas* to attain God. Therefore, neither fasting nor overeating is good. Moderation in diet is really wholesome both to the body and mind... Baba said to Dada Kelkar that he would not allow his children to starve during

the Shimga, i.e., Holi holidays, and that if they had to starve, why was he there?

(*Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XXXII*)



At the time I met Guruji I had received my Bachelor of Science degree and wanted to start the Master of Science course. I told Guruji.

He gave me a beautiful smile and said, “Baba is here for us.”

Within three or four months, after many twists and turns, I found myself studying at a college in Kopergaon, a town just twenty kilometres from Shirdi. I lived close to Guruji in Shirdi and would travel every day to Kopergaon. During those months I had the opportunity to witness the astounding experiences of many of the people coming to Guruji. I considered it a blessing of Sai Baba to be able to see at close quarters the way Guruji lives and how he affects the people around him positively and often dramatically.

I must confess that I often wondered whether all the miraculous incidents were due to Baba’s power rather than to Guruji’s, but over the years as I witnessed many incredible happenings I became convinced they are from Guruji. Once, while I was sitting with Guruji in his room, a couple from Tenali came in. They very much wanted children and begged Guruji to grant them their desire.

Guruji picked up a guava, did *namaskar* to Baba and gave the fruit to the woman, saying, “Only you should eat this fruit.”

Later in the day another couple arrived from Vakadu. They shared all their troubles with me. I advised them to tell Guruji everything and then brought them to his room.

After touching Guruji’s feet the woman said, “You know everything. Please help us and take away our troubles.”

Guruji smiled, gave them *udi* and said, “Stay in Shirdi for two days and do *pradakshina* around Gurusthan.”

The couple left, beaming happily. Through this incident I understood that it is not necessary to express anything verbally to Guruji. If it is our need to talk and tell him our woes, he will listen patiently

to satisfy this need, but he knows everything anyway. Both these couples, on later visits to Shirdi, told me that Guruji had resolved their problems and fulfilled their desires.

Once I told a friend of mine something I was unhappy about. When I later went to Guruji he repeated exactly what I had said to my friend, but talked as if he were alluding to something else. I was struck dumb. I knew for sure that my friend could not have told Guruji about our conversation. This showed me that I cannot hide anything from him.

On another occasion a man in his late 80s came to Guruji. He was born in Shirdi and had had the immense good fortune of receiving *udi* from Baba's own hands in his childhood. He prostrated to Guruji and took *udi*. After a week he came back in a very happy frame of mind and said that his health had improved considerably after having had Guruji's *darshan*. I often wondered and fantasized about how it would be to enjoy the bliss of Sai Baba's personal *darshan*. Now I was meeting a man who had met Baba while he was alive and yet was praising wholeheartedly the power of Guruji. Thanks to this incident, the lack I felt about not having met Baba in person, vanished completely.

I have seen many times that Guruji has the power to solve any problem, be it material or spiritual, yet he always points to Sai Baba as the cause of all these happenings. It was precisely because of Guruji's humility that I at first believed that it was all due exclusively to Baba's power and not to Guruji. I discovered only later that Guruji's stance is in the sublime spiritual tradition of great Satgurus. Baba, too, would often say, "Allah is the greatest" and "I am only a servant of Allah."

Kishore Parna, born in 1970, is a chemistry lecturer who lives in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh.

Baba replied, "You see, mysterious is the path of action. Though I do nothing, they hold me responsible... The Lord is the sole doer and inspirer. He is also most merciful. Neither

I am God nor Lord. I am His obedient servant and remember Him often.”

(*Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XXXIV*)



SRI BABUJI: *Have I called you? Have I invited you? Have I promised you anything? Or at any time did I tell you I am a guru, I am a saint, I am realized? Or I am Sai Baba's missionary, I am a spokesman of Sai Baba, I have been born to uplift humanity? Did I say anything like that?*

No. In fact, I said I am not. I am not a teacher! I am not a guru! I am not a saint!

DEVOTEE: *What are you, Guruji?*

SRI BABUJI: *I am just like you.*

DEVOTEE: *I wish I were just like you!*

SRI BABUJI: *What wishing? You are like me. I am a simple Sai devotee. Yes, I am.*

A journey of wonders

Tenali, January 2000

In 1998 a small group of Indian and Western devotees accompanied Guruji on a journey to North India. During this trip we had many wonderful experiences of his power. One time we were driving in a minibus to Kausani. The mountain roads were narrow and twisting, and climbed above huge gorges and narrow ravines. We wanted to reach the Gandhi Ashram in Kausani to stay there for the night.

At a certain point Guruji said, “There seems to be some strange sound. Is something wrong with the bus? Check what it is.”

The driver stopped, examined the wheels and discovered that all the nuts on one of them had fallen off. We also noticed that we

were on the side of a deep gorge. How was it that the bus could go without nuts on one of its wheels and hadn't fallen into the ravine? We gasped in shock.

The driver stammered, "We should have ended up down there and be dead by now. Guruji must be a very great man. He saved us all!" He threw himself at Guruji's feet.

Some Western devotees asked, "What are we going to do now, Guruji? We can't go on by foot. There is far too much luggage."

But then, seemingly out of nowhere, three empty jeeps screeched to a halt behind our bus. The drivers said they were going to Kausani and asked if we needed a lift. Stunned, relieved and happy we piled the luggage and ourselves into the jeeps. Guruji not only saved us from a fatal accident but also took care to get us safely and comfortably to Kausani.



On another trip in 1996 we went to Simla with Guruji. For us, the name Simla evokes a cold climate and snow – lots of it! Most of us South Indians had never experienced snow, and snow was what we wanted to see in Simla. We were in for a big disappointment. On our arrival we discovered that there was none. November and December are the months when snow can be expected. We arrived in January but there was no snow, just as there hadn't been any in the previous months.

Guruji called us to his room around two o'clock in the afternoon. While we were talking, somebody asked him, "Why doesn't it snow here?"

Guruji replied, "Why do you worry? If Baba wants it to snow, how long will it take?"

A short time later, Guruji went to his room to rest. At around four o'clock it started to drizzle. The light rain turned into snow and it snowed and snowed the whole night through. When we opened the curtains the next morning, the ground was covered with a

thick blanket of pristine snow. The trees, the roofs, everything was laden with soft white snow! It was so beautiful that we couldn't take our eyes off it. The staff at the hotel said it hadn't snowed this much for three years and they were surprised to get such a heavy snowfall so late in the season. They were wondering if it had something to do with Guruji's presence and expressed their happiness at having such a great man as Guruji staying in their hotel. We could not get enough of the snow. We gaped, we gawked and then ran out to play in it.

Somebody said to Guruji, "What a pity we haven't brought a video camera to record it all."

Later some of us decided to go for a walk and have a good cup of coffee somewhere. About two kilometres down the path we saw a coffee stall. There were two men there with video cameras, interviewing people about the sudden snowfall. They were Delhi reporters from Doordarshan, the national TV channel. Curious about a small picture of Baba and Guruji we had pinned to our coats, they asked some questions. We started chatting with them and told them a little about Guruji and ourselves.

They asked, "Is your Guruji really so powerful? Can he give whatever we ask for?" We replied that he can do and give anything.

One of the reporters wanted to know if Guruji could also provide money and we said, "Sure." They asked if Guruji would give them an interview. Guruji disliked any sort of publicity and we told them this. But the reporters, who were by now very curious, decided to come back with us to the hotel and plead with Guruji for an interview. On the way, the reporter who had asked if Guruji could provide money suddenly stopped and picked up something from the ground. It was a one rupee coin.

I pointed out to him, "You asked for money and Guruji responded to you immediately. None of us saw the coin, only you."

Though the reporters waited in the hotel for a long time Guruji did not give an interview; he has, in fact, never given a public interview. In the end they interviewed some of us and promised that they would inform us when the interview would be broadcast. Once

they were back in Delhi they did indeed telephone to give us the information. They also sent a copy of the video cassette.

Later, during *satsang*, Guruji said smilingly, “You wanted to have a video of the snow and yourselves playing in it, and you thought of renting a video camera. Baba has fulfilled your desire and you didn’t have to spend a penny on it.”

Sivaram Addanki, born in 1963, is a businessman who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

The Sakori Mataji

Shirdi, December 2001

When I stayed for some days in Shirdi in August 1992, I witnessed an amazing incident. One day there was a phone call from Dr Bakliwala, the homoeopathic doctor at the Sai Baba Sansthan Hospital, announcing that the Sakori Mataji was coming to meet Guruji. To me this was an unheard-of event of some special and mysterious significance. As far as I knew, this Mataji – who was the head of the Sakori Ashram – never stepped outside her premises. She was the successor of Godavari Mataji who had been appointed by Upasani Baba¹ himself as head of the ashram.

At four in the afternoon Mataji arrived at Guruji’s room, physically supported by two nuns as she was too weak to walk by herself. They sat down in front of Guruji. Guruji’s wife offered them water and Bournvita to drink. I knew that the nuns from Sakori never go anywhere nor do they ever accept anything from anybody, yet here they were, accepting drinks. Mataji, a woman in her 60s, told Guruji about her long-standing illness, a severe stomach ache she had suffered from since childhood. She asked Guruji for homoeopathic medicine. Guruji enquired about the details of her disease and gave

¹ Upasani Baba (1870–1941), an eminent devotee of Sai Baba who later came to be revered as a Satguru by many.

her medicines with precise instructions on how to use them. The ladies thanked him and left for Sakori.

A week later a letter arrived from Mataji to Guruji. As it was written in the local language, Marathi, which none of us knew well, we asked our neighbour Bharat Patil to translate it for us. His reading was dotted with expressions of growing amazement. He told us that Mataji's stomach ache had vanished by simply sitting in front of Guruji and that therefore she hadn't even taken the medicines. She also asked Guruji to give her the necessary strength to be able to sit through the long hours of special Vedic ceremonies that were about to start at Sakori. She concluded the letter saying that while sitting in front of Guruji, she had clearly seen the form of Sai Baba sitting in his place. I was speechless. This Mataji is no ordinary woman. She is a very special person who gives *darshan* and to whom everybody prostrates. Yet one *darshan* with our Guruji freed her from her suffering and, to top it off, gave her Sai Baba's *darshan*!

This incident convinced me of Guruji's infinite power, and made me appreciate even more my incredible good fortune in being accepted by a such a guru.

Mohana Rao Gupta Sanka, born in 1950, is a contractor who lives in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh.

Calm down!

Hyderabad, June 1999

Long ago I asked if I could travel with Guruji whenever humanly possible. By his grace it has happened many times.

In January 1999 Guruji went to Tiruvannamalai. I was lucky enough to be one of the four people who travelled with him. To begin the journey we had to go from Shirdi to Pune by car, a trip

of four to five hours. From there we would fly to Bangalore and then go on to Tiruvannamalai by car, which takes a further five or six hours. We were supposed to be at Pune airport by 1 p.m. as the flight was scheduled for 2 p.m. This meant leaving Shirdi at 8.30 in the morning.

We were, of course, ready to go at that time but Guruji didn't come out of his room. Nine o'clock came, still no sign of Guruji. I got a little nervous. Finally, around 9.30, Guruji came out and we left. I thought that we might somehow still make it if we drove very fast, didn't have to stop and encountered little traffic, which at that time of day was very unlikely.

On the way we stopped in Ahmednagar, which is about two hours from Shirdi. For five precious minutes I tried to call the Pune airport but couldn't get through. Meanwhile, our driver looked at the tyres and discovered a puncture. It took half an hour to change the tyre. I heaved a sigh of relief when the car was finally ready to start, only to stop again after a few kilometres because of another puncture! I felt as if I were standing on red hot coals and my irritation started to show. Guruji told me to calm down. The puncture was repaired and we started again.

Guruji fell asleep peacefully. I wanted to call the airport to cancel the tickets but did not dare to speak as Guruji was sleeping. At 1.30 Guruji woke up and asked how far we were from the airport.

I replied, "It will take at least forty minutes with this kind of traffic."

Guruji said, "The flight is scheduled for two o'clock. Can we make it?"

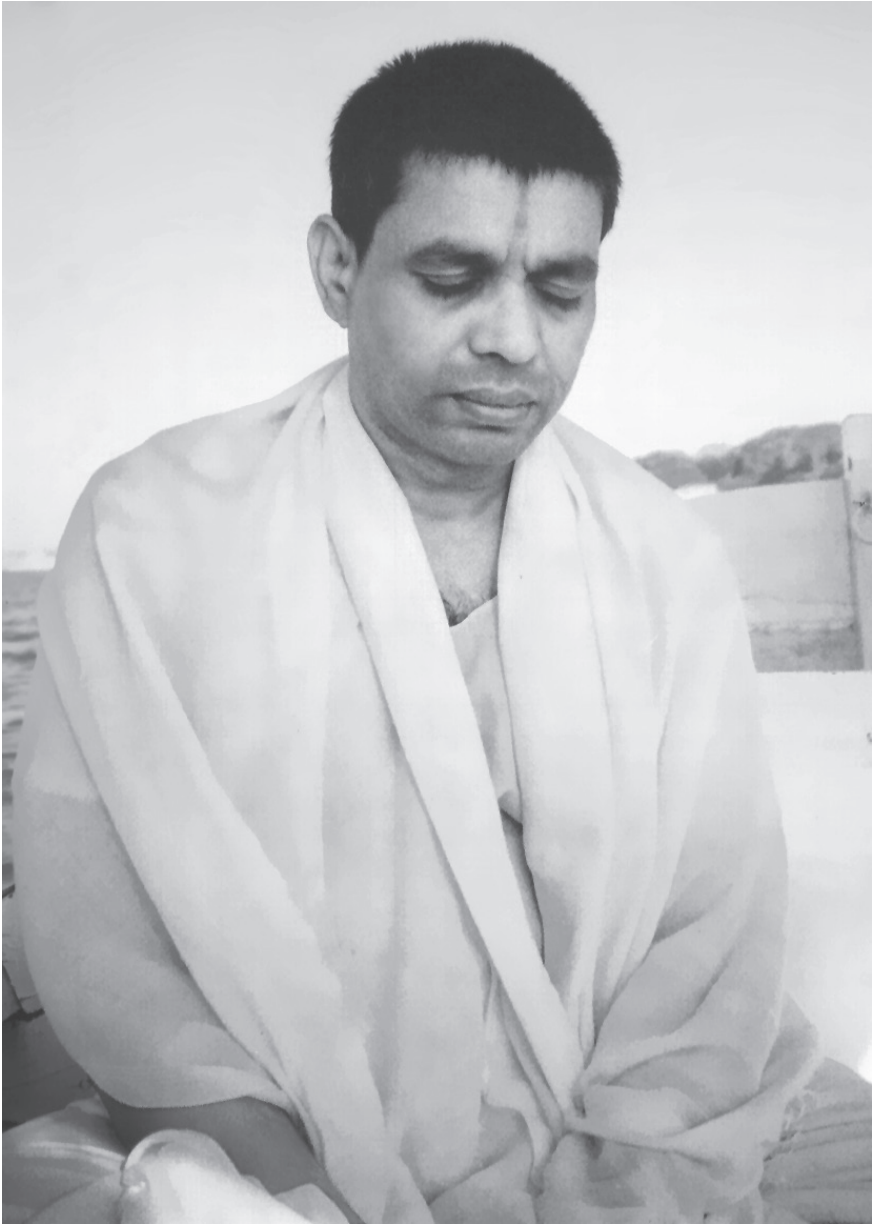
I replied that it was all up to him. The next thing that happened was that we were uncertain whether we were on the right road and, asking for directions, we found out that we had missed a turn-off! We reached the airport at three o'clock. I thought it was useless even to get out of the car and wondered what Guruji would do next.

Guruji got out and walked to the entrance. We followed him. As

Bound to Love

we stepped into the building, we heard a plane landing. Nothing was scheduled at this time. When I asked an employee what flight this might be I was flabbergasted to receive the answer, “It is the delayed flight to Bangalore.” When we checked in, the staff asked us how we knew the flight was delayed and would arrive at that very moment. We simply replied that we had come with our Guruji.

Siva Shankar Padmanabhuni, 1952-2002, was a businessman who lived in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.



Sri Babuji, Allahabad, 1995



Two

Crying Out for Help

Bound to Love

SRI BABUJI: *If we have an illness, what happens in some spiritual circles is that one should not complain about it. It is nothing to do with our sadhana or our Satguru. If you complain, you are told, "You are not the body. Focus on the Self." Even if you say, "I have a disease, I am in pain," you are told, "Don't worry about this illness! It is helping you realize that you are not the body." So we say to ourselves, "We are not the body," but at the same time we are troubled by the illness and so a conflict is created.*

For a Sai devotee, if he gets ill he goes to Baba to cure him. Then once he is better, he feels, "Oh, Baba has cured me!" Even the illness, that same body which is normally considered an obstacle, even that becomes a means of drawing him closer to the Satguru.



SRI BABUJI: *In Baba I see love, his love to help everybody. He is ready to help. I see his power that can help so many people.*

And that spirit of willingness, that passion to help, that love is the basis of a Satguru.

End of a nightmare

Srikakulam, June 2001

About a year ago my right hand began to itch terribly and to swell. When I scratched it, sores developed all over my fingers. My visit to a village doctor produced no relief. I consulted a series of other doctors, went to a skin specialist and tried many prescriptions but nothing ever helped. This nightmare went on for eight months. I tried different doctors who gave me new prescriptions, but nothing brought any improvement.

The doctors diagnosed my affliction as eczema and told me that, if it were to spread throughout the body, I could die of it. My hands were covered with pustules that gradually swelled to such an extent that I couldn't distinguish the fingers any more. The pain was so excruciating I could neither eat nor sleep. I was constantly crying out to Baba and Guruji to free me from this torment. One day the pustules started to burst, pus began to ooze continuously, emitting an unbearable, rotten stench. I was convinced that the eczema would spread and kill me. I fell into a deep depression and cried most of the time.

My daughter was going to Shirdi for Guru Purnima. She asked me to come with her and talk to Guruji personally. Thousands of people had come for the festival. Though I was ashamed to expose myself to others in this repulsive condition, I decided to go and to put my life in Baba's hands. I stopped all medicines the day before our departure.

We reached Shirdi on Guru Purnima day. I knew that when Guruji is sitting on the dais he does not give *udi* and people do not approach him individually but remain seated throughout the public *darshan*.

However, when Guruji came out I was so desperate I could not help myself – I ran up to the dais, grabbed his feet with my diseased hands and begged him in tears, "Guruji, please take this pain away.

Please free me from this terrible disease. Please save me!”

Guruji looked at me and then at my hands. He was sitting on a mat surrounded by many flowers, but he took the trouble to remove some flowers from a garland and gave them to me together with some *udi*. When I sat down, I started to shiver and shake for about fifteen minutes from the onset of a high fever, which abated by the end of *darshan*.

The sight of my hands and the stink were revolting to others. Nobody in Saipatham wanted to sit close to me. Though I understood why people were avoiding me, I was still hurt by it. The next day I decided to hide in my hotel room rather than face the rejection. My daughter thought otherwise. She said that I had been hiding and crying for ten months, and if I needed to cry I should do it in Saipatham, right in Guruji’s presence. With much reluctance I accompanied her back to Saipatham. Though there was a crowd around Guruji, we managed to push our way through to him. Again I begged Guruji for help and again he looked at my hands and gave me *udi*.

From that moment on I started to recover. I treated the wounds only with *udi* and gradually they healed completely. Baba’s *udi* and Guruji’s compassion were the cure that restored my health and mental balance.

Saraswati Bevara, born in 1950, is a housewife who lives in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh.

The same night

Shirdi, June 2001

My wife had been suffering from a continuous fever for some time and was eventually diagnosed with tuberculosis. Once during *darshan* when she asked Guruji for help, he gave her *udi* and his blessings. Her fever stopped the very same night and medical

tests showed that, miraculously, her lungs were now in perfect condition. The TB had disappeared completely, such is the grace of our Guruji.

Sarathbabu Rao Torath, born in 1954, is a businessman who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

Let him eat what he likes

Venkatagiri, June 1999

My son was suffering from bad allergic colds and asthma. A paediatrician in Nellore prescribed medicine. My son was healthy as long as he took it, but as soon as he stopped, the attacks would recur. His affliction was hard for us to bear. When he suffered, we suffered.

Our whole family went to Tirumala for Guruji's *darshan*. I told Guruji about my son's ill health. Guruji gave him an orange and told him to eat it. I was sitting close to Guruji and wondered why he would give an orange to my son as sour food was not allowed in his condition.

Guruji picked up my thought the moment it crossed my mind. He turned to me and said, "An orange is the best medicine for him."

I said, "He likes yoghurt and tomatoes. But the doctors always say they are bad for him."

Guruji replied, "Don't bother with these fears. Let him eat whatever he likes."

After this first *darshan* my son was completely cured. I can't tell you how delighted and relieved we were. With this experience our trust in and our devotion to Guruji became even stronger. If anybody asks me, I always say, "I have my Guruji, who is a living God, to take care of all my problems. I know he will certainly always do what is good for me."

Munindra Maakala, born in 1956, is a teacher who lives in Venkatagiri, Andhra Pradesh.

The power of holy hands

Nellore, July 1998

My daughter had severe eczema. Her forearms were covered with big, black, itching patches. We tried everything – allopathy, homoeopathy, Ayurveda, but nothing worked. We finally went to a homoeopathic doctor. He gave us medicine but emphasized that this chronic condition was exceptionally difficult to cure. However, he said that his Guruji, Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, could definitely bring about a healing.

In 1992, just a week after this consultation, Guruji came to Nellore. The doctor told him about our daughter's skin disease. In *darshan* we asked Guruji for his help. He looked at the eczema, put some *udi* in my daughter's hand and told us to put the *udi* on her arms after *darshan*. After many years of futile treatment, we were stunned to see the eczema healing very quickly. One week after Guruji's *darshan* it was hardly visible, and after another week it had disappeared completely, with no recurrence. This is the love and the power of our Guruji's holy hands.

Seshacharyulu Kalavagunta born in 1934, is retired and lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

The barren daughter

Hyderabad, July 2001

My daughter, Radhika, an architect, was married in 1989. Radhika and her husband very much wanted to have children. When two years after the wedding she was still childless, we began to consult various doctors. Over the following years she had many medical tests done. In the various towns where my

son-in-law was posted she tried allopathy, Ayurveda, homoeopathy, and many other local remedies. After ten years of these futile efforts my daughter was deeply depressed. We couldn't bear to see her in so much pain. We did pilgrimages and pujas, we prayed to each and every god and goddess. Radhika did penances, swallowed dangerous medications and underwent various operations but nothing worked.

She stopped going out and meeting people, fearing that somebody would raise the subject of her barrenness and increase her despair. Her pain affected us so much that we became quite disturbed and unbalanced ourselves. Once on a pilgrimage to Tirupati I happened to meet Bhanu Murthy, who is both a colleague and a friend. I poured my heart out to him. He said he knew someone who could definitely help and urged us to meet his Guruji. Some time later we met another friend who, to our surprise, gave us the same advice.

When we went to Shirdi in October 1998, all our hopes were concentrated on Guruji. We planned to stay for two days and had already booked our return journey. Narayana Rao, who was in Shirdi at the time, had made all the arrangements for our stay.

He laughed when we told him we would leave in two days and said, "The only thing that is up to you is coming to Shirdi. Your return journey isn't. You can only go when Baba wills it. At least, this is my experience."

We were lucky enough to see Guruji every evening in *darshan* and could even touch his feet. Everything was just perfect in his presence. We were so happy that the days went flying by like minutes. On the fourth evening during an individual *darshan* we begged Guruji passionately to grant Radhika a child. He nodded and smiled.

The next day Narayana Rao told us that there was an opportunity to do some small work if we wanted to. We were ecstatic to hear that it was counting the donations from the *hundi* in the Samadhi

Mandir, the temple where Sai Baba's tomb is placed.

We said to Narayana Rao, "It is difficult even to get into the Samadhi Mandir because of the crowds. How can we be so lucky as to get this responsibility?"

"This is Guruji's blessing, so just go and do it," he replied, sending us on our way.

At the temple the security guards invited us courteously to come in. We learned that the people who usually count the donations had been absent for two days and that the Sansthan authorities had asked for some people from Saipatham to help out. By Guruji's grace we were among the lucky ones.

At that time this work was done in rooms above and opposite the statue of Sai Baba. We thought we were immensely fortunate to have the chance to be there, and even more in that women are usually not allowed to do this work. My daughter, however, had come with us and encountered no objection to her participating in the service. We thought this was a good omen.

We started to separate the coins and notes, joyfully chanting Baba's name. We finished our work by evening and handed over the accounts to the Sansthan. They offered us tea, coffee and *prasad*. Then we were taken into the temple in front of Baba's beautiful statue where the priest did a special *arati*. We were given pictures of Baba, *prasad* and *udi*, and my daughter received a coconut as an extra gift. Glowing with joy we went back to Saipatham.

We returned to Hyderabad carrying such sweet memories with us. How happy our first visit to Shirdi had been! Two months later Radhika became pregnant. We never doubted that our long-standing desire had been fulfilled by Guruji's grace. There are no words to express our joy and gratitude. For ten long years we had tried every possible and impossible avenue and failed. Guruji's magnanimity and kindness changed all our lives.

Our daughter gave birth to a girl. For us this child is a gift of Sai Baba, that is why, with affection and gratitude, we call her Sai Baba,

Sai Prasad and Sai Amma. She is now two years old, a healthy, happy child, and the apple of our eye. Looking back at the pain we suffered and the happiness and joy we are experiencing now by Guruji's grace, we feel that this one experience is already enough to last us for a lifetime.

Venkata Satyanarayana Sundara, born in 1948, is a government employee who lives in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

Baba's speech established its efficacy or greatness while he was living in the flesh, but – wonder of wonders – it did the same even after his passing away! Baba said, "Believe me, though I pass away, my bones in my tomb will give you hope and confidence. Not only myself but my tomb will be speaking, moving and communicating with those who surrender themselves wholeheartedly to me. Do not be anxious that I will be absent from you. You will hear my bones speaking and discussing your welfare."

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XXV)

Restored to light

Shirdi, November 2002

Guruji's blessings are with my whole family. My daughter, Surekha, lost her eyesight during the birth of her first baby. An eye specialist was called. He said that she would most probably remain blind for the rest of her life, but that there might be a slight chance of her recovering sight in one eye if she took certain strong medicines for a long time. My devastated daughter asked me to ring Shirdi immediately. Amma, Guruji's wife, answered the phone and promised to inform Guruji straight away. Surekha's eyesight gradually recovered over the succeeding week and after ten days was back to normal.



After a cataract operation my mother developed an unusual complication so severe that the doctor told us that no medical treatment would help her. We telephoned Shirdi, told a *gurubandhu* of our mother's condition, and asked him to inform Guruji. My mother recovered her sight completely in the course of a few weeks.

Kondayya Bavana, born in 1947, is a government employee who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

Nishtha and saburi

Nellore, January 2001

I have suffered from chronic colds ever since my childhood. When they occurred, my nose ran constantly and my eyes watered. After I got married this condition became worse. Anything cold would bring it on; I couldn't even touch cold water. An ENT specialist did an operation that gave me temporary relief, but the colds eventually returned with a vengeance, worse than before. The many medicines I tried didn't do a thing. When we moved from Hyderabad to Chittoor, the colds became even worse.

I saw Guruji for the first time in 1993 in Shirdi, but somehow didn't think of asking him for help. Years later, when we heard that Guruji was in Tiruvannamalai, my husband and I asked for permission to see him. During those days my health was extremely bad. For two weeks I had had a severe feverish cold and I was very weak. I hated to be in this kind of state but I wanted to meet Guruji. In spite of my illness we started our journey. The bus ride was awful and I felt sick the whole night.

We took a hotel room in Tiruvannamalai and went in the evening to Guruji's flat. Because I was too weak to stand in line for *darshan*,

I had to lie down. Finally it was my turn to sit in front of Guruji. Between sobs I told him about my long-standing affliction.

“Go for *darshan* at the Arunachaleswara Temple,” he said. “Then go to Seshadri Swami’s *samadhi* and come back to me again.”

My husband and I started off immediately. It was the season of the winter monsoon. The night was dark, a bitterly cold wind was blowing and the rain poured down relentlessly. My husband held my hand and led me from Seshadri Ashram to the big temple in town, a distance of one to two kilometres. We had to wade in knee-deep cold water and were soon soaked through and through. My mind started to question the wisdom of such a pilgrimage, “Why does Guruji send me out on this cold, rainy night when I am suffering from cold and fever?” After an hour and a half we reported back to Guruji, soaked and shivering, and told him that we had completed the tour.

He blessed us with *udi*, gave me some fruit and said, “Do *pradakshina* around Arunachala and then go back to Chittoor.”

Back in our room, I told my husband that it was beyond me to walk the thirteen kilometres around the hill, Arunachala, in this weather. Strangely enough, I was sure the fever had gone. However, I trusted my own assessment of my physical condition more than Guruji’s advice and didn’t do *pradakshina*. I still regret not having followed his instruction and I am sorry that I wasted an opportunity offered by him. My health, though, was completely restored. The colds, the fevers and the weakness that plagued me for so many years have gone and never come back.

I am shocked again and again by my own stubbornness. Guruji has, over the years, given me countless experiences that testify to his love and care. He has saved me from many difficult situations, yet I persist in the belief that I should be the one to solve my own problems. I have this ingrained habit of trying to depend on myself rather than on Guruji. As if I were able to save myself!

Baba asks from his devotees only two things, which are spoken of as two “coins”, *nishtha* and *saburi* (usually translated as faith and patience), but our mental habits make it so difficult to give them to

him. I pray that Guruji brings about the necessary change in me so that I can hand him these coins without any hesitation. Up to now, the only person I know who has successfully and wholeheartedly handed over these coins to Baba is my beloved Guruji.

Narmada Sunkara, born in 1958, is a housewife who lives in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh.

[Sai Baba spoke,] "I resorted to my guru for twelve years. He brought me up. There was no dearth of food and clothing. He was full of love; nay, he was love incarnate. How can I describe it? He loved me most. Rare is a guru like him. When I looked at him, he seemed as if he was in deep meditation, and then we both were filled with bliss. Night and day, I gazed at him with no thought of hunger and thirst. Without him, I felt restless. I had no other object to meditate on, nor any other thing than my guru to attend to. He was my sole refuge. My mind was always fixed on him. This *nishtha* was one *paisa* (coin) of *dakshina*. *Saburi* (patience or perseverance) was the other *paisa*. I waited patiently and very long on my guru and served him. This *saburi* will ferry you across the sea of this mundane existence. *Saburi* is manliness in men, it removes all sins and afflictions, gets rid of calamities in various ways, and casts aside all fear and ultimately gives you success. *Saburi* is the mine of virtues, consort of good thought. *Nishtha* (faith) and *saburi* (patience) are like twin sisters, loving each other very intimately."

(*Shri Sai Satcharita Chapter, XVIII & XIX*)



SRI BABUJI: *Baba said nishtha and saburi are necessary.*

Nishtha is having a purposeful adherence to your own goal. It means that loving care, that loving awareness, that focus. It is not something you practise. If the love is triggered, however much it is triggered, that much nishtha will be there. If you like something you'll do it carefully, and that care will naturally come. Because we love money, we keep it so carefully. We don't forget the passport, the visa and these things. Why is nishtha coming in this case? Because of the liking, because of the value that we attach to these things.

So the moment the love is there, the nishtha will automatically come. It is not that by nishtha love will come; it is a by-product of love. It is a characteristic of it.

And then saburi – it is usually translated as patience. However, the word “patience” connotes a sense of suffering. But saburi means happily waiting, waiting with a thrill. See the difference between waiting at the airport for your boss or for your Beloved. Suppose your boss is coming and you’ve been sent to receive him. You arrive with a name tag and you’re standing there when an announcer says, “This flight is delayed two hours for technical reasons.” Just see, during the next two hours, how you suffer! You feel anxious and stressed by the waiting, you’re impatient for it to be over. But if your Beloved’s flight is delayed by two hours, even though you must also wait, it’s a different kind of waiting. You happily wait, you enjoy the anticipation of seeing your Beloved! Just the thought of seeing him makes you happy! That is saburi.



SRI BABUJI: *Siddiq Falke in the “Sai Satcharita” had done a hajj pilgrimage but Baba didn’t even allow him to step into the mosque, into Dwarkamai. Baba told him you have to take darshan only from a distance. And he waited for nine months in Shirdi. Just to enter Dwarkamai he waited nine months, that old man.*

DEVOTEE: *Did he get into Dwarkamai?*

SRI BABUJI: *Yes, he did. This hajji Falke waited for nine months but afterwards he was so well-treated that he used to dine with Baba. Very few people were allowed to sit in Dwarkamai and dine with Baba – only about nine or ten, and Siddiq Falke was one of them. That man who was kept out for so long was so much honoured later. What gave him that? His saburi. What was the basis for his saburi? His love. “Why should I stay in Shirdi? I don’t get the chance even to enter Dwarkamai” – he didn’t think like that. He knew why Baba was doing that, and he waited and waited and waited. And he got what he wanted.*



THREE

A Guru? Not for Me!

Bound to Love

DEVOTEE: *Does everybody have a guru, whether they know it or not?*

SRI BABUJI: *Yes, everybody. All the creatures, all those who lack fulfilment, are in one way or another connected to one who gives fulfilment.*

First they explore the material ways. If they don't find fulfilment there, then they start being aware of the need for something else. People think their spiritual life begins at that point. However, in my view, everybody who is trying to get fulfilment is on the spiritual path. Everybody is on the spiritual path in one way or other.



DEVOTEE: *What you seem to be saying is, "Go to Baba and ask for your needs to be fulfilled."*

SRI BABUJI: *For me, Baba is synonymous with a real Satguru who uses his power with unconditional love and compassion to help us reach our destination. There may be others; of the one I know, I will speak. So for those people who haven't found one, yes, I'll suggest going to him. Not that Baba is the only one and everybody has to come to him.*

Tell me

Kandukur, December 2001

I often suffered from debilitating migraines that would last for two or three days and nights. During these attacks I would be unable to work and my eyesight was so affected that I could see very little. The night before I had to take the final exam in physics for my Bachelor of Science degree, I felt a migraine attack coming on. The pain rapidly increased and within fifteen minutes I was reduced to a wincing, helpless heap. Disappointment about not being able to take the exam, for which I had studied so hard, added to my misery. My mother also felt wretched seeing my state.

My friend Ganesh and I had studied together for the exams. Ganesh and his family are devotees of Sai Baba and Guruji and so is my sister and her family. They all go to *satsang* regularly and travel to Shirdi for Guruji's *darshan* whenever they can. For me, all this was just humbug. A guru was something for the gullible, the orthodox or old people. I was above all of these! My brother and I would entertain ourselves with scathing remarks about our relatives' religious obsession. The rare times I accompanied any of them to the temple, I would indulge in sarcastic comments about Baba, Guruji and all this outdated saint worship.

Ganesh, who was staying in my house to study with me, saw this latest migraine attack. He gave me a photo of Baba and Guruji and said, "I want to suggest something to you, though I know you won't like it. I want you to try it anyway. The best thing for you is to go to sleep and forget about trying to do any last-minute preparations for the exam. But please, before you sleep, just try this one thing: do *namaskar* to the picture of Baba and Guruji and ask them for help. Maybe your headache will go. And anyway, what do you have to lose?"

In my helpless suffering I was ready to try anything. I did *namaskar* to the picture and implored Guruji, "Let my headache

be gone by tomorrow! Let me write the exam well, or at least let me pass.”

I put the photo under my pillow. Usually sleep eluded me during a migraine, but this time I fell into a deep sleep.

Generally my migraines would last a couple of days and I was worried I wouldn't be able to attend the exam. The next morning, though, I woke up early, feeling fresh and strong! There was no trace of the migraine and I started to have faith in Baba and Guruji from that moment.

Ganesh was delighted and took me to the Sai Baba temple beside our college. We did *namaskar* and then quickly went over the most likely exam questions. From there we went to the examination hall.

Though relieved and happy that I had no headache, I was not confident that I would be able to do the exam well because I had lost a whole day of preparation. However, when the exam papers were handed out, I saw that the questions were identical to the ones we had gone over in the Sai Baba temple. I was sure I could answer at least seventy-five per cent of them, and answer them well. I was dumbfounded and wonderstruck.

After the exam I hugged my friend and exclaimed, “What a guru! And thank you, Ganesh, for your persistence!”

This was the first time in my life that I saluted Baba and Guruji with awe and heartfelt gratitude. From then on I became a happy visitor to the Sai Baba temple and started to go to *satsang* regularly.

When I received the exam results, I saw to my utter disbelief that I had not passed the physics exam. How could this be? Hadn't I written it with Baba's and Guruji's blessings? Sure of some kind of error, I applied for re-evaluation of the paper. For the moment, though, I had failed and I didn't dare ask my father for the money to go to Shirdi for Guru Purnima along with the other devotees. I so much wanted to go and touch Guruji's feet! Then my sister Sirisha came with her family from Nellore. They were on their way to Shirdi and my parents reluctantly agreed to let me go with them.

I didn't have a train reservation and spent the whole night's journey to Hyderabad standing by the door of an overcrowded general compartment. I didn't care about comfort; I was just delighted to be going to Shirdi. In Hyderabad we had to change trains. I didn't have a reservation for this train either. I was prepared to spend another sleepless night standing on my feet, but then Baba took pity on me. My brother-in-law discovered an empty berth next to my sister's in their compartment, and he reserved it for me. We reached our destination after a good night's sleep and I immediately went for the morning *arati* worship.

Overwhelmed by emotion, my eyes feasted on Baba's beautiful statue in the Samadhi Mandir. That evening, I finally saw my Guruji sitting on the dais of Saipatham Satsang Hall giving *darshan* to all of us. The only disappointment during these joyful days was that Guruji was not giving individual *darshan*. How I longed to touch his feet and tell him everything!

I spent my last night in Shirdi doing *pradakshina* around Gurusthan until five in the morning. On my way back to Saipatham I saw my sister running towards me, shouting excitedly, "Where have you been? Come quickly! Guruji is giving individual *darshan* and it's nearly over!"

I threw off my sandals and ran to the queue. There were only five people waiting in front of me and I saw that Guruji had already stood up from his mat and seemed to be ready to leave. I thought, "Oh, Guruji, please stay!" In that moment he suddenly looked at me and made a sign, as if telling me to come inside. Not believing my luck, I hesitated a moment but Guruji beckoned to me again and I walked to the door. A man who was standing there tried to stop me, but Guruji told him to let me come in.

I rushed to Guruji's feet. This was the first time that I had ever been able to touch Guruji's feet. Some unknown and never expressed pain welled up in me and I started to cry. Guruji remained standing there looking at me with compassion while I sobbed and sobbed.

He looked into my eyes, smiling so beautifully, and after a while he said, "Tell me."

I told him all my sorrows and problems and then asked him to help me get into the Master of Computer Applications course.

Guruji gave me *udi* and said, "*Subham.*"

It was as if I had been freed from a heavy load I hadn't even known I was carrying. I was in bliss. I will never forget this indescribably sweet moment. It has stayed in my heart, ever fresh and precious.

I didn't want to tear myself away from Shirdi, the place where I was experiencing untold love and happiness. However, I had to go back to Kandukur. Twenty days after returning home, two members of our *satsang* came to our house with the news that my exam had been re-marked and that I had got my degree. I knew that this, too, happened only by Guruji's grace and I thanked him from the depths of my heart. Shortly after this I was admitted to the MCA course.

Umamaheshwara Rao Donkina, born in 1978, is a student who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: We want many things. To fulfil them, what we need is power. Not simply power, it should be coupled with knowledge. And it is not enough if it is simply coupled with knowledge. It should be given with love. Then we really experience fulfilment.

What we need from the Satguru are these three things. For instance, somebody wants money, somebody wants a promotion, somebody wants health. What can give you that? You go to Sai Baba and pray, "I want health," and it is given. How is it given – by an abstract philosophical discourse?

When the power is not there, what happens with dry spiritual traditions is, they say, "This is all maya, illusion! Don't ask me about all these material things because these are all ephemeral, transient, mundane, trivial, insignificant. So ask me for something that is

really permanent and I will give it to you. First free yourself from all these mundane entanglements, then come to me. Then I will give you realization!" If I were able to free myself from all these things, why would I need to go to him?

There is a Telugu poet, Vemana, who wrote beautifully. He was a great yogi who also wrote very good poetry. He says, "If anybody tells you that there is nothing in this world – this world is maya, it is all false and you have to leave this; only there, beyond, there is something transcendental and you have to catch hold of it – he is a thief! Don't believe him. It's a kalla mata, a false statement; don't believe it."

The one who can show you that so-called transcendental reality in this world – he is the real Satguru.

Not a fairy tale

Kandukur, December 2001

I come from a large extended family that never had enough money to meet its needs. I finished my Bachelor of Science degree thanks to the financial support of my brothers, but there was no money for advanced studies. Our families went their separate ways in 1995 and the little property was shared out between us. All I received were my degree certificates and my books. There was no money for me.

Needing to work to support myself, I went to Hyderabad. The only position I could find, after much difficulty, was as a chemist in a laboratory. I had to accept it though I knew that this would aggravate my health problems. I had suffered from asthma since my childhood and had taken thousands of pills and injections just to be able to breathe normally. The constant exposure to chemicals in the

lab was disastrous for my weak body. The company doctor told me that I had better leave the job if I valued my life, so I resigned. I went back to Kandukur feeling truly miserable.

From my college days I knew a maths lecturer, Sai Prasad. I would go to his house from time to time and have a chat with him. He always spoke with great love about Sri Sai Baba and Sri Babuji but I just brushed it all aside. I didn't believe in gods or gurus. I thought of myself as a scientist and was convinced that the world ran according to scientific laws. We argued amicably for years.

Unable to bear seeing me suffer so badly from asthma, Sai Prasad sent me to Nellore to consult a homoeopathic doctor who was also a devotee of Sri Babuji. He started to treat me but always insisted that the real cure would come not through pills but by Sri Babuji's grace. I still did not want to hear these fairy tales about gurus and just took the prescription for a year. The asthma subsided whenever I took the pills but it would come back as soon as I stopped.

Over the years some of what Sai Prasad and the doctor said about Guruji must have seeped in, despite my resistance. When Guruji came to Tirumala in 1997, I very much wanted to meet him and asked for permission to do so. In *darshan* I begged Guruji to free me from asthma and he kindly listened to my tales of woe. After Guruji's *darshan*, to my amazement and wonder, the asthma simply vanished. Even now, I can still hardly believe that I can lead a normal life – eating, drinking and doing whatever I like – without the threat of an asthma attack lurking around the corner.

Since Guruji's *darshan* my life has changed dramatically. I never knew the meaning of happiness before. With my poor health and limited resources, my life had been suffering and misery. Guruji changed my whole life. My outlook, my disposition, and my emotions, everything has been transformed by his bounteous grace.

And as if this were not enough, he gave me even more. I applied for a job with the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation but I was afraid that I would fail the medical exam because of my

high blood pressure. After I wrote to Guruji for help, I was declared fit and was hired as a bus conductor! I am happy, healthy and have a good job. I will forever thank Baba and Guruji for their blessings.

Hema Sunder Kavarthapu, born in 1973, is a government employee who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.

The troublesome certificate

Kandukur, December 2001

I had heard about Sri Babuji from some of his devotees but it took time, and an amazing experience of his help, for me to be open to him.

There was an error on my Class X school certificate: my year of birth was recorded as 1975 instead of 1979. When such an error is not corrected within three years, the recorded date becomes legally binding and cannot be changed. It can create serious problems if a certificate doesn't agree with one's other recorded documents. This error caused us terrible worry. My father and I ran back and forth between various government offices for nearly three years but without success. The third year was coming to an end and I was getting frantic.

One of Guruji's devotees was holding *satsang* in a nearby house once a week. My cousin Prasad attended these *satsangs* regularly but I was never interested in accompanying him. At the time when my anxiety about the certificate reached a peak, Prasad insisted that I write a letter to Guruji. I didn't do it because I did not have a philosophical or spiritual problem. Gurus, I thought, were teaching lofty things and should not be bothered with my kind of worry. And even if there was a guru who would sympathize, how could he help me? He surely would not be sitting in the right office to correct my certificate. But finally, driven by despair, I forced

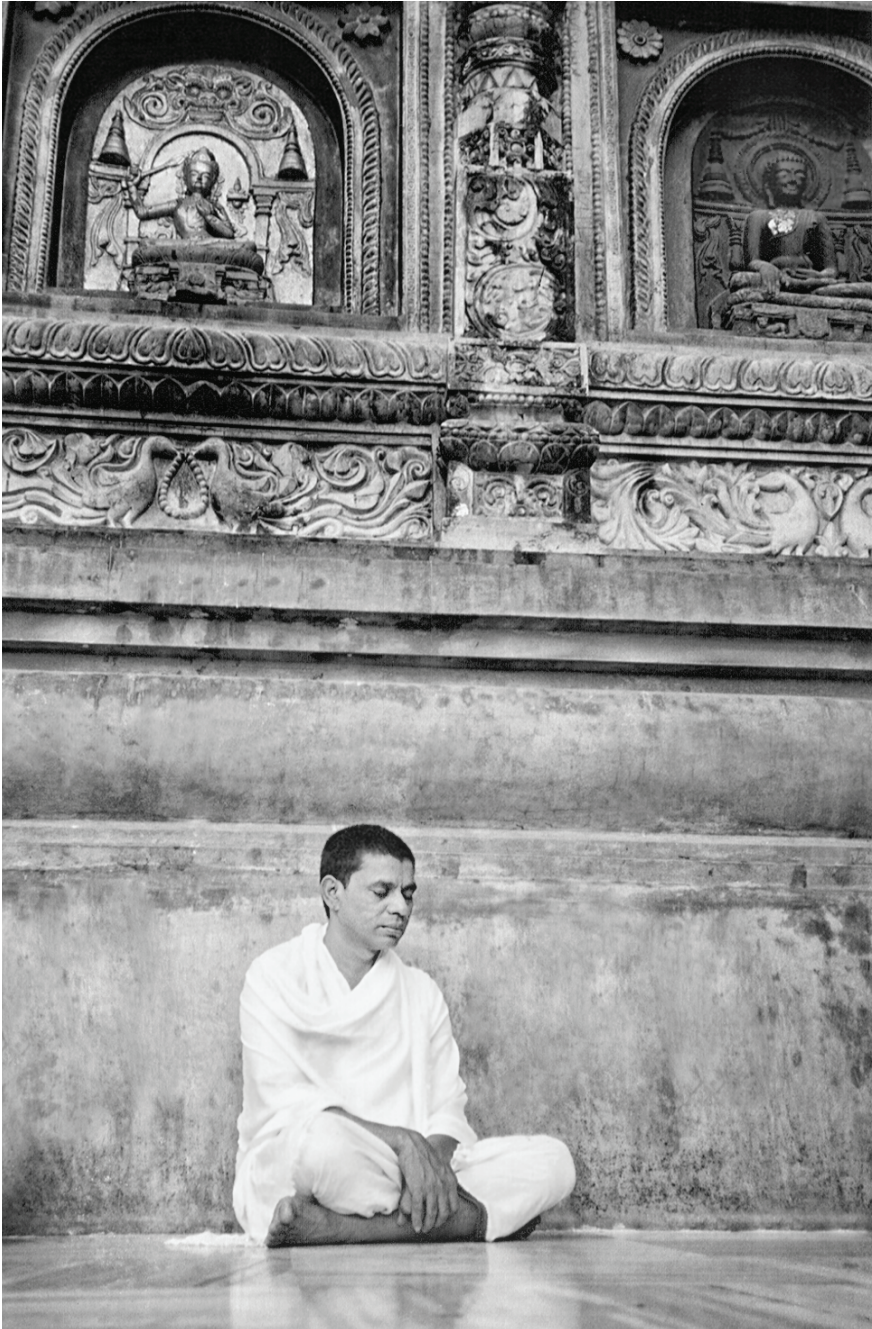
myself to write a letter. Just as one buys a lottery ticket without actually believing one has a chance of hitting the jackpot, I wrote this letter with no expectation of getting what I wanted. Prasad took my letter to Shirdi, promising he would give it to Guruji.

Meanwhile, I took a few days off and went to Nellore. When I came back after ten days, the impossible had happened: the corrected certificate had been sent! Can you imagine how I felt? Surprised and elated, my scepticism towards Guruji naturally vanished in an instant. What my cousin had been trying to convince me of was proved to be true. Only Guruji can do something in one week that we had failed to accomplish in three years!

This incident gave me a first glimpse of his power and magnanimity. Guruji helped me even though I didn't know him, didn't trust him and had never prayed to him. I couldn't believe that anybody would be that kind and generous. From then on I decided to go to *satsang* regularly and also to go to Shirdi.

I finally met Guruji in person for the first time during the Vijayadasami celebrations the following year. By then I had had more experiences of how Guruji reaches out to us when we think of him, and how thrilled we are when his help arrives.

Kiran Batchali, born in 1979, is a student who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.



Sri Babuji, Bodh Gaya, 1995



FOUR

*The Penny Drops:
Practical Teachings*

DEVOTEE: *You said that the guru is like an active mirror. What does that mean?*

SRI BABUJI: *A mirror only reflects what you are, but an active mirror is one that also tries to change you. It is not simply showing “You are ugly, you are dirty”. No, it tries to remove your ugliness, your dirt, and make you tidy. An ordinary mirror doesn’t do that, but this mirror [the Satguru] not only shows you what you are but tries to make you better.*

DEVOTEE: *Why does he do that? What is his motivation for doing that?*

SRI BABUJI: *When the active mirror is trying to make you tidy, what he is trying to do, in fact, is make himself tidy. From his side, he doesn’t see us as separate, he is just doing as he would for himself.*

For the “greater good”?

Tiruvannamalai, June 2003

A young man, Bharat, was engaged by me to look after the Sai Baba Satsang Mandir in Nellore. He saw to the cleaning, the flower arrangements and the organization of *satsangs*. He proved to be a real asset: responsible, reliable, honest and friendly. As we don’t accept donations, we couldn’t pay him much. Bharat enjoyed his work but he needed to earn more money. Several times he asked me to tell Guruji that he needed to find a better-paid job.

When one of our fellow devotees, Hari, was opening a cell phone shop in Nellore, he asked me if I knew any devotee who needed a job and who would be suitable. Immediately Bharat came to my mind and I mentioned him to Hari.

However, on second thoughts, I said, “I wouldn’t like to lose him. He guarantees the smooth running of the *mandir*, he enjoys his

work and most of all he is lucky enough to do service to Baba. Why deprive him of it? Let's find another person for your job. It won't be difficult as there are quite a few devotees who need work."

I mentioned Hari's job offer and our discussion to Guruji.

"I don't like your attitude," said Guruji. "It is like using a person."

"I'm not using him for my personal affairs," I responded. "He has the opportunity to serve Baba. Because of him the *mandir* runs smoothly, and anyway, we can't immediately find somebody to replace him."

Guruji looked at me. "How did Bharat come to us? He started to come to *satsang* and he developed a love for Baba. He wanted the job, got the chance, was employed and proved himself worthy. Now he has the opportunity to earn more, and this is what he needs. Baba has sent him to us, has answered his prayers and is now giving him a better-paid job. When Bharat goes, somebody else will come. Baba will send the right person."

The trap I had fallen into was suddenly clear to me. "Yes!" I exclaimed, struck by my mistaken attitude. "It is true. You are showing me the right way again."

In my concern about the running of the *mandir*, I had fallen into a trap common to people who are organizing something: efficiency had taken precedence over the needs of an individual. Furthermore, I rationalized my attitude with the argument of the "greater good", in this case, that Bharat was doing service to Baba. I forgot that we need Baba to take care of us; it is not we who have to take care of Baba.

When all this struck me, I thought that I would never want to forget it. I was grateful for Guruji's reminder. I know from countless incidents that Guruji appreciates it when we respect other people's needs and worries. He has told us many times that he is concerned with the individual and is not at all interested in organizations.

Narendra Majjiga, born in 1965, is a homoeopathic doctor from Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: *I have told you again and again that, to me, a group is not important. The individual is important. I always relate to people individually, personally. I advise people according to their nature, according to their leanings, according to their constitution.*

Everybody is unique to me. Every individual is so important. My goal is the individual.



DEVOTEE: *It is recorded somewhere that when Gangagir Maharaj visited Baba he took a shortcut to come to the masjid, and Baba chided him, "Don't come by the shortcut. Come the regular way, the straight way." But Gangagir Maharaj came by the shortcut, anxious to see Baba, so what is wrong with it? Why did Baba ask him not to do it?*

SRI BABUJI: *Actually what Baba was mentioning to him was not the shortcut that Gangagir Maharaj took to reach the masjid. He was referring to something that often happens in the spiritual field. When there is a spiritual group or an organization, after some time people in the organization often start to think, "When our views are correct, when our motivation is right, then we can take any step to reach the goal. Because our goals are good, whatever means we take are good. The means are not important." For example, they try to raise money in whatever way they like – "We use the money to spread Baba's name, so let us take the money" – or they use other people. What they try to make people believe is that their goals are good and noble, and so they can take any means to achieve them, that the means are not important, only the end is important.*

But the end is always out of our control. Whether anything good is going to happen when they use that person, or whether they will be able to spend the money properly so that Baba's name is really spread, we can't know these things. What is in our hands is the means only – that is, what we actually do. So whether we can reach the goal quickly or not, we should always be skillful about the means.

The means are more important than the end, in fact. You can't achieve a pure goal through impure means. You can't reach a pure and noble goal through ignoble means.

It is a trap, especially for those who have organizations. And Gangagir Maharaj was one who was very much into organizations. So I think Baba was indirectly cautioning Gangagir Maharaj not to take these kinds of shortcuts, that he should always keep his eye on the means and not sacrifice the means for the sake of the goal. We have to take his words in this respect, not about the shortcut from Lendi Garden to the masjid.

The principle of aparigraha

Anantapur, January 2003

My appointment as District Judge in November 1993 was an event I ascribe to the grace of Baba and Guruji. As a token of my gratitude I bought a gold ring and went to Shirdi with the intention of presenting it to Guruji. Although I had heard that Guruji never accepts any *dakshina* or gift from anybody because he adheres to the principle of *aparigraha*, I wanted to give him something to express my gratitude. In a private *darshan* I laid the ring at his feet and begged him to accept it.

Guruji smiled and said very gently, "Please take it back."

"But I bought it just for you. I am so grateful and I want you to have it. Please accept it."

"Don't you know that I do not accept anything from anybody?"

"Yes, I have heard. But how else can I express my gratitude? Please, Guruji, accept it!"

"Whatever gratitude there is has to be shown only to Baba. If you insist on giving it, put it in the *hundi* in the Samadhi Mandir as an offering to Baba. Only Baba is entitled to accept *dakshina*."

After *darshan* I went to the Samadhi Mandir and put the ring in the slot of the donation box.

SRI BABUJI: *Baba accepted donations; he even asked for them.*

DEVOTEE: *As a fakir one can, and as a householder, not?*

SRI BABUJI: *Yes. It is contained in the dharma, the pious tradition.*

And, moreover, not only because he is a fakir. Baba said, "If I take one rupee from you, I have the obligation to give you ten rupees." That is the real qualification, he is the one who deserves to receive donations. And Baba had that capacity. In many of the instances you see in Baba's life, that is how he gives to people.



My salary as a District Judge did not meet my expenses. We lived on a tight budget and I often didn't know how I would be able to pay my children's school fees. There were debts that I could not repay with my income. I have never accepted bribes. The only gifts I considered I could not refuse were small offerings, for example, sweets, fruit or a diary that people gave on certain festivals such as New Year's Day. A house that I owned in my home town was my only security and I was therefore hesitant to sell it.

During a visit to Shirdi I told Guruji about my financial difficulties and my debts, and I also mentioned the house.

This was his advice, "Sell the house and pay off the debts. It is better to lose property than to go against a principle."

I tried to sell but nobody showed any interest in buying the house.

Again I went to Shirdi to speak to Guruji about my tight finances. On this occasion I mentioned that somebody had offered me a big sum of money but that I had refused. Guruji did not answer at once. He simply sat there with a rather serious look on his face.

"You know that this is *not* our path. You can't have both Baba and bribe money," he said at last.

For about fifteen minutes Guruji explained to me the principle of *aparigraha* and emphasized how breaking this principle would inevitably distance us more and more from Baba. While he talked I was very relieved that I had never accepted any bribes.

Needing complete clarity, I asked, “What about small gifts, not given with the intention to bribe?”

He explained, “Let’s take the example of two employees working under you. One of them gives you a small birthday present, the other one doesn’t. Whether you want to or not, you will begin to prefer the person who has made the effort to give you something. This is only human. It is better not to accept anything because the mind of the giver has an influence on the mind of the receiver. Now suppose that the employee who gave the gift makes a mistake or commits a blunder the next day – you will think twice about reprimanding him or being as strict with him as is necessary. Because you accepted the gift, you have lost the freedom to act in the correct way.”

“What to do about gifts from fellow devotees?” I wanted to know.

“From them you can accept food, if they offer it, especially during a function when it is offered to everybody.”

Guruji continued, “Always remember that you belong to Baba. Be an example to society of how a judge should be. Show them that one on the path of Sai is an exemplary judge.” If there had ever been the slightest wavering in my mind whether or not to give in to temptation, Guruji’s words had vanquished it completely. From then on I never accepted even the smallest gift. I was able to explain the principle of *aparigraha* to people who tried to offer something to me without hurting them or making them feel rejected. And I understood that I was not losing but rather gaining by adhering to this principle.



Guruji never accepts gifts for himself. Whatever is offered to him, such as biscuits or fruit, he distributes as *prasad*. He is also not at all

in favour of donations. In the small office room at the entrance to Saipatham in Shirdi, a sign on the wall says, 'Donations are neither expected nor accepted'. No matter how noble the cause or intention, Guruji always refuses donations.

In a *satsang* at the beginning of January 2003 that I was fortunate enough to attend, Guruji once again made his stance completely clear. A devotee who had known Guruji for many years told him that his life's ambition was to build a Sai Baba *mandir* for the benefit of everybody. Personal gain was not his motivation.

He asked, "I don't have the means to do it. Is it good if I ask other devotees to contribute to such a good cause and start a subscription?"

Guruji replied, "No! It is not good, and it is not wise to ask for donations. We do not need to go around with a begging bowl in Baba's name. Don't accept money. Don't be a cashier or a trustee of anybody's money. What happens when you start accepting money? You have seen it, you know: the donors may want their names engraved on plaques, an organization will be necessary to manage the funds, then somebody will want to have the power of decision over the funds, disputes and quarrels will arise. We don't need any of this.

I am not saying that it is wrong in itself to accept donations. If people want to do it this way, it is their choice and their way. But my way is different.

If you want to do something, you can invite people, share your experience of Baba, and do with them all those things that make us come closer to Baba and help us live Baba's teachings in our daily lives. For example, we can chant his name, read books about him, do *arati*, sing *bhajan* and share our experiences. If, at a certain point, people are coming closer to Baba and feel the need for a special place, they will propose it and do something about it. I personally like it when a *mandir* grows naturally out of the need of the devotees and out of their love for Baba, and when it is built with their active involvement.

Let the creation of a *mandir* be in Baba's hands. If he wants a *mandir*, it will materialize in a natural fashion. And when it comes to this point, don't take money from people and organize the work for them. Let them have the feeling that they are participating actively. If the wish for a *mandir* becomes the group emotion, all will want to contribute in their own way. Do not take money. If people want to contribute, they will ask what is needed and then say, for example, 'I will take care of one window.' They will find out what is needed, buy the material and bring it to the site. They themselves will help do it, or if they cannot do it physically, they will be there with the right workman.

Do not beg. Do not accept money. This is my way. I like it this way."

Guruji's words touched me deeply. I feel blessed and extremely fortunate to have been accepted under the wings of a compassionate guru who is both wise and practical, and who lives what he teaches.

Chandra Kumar Bejjaram, born in 1953, is a District Judge who lives in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, if a gift is offered to you with love, what is wrong with your accepting it?

SRI BABUJI: If it is offered with love, I accept that love, I acknowledge the love, I receive it. On another level of physically accepting and enjoying such a gift, it doesn't stand as a good principle. It leads to the deterioration of healthy principles and a healthy environment.

For example, if you bring some coffee and I use it, then it is indirectly encouraging you to bring more coffee. And the next step is to order, "Bring coffee!" And another step is, "If you don't bring coffee, you are not a good devotee!" Like that, it goes on. Where is the end to it? So, as a principle, I don't use anything that people give me, whether it is a packet of biscuits or fruit or anything.

There is a book "Varthalapamu" by Prakasananda, a very great book. Sri Prakasananda also never used to accept

any offerings from anybody. “Stick to that principle, *aparigraha*,” he said. And then a devotee came and asked him, “Is it not the *dharma* – *dharma* means the pious Indian tradition – that one has to offer something to a saint? Why are you not accepting it? We are offering it with love.” Then he said, “Yes, it is the *dharma* in the Indian tradition that we have to offer things to a great saint. And it is also *dharma* in the Indian tradition that a saint has to refuse it!” Of course, I’m not comparing myself to him, but it is a good principle and I like to follow it.



Baba always used to get wild and scolded those who brought costly and rich articles. He said to Mr Nanasaheb Chandorkar that all his property consisted of one *koupin* (codpiece), one stray piece of cloth, one *kafni* (robe) and a *tumrel* (tinpot), and that all the people troubled him by bringing all these unnecessary, useless and costly articles.

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XIV)

Barefoot *pradakshina*

Shirdi, July 2003

In 1993 my wife, Yvonne, and I met Guruji for the first time in Tiruvannamalai. Guruji was staying in a cottage next to ours. We had the precious opportunity to sit with him in *satsang* in the evenings on the roof of his cottage. The third evening, as we were getting ready for *satsang*, Narayana Rao told us that there wouldn’t be *satsang* as Guruji was going on *giri pradakshina*, walking around the sacred hill, Arunachala. We asked if we could join him.

“Yes, you can,” was the answer, “but you had better start now because Guruji walks incredibly fast. He will catch up with you very soon.”

I was adjusting the straps of my sandals when Yvonne intervened saying, "Please, Carlos, let's go barefoot. We are going with Swamiji. (That's what we called him in those early days.) He and his Indian devotees will feel offended if we wear shoes. It is their tradition to walk on holy ground without shoes."

I was horrified. I told Yvonne in no uncertain terms that it was impossible for me to walk thirteen kilometres on a rough road without shoes. Finally, with great reluctance, I gave in to her pleading. Off we went, treading gingerly on the uneven ground. It was very painful. Not long after our departure Guruji caught up with us. He was walking very quickly. "He is almost floating," I thought.

Looking at our feet, Guruji remarked, "Why don't you wear shoes? Of course, it is better if you can go without, but you are not used to walking barefoot. It will be a torture for you. What is this good for? You will think all the time only about your feet instead of keeping your mind focused on Arunachala."

This was the first of many lessons about traditions that I would receive over the years. Guruji is neither for nor against traditions *per se*. He likes us to learn to discriminate which traditions and customs may be helpful, and which ones we should simply respect but not follow because they are not meaningful to us. A ritual should help us focus on the object of our love, not distract us from it.

Carlos Gil, born in 1951, is an IT expert from Spain who lives in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu.

"Do you know why I didn't call you?"

Shirdi, November 2002

During one of my visits to Shirdi, Guruji did not call for me the whole day. I was waiting outside his room growing more

and more disappointed and resentful. I even refused to join the evening *satsang* when it was about to start. Amma came out and asked, "What's happening? Are you angry with Guruji?"

I replied that I was very angry indeed. Amma went back inside, chuckling to herself. She returned an hour later to call me to Guruji's room. I followed her and touched his feet.

Guruji asked me good-humouredly, "Are you finished with it? Anything left?"

I replied in a grim and accusing tone that he had made me wait for twelve hours in order to talk to him.

"Well, talk now," he said, and invited me to share his dinner.

Later, I was about to leave when he called me back asking, "Do you know why I didn't call for you in the morning? If I had, you would have left immediately afterwards, but this way you had to stay the whole day close to me."

His explanation swept me off my feet. By making me wait he had kept my thoughts on him the whole day and given me a great blessing.

Kondayya Bavana, born in 1947, is a government employee who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: What are the causes of anger? Usually when your ego is hurt, when your expectations aren't met, you get angry. If you expect respect, for instance, and someone doesn't show you it, you get angry. Or if you expect some decency, some decorum, some kind of gentle and polite expression, or you think that other people should not hurt you physically, when these expectations are not fulfilled you get angry, don't you? Think! Why do you get angry in day-to-day life?

Now look at Baba: all the times when he was almost in a rage, show me one instance when he was personally hurt or offended, or when his expectations were not fulfilled! For example, one day a devotee came when Baba was at the peak of his glory, when thousands and thousands of people were coming and paying their respects to him. The

devotee came and said, "Baba, get up! I want to sit there on your seat."

Actually, that should have been a reason for Baba to get angry. He was respected by so many people and this fellow was coming and giving him orders. That should have made him angry. But Baba didn't get angry. He immediately got up and asked that man to sit down.

Try and read Baba's biography with an eye of discrimination and wisdom, then you will know that not even once did he really get angry. That is why he himself said, "I never get angry with anybody." "Then what are those scoldings, Baba?" a devotee asked. "No, no, I am not scolding, I am blessing," he said.

Falling out with Baba

Shirdi, January 2001

In 1990 I was entitled to get a tax refund of 35,000 rupees from the government. My auditor, though, made a serious mistake in the tax return and I thus found myself not only being told to pay extra taxes, but also that I might have to go to prison even if I did pay. I considered I had been unjustly treated through no fault of my own. I was furious and could think of nothing else.

One day, feeling exasperated, I sat before Baba's picture and told him off. "You have created a lot of trouble for me. You have put me in an awful situation and you do not allow my mind to be at peace. This is your doing, not mine. Unless you change the situation, I won't do any *namaskar* to you or take your *udi!*"

I tried to get other auditors to take up my case, but they refused on the grounds that it was doomed to failure. Finally, a retired income tax officer reluctantly filed an appeal but he had very little confidence of a good outcome. At this point Guruji was my only

hope. I went to Shirdi to ask for his help.

Guruji looked at me rather sternly and asked, "Don't you feel it is wrong to fall out with Baba in this manner?"

"No," I replied. "When we are annoyed with an elder in our family, we complain to him. That is not wrong. Baba is our elder and our father. Why shouldn't we tell him when we are annoyed with him? When we can get what we need from our elders by speaking up, why shouldn't we do it with Baba who is the supreme elder?"

Guruji listened quietly. Then he said, "Everything will be fine."

My case was two years in appeal but I finally won it. Everybody had told me how hopeless it was, but Baba and Guruji helped me and showed their generosity and kindness in spite of my high-handed behaviour.



In 1991, when my wife and I were in Shirdi for some days, Guruji called me to his room and said, "You are a contractor for construction work. I am sure you know how to lay water pipes. Would you like to lay the pipes here and also fix an electric pump?"

I was given money to buy the pipes and fittings and did the work that Guruji assigned to me. However, the water didn't flow smoothly because of some air leaks in the pipes. I asked a fellow devotee, Bhanu Murthy, who is an engineer, to fix the leaks and then left for Manmad to take a train to my home town, Guntur. After a bus ride of about two hours I reached Manmad. Overloaded with heavy luggage, I climbed up the stairs to the station, from where I saw my train disappearing towards Guntur. I have diabetes and get exhausted quickly; I also have a hot temper. Tired and utterly frustrated, I took out my anger on Baba and Guruji because they were responsible for me and for whatever happened to me. First they made me buy a ticket, then they made me take the bus to Manmad and drag all my heavy luggage up the stairs, only to make me see the train leave without me!

To cap it all, there was no other train that day. And how could I get a reservation for the next day? And what to do with all the heavy luggage? There was no other way; I had to go back to Shirdi. I arrived there at ten o'clock at night, hot, exhausted and absolutely furious with Baba.

In a rage I shouted to Bhanu Murthy and to my wife, "No more Baba for us. Never again will we come back to Shirdi. Never ever again will I do *namaskar* to Baba! It is he who made me go to Manmad. It is he who made me miss the train and come back to Shirdi in this state. I've had it! You pack your bags, too," I ordered my wife. "We will leave tomorrow for good."

I took a shower, had my dinner and then went to take Guruji's *darshan*. Somebody had told him about my outburst. He simply handed me *Sai Leelamrutham* (the Telugu edition of Acharya Bharadwaja's book *Sai Baba the Master*) and told me to read the chapter about Purandhare, a close devotee of Baba from Bombay. Purandhare decided to build an annexe to Baba's mosque to shelter a palanquin that was used for the procession from the mosque to the Chavadi¹ on alternate nights. When Baba saw that alterations were being made to his mosque, he opposed them firmly, even violently. He was not interested in the palanquin nor had he given permission for any construction work. Purandhare, however, remained adamant. He continued his job in spite of Baba's vehement protest and scoldings because he was convinced that he was doing something good and useful. Moved by his love and determination, Baba eventually relented but told him that he could go back to his work in Bombay only after finishing his self-appointed job. Reading this account, the Manmad incident began to make some sense. I had left Saipatham without completing the work that my guru had

¹ A small building very near the mosque. During the last years of his life, Baba slept there on alternate nights, and there was a grand procession escorting him when he walked from Dwarkamai to Chavadi. In commemoration of this, a procession takes place every Thursday evening, when Baba's picture is carried from the Samadhi Mandir to Chavadi.

given me. That's why Baba did not allow me to catch the train and made me go back to Shirdi.

Guruji confirmed my insight, "Do you understand why you had to come back to Shirdi? Do you remember that when you had problems with the income tax you were also angry with Baba and refused to do *namaskar* to him? You may feel that you were in the right then, but what you have done now is really wrong and that is why Baba has brought you back."

Shamefaced, I touched Guruji's feet and said, "I have learned my lesson. Never again will I quarrel with Baba. Now I see the mistake I made here."

The next day I carefully repaired the leaks in the pipeline and left with Guruji's blessings. This time I had a particularly smooth and pleasant journey. I have never forgotten this lesson. Under all circumstances we should do the work given to us by Baba and Guruji with utmost care, and always make sure we complete it.

Mohana Rao Gupta Sanka, born in 1950, is a contractor who lives in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh.

S. B. Nachne was commissioned by a devotee to deliver to Baba *annas* [coins] two, a coconut etc. Nachne delivered only the articles, but not the money as he forgot all about it.

NACHNE: Baba, give me leave to go.

BABA: Yes, you may go via Chitale. But why do you withhold a poor Brahmin's² two *annas*?

Thus reminded, S. B. Nachne performed his duty and paid two *annas* to Baba.

BABA: When you undertake anything, carry it out thoroughly or do not undertake it.

(Charters and Sayings, No. 421)

² Sai Baba sometimes referred to himself in this way, though during his lifetime he was generally taken to be a Muslim.

Hurting oneself and others

Chennai, June 2002

I had my first *satsang* with Guruji in Tirumala in May 1999, when I went with my family for his *darshan* to get blessings on our wedding anniversary.

During the *satsang*, Guruji turned to me and said out of the blue, “Why do you stare at Baba with unblinking eyes? You can let your eyes blink naturally and can happily enjoy looking at Baba. What is important is that we keep him always in our hearts and minds.”

I was slightly puzzled and thought he had made a casual or general remark. About five minutes later the penny dropped and I gaped at Guruji in awe. How did he know? I had the habit of staring at Baba’s picture with unblinking eyes and would keep doing this even if my eyes were burning and watering, spurred on by the hope that this effort would raise my devotion to greater heights. The tears caused by the strain were the proof for me that this technique was working. I had never told anybody about it; even my close family was oblivious of my efforts.

This was the first example of something that I came to experience many times – that Guruji knows everything and that we cannot hide anything from him. I also understood that Guruji doesn’t endorse artificial means to increase devotion. He likes things to grow naturally, for he wants the path of Sai to be a happy one for us.

SRI BABUJI: Don’t try to imitate the great saints in the name of tapas [ascetic practices]. When Ramana Maharshi came to Tiruvannamalai and sat for weeks in the basement of the temple not eating and not moving, he was totally absorbed in meditation – not minding his clothes, not minding his food or any of the physical comforts. He wasn’t trying to torture his body; he wasn’t practising asceticism. He was so happy, he was so absorbed in the bliss of his own Self, that he was oblivious of those things.

He was not doing tapas. It may have looked like he was doing tapas, but in fact it was a natural response to the profound experience that had taken hold of him.



My wife, Lakshmi, has a good singing voice. During our Chennai *satsangs* she often sings the beautiful Baba songs that were written by Guruji. I would get angry with her if I judged that she was singing mechanically, without the proper feeling.

One day I lost my temper and shouted at her, “You are too proud of your voice, that’s why you are singing to Baba without devotion.”

My wife didn’t say a word to me but I saw her go to Guruji’s photo and cry. She was deeply hurt.

The next day our family got permission to go to Tirumala to see Guruji. I couldn’t go because of pressing work commitments but my wife and daughters stayed for a whole week in Tirumala. During this time, Guruji’s wife asked Lakshmi to sing a song written by Guruji:

*Devude puttithe Sai rupam
Manishi daivamga peragatam Baba matam
Ananda jeevanam Sai jagam*

*(If God takes birth it will be in the form of Sai.
To uplift human beings into divinity is Baba’s way;
To live in bliss is to live in Sai’s world.)*

She listened and praised Lakshmi for her beautiful rendition, telling her that Guruji had asked her to call her and listen to her singing. My wife was deeply touched and happy because she felt that Guruji had somehow heard her singing and appreciated it. She also felt that her earlier prayers at Guruji’s photo had been heard.

I was truly ashamed to learn that Guruji heard clearly the love in my wife’s voice, while I was deaf to it. I saw that I had better check my temper and my judgements as they were clouding my perceptions

severely and hurting others. I pray to Guruji to remove my anger, hastiness and criticizing of others.

Subba Rao Bonigam, born in 1950, is a government employee who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

BABA: If anybody comes and abuses³ you or punishes you, do not quarrel with them. If you cannot endure it, speak a simple word or two, or else leave the place. But do not battle with them and give tit for tat. I feel sick and disgusted when you quarrel with others.

(Charters and Sayings, No. 210)

DEVOTEE: Do some behaviour patterns please you, Guruji, and some displease you?

SRI BABUJI: There is no question of displeasing. But I will be pleased if you behave in another way.

DEVOTEE: Which way?

SRI BABUJI: Don't fight among yourselves; be harmonious. Just live like one family. Don't mind small discomforts. Always be focused on the object of your love. And try to do what you say. Then I love it.

Astrology and auspicious days

Vijayawada, January 2002

Guruji often says, "Whatever your desires may be, or however you may expect him to fulfil them, Baba has his own ways." He also has a clear and simple stance on certain traditions and superstitions that are rooted in our culture, such as astrology. Guruji says that Sai devotees need only rely on Baba who will lovingly take care of every aspect of our lives. There is, therefore,

³ Here, "abuse" means scoldings or harsh speech.

no need to resort to astrology, *vastu*, oracles or mediums; Baba is our sole refuge. The events I want to tell illustrate these aspects and also Guruji's way of pointing them out.

My sister's daughter, Snehita, was born around the same time as my daughter Harshita. When the girls reached the age of four we wanted Guruji to do their *aksharabhyas*. This is a ceremony in which the guru (or elder) guides the hand of the child in writing its first words. It is always a sweet and touching moment when Guruji takes a child on his lap, puts his arm around her shoulders and guides the small hand to write her first words, "Sai Baba". We firmly believe that our children will study and progress well when Guruji does the *aksharabhyas* for them.

Traditionally, an astrologer determines the auspicious time for the ceremony. We ourselves don't care for astrology, but our mother, who is quite attached to the old ways, does. To please her we asked some famous astrologers to calculate the most auspicious day.

This was in 1995 and Guruji was in Poondi at the time. He was staying in a small dark room right next to where Poondi Swami lived for many years. We all went to Poondi, expecting Guruji to perform the *aksharabhyas* at the auspicious moment.

We sat in the open area outside Guruji's room, waiting for permission to go in. Quite a few people were sitting inside talking to Guruji. More were arriving and were allowed in but nobody ever came out. Our mother became more nervous and impatient by the minute. The auspicious time would be over soon and the next day was ill-omened, according to the astrologers. Our mother's anxiety started to affect us and old superstitious beliefs began to creep in again. We asked those who were allowed in to Guruji's room to tell him that it was urgent for us to meet him then, but there was no *darshan* at all for us that day! We were acutely disappointed. We had taken great care to prepare everything according to custom, paid for the best astrologers to calculate the most auspicious time, and it was all for nothing!

The next day Guruji called us in. As we were talking to him in

his room, a man came in and gave Guruji some big calendars with Sai Baba's photos on them. Guruji touched them to his forehead in reverence and said smilingly, "See, Baba has come! This is the auspicious time set by Baba."

He gestured to our daughters to come close, and he did the *aksharabhyas*. As is the custom, we had brought many offerings – pencils, pens, crayons, books, food, sweets and clothes – and we laid them at Guruji's feet. Usually, the children then offer the children's things to the children, and food, sweets and clothes to the adults, but here the only children present were our small girls. Good-humouredly, Guruji told the two girls to distribute all the offerings to the adults in the room. And so the principal of the Saibaba Central School in Ongole, some teachers, several college lecturers and some old devotees of Poondi Swami all received crayons and schoolbooks as well as sweets and clothes! Guruji asked them to give our daughters the customary blessings, which was done with much laughter. Later, all the offerings were distributed among the village children.

What our mother expected to be a solemn, fate-deciding ceremony depending on astrological calculations turned into a light-hearted, mirthful event. And Guruji used the occasion to give us a teaching, in his own inimitable way and laced with much humour. By the way, I must add that, by Guruji's grace, these two girls have always done exceptionally well in school.

Padmaja Grandhi, born in 1964, is a housewife who lives in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

Babu Tendulkar was studying hard day and night and wanted to appear for the medical examination. He consulted some astrologers...[who] told him that the stars were not favourable that year... This cast a gloom over him and made him restless. A few days afterwards his mother went to Shirdi and saw Baba. Amongst other things she mentioned the gloomy and morose condition of her son... Hearing this Baba said to her, "Tell your son to believe in me, to

throw aside horoscopes and predictions of astrologers and palmists and go on with his studies. Let him appear for the examination with a calm mind. He is sure to pass this year. Ask him to trust in me and not to get disappointed.” The mother returned home and communicated Baba’s message to her son. Then he studied hard and in due course appeared for the examination... The examiner...sent word through a fellow student, stating that he had passed in the written examination... The son being thus encouraged appeared for the oral examination and was successful in both. Thus he got through the examination that year successfully by Baba’s grace, though the stars were against him.

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XXIX)

Cooking with a grudge

Tirupati, March 2000

The famous Hindi movie *Shirdi ke Sai Baba (Sai Baba of Shirdi)* inspired me to go to Shirdi for Baba’s *darshan* in 1989, together with my sister and my three children, Gayatri, Srikanth and Vani. On our next visit a year later my husband came with us. We began to go to the Sai Baba temple in our town. Baba had entered our lives and we were very happy about it. Then during a corporation meeting in Hyderabad my husband met two colleagues, Narayana Rao and Bhanu Murthy, who showed him the *Saipatham* magazine, to which he immediately subscribed. We enjoyed reading it. It contained beautiful articles by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji about Sai Baba, along with information on what the path of Sai means for a devotee. This is how we learned about Guruji.

Guruji came to Tirumala in 1992 accompanied by some devotees. It was the first time since I had met him that he came to stay close to where I live in Tirupati. Tirumala is only an hour’s drive up the hill. My husband asked me to prepare some breakfast, which he wanted to

take to the devotees. He also told me to prepare a late lunch for them, which he would come and fetch later. Usually I like cooking but on that particular day I didn't feel up to it. I was unwell and wanted to rest. Resentful, and cross with my husband for making me cook for so many people, I grudgingly prepared three or four curries and put them into thermos boxes to be taken to Guruji's cottage.

When my husband came back in the evening he told me that Narayana Rao had asked him not to bring anything any more from our house. He didn't look at all happy. The reason for this message was immediately clear to me. I was ashamed that I needed to be taught this lesson. Whatever we do for Guruji or for fellow devotees should be done with a clear heart. It should be done happily and with love; only then will they be able to enjoy it. We should never do anything grudgingly or half-heartedly.

I was delighted, then, when my husband said to me a week later, "Let's take some food to Guruji."

This was my chance to redeem myself. I prayed to Baba to make me cook every dish perfectly and then prepared the food with great care. This time it was accepted and enjoyed!

Sarada Ikkurthi, born in 1962, is a housewife who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

The cost of a bus ticket

Nellore, November 2002

I went to see Guruji in Shirdi as often as I could. During one of these visits he said to me out of the blue, "You are very attached to money. That should go."

To my reply that I was not attached to money, he simply said, "Very good." I didn't understand at all why he had mentioned money. I did not see myself as a miserly penny-pincher and felt irked and wronged.

The next day I had to leave. I asked Amma if Guruji had mentioned whether he would see me again before I left.

She answered, "Yes, he did say so. He mentioned that you were leaving today and that he would call you before departure."

My spirits rose considerably on hearing these words. I waited the whole day until only twenty minutes remained before my bus was due to leave. I needed ten minutes to get to the bus station. While doing this calculation there was a power failure. Wonderful! I knew that Guruji would wake up if the fan stopped working. I sent a prayer of thanks to Baba whom I thought had arranged the power cut to wake Guruji up in time for me. Ten minutes later Amma came out. I approached her and asked eagerly if Guruji had woken up.

"You are right," she said. "He woke up as soon as the power was cut. He had his coffee but then went back to sleep immediately."

Narayana Rao – whom many of us call Naruncle – said, "Kondayya, why are you anxious? Last night you got Guruji's permission to leave. So, go and take your bus. When Guruji wakes up I will inform him that you had to go."

How to decide? If I did not go I would lose my bus ticket worth 275 rupees, but I also did want to see Guruji before leaving.

Naruncle proposed a solution to my dilemma, "You can go to the bus station in Siva Shankar's car. Try and sell your ticket to someone else. If it's not possible, then just leave."

All the passengers at the bus station had already bought their tickets. I didn't want to lose the money. Luckily for me a young man came running to catch the bus and the conductor agreed that he could take my ticket.

That night in *darshan* Guruji gave me a smile and said, "You said you were leaving. Why didn't you go? Do you remember what I told you last night? See how nervous and anxious you became over a couple of hundred rupees. Money is more important to you than I am. If nobody had bought your ticket, you would have left."

Though there was no denying his conclusion, I didn't like to

hear it. I did not have an image of myself as a miser and disliked being seen that way. He had just given me a practical and irrefutable example but I found it hard to swallow. Gradually, however, I became more aware of this trait of mine. Guruji does sometimes point something out to us directly, but if one resists the truth of it, he will create a situation to make it obvious.

Kondayya Bavana, born in 1947, is a government employee who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: I can give a hundred examples of how your decisions and choices are controlled by financial considerations. But why do you bother so much about money? Baba will give you what you need!

Baba gives you money so you don't think or fret so much about those things, and so that your focus will not be there, but on him.

Learning to listen carefully

Guntur, July 2000

In 1997 we went by car to Shirdi for the Guru Purnima celebrations. During our leaving *darshan*⁴ Guruji asked me, "Did your driver have a good rest?"

I nodded, "Yes, he had a long sleep."

Guruji said, "That's good. Now you can sit in the back and rest while the driver does his job."

After Guruji gave us his blessings, we started our journey in two cars. I sat in the back of my car, slept most of the night and woke up only when we came to a halt. My friend Hanumantha Rao, the

⁴ An opportunity for devotees to take individual *darshan* before leaving to travel.

owner of the other car, thought that the drivers needed a cup of *chai* to stay awake for the last hour of the journey. I told my driver to sit in the back and sleep, as I was well-rested. I like driving and I consider myself to be good at it. I drove Guruji several times and even he appreciated my skill.

We were about thirty minutes from home when a truck came speeding towards me and hit the side of the car. The truck accelerated instead of stopping and escaped. Fortunately, none of the others in the car were injured; they didn't even have a scratch. However, my right arm suffered a severe fracture that took many months to heal.

I couldn't figure out why the accident had happened. Didn't we start our journey with Guruji's blessings? Then I suddenly remembered that Guruji had told me to sit in the back and let the driver do his job. At the time it seemed to be a casual remark but now I thought that he obviously knew I was about to have an accident and wanted to spare me. I did not pay attention to him and fate or karma had to take its course, though I am sure that Guruji intervened and let me off with only a fracture. He also took care that nobody else was hurt.

This was a big lesson for me. I understood that Guruji never indulges in idle conversation the way we do. Everything he says to us is significant. We have to listen carefully to his words and take to heart those hints that he may drop in a seemingly off-hand fashion. Though he is always natural, he is never casual or superficial. This incident made me more attentive and it also gave me the sweet reassurance that Guruji is there for me always. He protects and saves me even when I am blind or deaf to what he is showing or saying. His love knows no limit.

Siva Gopavarapu, born in 1960, is a businessman who lives in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

DEVOTEE: *Why won't the guru tell us what to do? Why doesn't he tell things directly?*

SRI BABUJI: *For instance, if Baba feels that it is not good for someone to do something – maybe a business decision, travel plans, building a house, whatever it is – what he says is only put as a suggestion. If people try to argue, Baba doesn't say, "No, if you do that, this will happen." He won't explain these things.*

DEVOTEE: *Why is that?*

SRI BABUJI: *Why should he explain? There is no need.*

And there is another point, one which Ramana Maharshi spoke about. He said, "A jnani will never say that he is a jnani, and a guru will never say that he is a guru." They should not say such things – "Tomorrow if you go there, this thing will happen, that thing will happen" – because that is indirectly saying that he's a jnani, that he knows everything. He simply suggests, "Don't go there tomorrow!" That is enough.

No udi?

Shirdi, July 2003

A new cupboard was installed in Guruji's living room. I watched him inspect it and try out the drawers. He seemed pleased with it and asked me to put his books and files in it, then left the room.

As I was arranging the books on the shelves, Guruji came back and asked, "You have put *udi* on it, haven't you?"

"No," I replied.

Guruji's face, eyes and voice took on an expression between the incredulous and the appalled.

“How could you use anything new without putting Baba’s *udi* on it!” he exclaimed and went back in his room.

Feeling shaken and ashamed of my forgetfulness, I took everything out of the cupboard, touched every shelf and drawer with a dot of *udi* and began to arrange the books again.

I will never forget the expression on Guruji’s face. He has never told me to put *udi* on my things before using them, but I knew that it was unthinkable for him not to do so. Somehow, however, that point hadn’t fully sunk in. Guruji always says that whatever he is and whatever he has is due only to Baba’s grace. Putting *udi* on a new article provided by Baba is an act of acknowledgement and gratitude for Baba’s infinite grace. This incident had a strong impact on me and a lasting effect.

Whenever a new article arrives in Guruji’s household, be it a spoon, a pillowcase or anything else, I now remember how crucial it is for Guruji to acknowledge Baba’s grace. His reverence embraces every second of his life and whatever he does – whether it be entering or leaving his room, picking up a book to read or putting it down, opening or closing the computer, eating his meal or sipping a cup of coffee – he always folds his hands in silent *namaskar* to Baba, or bows slightly or closes his eyes while touching his heart. All these gestures are expressions of a profound intimacy from someone who has given himself wholly to Baba and is entirely immersed in him. They happen naturally and are completely devoid of effort. Interwoven with all aspects of his life, they manifest as spontaneously as the rise and fall of his breath.

Yvonne Weier, born in 1959, is a meditation teacher from Switzerland who serves in Guruji’s household.



Sri Babuji, Bhodan, Andhra Pradesh, 2000



Sri Babuji blessing a marriage, Shirdi, 2002



FIVE

Growing Up in Grace

A nicer school

Shirdi, July 2001

I was 7 years old and in the second standard at school. I didn't like my school because the teachers were very strict. I wanted to go to St Michael's Academy but there was no opening.

At that time Guruji was in Tirumala. I went there and asked him in *darshan*, "Uncle, I want a place at St Michael's."

Guruji nodded and gave me *udi*. Back in Chennai, I went with my daddy to St Michael's to check if they had a place for me. I was very happy when the principal told us that I could enter the school. I have already been with Guruji for three years and he makes me very happy. My anger is not so bad and now I listen to my parents more. Thank you, Guruji.

Visvaksen Pannavolu, born in 1992, is a schoolboy who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

The plum cake

Tirupati, July 2001

My parents have been devotees of Guruji since I was a child. We live in Tirupati, a town that attracts many pilgrims from all over India. Close to Tirupati, just an hour's drive up the hill, is the famous temple town of Tirumala, India's biggest pilgrimage destination.

I was a rather closed and difficult girl. Though my parents were devoted to Guruji, I had no great interest in spirituality. At first I wasn't impressed at all by Sai Baba or Guruji. My parents would talk about Guruji with great awe and love and would go to Shirdi as often as possible but it was their thing, not mine.

It was a seemingly small incident that caused a big change in me. It happened when I was a schoolgirl, about 14 years old. One

afternoon I felt peckish. I said to my mother that I would really like a piece of cake. Handing me some money, she told me to go and buy what I wanted before it got too dark. Just then it started to rain heavily. I didn't want to go out and get wet. It was dark by the time the rain stopped and therefore my mother wouldn't allow me to go alone. Angry and frustrated, I quarrelled with her for quite some time before going to bed in a sulk.

Guruji was in Tirumala at that time. Every evening my father would drive up the hill for his *darshan* and return early the following morning. The very morning after I had the quarrel with my mother, Guruji gave my father a plum cake as *prasad* for us children.

That same morning, when I woke up, my mother held the cake out to me and said, "Look! Yesterday for the whole evening you made such a fuss about a piece of cake. Guruji couldn't stand your temper tantrum and has sent a cake for you."

I was in shock. Several times Guruji had sent *prasad* for us but never a cake. How did he know about what had happened the previous evening?

I stammered, "How did he know? And why did he send it?"

My mother said it was because of the love he has for his devotees and because he always keeps his loving glance on them. The only thing we have to do is to be aware of his protection and depend on him for everything because he surely will give what we need and what is right for us. Many months later, when I started to read about Baba, I found where he says that his ways are inscrutable. I thought, "Yes, they are. He drew me to him with a piece of plum cake." It was this incident that made me turn to Guruji. From then on I began to tell him everything that troubled me.



In spite of having studied hard, I didn't qualify for the college entrance exam. I was sitting at home moping and crying about it. My father was also rather worried. He wanted me to have a good

education and my failure made him quite anxious. At this point Guruji intervened. He told me and my parents that I should stay for a while at Saipatham in Shirdi, under his wife's care.

I had a big inferiority complex that made me scared to meet people and talk to them. I confessed my fears to Guruji and asked him to remove this complex, which he did, slowly, in his own way. Being in Shirdi changed my life completely. My tension and anger vanished. Every day I would read the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, go to the Samadhi Mandir and do *pradakshina* around Gurusthan with Amma. Before going to Shirdi I was constantly angry even about small insignificant things. In Shirdi, I started to relax, to laugh and to enjoy myself and others.

Now I am the most confident, talkative and outgoing member of our family. Whenever I feel a need for anything, be it big or small, I address it to Guruji, and because of this I remember him every day. He has given me many experiences of his power and grace and I can't help but feel his love and care. And over the years I have come to understand that each moment that is spent in his presence, or in the awareness of him, is a precious experience in itself.

Gayatri Ikkurthi, born in 1980, is a student who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: To Baba, it is just like with a small child who doesn't want to go to school. We tell her, "I'll give you a chocolate if you go to school." She wants the chocolate and so she goes. By giving the chocolate, by fulfilling the desire, we make her do what we want and what is good for her.

We are all, to Baba, his children. We want some toys – health, money, clothes, a promotion, children. When we are in the state of children playing with toys, he gives more toys, like a loving father who enjoys providing his children with toys.

So realize that you are children and you have a father taking care of you, and happily ask for more toys and play – until naturally you grow and give up these toys.

Winning prizes

Chennai, September 2001

I like Guruji a lot. I asked him for a younger brother and he gave me a good one. When I was five my mummy said she would give me a doll if I did *pradakshina* of Gurusthan 108 times on Vijayadasami. I did the *pradakshina* although it was hard but she did not give me a doll. Later when we had Guruji's *darshan* he gave me a nice doll. He knows what we are thinking and gives whatever we want.

I studied magic and went for a state-level competition. I was very nervous and was constantly thinking of Guruji. I was thrilled when I won third prize.

All the other children were teasing me because I wasn't good at dancing. I went in front of Guruji's photo and asked him to teach me to dance well. After that, I twice won first prize in the state break-dance competition. I have now collected twenty-two prizes from dance competitions. All this is from the grace of Guruji.

I like drawing and painting. My teacher is very good at it but isn't really interested in us. I asked Guruji to make my drawing teacher teach me properly. Usually the teacher never gave me more than fifteen minutes of his time, but from then on he stayed with me for many hours and even showed me how to do figure drawing and portraits.

Guruji is helping me in many ways with my studies. I read *Nitya Prardhana*¹ every day before going to school. It gives me a lot of confidence. Before I go to a competition I do *namaskar* to Guruji's picture. Even if there are hundreds of competitors, I am able to perform with energy and confidence as Guruji always helps me.

Once when I was practising break-dancing with roller skates I fell down and hurt my back. I prayed to Guruji to make me well for the competition and then dropped off to sleep. The next morning

¹ A prayer that Guruji adapted from "Arunachala Padikam" ("Eleven Verses on Sri Arunachala") by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

the pain was gone and I won second prize. In this way Guruji protects me and shows me his kindness at every step.

Snehita Addanki, born in 1990, is a schoolgirl who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Fifty rupees

Venkatagiri, June 1999

My parents have been devotees of Baba and Guruji for many years. My personal connection with Guruji started at the age of 14 when I went to Shirdi with my mother during the summer holidays of 1992. After a week in Shirdi my mother had to go back to Venkatagiri. I also wanted to go but Guruji told me to remain in Shirdi. I stayed in a room owned by another devotee in the same row where Guruji lived, and I had my meals with everybody there. As I come from a small town I enjoyed being in a different environment and moving around freely. My mother left me only forty rupees pocket money, which was gone in three days. So, no more soft drinks, ice creams and enjoyable extras. I didn't know what to do about it. I wanted to borrow some money but was too shy as I had no close friends there whom I could ask. There was nothing left but to ask Baba for help.

I went to the Samadhi Mandir and to Gurusthan and prayed, "Baba! My father! Please let me find fifty rupees somewhere along the road."

I prayed for two days and always walked back from the *mandir* with my eyes carefully scanning the road. I knew it was wrong to pray for money that somebody else might have lost but I couldn't think of a better solution.

On the third day, after coming back to Saipatham from the *mandir*, Guruji called me to his room and asked me, "Do you have any money?" I said I didn't.

Guruji turned to Mr Gupta, who was also in the room, told him that I should be given fifty rupees, and then said affectionately, "Buy whatever you like."

After ten minutes he called me once again to his room and gave me fifty rupees. Overwhelmed by his smile, his love and his kindness, I was speechless and walked away in a daze. This incident was the start of my loving Guruji, and also convinced me that there is no difference between him and Baba.

Anil Kumar Pasupuleti, born in 1977, is a student who lives in Gudivada, Andhra Pradesh.

My all and everything

Chennai, February 2001

Guruji is my mother's elder brother. He came to visit us when I was just a baby. I only met him again in Shirdi when I was a teenager. I expected I would see him as my uncle, but from the very first meeting I was overwhelmed with awe and a love that was different from the love I feel for my other relatives. Although I call him Uncle, as most of the young devotees do, Guruji is far more than that. His love is immense. He understands me better than anybody else. I feel safe and know that I can tell him anything and can turn to him for all my needs. He has fulfilled my every wish, even the little things that I wanted or thought of. He is my guide, my father, my mother, my best friend, my all and everything.

Once when I was all alone in our house, I had a feeling that somebody was there, but when I searched I couldn't find anyone. Then, suddenly, I had a feeling that Baba and Guruji were sitting in our hall. I wanted to go and see them but I was too scared, yet some great force was compelling me. Finally I prayed to Baba and Guruji and went to the hall, closing my eyes and not daring to open them until I reached Baba's and Guruji's photos. When I got there, I

saw that the flowers that I had placed carefully around Baba's photo were lying on the seat below it. There was no way they could have moved by themselves and there was no draught in the room. Then I realized that Baba and Guruji had actually come, but it was not confirmed until later when Guruji came to Chennai.

When I had a chance to speak to him in *darshan*, I invited him to our house. He replied, "Why are you inviting me again? I am already there in your house, am I not?"

By saying this, Guruji confirmed my experience that he is always with me.

Divya Addepalli, born in 1984, is a student who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

No mollycoddling

Tenali, September 2001

When I was 21 I went on a 10-day course in Siddha Samaja Yoga, which was meant to strengthen my body. After it finished, I continued with the exercises and diet but overdid it. I became emaciated and almost too weak to walk. Some friends were worried about my state and they convinced me to go to Shirdi with them to meet Guruji. They said he would definitely help and set me right.

In Shirdi my friends asked Guruji how they should best spend their time. He told them to be as much as possible in Baba's *mandir* and to work in the Saipatham garden in their spare time. Not wanting to lag behind, I also asked Guruji what to do.

To my surprise he told me, "Work in the garden, and work really hard until you sweat!"

I had expected exactly the opposite. I was sure he would tell me to rest a lot and eat well to restore my health. But I followed his advice and became so healthy and strong that I outdid my friends in the work.



My parents had plans for me that I didn't agree with. Feeling misunderstood and angry, I ran away to Shirdi without telling anybody. I expected that Guruji would receive me warmly and with open arms, that he would protect and shelter me, and let me stay with him in Shirdi.

But instead he said, "Catch the next bus or train home or whatever transport you can get and go back immediately."

I had no choice but to follow his instructions. Once I was back, my parents, who had been anxiously looking for me everywhere, welcomed me with much relief. I began to understand that Guruji would neither mollycoddle me nor allow me to go astray.

Ramakrishna Biyyapu, born in 1975, is a bank employee who lives in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

Desires big and small

Venkatagiri, June 2001

I have been told that I was just 3 months old when Guruji first came to our house. For a long time I knew him only as the Sri Sarath Babu who would occasionally visit us. I also knew that he was a disciple of Sri Bharadwaja, that he had inspired the foundation of the Sai Baba Mandir in Venkatagiri and that he gave *satsang* there every evening. My father would talk about him with much awe and admiration but I wasn't especially interested. My father often went to Shirdi and sometimes stayed away from home for many months. I thought he was simply wasting his time and money.

In my teens I became more curious about my father's much-loved guru and started to go to *satsang* to check out what it was all about. This, along with endless discussions at home, led to a

gradual opening. After my Class IX exams I went with my parents to Shirdi to spend the holiday there. Then for the first time I had *darshan* not of Sri Sarath Babu but of Guruji. With this a new phase in my life began. I accepted Guruji as my Satguru and started to cherish him as such. My love and trust for him, strengthened by various beautiful and inexplicable experiences, began to grow and deepen.

What attracts me to him most is the calm I feel in his divine presence. No matter how big my problem or my irritation might be, close to Guruji my mind always becomes peaceful.

His vigilant eye is always on us, protecting us from harm. He defuses nearby dangers, often before we become aware of them. I have had many experiences of his love, care and power.



If one writes a letter to Guruji or tells one's worries to his photo, the problem gets solved even if one hasn't sent the letter. Once when I was in Shirdi I had a strong desire to go back home, and told Guruji's photo so.

When I went for *darshan* Guruji called me to see him and asked, "Do you want to go home?"

From then on I knew that there is no difference between him and Baba.

Sai Baba said, "I give my devotees what they ask for until they ask for what I really want to give." This applies to Guruji too. When we need something and ask for it he fulfils our desire. I have experienced this many times. Guruji made me come first in the Class X exams. He arranged a place in a good college for me to study homoeopathy. When I travel he makes sure that I get a seat in an overcrowded bus or train. He resolves my disputes or disagreements with fellow students. There is nothing too big or too small, nothing that he can't or won't do.

Vinay Kumar Pasupuleti, born in 1979, is a student who lives in Cuddapah, Andhra Pradesh.

Stage fright

Shirdi, November 2002

Before going to Shirdi for the first time in 1999, I had been to only one *satsang*. That time, Sadhana, who was taking care of the weekly meetings in Narasingapuram, read out an article by Sri Babuji about the importance of *kshetras* and how they influence the mind and emotions of pilgrims. I found it very interesting and was fascinated by the scientific explanation he gave. This is how I first learned about Sri Babuji. I thought that he was principally a great scholar and I became a kind of fan of his.

When many of the Tirupati *satsang* members went to Shirdi for Guru Purnima, I rather casually decided to join them. We had Guruji's *darshan* the day we arrived. The next day I was ill with a cold and high fever and was having difficulty breathing. I thought I would not be able to get up in the evening, but Sadhana persuaded me to make the effort to go to Saipatham, and not to miss the *darshan* on the eve of Guru Purnima.

Guruji sat down on the dais. As his glance was sweeping the hall it rested for a short while on me and then turned to others. I wanted him to look at me again but that didn't happen. I found myself weeping for no obvious reason. When I got up after *darshan* I felt completely well and healthy. Suddenly I could breathe with ease. The fever and cold disappeared in Guruji's presence without my even asking for it. What a revelation! It completely changed my previous idea of Guruji as mainly a great scholar. There was clearly much, much more to him. I had first-hand experience of his power to relieve people from suffering.



I wasn't a confident girl and this bothered me a lot. I suffered from a kind of stage fright when addressing others. While in Shirdi I prayed to Guruji to relieve me from this fear and he did.

During my second year in college an elocution competition was going to take place for which the topic would be announced only twenty minutes before the start. One of our lecturers mocked us because no girl in our class was ready to participate in the competition. Just to defend my dignity I put my name on the list. Then I prayed to Baba and Guruji for help. Though the topic, "Should India be a theocratic or a democratic state?" was totally unfamiliar to me, I went to the dais full of unusual confidence and gave my speech. I, who had always been terrified of any audience, won second prize! I could hardly believe it. It was perfectly clear to me that this hadn't been the fruit of my great talent. My newly fledged confidence was only due to Baba's and Guruji's grace. They had heard my prayer and enabled me to give a prize-winning speech.

This confidence has stayed with me during my further studies. Now I am completely at ease while addressing any audience. For this profound change I am very grateful to Baba and Guruji and I have come to rely on them more and more.

Prathima Gopathipalem, born in 1979, is a student who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

Take life as a challenge

Tirumala, May 1999

I had Guruji's *darshan* for the first time when I was in Class VI at the age of eleven. My family often accompanied Guruji when he went from Ongole to Shirdi. I called him Uncle and at first I thought of him only as my father's friend. But as the months passed I gradually began to understand that he is not simply an ordinary uncle like others, but someone really great.

After that I would spend my summer holidays in his presence. He would clear my doubts and correct my mistakes in such a pleasant

manner that I wasn't hurt. He would encourage me in my studies and in other aspects of life. He would make me feel that I could do so many things that I thought I couldn't do.

I wanted to study maths, physics, chemistry rather than biology, physics, chemistry (BiPC) because I feared that biology would be too difficult a subject for me. When Uncle heard about my concerns, he gave an example from his own life that inspired me very much.

He said, "When I was about to start my Bachelor of Arts course, everyone, including the lecturers, told me not to take English literature as a subject, as it is especially difficult. 'Is it really so difficult?' I thought. I took it as a challenge and I came first in that subject. This is how we should take these things, as a challenge. Anyone can pass in easy subjects. What is your greatness in passing easy subjects? Don't be a coward. Be brave so that you can easily face things."

This incident gave me the courage to opt wholeheartedly for BiPC. It also made me think in a positive way, not only about my studies but also about other aspects of my life.

SRI BABUJI: Try! By trying you may succeed. And that is the spirit of life – going on trying, striving. It is so natural. Everything, every cell of your body, your whole being is striving. When you breathe you are striving to live, aren't you? So don't stop trying. The trying itself is an achievement.

Uncle always explains everything in a practical way that is easy to understand. He says that we should have enthusiasm and zeal to know about new things. We should have an interest in knowing about everything.

I have come to trust that Guruji knows what is good for me and what isn't. I firmly believe that he is there to guide me on the right path. I always pray to him for his blessings and he always forgives me all my mistakes.

His presence and his smile relieve me of all suffering and give me peace of mind. For me it is true that no one in this world is as

fortunate as those who have our Guruji's *darshan*. Under his shelter there is no room for fears, tension or worry.

Bhanu Teja Sainathuni, born in 1977, is a student who lives in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

The best father in the universe

Shirdi, October 2000

Guruji doesn't look like a saint, or at least not how we imagine one to be, but he is a real saint in whose presence peace will be experienced. He is very simple and natural. I am glad to inform you that I am his daughter. My father is known as Guruji to the many people from all over the world who come to take his *darshan*. Some come simply to see him, others come to get rid of their problems but all of them find peace when their wishes are fulfilled. After having his *darshan* some have their diseases cured, some experience happiness, while others get rid of all their miseries.



During a holiday in Tirumala, while chatting with my friends, we happened to talk ill of a friend who wasn't there. Normally when I went to my father to play he would never ask me anything.

But on that day when I came to him he asked me, "What were you talking about with your friends?"

I said, "Nothing, Daddy."

It immediately reminded me of an incident from the *Shri Sai Satcharita*. In Baba's time some of the devotees who were staying in the *wada* were talking ill of a person who was not there. (Baba wasn't there with them – he was in the mosque.) In the morning when Baba went for his walk, he asked one of those devotees, "What were you talking about in the *wada* last night?"

That person said, "Nothing, Baba."

Baba pointed to a pig sniffing around in the dirt and said, "There is no difference between you and this pig."

I then understood that we should not make any bad remarks about others. I think that it is very important to listen to what my Daddy says.



When I was younger and suffering from fever or any pain, my father would always tell me, "Pray to Baba. It will be okay," and I would pray and be okay.

I will tell you an experience that happened to me. One day I had an annoying pain in my left arm. I prayed to Baba, "Please Baba, relieve me of the pain." Right after this my father called me and told me to sit beside him. I sat down and he asked me to sing a song. I started singing. My father was tapping on the spot where I had the pain but while he was tapping I didn't feel any discomfort.

When the song was over my father said, "Go and play."

I went outside. The pain had gone. From this moment on I understood why many people say that there is no difference between Baba and Daddy. Some of the experiences devotees have with Guruji are so similar to the *leelas* that happened during Baba's lifetime that many people think Guruji is Baba. But I think Baba is blessing people through Guruji.



Now I would like to say something about Sarath Babuji, not as Guruji but as my father. My father is totally devoted to Baba. In our house there are no photos of other deities or of any other people but Baba and Guruji. In my father's room there are only pictures of Sai Baba. Whatever he does is always related to Baba. When he works on the computer it always has to do with Baba. Either he is writing something about Baba or he is correcting some article or other about him. He has told me many times that if I remember Baba and do puja to him regularly, I won't have any problems.

When we buy something new, whether a pen, a TV or anything else, my father first offers it to Baba and puts *udi* on it. We don't use anything unless it has been offered to Baba. This is a common daily practice in our house but I don't know if the same is done in other people's homes.

I always like to be with my father. So far, I don't remember a single wish of mine that hasn't been fulfilled. He has always given me everything I have asked for, right from my hair-band to travelling abroad. Sometimes I forget what I wanted but my father never forgets. He always gets me what I want no matter if it is from India or some other part of the world. He knows what I want before I know it. He gives me everything even before the wish comes out of my mouth. I am the most lucky person to have such a nice daddy.

Many people ask me if my father talks to me or not. Of course he talks to me – he is my father! We always sit together when we eat. He jokes a lot, also about me, and likes to tease me. Usually people have only one pet name but I have an infinite number of them. My father constantly invents new pet names for me, funny ones, teasing ones, nonsense ones, he never runs out of new names. I like it very much. My father is the best father anyone could have in this whole universe.

Sruti Sainathuni, born in 1987, is a student who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

SRI BABUJI: My daughter has everything. All that she asks I give and usually she won't ask for anything. But when I would go to the market she would ask, "Daddy, I want this bangle, I want this bindi, I want this doll." Okay, I buy it and then give it to her. Once she sees it she gives it to somebody else. She doesn't play with it at all. She doesn't need it. It's just that she goes shopping with me very rarely and asking is an expression of her love. She has to ask and I have to fulfil it, and that interaction is the experience of the love in a more intense way.



Sri Babuji performing the ceremony of *annaprasana* (giving a child its first solid food), Shirdi, 2005



SIX

“Baba Will Take Care”

SRI BABUJI: *Baba said it very beautifully, "The moment you step into this Dwarkamai, your karma has ended. Now it is my responsibility." Stepping into Dwarkamai means not physically stepping into the mosque, but becoming a child of Baba. Once you become his child you give all the reins to him. Then it is his responsibility.*

A family of seventy-five

Guntur, July 2000

My uncle Balakrishna Gupta moved to Ongole in 1984. It was there that he met Guruji. From then on whenever I met my uncle he couldn't stop talking about Guruji, referring to him with much awe and admiration, quoting him with glowing eyes. I wanted to meet this extraordinary man who occupied such a large place in his heart.

My marriage to a niece of mine was arranged by our families.¹ Our first child, a much wished for son, was mentally disabled. A daughter, born four years later, turned out to be severely physically disabled. My wife and I cared for our children to the best of our abilities, but their conditions weighed heavily on our hearts, causing us much anxiety and unhappiness. When my uncle introduced me to Guruji, I talked to him about the biggest worry in my life – my children.

Guruji listened intently and then, looking at me with much love, said, "Baba is here for us. He will look after everything. Give all your anxieties to him and stop worrying."

Was it what he said or the way he said it? I don't know but something in me responded to him very strongly and simply trusted

¹ Marriage between a daughter and the mother's brother is legal and not uncommon in South India. Considerations of social class, keeping property in the family, and the security of being with somebody whose character is known, are some of the reasons for this custom.

him. My wife and I brought our children, then aged 8 and 4, to Guruji, who gave us homoeopathic medicines for them. Our son, Vinay, who was extremely restless, excitable and uncontrollable, slowly became more balanced and quiet, thanks to Guruji's grace.

Our daughter, Haritha, died a year later. She was playing and then suddenly started to cry and passed away very quickly. As much as we were sad, we were also relieved because life would have been extremely difficult and painful for her.

We still longed to have one more child, a healthy one, but fear held us back. We told Guruji about our wish for another child.

One day when we saw Guruji, he gave us his blessings and reassurance, and told us to spend three days in Shirdi. In less than a year my wife gave birth to a beautiful, healthy boy whom we named Sai Chaitanya. As he was born with Guruji's blessings, we knew he would be fine. In fact, he is growing up as a healthy intelligent boy, and a great joy to us. When Guruji entered our lives the dark clouds began to part and rays of sunshine lit our minds and hearts. Knowing that he is there to give his love and help and to lighten our burden has given us great happiness and security. We are immensely grateful to him.

Guruji's power and compassion and the effect he had on us began to attract other relatives of our big joint family. Now, seventy-five of us, we all belong to Guruji.

Siva Gopavarapu, born in 1960, is a businessman who lives in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

The phone booth

Nellore, June 2001

I knew Guruji in my school days when we were fellow pupils in Totapalli Gudur, Nellore District. I didn't know him well then but I was aware of him as a prominent person on the campus.

The first time I went to Shirdi I hadn't set eyes on Guruji for about thirty years. Seeing him there I was overcome by a flood of emotions so powerful that I was in tears most of the time and couldn't speak.

At the time of my second visit to Shirdi I was in dire straits financially, up to my neck in debt with the threat of poverty looming over my family. I believed that the only solution was to sell my small shop in order to pay off the creditors. On this visit I had the chance in *darshan* to tell Guruji all my worries. I also placed a photo of the shop in his hands.

Guruji looked at the photo intently for some time, instructed me not to sell the shop and said, "*Baba ashirvadam*," reassuring me that I was in Baba's care.

I went back to Nellore calmer, but still somewhat anxious, having no idea of the course of events that had been set in motion by Guruji's grace.

A long time prior to my trip to Shirdi I had applied for a telephone connection for my shop, but nothing had come of it in spite of my repeated requests. About ten days after I returned, I was coming out of the telephone office where I had again been asking about the status of my application. I was stopped outside the door by a stranger. He must have noticed the frustration on my face because he asked me if I had any problems. I told him about my futile attempts to get a phone connection. He wrote down his name, Sivakumar, added his personal phone number and asked me to call him in a week. Intrigued by this incident I asked in the office if they knew a man of this name. I discovered that, in fact, he was a sub-divisional officer.

As I did not think it proper simply to ring him up, I went to see him personally after a week had passed. He was very kind to me. He told me he had recognized the picture of Sai Baba and Guruji I wore pinned to my shirt. He said he also knew Guruji and had been to Shirdi. During our conversation he advised me to open a phone booth in my shop as an additional source of income.

After less than three weeks I finally got the connection and I was able to install a computer and a conference-call facility. We were amazed and deeply grateful. With much happiness we made our first call from the new phone booth to Saipatham in Shirdi. All our debts were cleared quickly. I am now earning enough money to take care of my family in a decent way.

When I spoke to Guruji in Shirdi I was in a desperate situation. He simply looked at the photo of my shop and reassured me of Baba's grace. How could I ever have imagined the blessings that would be showered on me? He generously gave so much more than I dared ask for.

When I met Guruji in Shirdi for the first time, I cried and cried. And even now, after many months, tears come to my eyes each time I talk about him.

Srinivasulu Pannam, born in 1953, owns a telephone booth and lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: A businessman asks Baba for help in his business. Then when he gets success, it brings him closer to Baba. What is often seen as an obstacle – the world that obstructs, that is an enemy, that is a nightmare – to a Sai devotee it is a means. It doesn't take him away from Baba. It is a tool that draws him nearer and nearer to the object of his love.

The impossible school

Hyderabad, September 2001

Our children, Gautam and Vyuha, were not progressing well in their schools. The ones we had chosen, even after much consideration, proved to be inadequate because of the low teaching standards and the uncongenial environment. Like any parents, we were troubled and unhappy about this situation.

My husband went to Guruji to lay the problem at his feet. Guruji talked to him in some detail about methods of teaching and what makes a school a good one. On hearing what Guruji said, I became dejected thinking it would be impossible to find even an acceptable school, let alone one with the utopian standards laid down by Guruji. Yet somehow, after listening to Guruji's advice, we decided to put our doubts aside and search for a school that corresponded to his guidelines.

Around that time I met a childhood friend who told us, to our joy and excitement, about a school that seemed to meet all Guruji's criteria. However, our hopes were shattered the very next minute when she said that she was unable to get her son admitted because there was no space. My husband went back to Shirdi to tell Guruji everything.

Guruji said, "Go ahead and try to get a place for your child. If it is a good school, Baba will help you get a place."

After my husband's return from Shirdi we went to the school to meet the director, carrying *prasad* from Shirdi, Baba's *udi* and a copy of the *Shri Sai Satcharita*. To our utter disappointment, the director had already left for the day. We decided to give the *prasad*, the *udi*, the book and our visiting card to her secretary. We asked him to hand them over to the director the next day. Then we went back home and tried to forget about this wonderful school, believing that there was no point in making any further attempts.

Our Guruji, however, had forgotten neither us nor the school. The very next day the director asked us to come to the school. She graciously invited us into her office.

Smiling, she said, "Yesterday, I organized a Sai Baba *satsang* in my home for the first time and invited our relatives. At the start of the *satsang* my secretary appeared with the Shirdi *prasad* and the *Satcharita*! We all thought it was a sign of Baba's grace. I take this as an order from Baba to give places in our school to both your children."

We were overjoyed! Guruji had given us not one but two places in this excellent school! At the same time he also pulled the

director and her family into the circle of his love and grace. It gave me one more glimpse of how a Satguru takes such beautiful care of his devotees in every moment of their lives and, by increasing their trust and devotion, fills their hearts with happiness and love.

Geeta Annapurna Namburi, born in 1970, is a housewife who lives in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

Let's all stay together

Guntur, July 2000

Once I was accompanying Guruji on a train journey from Bangalore to Shirdi on the Karnataka Express. The train was overcrowded and all we had managed to secure were berths in the ordinary second-class sleeper compartment. It was summer and already unbearably hot by nine in the morning. I tried desperately to get at least one berth in the AC car for Guruji. It seemed impossible, but finally the attendant agreed to offer his berth.

Guruji, however, hearing about my efforts said, "Why are you trying this? Let's all stay together. Wouldn't Baba make the weather cooler if he thought it necessary?"

What could I say? We stayed together, mopping our sweaty brows. But then, after ten minutes or so, we stopped feeling uncomfortable. Clouds had started to gather in the sky, hiding the sun, and a wonderfully cool wind began to blow. Placing my hand on my heart, I beamed at Guruji, silently thanking him and Baba.

Siva Gopavarapu, born in 1960, is a businessman who lives in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

Baba in Sarpadoh

Shirdi, November 2000

My family had some agricultural land in the Solapur area in the village of Sarpadoh. In 1993 we started construction of a Sai Baba temple there, which was completed within five years. A beautiful marble statue of Sai Baba, sculpted in Jaipur, was ready in 1997 and waiting to be installed in the temple in Sarpadoh. I asked Guruji several times if he would inaugurate the statue. He always nodded his consent.

On 3 January 2000 thousands of devotees from Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra came to the village. It is very small and far away from other villages but this did not deter the devotees. An endless stream of people arrived – by car, by bus, by bicycle and by bullock cart – to celebrate Baba’s new abode and to take Guruji’s *darshan*. While we were chanting Baba’s name, Guruji inaugurated the statue in his inimitably simple yet magnificent way, and did the first *arati* worship of Baba in the new temple.

As is usual, we had prepared a meal to offer to everyone. We expected 3,000 people but at least 6,000 came, and yet there was enough food for everybody, thanks to Guruji’s grace.

It was a wonderful day, the fulfilment of my dream. I will never forget those sweet moments.

Harichandra D. Gaware, born in 1960, is a government employee who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

SRI BABUJI: Why I like it when someone is arranging meals for others, is because Baba liked it. He himself fed people. From the dakshina that came to him, he used to give fifty-five rupees daily to Bade Baba and ask him to feed the fakirs and beggars who were there. Sometimes he would cook himself and feed everybody. And if at all he recommended any ceremony or ritual, he always advised feeding people. In his teachings that point always comes, to feed the hungry.



SRI BABUJI: *The principle behind feeding the hungry is what Baba said, "See me in all the creatures. If you feed the hungry, you are feeding me." When somebody is providing meals it is a kind of practice – trying to be aware of Baba in every creature. That awareness has to be fostered and strengthened. This feeding is not some kind of act of mercy – "Oh, so many people are there, we have to help them, we have to feed them." This is not why we do it. In the Indian tradition, when we give alms to a beggar we give them as an offering to God. We say "Krishnarpanam." It means "an offering to Krishna". Even with the small beggar who comes to the front of your house, the one who gives him alms says, "Krishnarpanam" and the one who receives also says, "Krishnarpanam" – or Ramarpanam, Dattarpanam, Saiarpanam, whatever name of God it may be. "I am offering it to God," and the one who receives it knows it is being offered to God. Both acknowledge the fact. That is the basic principle behind feeding the hungry and giving alms.*

Light and floating

Shirdi, June 2001

I will never forget my first *darshan* of Guruji in 1996. When he put *udi* on my forehead I felt so light that it was as if I were floating. Ever since then I have gone for Guruji's *darshan* regularly when he is in Shirdi.

For six months I had been suffering from severe back pain. It was awful: standing, sitting, lying down, no matter what, I was in agony. Finally I had a chance to speak to Guruji in *darshan* about it. He told me to turn around and touched my spine. Then, turning his head towards Baba's picture, he did *namaskar* and put *udi* on my forehead. I touched Guruji's feet and got up easily because the pain wasn't there any more! It had gone and has never bothered me again.

Sureshbhai Lokchandani, born in 1963, is a businessman who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

Abode of Sai

Chandragiri, July 2002

For quite some time we had wanted to build a house. When we were almost ready to start the work we did puja to Baba and Guruji. We named the future building Sai Nilayam, which means Abode of Sai. The construction proceeded rapidly. There was, however, one big problem: in my excitement and enthusiasm I had started to build not one house but two, and completely neglected to take care of the financial side. I ran out of money before the construction was finished. I knew my only recourse was Guruji.

I went to Shirdi with the photos of the incomplete buildings in my pocket. Some hours before *darshan* I suddenly remembered my first meeting with Guruji in 1997. He told us at the time to start a *satsang* in our village. The *satsang* did happen a few times but then petered out, partly because of lack of commitment and partly for want of a proper space. But it had been on all our minds to find a permanent *satsang* space. Now, in Shirdi and waiting for Guruji's *darshan*, I decided to build a *satsang* hall on the roof of my new house.

In *darshan* I prostrated to Guruji and said, "The construction work had to be stopped because I ran out of money. I want to finish the house and build a *satsang* hall on the roof."

He looked at the photos and said, "Continue with the construction."

I said, "I don't have the money. I am scared."

Guruji reassured me, "Don't worry. Baba will take care. Build the houses."

I went back home. Ten days later my wife's sister arrived unexpectedly from London and stayed for two weeks. Having seen our predicament, when she was leaving she gave us 200,000 rupees (about 4,500 US dollars). In this way I was able to finish the construction of a beautiful house. By Guruji's blessings, we inaugurated the

new *satsang* hall on Vijayadasami day 2000, and offered food to all the devotees. Since that day we have been having *satsang* every Thursday.

Subbayya Jonnagadla, born in 1968, is a government employee who lives in Chandragiri, Andhra Pradesh.

A priest in pain

Shirdi, June 2002

I am a priest in the Sai Baba Mandir in Shirdi. In 1991 the lining of my mouth and my tongue became covered with persistent sores. I couldn't eat anything unless I first had an injection in my tongue. This went on for many months. Some friends urged me to go to Saipatham and ask for Guruji's help. I went, and during a personal *darshan* I told Guruji about my affliction.

Guruji, gesturing to Baba's picture, said, "Baba will take care," and gave me *udi*.

The sores disappeared altogether. From that time on, to my great relief, I could eat whatever I liked. Since then I go for *darshan* whenever Guruji is in Shirdi and when my duties in the temple allow it.

Chandrakant Achyutarao Gorkar, born in 1963, is a priest who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

He never takes credit

Narasingapuram, September 2001

I hadn't been feeling well for some time. A doctor in Tirupati told me to have my uterus scanned. It showed a fibroid cyst. I was told to have an operation quickly before the cyst got any bigger. I went for a second opinion at the Apollo Hospital in Chennai where

I was given the same diagnosis and advice. But I had no time for an operation. My husband worked in a bank and my children were studying. I was left alone to take care of the house and our cattle farm, which we had just started.

I did not know much about Sai Baba in those days, but my daughter, Sadhana, has been going to *satsang* since 1994 and always talks about Baba and Guruji with much love. I also started to go to *satsang* and was astonished to hear about the wonderful experiences of many devotees.

During a *darshan* in 1996 my daughter told Guruji about my health problem.

“Ask your mother to consult the doctor and to do what he says,” was Guruji’s answer.

I did not go to a doctor immediately because I was afraid of what he might find and do.

About six months later we heard that Guruji was coming to Tirumala and we would have the opportunity to have his personal *darshan*. Sadhana insisted that I should have another scan. She has had so many positive experiences with Guruji that her trust in his grace and power is unshakeable. She thought that Guruji might have cured me already; if not, we could seek his blessings in case surgery was necessary. Now I was cornered. Unable to evade the issue any longer I went for another scan. There was no sign of any cyst! I was wonderstruck and moved to tears by Guruji’s help and care.

The next day in *darshan* I showed Guruji the old and the recent scan reports. He simply turned to Baba’s picture and did *namaskar* to him. I was deeply touched by his humility; he never takes credit for anything. He ascribes all the blessings we receive from him to Baba’s boundless grace.

Amaravati Palem, born in 1951, is a housewife who lives in Narasingapuram, Andhra Pradesh.

“Think of Baba and Baba only”

Nellore, June 2000

My first opportunity to meet Guruji was in Tirumala in May 1996. I waited in the long queue for his *darshan*, full of happy anticipation until my turn came.

I did *namaskar* and was about to introduce myself when Guruji forestalled me saying, “I know you. You wrote to me.”

Surprised and very happy to hear that he knew me, I asked permission to come back for *darshan* the next evening. On this occasion I poured out all my worries to him.

He said, “Forget all these problems. Don’t think about them any more. I will look after everything.”

He comforted me in the way that a loving father would soothe a troubled daughter.

I asked him, “What should I do to get closer to you and to receive Baba’s grace?”

Guruji pointed to my handbag and said, “Read that.”

I couldn’t believe it! How could Guruji know that I always carry a copy of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* in my handbag? The bag was closed and there was no way anyone could detect its contents from the outside. This was an important experience for me, convincing me that Guruji was not an ordinary man but a great saint like Baba who truly would take on all my burdens and troubles.

My heart swelled with love for him. I did *namaskar* again and said, “You are my God. I am yours, and my burden is yours.”

Guruji also told me the way to get closer to Baba, “Read Baba’s books. Learn more about Baba. Keep thinking of him. Call his name. Go to *satsang*. When you have any spare time, think of Baba and Baba only.”

Sirisha Kamatham, born in 1972, is a housewife who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

Bound to Love

SRI BABUJI: *I don't use the expression "repetition of Baba's name".² I always like to call it "calling". When we are in need, just calling for him.*

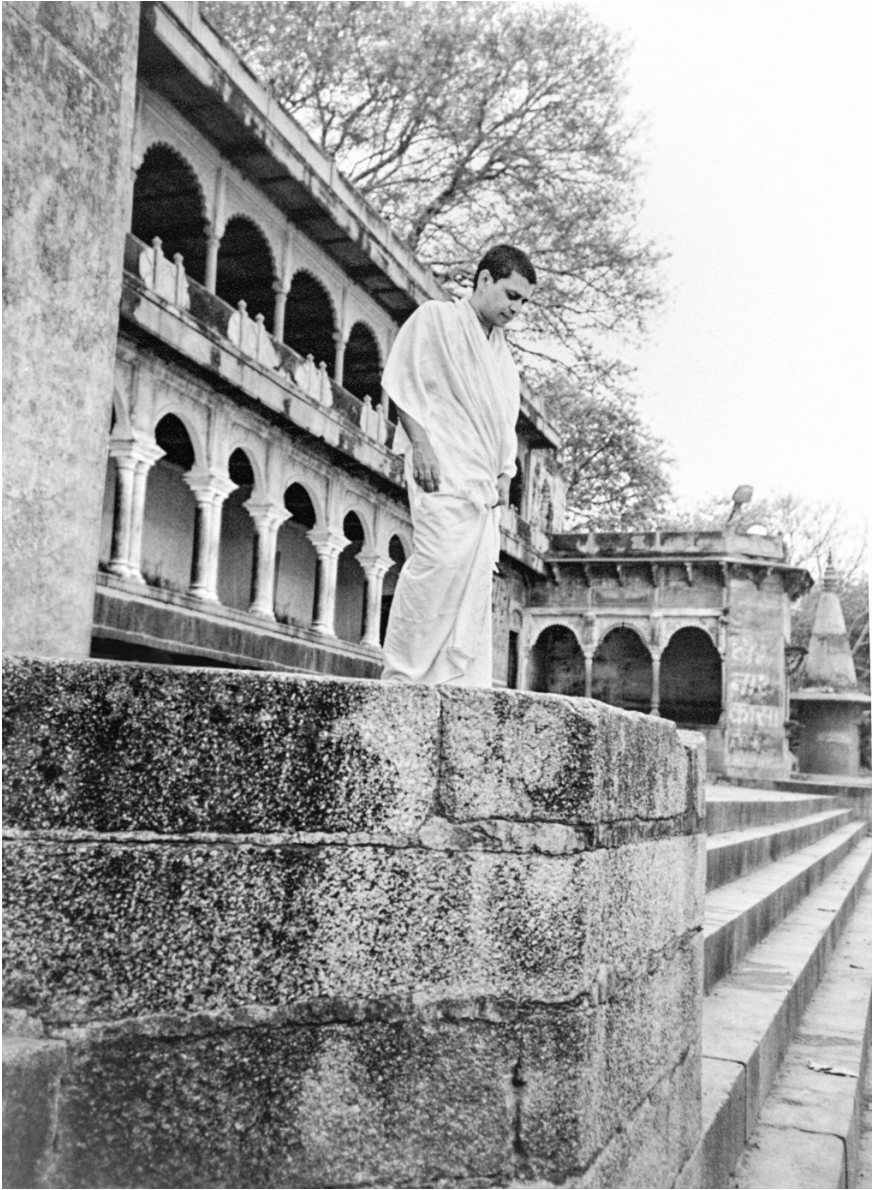
Then you are aware of his presence, you are aware of your need, you are aware that he is going to help you. So many things are involved when you call. It is not just repetition.



[Baba said,] "If you always say "Sai, Sai" I shall take you over the seven seas; believe in these words and you will be certainly benefited. I do not need any paraphernalia of worship... I rest there where there is full devotion."

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XIII)

² Sri Babuji is referring to the practice of *nama japa*, repetition of the name of God or Guru.



Sri Babuji on the ghats, Varanasi, 1995



SEVEN

Addictions Vanquished

DEVOTEE: *Baba had no more desires?*

SRI BABUJI: *It is true that Baba no longer had any desires. That is why he was fulfilling the desires of so many others, because all his own had been fulfilled. Desires are directed towards finding fulfilment. Once you get it, then it is a different matter – then it is a fulfilled life. Because he had done his work, he started helping others.*

For example, there are two people who desire to pass an exam. How to be free of this desire? One man suppresses his desire and doesn't write the exam, the other writes the exam and gets a distinction. What is the difference between the two? The man who got the distinction is also free from the desire to pass the exam, isn't he?

When he has passed, then he tells you how to pass. He tries to coach you, he tries to instruct you, he can help you. A saint is like that – a person who tried for an exam, passed it with distinction, and is now in a position to advise you how to study and how to get through the exam yourself.

He is free from desires, no doubt about it, and having fulfilled the desires he became free. That is why there is an expression in Sanskrit, "apta purna kama", one whose desires have been totally fulfilled. That is how a saint is described.

A slave of spirits

Nellore, September 2002

I have been a devotee of Guruji since 1990. Every year I go to Shirdi to have his *darshan*.

My life was very difficult as my husband was an alcoholic. I can't remember how many times I spoke to my husband about Guruji, about his love and his power, and urged him to go for

Guruji's *darshan*. My husband, though, was deaf to whatever I said. On each visit to Shirdi I begged Guruji to change my husband's habits.

Finally, during a *darshan* in October 1997 on the day of Vijayadasami, I caught hold of Guruji's feet and with tears streaming down my face, I begged him to draw my husband close to him, to rid him of his bad habits and to bring him to Shirdi before Vijayadasami of the following year. Guruji nodded and blessed me with Baba's *udi*.

Ramnavami,¹ which is a big celebration in Shirdi, was to be held in early April. I told my husband that Guruji was going to be in Shirdi at that time though I did not believe that my reminder made any impression. Yet on Ramnavami day my husband, who woke up very early, told me to pack his clothes as he was going to Shirdi right then and there. I didn't really believe him. I heard only afterwards that he did go to Shirdi and was even lucky enough to have personal *darshan*.

Some time later my husband told me what happened. He said that he clasped Guruji's feet in *darshan* and begged, "I am a slave of alcohol and everybody despises me. I want to be treated with respect, and I want to deserve it. Please save me from this habit and change me."

Guruji put *udi* on my husband's forehead and blessed him. From that moment onwards my husband was a changed man. He developed an aversion to alcohol. The mere smell would disgust him. He started caring for his family again. It was incredible!

My husband returned to Shirdi for Vijayadasami that same year and begged Guruji, "I have two children and hardly any money. Please help me."

Guruji told him, "Go to the *mandir* in Nellore regularly. Some means of livelihood will come."

My husband followed Guruji's instruction. Exactly one year

¹ A festival that commemorates the birth of Lord Rama, hero of the *Ramayana*. The origin of this celebration in Shirdi is given in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, Chapter VI.

later to the day, it came about that he was able to open a shop in the premises of the Sai Baba Mandir in Nellore, selling coconuts and garlands to devotees coming for *darshan* and *arati*. He is very happy to be able to make his living in Baba's own abode and to earn enough money for our children's schooling.

Now we lead a happy and respectable life and nothing is lacking. My husband, formerly an alcoholic, has become a new man and all our lives have been transformed by this change. My Guruji fulfilled my prayers and gave us a new life. This life is nothing but Guruji's blessing.

Aruna Pette, born in 1971, is a housewife who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

Still eating paan?

Hyderabad, June 1999

I was addicted to chewing *paan*.² I was such a slave to this habit that when I was away from home I would have *paan* from Hyderabad sent to me in Chennai or Mumbai by people who were coming to wherever I was.

One day Guruji told me, "Siva Shankar, you may take *paan* only when you are with me in Shirdi."

My visits to Shirdi increased considerably just so that I could take *paan*.

Once while I was in Hyderabad I heard that Guruji was ill with a high fever and earache. I went immediately to Shirdi to see him. When I arrived in Shirdi I had something to eat, stuffed a *paan* in my mouth and went to Saipatham. Still chewing, I was called for *darshan*.

² A mixture of areca nut, lime paste and spices, wrapped in a betel leaf and usually chewed for digestion and then spat out. One of the ingredients is a mild narcotic.

On seeing me, Guruji said, "Have you still not stopped eating *paan*?"

I was deeply moved that, in spite of his pain and fever, he was still concerned about me. I was very upset with myself and started to cry. I couldn't stop crying and didn't even go for Baba's *darshan*. My crying continued on the bus journey back to Hyderabad. At some point I was mercifully overtaken by sleep. When I woke up, close to Hyderabad, I sensed that there was something different about my mouth, as if something had been taken away from it. Since that day I have never had *paan* again.

Siva Shankar Padmanabhuni, 1952-2002, was a businessman who lived in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

The fall of the cigarette

Kandukur, March 2000

I was addicted to smoking. I begged Guruji in *darshan* to give me the determination and willpower to stop. He simply smiled. After this *darshan* I smoked more than ever before. I didn't understand why this was happening and it worried me a lot.

One day I had an excruciating pain in my chest and panicked. I went to Dr Reddy in Ongole. He examined me and said I had nothing to worry about but that I had better quit smoking. I promised him and myself that I would stop at Ugadi, Telugu New Year, when I would be in Shirdi. I arrived in Shirdi on 18 March 1998 and had Baba's and Guruji's *darshan*. The urge to smoke was stronger than ever. Wherever I possibly could I would light a cigarette.

Feeling very guilty I mentally prayed to Guruji, "I promised to stop smoking but I cannot do it by myself. Please forgive me and please help me."

On the morning of the 19th when I lit my first cigarette my head started to spin. I was overcome by terrible nausea and all my strength

drained out of my body. The cigarette fell out of my fingers. I couldn't hold it any more. This was the end of my addiction. I have never touched a cigarette again. Now the faintest smell of cigarette smoke makes me nauseous. What I was helpless to achieve by myself, Guruji did with one smile. It was his doing, his kindness, that freed me from this dreadful habit.

Venkata Ramana Batchali, born in 1963, is an employee who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: An experience becomes valuable once it is succeeded by a transformation in the heart. We have to see whether it ensures any change in our personality, in our outlook, in our fears, in our likes, in our dislikes, in our temptations.

*There are so-called spiritual experiences, those dazzling experiences that Baba referred to as *chamatkar* – for example, someone seeing a big flash of light, or a big boom of sound in the ears, or swooning, or almost being driven crazy – but what is the value of just seeing a big light?*

*I don't subscribe to it. And Baba categorically said he doesn't do *chamatkar*. He won't give this kind of experience. People have to be normal; they have to grow up and progress and unfold normally.*



Sri Babuji, Shirdi, 1992



Sri Babuji, Shirdi, 2007



EIGHT

*Nothing Is Too Small
for Him*

SRI BABUJI: *I can say that that is the essence of Baba's teachings: "I will give people what they ask, till they ask me for what I want to give them."*

DEVOTEE: *Why didn't Baba give that complete fulfilment?*

SRI BABUJI: *Nobody asked, and nobody was interested. Even those people who think that they are asking for it, they are not really asking. We are worried about so many things but we think that we are only concerned about liberation. It is not true. If you examine yourself, you will see how many things worry you. The last and least thing we want is liberation, in fact.*



SRI BABUJI: *Don't be so afraid of desires! It is all part of the search, part of the seeking. If Buddha did not get the desire to find the solution for the mysteries of disease, old age and death, he would not have become Buddha.*

Stray thoughts

Shirdi, June 1999

I remember distinctly one morning a few stray thoughts crossed my mind but they didn't register very strongly. Momentarily I thought that I was not eating enough fruit, that my habit of smoking was too expensive and that I was concerned about where to stay in Shirdi.

That same afternoon I got word that Guruji would see me. Sitting with Guruji, he told me that he would be leaving soon, but wanted me to stay on in Shirdi for a little while. During the meeting Guruji offered me the chance to stay at Saipatham. Before I left him he gave me a large bunch of grapes. As I was walking away Narayana Rao called me back saying, "Guruji

asked me to give this to you,” and handed me a pack of cigarettes.

Afterwards I remembered the thoughts that had passed through my mind earlier in the day. Those thoughts were simply an awareness of needs and were not asking for anything. Nevertheless, Guruji responded to each one in full.

Geoff Dowson, born in 1953, is a director of education who lives in Broadhempston, Devon, UK

A packet of udi

Chennai, March 2002

Last year my wife and I brought our 18-month-old daughter, Namy, to India to spend time with Guruji. We planned to do some travelling and I thought of collecting *udi* from the Samadhi Mandir and having it blessed by Guruji in case Namy got sick. I soon forgot about this as I am confident that Guruji always takes care of our needs.

A few days after the New Year celebrations in Shirdi we were due to leave. It was late afternoon and Guruji was giving *udi darshan* to the people who would be leaving the next day. From the queue I saw the devotees in front of me touching Guruji's feet and receiving a nod or a smile, a look or a few words, and a biscuit as *prasad*. When my turn came Guruji, instead of reaching for a biscuit, somehow “found” a packet of *udi*, blessed it and placed it in my hand.

In the moment I was just happy to be in his presence but a few minutes later I realized why he had given me the *udi*. Then the tears filled my eyes as I realized, once again, his way of watching over us and taking care of even the smallest desires.

Bob Barnett, born in 1971, is a website developer who lives in Boulder, Colorado, USA.

Three chapatis

Tirupati, January 2000

Guruji came to Tirumala in July 1996. At the end of his stay on the day of his departure, we went for his *darshan*. Many devotees had arrived from Nellore, Venkatagiri and Kota. One of the new arrivals started chanting Baba's name at two in the afternoon. He lost himself completely in the chanting. At five o'clock Guruji came out and people went one by one to take *darshan*. When the person who had been leading the chanting bowed down in *namaskar*, Guruji handed him a bunch of flowers. I thought, "That man is so lucky. Guruji has given him flowers because he appreciated his singing."

After *darshan* all the devotees left. Only my husband, our daughter Vani and I were still there. At 10.30 that night many more devotees arrived and Guruji came out again. Our daughter was very hungry, and told her father. We hadn't eaten anything for many hours. My husband took us to a nearby restaurant for a quick snack. We ordered *dosas*. They were small and not really filling. I was still hungry and thought it would be nice to have a chapati as well, but didn't say anything. My husband hurried us through the snack and then we ran back because we did not want to miss Guruji's departure.

After I touched his feet Guruji gave me a flower garland and also put a small parcel tied with string in my hand. The garland made me especially happy. I thought he gave it as a sign of his appreciation for how I was taking care of the weekly *satsang* in Tirupati. I fingered the packet expecting it to contain *prasad* in the form of sweets. When I opened it I couldn't believe my eyes. There were three neatly folded chapatis! Somehow Guruji knew that I was hungry and had wanted a chapati.

No mother can take care of us the way Guruji does. He treats us as his children and gives us everything we need with infinite love.

All we can do is keep him in our hearts and our awareness more and more, and thus come closer to him.

Sarada Ikkurthi, born in 1962, is a housewife who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

Where are the spots?

Sangam Jagarlamudi, May 2001

I had ugly black marks on my hands that made me terribly self-conscious. I didn't want anybody to see my hands. I had been told that the spots were due to an allergy. Consultations and treatments with various doctors didn't bring any change. When I heard that Guruji was coming to Tirumala I asked to have his *darshan* and told him about my affliction.

Guruji looked at my hands and said, "Where are the spots? I can't see them."

The spots had simply disappeared in his presence.

Susi Paruchuri, born in 1983, is a housewife who lives in Sangam Jagarlamudi, Andhra Pradesh.

One rupee coin

Shirdi, July 2002

I have lived in Shirdi since 1972 and have a pharmacy here. We were Guruji's neighbours between 1988 and 1990 when he was living in a small room,¹ but I was not aware of his greatness then. I don't know why it took me so long to recognize it.

¹ Sri Babuji rented a small place in Shirdi in 1988 and moved there permanently after his Master's *mahasamadhi* in 1989.

In 1997 I went to have Guruji's *darshan* for the first time. My life has changed so much since then. Guruji's love gives so much happiness and contentment.

One day I was reading in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* how Sri Sai Baba gave nine rupee coins to Mrs Lakshmibai Shinde. I thought that I very much wanted to receive at least one rupee coin from Guruji's holy hands as a symbol of never having to worry about my business or my family's welfare. When I had Guruji's *darshan* on 30 October 2001 – I will never forget this date – Guruji gave me a biscuit as *prasad* and a one rupee coin! We all know that Guruji never accepts money from anybody nor does he ever carry any money himself, then where did he get this coin from? I was stunned and beamed with joy. We have put this coin in a silver box on our puja table.

Vilas K. Gujarati, born in 1951, is a pharmacist who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

A scooter for a piece of bread

Nellore, September 2001

For a long time I wanted a scooter but never had the money to buy one. One day when my mother came back from *satsang* she told me about a girl who had put a *puri* in front of Guruji's picture and asked him for a colour TV. Her desire was fulfilled. As soon as I heard this I put a chapati before Guruji's picture and asked him for a scooter.

The next day while I was riding on my bicycle, a man on a motor-bike ran into me and knocked me off. Fortunately neither of us was hurt. The driver was very sorry. He helped me get up, bought me a soft drink and asked me about my family.

When I told him my family name he exclaimed, "Then we are relatives!"

He offered to have my bike repaired and I, not knowing where my

boldness came from, told him that I didn't really want my bike back but would rather have a scooter. He laughed and said that he had a spare scooter and would I like to have it? I hesitated as I didn't know how to pay for it. He was aware of our tight finances and said that I could pay him at my convenience. In truth, however, we had not a rupee to spare.

But that same day a man came to our shop and paid 1,500 rupees in advance for some work he wanted us to do. I immediately took this money to my new-found relative and got the keys to the scooter. Only the day before I had asked Guruji for a scooter. I never expected my desire to be fulfilled so soon! Sometimes I think Guruji likes to surprise us and play with us, like a doting father does with his children.

Did I forget to tell you that my scooter carries a picture of Guruji and the inscription "Saipatham", which means the path of Sai?

Rajasekhar Kinnera, born in 1981, is a student who lives in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

Darshan at an improbable hour

Palsood, February 2001

In March 1995, hearing that Guruji would soon be travelling, I started for Shirdi anxious to have his *darshan*. Usually I would leave Palsood at a time that would get me to Shirdi at around nine at night. Thus my usual travel arrangements allowed me to arrive just in time for Guruji's evening *darshan* and I would have Baba's *darshan* the following day. On this occasion, however, I could not leave my village before midnight and would thus arrive in Shirdi at 5.30 in the morning. Was I to spend the whole day without *darshan*? I prayed to Guruji to grant me his *darshan* as soon as I reached Shirdi. I stayed awake the whole night with this single thought in my mind, "Guruji, you must give me your *darshan* when I reach Shirdi in the

morning. You must fulfil my desire for *darshan*. Baba! Please let me have Guruji's *darshan* in the morning."

I reached Shirdi at 5.30 a.m. and walked towards a hotel near Gurusthan (part of the *mandir* complex) to get a room. About fifty metres behind Gurusthan my eyes fell on Narayana Rao, a close devotee of Guruji. I ran to meet him, and to my utter delight, I saw Guruji and his wife walking in front! I was about to fall at Guruji's feet, but was asked not to by Narayana Rao. Guruji doesn't like anybody to do *namaskar* to him while he himself is there to worship in those places where Baba spent his time.

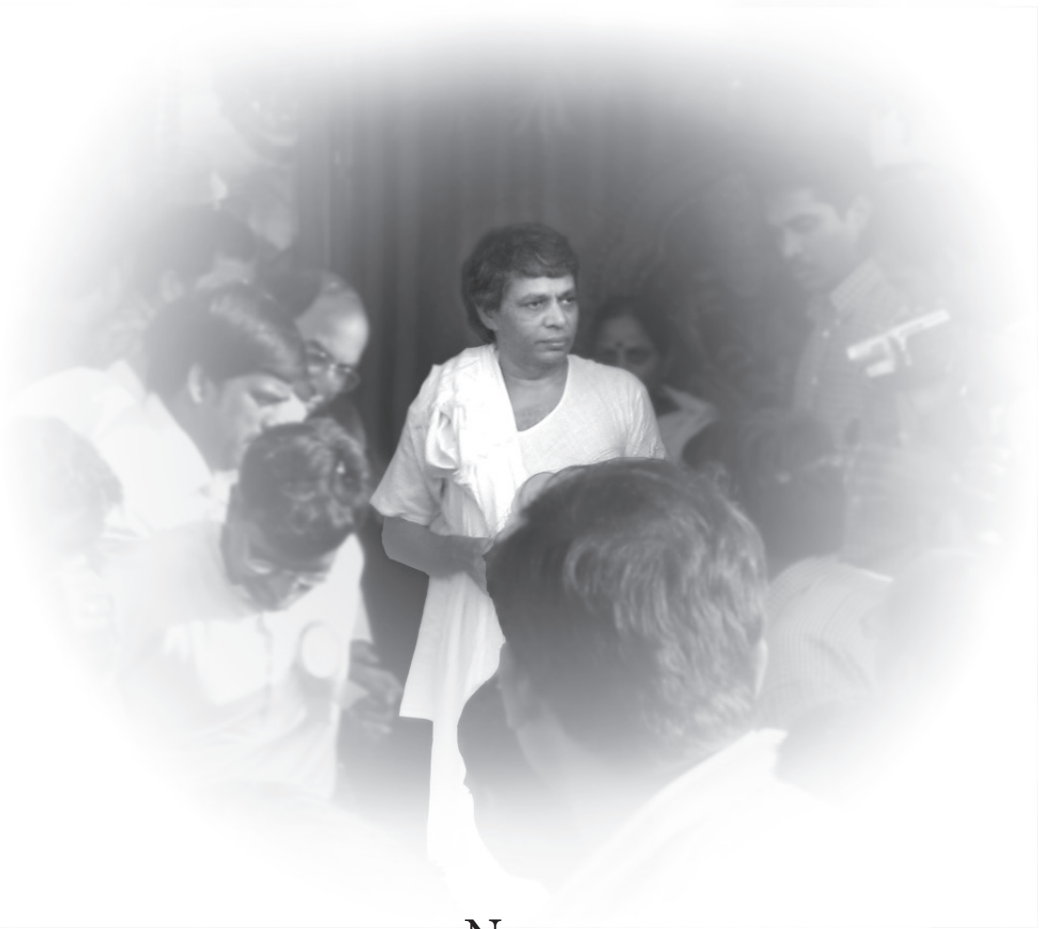
I walked back with them to Saipatham where I could finally prostrate, clasp the holy feet of my Guruji and rest my forehead on them. Guruji then reached for a wrapped sweet and put it in my hand. He always gives more than one asks for!

My prayers were answered. I had his *darshan* at an improbable hour and even received *prasad*. It happened!

Veeraswami Settipalli, born in 1944, is a contractor who lives in Palsood, Madhya Pradesh.



Sri Babuji, Tirumala, 1995



NINE

Dreams Come True

DEVOTEE: *Sai Baba didn't give philosophical teachings, did he?*

SRI BABUJI: *Nobody expected such a thing from him. The moment they went to him they saw the power, they were aware of their helplessness, they sought help, and they got it. By getting the help they got some teaching also. So every leela, every incident, every miracle that you see in Baba's life, every experience that you read, conveys a message.*

And nobody felt any lack that Baba did not give verbal teachings. There was no need. Teaching is needed to get that experience of fulfilment, to get rid of our helplessness. When that is achieved, spontaneously, there in Baba's presence, what is the need of any other thing?

A bag of rice

Burripalem, July 2001

Once it happened that I ran out of rice. I had no money to go and buy some and became quite downcast. But then I remembered Guruji and told his photo that I didn't have a grain of rice to cook.

The same night I had a dream. Guruji came out of his photo, walked over to the cupboard, put a 25 kg bag of rice in it and then went back into the photo.

The next morning a man I knew came up to me and told me he had recently started a rice business in our street. He offered to deliver some rice to my house. I thought he simply wanted to promote his business and would not carry out his offer. Some hours later, however, he brought a 25 kg bag of rice, said that I could pay later, then left.

I know it was only by Guruji's grace that I received the same amount of rice that I dreamt of. Ever since then I have trusted that Guruji takes care of me and that nothing is either too big or too small for him. I simply tell Guruji's photo my need or worry and he

always responds. His photo is not a mere photo. I feel I am indeed talking to Sri Babuji in flesh and blood.

Seetharavamma Sakhamuri, born in 1933, is a housewife who lives in Burripalem, Andhra Pradesh.

BABA: People must put full faith in the Lord's providence. They should not worry about food and clothing. Do not waste your life on these. In the abode of my devotees, there will be no dearth of food and clothing.

(Charters and Sayings, No. 262)

"Who needs all this?"

Ongole, January 2001

I often suffered from severe chest pain. I had already borrowed 20,000 rupees to pay for doctors and prescriptions, but nothing ever helped. I am poor, so for me even 1,000 rupees is a huge sum.

One day the pain became unbearable. I went to a hospital where I was put in a ward and given painkillers. There I had a dream.

Guruji came to my bedside and said, "Who told you to come here? It is too expensive. It costs 600 rupees a day! Who needs all this? Come on, let's go home."

I could see him clearly, and afterwards I could still remember everything. The next morning the doctors found me well enough to send me home. From that day on my health improved, and with it, my finances too. I simply know that Guruji is there to help me whenever I need him.

Venkamma Kunchala, born in the 1950s, is a housewife who lives in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh.

A phone call from Guruji

Tirupati, January 2000

Many devotees of Sai Baba are familiar with the incident in Chapter XL of the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, in which Baba appears to Hemadpant in a dream and tells him that he is coming to Hemadpant's house for lunch on the day of the Holi festival. Guruji gave me a similar experience.

In 1996 I went to Shirdi with my family for Guru Purnima. On that day Guruji did the *aksharabhyas* for our grandson, Sai Charan, and some other children. Somebody took photos of the ceremony but we forgot to ask for a copy.

A few days later when we were back in Tirupati I had a dream in which Guruji phoned me. I said, "I am surprised to get a call from you, Guruji." He said, "You will be even more surprised when you hear what I am going to tell you. I'm coming to your house tomorrow."

I woke up startled, shook my wife out of her sleep and told her about my dream. We remembered that Guruji never visits private houses and decided, therefore, that this dream couldn't come true and went back to sleep.

Since the following day was a Thursday, we went for our weekly *satsang*. Purnachandra Rao, a member of our *satsang*, called me over and gave me a photo of Guruji doing our grandson's *aksharabhyas*. We then heard that Mr Gupta, while looking at photos from Guru Purnima, had recognized me and sent the photo to Purnachandra Rao, asking him to pass it on to me in *satsang*. I was overjoyed. The dream had come true and Guruji had, in fact, come in the form of this photo, just like Baba came to Hemadpant in the form of a picture. This confirmed what I already believed – that there is no difference between Baba and Guruji. For me they are one and the same.

Sura Reddy Modugula, born in 1946, is a retired government employee who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

A look in a dream

Kandukur, August 2001

Every day my younger sister was complaining of stomach pain. At one point vomiting and diarrhoea added to her discomfort and she lost a lot of weight. A doctor sent her to hospital where her condition was diagnosed as serious. Her intestines were twisted and gangrene had set in. The doctors advised immediate surgery but doubted whether she could truly be cured.

I trusted that our Guruji would help and told my mother as much. My mother put Baba's and Guruji's photos under my sister's pillow and reassured her that they would help her.

The same night my mother had a dream. Guruji, accompanied by some other people, was driving in a jeep to the hospital. My mother showed him where my sister was sleeping. Guruji looked at my sister for a while and then left.

As the doctors made their rounds the next morning they were surprised to see my sister looking so well. They examined her again and again as they could hardly believe their own diagnosis. My sister had recovered completely overnight!

My sister is now completely well and has no health problems whatsoever. We are still amazed at the power of Guruji's mere look, even in a dream.

Narendra Kumar, born in 1977, is a student who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.

Live telecast

Texas, August 2001

During August 2001 I travelled from Texas to visit my friend, Suvarna, in Colorado Springs. I attended the Sai Baba *satsang*

in Janardhan's house and came to know about Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji from him. I had never seen or met Guruji, but I formed a very strong impression in my mind that he was an extremely noble and holy person and I was interested to know more about him.

On 29 August I was feeling a little depressed. That night I looked at Baba's picture in my room and expressing my feelings to him. I have the habit of talking to his photo before going to bed each night. I asked Baba sadly why I was not able to get *darshan* of a holy person like Sri Babuji. I prayed to Guruji too and said, "Guruji, if all I've heard about you is true, please grant me your *darshan* and Baba's."

That night, during the small hours of the morning, I had a dream. I saw a person dressed in white, sitting in a chair and answering questions from a group of people sitting around him. I was surprised to see that I was also part of the group. The person spoke to me too but I don't remember what it was about. I woke up when my daughter started crying at 4.20 a.m. I fed her some milk and put her back to sleep. The person I had seen in my dream was dressed very simply, but I had a feeling he was not an ordinary man. I dozed off, wondering who he might be.

Then I had another dream. In my dream I was asleep. My mother poured some hot milk into a plate to cool it, and I saw Sai Baba in the milk. He was sitting cross-legged on a stone and had a great smile. He was so handsome, it is hard to describe. I wanted to share my happiness with the others around me but I could not speak. I was unable to take my eyes off Baba. All I could say was "Ba...Ba...Baba." With that, I woke up. It was a Thursday¹ morning and I felt immensely happy with the dreams I had had. It was an unforgettable and precious memory that I would always treasure. I'd had *darshan* of Baba and my wish had been fulfilled, but I was not sure who the person in my first dream was. I had been thinking about that all day when my friend Suvarna called me in the afternoon

¹ In India, Thursday is dedicated to and named after the Guru ("Guruvar").

from Colorado Springs. She shared with me some things from the *satsang* they had had that week, and I told her my dream and asked her to send me a picture of Sri Babuji. I was hoping that the person in my first dream was him, and I was very eager to see his photo.

Suvarna said that she would send the picture and asked me to visit www.saibaba.com, where I would be able to see more photos of Guruji. I immediately did so and was thrilled to see that the person in my first dream was indeed Sri Babuji! Guruji heard my prayers and fulfilled my wish of having *darshan* of both Baba and himself in my dream. They have showed that our wishes do get fulfilled if we pray to them sincerely.

After hearing about my experience, Surya Prakash from Dallas shared it by phone with a couple of the people who were with Guruji in Tiruvannamalai at the time. They were awestruck, as Guruji had actually been giving *satsang* that night. He remarked that my dream had been like a live telecast of the *satsang* with Guruji. I felt immensely happy after hearing that. Guruji was in India and I was continents away in the US, but he still answered my prayers!

Hari Sundari Kota, born in 1971, is a housewife who lives in Irving, Texas, USA.

A touch

Vijayawada, September 2001

I suffered from a sore throat for three long years. The pain was often severe and I couldn't eat properly. I wasn't even able to swallow the medicines prescribed by the doctor. In early August 2000, while I was spending the night at my friend Sushma's house, Guruji appeared to me in a dream in the morning. He talked to me and briefly touched my throat. Ever since then my throat has never troubled me again, thanks to Guruji's grace.

Kavitha Sravanthi Chivukula, born in 1978, is a student who lives in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

He said, "Sai Baba"

Kandukur, March 2000

One night in 1995 I had a dream. I saw a saintly-looking man with a short beard. He was accompanied by some other people and they were all walking into our house. A girl, whose face I couldn't see clearly, was standing next to me. We both prostrated and touched the saint's feet, who blessed us saying, "Sai Baba." I knew neither the man nor the girl. I had never met Guruji before and didn't know what he looked like.

I was single then but in 1996 I got married to a girl my parents chose for me.² The same year my wife and I went to Shirdi for Guru Purnima to have Baba's *darshan*. Before our departure my brother showed me a photo of Guruji, whom I knew was living in Shirdi. I had no reaction to it and didn't have any intention of going to see him. We went to Shirdi only for Sai Baba.

The day after our arrival, when we had just come out of Baba's Samadhi Mandir, a shopkeeper pointed to a man in the road and exclaimed, "There is Sarath Babuji!"

We both ran to meet him. He was surrounded by a huge crowd and my wife and I got separated in the crush. When my eyes fell on him I realized that he was the bearded saint I had seen in my dream. I pushed my way through the crowd and touched his right foot. My wife – I know it seems incredible – had reached Guruji at the same time from some other part of the crowd and was touching Guruji's left foot. It was exactly as it was in the dream of the previous year, in which Guruji received both our *namaskars* at the same time. And while we were touching his feet Guruji also said, "Sai Baba." It was an unforgettable experience.

Venkata Ramana Batchali, born in 1963, is an employee who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.

² In India, marriages are usually arranged by the parents.

The sacred guest

Shirdi, November 2002

My father was introduced to Guruji by his close friend, Kondayya Bavana. He in turn transmitted his love for Guruji to our whole family. In 1996 I married Kondayya's daughter, Surekha.

I first met Guruji in Shirdi when I went for my engagement ceremony. Guruji blessed me on this first visit by removing the sciatic pain I had been plagued with for many years. I will feel immensely indebted to Guruji for the rest of my life for this experience.

In 1996 I had a dream in which I was on my way to the market. Going round a corner near my house, I saw Guruji standing under a neem tree. I went to him, did *namaskar* and invited him to come to our house.

Guruji said, "I will come later."

One night my wife, who had had a bad day, went to sleep feeling rather unhappy and had the following dream. In the dream she was lying asleep in our bedroom, when Guruji came and slapped her hard on the cheek, causing her to fall. She dreamt that when she woke up and went outside, she saw Guruji, Ammagaru and Sruti getting out of a car and walking towards her. She invited them in and gave them a tour of the house.

When Guruji was about to leave, she said, "Our room is upstairs, Uncle. Please come and see it."

Guruji replied, "There will be a time for this," and then left. Surekha was very sad that Guruji did not visit our room.

Four years later, Guruji made both our dreams come true by visiting our house when he came to Palsood after Guru Purnima in July 2001, to inaugurate the Sai Baba Temple. We knew some months ahead that Guruji might come and so we had constructed a second room upstairs for his use, just beside our room.

Bound to Love

The day came for Guruji's visit. Arriving at our house, Guruji was ushered upstairs to the new room we had prepared for him. As he approached, the door became accidentally locked! Guruji simply walked straight into the room next door – ours – and sat on the bed. We were all extremely happy that Guruji fulfilled the promise he had given Surekha in her dream.

Eventually, we were able to unlock the door of the new room and my father asked Guruji to go inside and sit down. Our wish was to convert it into a puja room after it had been blessed by Guruji's holy presence. Guruji graciously assented and rested there for a while. We feel deeply blessed that our puja room has been sanctified by Guruji's presence and my wife and I feel incredibly fortunate to have received Guruji's love and grace in this way.

Ramesh Settipalli, born in 1969, is a contractor who lives in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh.



Sri Babuji in Shirdi, 2006



Sri Babuji in Shirdi, 2006



TEN

*“Subham” –
All Will Be Well*

SRI BABUJI: *The relationship between mother and child is the best comparison I can find for the Satguru's care and love. A child comes from the mother. It is like a part of her, like her own organ. And that is how we are to Baba; we are like a part of him. So, loving us is at the same time loving himself.*

It is the same as it is for you with your own body. You want all the parts of it to be well. For example, your finger. It is not different from you – when it hurts, you take care of it. Like this, Baba takes care of us all.

Who would have believed me?

Tenali, February 2001

I met Guruji in 1984 through my uncle, Balakrishna Gupta. Since then I have had hundreds of experiences of Guruji's grace and of his power to save me from danger and trouble.

My wedding took place in Guruji's presence in 1988. However, for the first three years of my marriage my husband, Sivaram, was reluctant to acknowledge Guruji and did not take me to see him. Every day I sat in front of Baba's picture and prayed, "Baba, I beg you, bring my husband to Guruji." Now my husband loves Guruji more than anything else.

Our first child was a healthy girl. We wanted a boy next and told Guruji.

Guruji said, "Subham."

During the pregnancy I read the *Shri Sai Satcharita* and did *arati* every afternoon. Guruji gave me not only the much desired son but also an unforgettable experience. The baby was overdue yet there was no sign of the onset of labour. The doctors told me to wait another five days. Meanwhile I prayed to Guruji to grant me a normal delivery without surgery. On the morning of the fifth day I

went into hospital and waited the whole day for labour to start, but it didn't. At some point during the night I prayed to Guruji to make me deliver within five minutes and without pain. Guruji answered my prayer. I gave birth to a boy within five minutes and didn't feel any pain whatsoever!

The whole time I had a picture of Baba and Guruji pinned to my clothing. After the birth I placed it on my son's chest and put some drops of Baba's *teertham* in his mouth. I repeated Baba's name again and again. I also asked the nurse to wrap the baby in a shawl that Guruji had given me. This is how I always wanted the birth of my child to be and by Guruji's grace it happened.

The delivery took place at 2.30 in the morning. My husband tried to call Varanasi, where Guruji was staying at the time, but he could not get through. He tried again at six in the morning and one of our *gurubandhus* answered.

Before my husband could tell him, the *gurubandhu* said, "Yes, we know. Jhansi has given birth and had no pain."

Completely flabbergasted, my husband asked, "How do you know?" He was told that Guruji had given *satsang* the night before and sent everybody home at two in the morning. He suddenly had severe cramps and pain in his belly for about half an hour that he described as being like labour pains. I had an easy delivery because Guruji took on my pain.



Guruji once saved me from certain death just as Baba saved a child that was falling into a burning furnace.¹ One evening I was sweeping the upstairs balcony of our house in Tenali, chanting Baba's name as I worked. I gathered the dust in a pan. While I was throwing it vigorously over the low railing of the balcony, I suddenly lost my balance. My feet went out from under me and I started to fall over

¹ See *Shri Sai Satcharita*, Chapter VII.

the railing. I was still chanting Baba's name. Suddenly I was flung back by some immense force. A boy from a house opposite saw me fall and ran to our house; he found me back on the balcony.

He stammered again and again, "How could you come back again after falling so far? It must be the *satsang* you do that saved you!"

I know it was Guruji's grace and power that saved me. I also think that he put the boy there to witness it. Otherwise, who would have believed me?

Jhansi Addanki, born in 1967, is a housewife who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Buffaloes

Kandukur, March 2001

I was working as a school teacher and my husband was employed in a pickle shop, but our salaries didn't cover our expenses. We owned some agricultural land in Kandukur but that hadn't yielded any crops for several years. We also had a house which nobody wanted to buy.

We went to Shirdi in July 2000 for Guru Purnima. During individual *darshan* we asked Guruji to help us set up a dairy farm. He gave us his blessings. Within four days of our return from Shirdi a stranger came up to my husband in the bazaar and offered to sell him two good buffaloes. He brought the animals to our house, told us that we could pay him after ten days, and disappeared. This is how our dairy farm started. We were able to buy more good buffaloes and it seemed that Guruji's blessings were certainly on our new venture.

But how to sell all the milk? We did *namaskar* to Guruji's photo and asked him to send us customers. One day after *satsang*, a devotee announced that we had good milk for sale, and from then on we always had enough customers. Now we are selling thirty litres of milk a day, thanks to Guruji's grace.



Another time my husband and I had gone to the market and when we came back our buffaloes were gone. My husband immediately went out to search but couldn't find them. We were desperate. They were worth 25,000 rupees and constituted our entire livelihood.

I bowed to Guruji's picture and said, "Gurudeva, these cattle are *prasad*² that you have kindly given us. They are gone and we don't know what to do or where to look for them. Their calves are also crying for them. Please bless us and make sure that we find them soon, and possibly nearby."

The next day a stranger came to *satsang* to tell one of the devotees that our buffaloes had been seen on the outskirts of Kandukur, and that somebody was milking them. We immediately rushed there and got them back. This showed us once again that Baba and Guruji are looking after us and protecting us from harm.



We needed to repay the loan we took to buy the cattle. All we had to sell was the barren land and a small house but nobody wanted either of them. Then suddenly somebody was interested in the land and bought it for a good price. Soon after that somebody wanted to buy the house, and then yet another person was interested in it too. One man, in order to prove his claim on the property, cut down some trees around the site and started to make a footpath. We ended up helplessly sandwiched between two parties fiercely vying to buy our house, a house that nobody had been interested in before!

A *satsang* member told us to write a letter to Guruji. Before we could write it we heard that Guruji was in South India, in Tirumala,

² *Prasad* is used in a broad sense to mean anything that comes through the guru, god or saint, and thus is blessed. Devotees may refer to things that come in answer to a prayer, as *prasad*.

and so we asked for permission to see him. We went, and I was so happy to have his *darshan* that I couldn't say anything. I told him only mentally about our problems. When we came back home, we all watched in amazement how the dispute between the fighting parties resolved itself amicably in a very short time. We are unendingly grateful for Guruji's constant help and blessings.

Manoja Sri Ram Maganti, born in 1973, is a teacher who lives in Kandukur, Andhra Pradesh.

“Don't be idle”

Shirdi, July 2004

I inherited three acres of land from my father and two from my father-in-law. I acquired another two-and-half acres with my earnings from agriculture. I was leading a fairly happy life with my family.

In 1993 many of our neighbours converted their agricultural land into shrimp farms. One effect of this was that we lost our direct water connection for irrigating the fields. I could not sell the land as it was not a seller's market. The only option I had was to convert my agricultural land too so that I could do shrimp culture. I borrowed a lot of money to invest in this venture. Most of the other farmers in the business suffered a loss in 1994, but luckily, I gained 850,000 rupees. With that profit I was able to pay off all my debts. The next harvest, however, was not very profitable. Then for the next three years I suffered losses. Gradually, I started borrowing huge amounts of money and was much pestered by the lenders to repay the loans.

I heard of our beloved Guruji through an acquaintance and had his *darshan* in Shirdi in February 1997, when I told him all my problems. Guruji told me to give up shrimp farming.

“I don’t have any way out,” I replied. “I need to continue in order to repay my loans.”

It was very evident that I was not prepared to take Guruji’s advice. I went back home and continued with my shrimp farming. I took a hit that year as well. My debt reached almost 2,500,000 rupees. I was worried about how I would repay that amount. I couldn’t think of any solution and came to the painful conclusion that suicide was the only way out of these problems, but I wanted one last *darshan* of Baba and Guruji before I committed suicide.

During Guruji’s *darshan* I experienced a strong sense of security. Explaining my situation to him I asked, “Should I sell all our land?”

“Not now!” Guruji replied. He said I could sell it the following year and repay as much of the debt as possible with the proceeds.

By Guru Purnima 1997, my situation had seriously deteriorated. My near and dear ones had started avoiding me and it was extremely embarrassing for me to continue living in my village. In December 1997 my family and I went to stay in Shirdi for a month, since we could no longer live peacefully in our village. My intention was to spend as much time as possible in Guruji’s presence while he was in Shirdi, and then go back to the village to commit suicide.

In Guruji’s presence my suicidal tendencies gradually faded. After we had been in Shirdi for a month, we came to know that Guruji would be leaving Shirdi on a trip. We went to get his *darshan* along with the other *gurubandhus*.

As soon as I sat in front of Guruji, he asked, “What are you doing?”

To earn his approval, I replied, “I’m doing *parayana*.”

Guruji immediately said, “I will take care of all that. Keep working and the problems will get resolved by themselves. If you have no work, dig a pit and refill it, but never stay idle. Everyone is engaged in some work or other except you – you are coming to Saipatham like a son-in-law!”³

³ This is a common Telugu expression to denote idleness, since traditionally, a son-in-law is not required to participate in daily chores.

After that, I started working in the garden. The following year I went to my village to sell off our land. I was expecting an acre to fetch a minimum of 200,000 rupees, but the asking price was only 150,000 rupees. I returned to Shirdi and informed Guruji. After getting Guruji's blessings, I went back to my village. To my surprise, I got 1,600,000 rupees, which was more than I expected. Apart from the 210,000 rupees owed to my brother-in-law, I made a settlement⁴ with the other money lenders and paid them a total of 1,600,000 rupees. I then returned to Shirdi.

Having paid the amount that was agreed upon, I thought that I had cut the cord with my village. I continued to live with Guruji in Shirdi, working in the garden at Saipatham while my wife worked in the kitchen there. Ammagaru, Guruji's wife, used to take loving care of my wife and children. Guruji had suggested we go to Gurusthan every day and do *pradakshina*, and whenever we went for *udi darshan* he would immediately ask us, "Are you doing *pradakshina*?"

After some days had passed, I asked Guruji to suggest a livelihood for me. He said, "Start a restaurant."

I felt it would be rather demeaning to be in the restaurant business. Almost a year-and-a-half passed by and I had not done anything about it. Then one day when we went for Guruji's *darshan* he said, "Do what I told you. I will pull you out of your trouble and see that you are respected in your village."

Guruji's care and concern towards me were very clear in that assurance. I immediately thought that I should not procrastinate any longer. I decided that there was no need for me to worry about my abilities after getting such an assurance from Guruji. I finally started a restaurant in Shirdi as Guruji had suggested, and opened it in Narayan Baba Ashram. My brother-in-law and a few other *gurubandhus* loaned me the money for the initial investment.

Within a year I was able to repay the loans I had taken to start

⁴ A settlement is an agreement to pay a lower amount than is actually owed.

the hotel, and was even able to save some money. When I told Guruji about my savings, he reminded me of my past dues and said, “Don’t think that you settled it completely with the people you borrowed from. Repay any remaining amount and things will turn out even better for you.”

I returned to my village and repaid my brother-in-law and a few others to whom I owed money. I started repaying the remaining loans each year with the profit from the hotel. Some of the money lenders had been out of town when I went to repay them, so I had not been able to meet them to give them their money. When I told Guruji this, he suggested that I keep that amount aside to repay them later.

In this way, I was repaying the outstanding sums to people I owed, even after a settlement had been made a few years previously. Some of the people felt that it was a little strange for me to pay them again, and they were very surprised. I told them clearly, “My Guruji asked me to repay any balance amount. He suggested I should not be indebted to anyone.” Many of them were astonished to learn of Guruji’s advice. They felt I was no longer under any obligation to repay the original amount since a settlement had already been made, and as the amount I had to repay was in hundreds of thousands, they were amazed! A few people even asked me what the fate of my children would be if I were to use up all my earnings again.

When I had the opportunity to speak to Guruji, I told him the general opinion of my relatives. Guruji gave me great strength by saying, “Won’t Baba take care of you and your children? Baba has taken care of you so far and given you all this – and he will take care of you in the future too!”

Eventually I became completely free of debt without owing even a single rupee. I regained respect in the same village where I had experienced extreme humiliation. Later, it gave me immense joy when I heard that Guruji had said, “I am happy that Raju has done what I told him.”

Venkata Raju Kusampudi, born in 1952, is a restaurant owner in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

New dawn

Hyderabad, June 2001

Through my brother, I had the blessing of meeting Guruji for the first time in Hyderabad, in October 1993. In those days my situation was emotionally and financially dark and desperate. My husband, who was the founder and director of a private school, had died unexpectedly. I was left with two teenage daughters and a 7-year-old son. Suddenly, I had to shoulder too many burdens all alone: looking after my children, taking over the management of the school, dealing with my ill health and with a difficult mother-in-law. Feeling helpless, lonely and depressed, I thought life had dealt me too hard a blow to bear.

Meeting Guruji was like seeing a light on a pitch-black scary night. A new life dawned and I began to feel stronger, more optimistic and hopeful. It was a kind of rebirth. Guruji not only understood my situation very well, he also changed it through his grace and power. He told me to stay one week in Shirdi and do *pradakshina* around Gurusthan every day. The effect was undeniable. Little by little, without any effort on my part, changes began to take place. The difficult situations started to resolve themselves and my life became much easier.

The school was a constant source of problems. Guruji took care of this too. In December 1997 a close devotee held *satsang* in our school. For this occasion we ceremonially hung a beautiful large photo of Guruji in the main area. From that moment on I haven't had any worries. Guruji's love and care laid the foundations of an unshakeable trust in him. If difficulties arise, I know my Guruji will take care of them and protect me. He is my refuge.

Padma Ravindranath Tummala, born in 1955, is headmistress of a school in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

A young mother's worries

Tirupati, January 2002

As a devotee of Baba I read the *Shri Sai Satcharita* regularly. I often wondered if Satgurus still existed and if I would ever find one. How many times I prayed to Baba to grant me a meeting with a living guru, my Satguru! In due course, Baba used my marriage as a means to fulfil my desire, as my husband, along with his brother and his family, has been with Guruji for many years.

From my very first *darshan* I had a deep respect for Guruji and trusted him completely. What attracts me most and makes me crave to be with Guruji is his smile. I have nothing against being born again and again if only I can see this divine smile.

DEVOTEE: *Why do you often use the word "Satguru" instead of "guru"?*

SRI BABUJI: *There are several meanings to the word "guru", but in common parlance in Indian culture, guru means not only a spiritual teacher, but anyone who teaches you – a profession, a musical instrument, or even the alphabet. Any respectable or elderly person is a guru.*

Because of over-use, the word guru has become commonplace. So when I talk about Sai Baba, I use the word Satguru. It means a guru, a teacher, who will give the experience of the "sat", what exists. "Sat" means what exists, what is, truth.

DEVOTEE: *Can a Satguru take many forms?*

SRI BABUJI: *Yes, there may be many forms. Baba is one of the forms. When you look at a form, you may feel, "Oh, this is what I have been seeking!" If a form spontaneously gives you a sense of fulfilment, a sense of trust, a sense of peace or a sense of an irresistible pull – in short, if you feel happy, contented, fulfilled, thrilled in his presence – that is your Satguru.*



Guruji gave my child the name Sai Rachana.⁵ He also did the *annaprasana* ceremony for her, feeding her the first solid food. Rachana showed herself to be strong-minded from her very early days. She was a sweet and easy child as long as we didn't try to coerce her in any way. Anything disagreeable to her would provoke vehement protest and furious endless crying. She would cry herself into a fit and turn green and blue in the face for lack of oxygen. Her eyes would roll upward and she wouldn't breathe for what seemed like a very long time. When this occurred we would be frantic with worry.

We took her to Tiruvannamalai to have Guruji's *darshan*. While we were waiting the same thing happened. As it was subsiding Guruji called us in. He held our baby in his arms, touching her back and chest with infinite tenderness. Through this simple and wonderful touch our little one was cured. That was the last fit she ever had! Who can show so much loving kindness, freeing us from pain and trouble, except a great being like him? How can we repay the kindness he shows us except by falling at his feet in gratitude?

Sailaja Ikkurthi, born in 1978, is a housewife who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

No prescriptions

Hyderabad, June 2001

My second daughter, Smitha, frequently suffered from a sore throat. We thought they were infections and gave her appropriate medication but that didn't stop her pain. Once during

⁵At the request of the devotees Guruji would sometimes name their children, which was regarded as a blessing.

personal *darshan* in Shirdi I told Guruji about Smitha's throat. Guruji asked my daughter to open her mouth so that he could examine her. As it was nighttime and there was no light I thought he would ask for a torch, but he didn't. He simply looked at her throat in the dark. I wondered what he could see.

Guruji said he would give her some medicine, which he never did. But there was no need for it either because my daughter's pain vanished, never to return again. Guruji freed her from her affliction merely by his compassionate glance. Though Guruji sometimes gives medicines, he does so just to reassure us and not because these are the real cause of the cure.

Balakrishna Rao Chennadi, born in 1946, is a government employee who lives in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

The impossible transfer to Shirdi

Shirdi, November 2000

I live in Shirdi and work for the telephone company. I have known about Guruji since 1992 and I would go to see him from time to time, without being much impressed. This casual contact went on until 1997.

I had been working as a junior telecom officer in the telephone exchange. When I was promoted to sub-divisional engineer, I was transferred to Ahmednagar, about eighty kilometres from Shirdi. This promotion didn't make me happy at all. My life was in Shirdi where I had my house and my wife, and where my children were going to school. I was in a dilemma: Shirdi didn't offer suitable employment but I really did not want to transfer my family to Ahmednagar.

The idea of leaving Shirdi was simply unbearable. I tried pulling all possible strings in order to be able to remain in Shirdi, hoping

that a suitable post would be created for me. The general manager, however, told me that even if a new post were to be created in Shirdi, I would not qualify for it. I had already been posted here for seven years and was overdue for a transfer. I had no choice but to accept the job in Ahmednagar and to commute four hours by bus every day.

Sometimes I would be called to Saipatham when there was a problem with the phones. On one of these occasions I told Narayana Rao about my unhappy situation. He encouraged me to come for Guruji's *darshan* and said he would surely help me. I decided to take up the suggestion and commit myself for fifteen days.

Every day I went for Guruji's *darshan* and received *udi* and *prasad*. My mind became still in his presence; being with him was simply blissful. One evening I couldn't go because of some unavoidable engagement. The next day I asked Guruji to forgive me for having missed the previous night. He smiled and my anxiety vanished.

On the sixteenth day our office received the order from the Delhi corporate office to create a new post for a sub-divisional engineer in the Kopargaon area and that Gaware should be employed in that post. This post had never existed before! I firmly believe that it was created by Guruji's grace so that I could be transferred back to Shirdi, which is the headquarters for this post.

This experience of Guruji's help with a serious problem that I had failed to solve myself, brought about a big change in me. It gave me a new outlook on life and the most precious of all gifts, a Satguru to guide me.

Harichandra D. Gaware, born in 1960, is a government employee who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

All is well

Shirdi, June 2001

Some time ago we bought some land in Shirdi and built three rooms on it. Only after finishing the work did we realize that we couldn't get water there. Who could we turn to but Guruji? In *darshan* we asked him for help. He simply said to go back and sink a bore well wherever we felt like it, which we did. In Shirdi the water table is notoriously low. Drilling for several hundred metres is usually necessary before striking water, if at all. But we struck water at about thirty metres!

Sarathbabu Rao Torath, born in 1954, is a businessman who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

The best cure

Zaheerabad, January 2000

In 1998 when I was seriously ill I went to Hyderabad to get treatment. After various tests the doctors advised immediate surgery. The affected part was scanned by a specialist who diagnosed an infection. He prescribed two weeks of medication prior to the surgery. The date for the operation was fixed and I was told to rest in bed and not to work on my farm.

At this point my wife determined to travel to Shirdi to get Guruji's blessings for me. I also wanted to go but all my relatives were against my travelling while I was seriously ill. At first I gave in to them. After a few days, however, the pull to go to Shirdi was too strong and I just set off.

Meanwhile in Shirdi a close devotee of Guruji said to my wife, "What is he going to get by staying at home? It would be much more beneficial for him to take Baba's *darshan* and to be in Guruji's presence. Tell him to come immediately."

I had already started on my journey and knew nothing of this conversation. After my arrival, the magic of Shirdi and Guruji's loving presence began to work on me. Day by day I became more relaxed, happy and healthy.

After two wonderful weeks I went back to the doctors in Hyderabad and, certain of my improved health, asked them to repeat all the tests. They could not find anything wrong with me! I know now that the very best cure is to spend time in Baba's Shirdi in our Guruji's blessed presence, and to receive *udi* from his hand.

Vitthal Reddy Billipuram, born in 1956, owns a farm in Zaheerabad, Andhra Pradesh.

It occurred to him {Bhimaji Patil} that he should consult Mr Nanasaheb Chandorkar, a great devotee of Baba, in this respect. So he wrote him a letter giving all details of his malady, and asking for his opinion. In reply Mr Nanasaheb wrote to him that there was only one remedy left and that was to have recourse to Baba's feet. Relying on Mr Nanasaheb's advice, he made preparations for going to Shirdi. He was brought to Shirdi and taken to the *masjid* and placed before Baba. Mr Nanasaheb and Shama (Madhavrao Deshpande) were then present. Baba pointed out that the disease was due to the previous evil karma and was not at first disposed to interfere. But the patient cried out in despair that he was helpless, and sought refuge in him as he was his last hope, and prayed for mercy. Then Baba's heart melted and he said, "Stay, cast off your anxiety, your sufferings have come to an end. However oppressed and troubled one may be, as soon as he steps into the *masjid* he is on the pathway to happiness. The fakir here is very kind and he will cure the disease and protect all with love and kindness."

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XIII)

The scourge of sciatica

Palsood, February 2001

I met Guruji for the first time in Shirdi in 1988 through a relative and a friend of mine. He spoke to me about Guruji with much love and admiration. All the same, I wasn't interested because I didn't believe in gurus. I considered Sri Babuji to be a well-intentioned person, but nothing more.

The second time that I met Guruji was in 1992 at the Saibaba Central School in Ongole, the school founded by Guruji in 1983. I imitated my relative who prostrated to Guruji and touched his feet, but later I expressed my doubts about touching the feet of someone who, as a human being, was after all basically the same as we are.

My son, Ramesh, had suffered from sciatica for many years. We consulted many doctors in various cities, many tests were done and many prescriptions given, but to no avail. Disappointed, we stopped all treatment and he just had to learn to live with the pain.

Somehow my relative's love and my meetings with other *gurubandhus* kindled something in me, and I decided to go to Shirdi with Ramesh to ask Guruji's blessings for his forthcoming marriage. This was my son's first *darshan* of Guruji.

Ramesh did not tell Guruji about his sciatica. But to everybody's amazement, in the presence of Guruji the sciatica vanished, never to return again. He has now completely forgotten that the painful and frustrating scourge of sciatica was ever a part of his life.

Veeraswami Settipalli, born in 1944, is a contractor who lives in Palsood, Madhya Pradesh.

“So, you brought me here”

Narasingapuram, January 2001

I travelled to Shirdi for the first time in 1994, where I had Baba’s and Guruji’s *darshan*. Since then, whenever possible, I go to Shirdi for special occasions such as Vijayadasami and Guru Purnima. Each time I saw devotees having their engagement ceremony or wedding in Guruji’s divine presence, I thought how much I wanted to have the same thing done for me by Guruji.

My parents were looking for a husband for me. I was always convinced that the wedding would happen only if Baba and Guruji felt that the man was right for me. When my parents eventually found a prospective husband, I insisted that either the engagement ceremony or the wedding be celebrated in Guruji’s presence. At first the groom’s family would not hear of it. My parents and relatives tried to convince me that the blessings of Guruji would be with me anywhere, but I had my heart set on being with Guruji on this occasion.

I pleaded in front of Guruji’s picture many times, “I so much want either the engagement or wedding to be celebrated in your presence. Please, do what you feel is good for me.”

Finally the groom’s family consented to come to Shirdi for the engagement. I believed that Guruji had listened to my prayers and supported me. On Guru Purnima 2000 my future husband and I exchanged garlands in the presence of Guruji and many fellow devotees. It was just what I had been hoping for and I was overjoyed.

When the wedding date came closer I thought that this time I would have to do without Guruji’s physical presence. He, however, did more than I could ever have dreamt of – he came to Tirumala for my wedding! Afterwards I was told that Guruji left Shirdi quite unexpectedly to go to Tirumala. In a *satsang* the night before his departure, Guruji said casually, “Tomorrow is Sadhana’s wedding.”

Guruji gave me the grandest wedding gift one could ever wish for: *darshan* to all our family members. I was ecstatic. I had asked to be with Guruji for either the engagement or the wedding but that he would do what was good for me, and he was there for both!

Guruji was not physically present at the wedding in Tirupati, but after the ceremony we were able to go up the hill to Tirumala for his *darshan*.

As I was bowing down to him, Guruji said, "So, you brought me here."

Tears of joy trickled down my cheeks.

Sadhana Palem, born in 1973, is a housewife who lives in Narasingapuram, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: If suddenly Baba appeared in front of you and gave you a choice – "Ask for anything and I'll give it but you can ask only once, no second or third chance. I will give one boon and that will be the final one. Ask!" – what would you ask for?

After thinking and thinking – if at all I would be in that position – I would say, "Baba, I do not know what to ask for because I don't know what will give me fulfilment. I have tried so many things, imagining that they would give me full fulfilment, but I failed. You know better than I do. So I ask that you give me what will give me fulfilment."



ELEVEN

Transformation in Progress

Bound to Love

DEVOTEE: *Do emotions change or do they always remain the same?*

SRI BABUJI: *When I speak about transformation it means a change in your emotions. It is not that if you change, then your emotions change. The change of the emotions is what we call change. In other words, when there is a change in your emotions, then you can say that you have changed.*



DEVOTEE: *How can we know that we are making progress?*

SRI BABUJI: *The real progress, as I have told you many times, is how often you don't say "I" – this "I" business – "I want this, I love it, I like it, I don't like it!" And how harmonized you are inside and outside, how contented and how happy you are, how much you feel the sense of security within you, an indescribable sense of security. The real progress is in how your personality has been transformed, how you look at the world, how you look at yourself, how people look at you, how you look at people and how you interact with them – that is what matters.*



SRI BABUJI: *What the guru does is he prepares the mind and the environment in such a way that you come to know the Truth. Then it becomes your experience. To the one who gets it, it seems as if the guru has given it. But it is not that anybody gives anything. It is dark there and the light is switched on. It may be that the guru made you see something, but it is you who see it; switching on the light only enabled you to see it.*

So what the guru does is he enables you, he makes you prepared, he gives you the power to see your own self.

*Losing a brother,
finding the Satguru*

Chennai, January 2001

Guruji is my elder brother. There were five children, Guruji, me, two younger brothers and one younger sister. The considerable age gap between the first two and the later three children meant that my elder brother and I spent a lot of time in each other's company. His name is Sarath Babu but I called him Anna, which is the way younger sisters commonly call their elder brothers in our language. *Anna* simply means elder brother.

The two of us were always playing or arguing or doing things together. We were very close. I loved and adored my elder brother who was my point of reference in everything. If I needed counsel or had a very personal problem or any doubts, I always confided in him. He had a great sense of humour and we shared many laughs together. Sometimes, though, he could be in a very serious mood and seem to be far away, almost unreachable. In those moments none of us would dare to go near him. This was true not only for us children, but also for the elders. We simply respected this mood without ever discussing it.

Anna and I continued to be closely connected even after he left home, first to study in Vidyanagar and later when he moved to Venkatagiri and then to Ongole. The contact was interrupted in 1989, however, when he moved to Shirdi. During that time I did not see him for seven years. Finally in 1996 I went with my family to Shirdi, but he had just left for a long journey the day we arrived.

In 1997 my husband and I, my parents, brothers and sister, along with all our children, decided to go and see Sarath Babu in Shirdi. However, it happened that at that very time my husband had to register a piece of land we had bought, so he said that our family would have to withdraw from the group.

At that exact moment, our dear friend Bhaskar called us from Kota, asking why we were not going. We told him that we had certain problems that needed resolving before we could leave, to which he replied, "Don't you know that all your problems will be solved if you go to Shirdi? Just go. Everything will be fine."

I am still immensely grateful to Bhaskar for saying this, for it made me ask my husband if he was willing to let me go to Shirdi without him. My husband agreed to my request, and thus we went to Shirdi for Vijayadasami. I was thrilled at the prospect of seeing my brother after seven years, but at the same time the sadness of having missed him for such a long time was reawakened. I arrived in Shirdi filled with mixed emotions.

Hugging my sister-in-law, Anasuya, I sighed tearfully, "Oh, it's been so many years! I wish I could have come sooner."

Anasuya smiled, "Come, Suchi. Let's go and see your brother."

The new Saipatham *satsang* hall was still under construction. Thousands of people were crowded into a huge and beautifully decorated tent where *darshan* was already in progress. A figure dressed in simple white clothes was sitting on a wooden platform surrounded by flowers. The sight filled me with unexpected happiness. My breathing stopped. Only then did I realize that it was my own brother who was sitting there. My mind was puzzled. "Is this really him? He looks so different. There is something strangely peaceful about him, something almost divine. What is it? Is this the brother I have known since I was born?"

I was standing in the *darshan* queue watching him give *udi* and smile lovingly at each person who touched his feet. Tears were pouring down my cheeks. This small figure sitting there exuded a power and a love I had never experienced before. Then it was my turn. Without knowing what was happening, my head and then my hands were touching his feet. They felt incredibly soft and safe, like a mother's lap. When my head came up, my eyes just stared at him.

His first words took me completely by surprise, “Have you been to the *mandir*¹ yet?”

I indicated no with my head, unable to speak.

“First go to the *mandir* and then come back here again.”

I went to the Samadhi Mandir, thinking all the while about how he had addressed me after all these years. He could have asked me the obvious, “How are you?” or “How are your children?” or many other things. But no, he asks me if I have been to the *mandir* and sends me there first. I found this most peculiar. I hadn’t come to Shirdi for Sai Baba. Absolutely not. I had come to see my brother, and for no other reason. Not that I didn’t know about Sai Baba. On the contrary, I had been a devotee of his for many years, but I considered that chapter was now closed for good.

How had that happened? For many years I read the *Shri Sai Satcharita* regularly and did daily puja to Baba’s picture with much love and trust. Anna talked to me so much about him and I knew that Baba was his one and only God. My connection with Sai Baba continued in my married life because my parents arranged my marriage with my mother’s brother² who, as well as being a Sai devotee, was very close to my brother.

When I became pregnant my husband and I were thrilled. We prayed for Baba’s blessings, but when the baby came she was stillborn. We were both immensely sad but continued to pray to Baba for another baby. A year and a half later I gave birth to another girl. The pregnancy had been easy, the labour short and the girl was healthy and beautiful, but she died after ten days. The doctors could offer no real explanation but said it was due to the strain of labour, although there had been no strain. With more fervour than ever I prayed to Baba for another child. After another year and a half I once more gave birth to a girl. She looked healthy and strong,

¹ Temple; Sri Babuji is referring to the Sai Baba Mandir in Shirdi.

² Marriage between a daughter and the mother’s brother is legal and not uncommon in South India.

weighed more than 5 kg and was clearly destined to live. But this girl too died after six days. Again, the labour had been short and easy yet the doctors gave the same unsatisfactory explanations.

At that point something snapped inside me. The sadness, disappointment and pain were too much to bear. There had not been one day when I had not prayed to Baba, begging and pleading with him for a healthy child who would live and grow. Three dead babies in five years was proof that Baba was not with me. He was not helping me at all. I locked Baba's picture in the darkest cupboard and gave away all the Baba books. For me this chapter was closed once and for all. I started to turn to Rajeshwari Devi, a mother goddess much revered in our area, and prayed to her for another child.

When my brother visited me after each ordeal, I would be sitting there crying and he would stand close to me, his hand on my shoulder, consoling me with his presence. He never commented on the tragedies that had befallen us. He was simply there, giving silent comfort and love.

Two years later, in 1984, I became pregnant again. My husband and I were extremely anxious, as was the whole family. This time I did all possible examinations and tests, even a special genetic test to rule out any incompatibilities that might be due to the close blood relationship between me and my husband. All the test results were perfect and indicated no problem whatsoever. I prayed to Rajeshwari with all my heart. The doctors had already decided on a Caesarean birth to preclude any complications of labour. And so our fourth daughter was born. How anxiously we watched Divya, this beautiful child, day after day, as she grew into a healthy girl and began first to crawl and then to sit, walk and talk. Our joy was indescribable.

In 1986 our second daughter, Kavya, was born, also by Caesarean section, and to our immense delight she too grew up without any complications into a healthy, beautiful and intelligent girl.

Now you can understand my utter surprise and puzzlement in the face of my brother's first question, "Have you been to the *mandir* yet?"

I went to the Samadhi Mandir with my whole family. On our way back my younger sister and I decided to go to Saipatham. We went to see our sister-in-law, Anasuya, in her room and chatted with her. Her daughter, Sruti, joined us, and after about twenty minutes Anna walked into the room, smiled at us and sat down on a mat. A tidal wave of love and happiness swept the room.

"Suchi, how are the children? How is Mavayya?" he enquired. By *mavayya*, which is Telugu for "uncle", he was referring to my husband, who is his uncle. His questions were those any close friend or relative might have asked. Yet he was very different from the brother I remembered. There was an obvious and dramatic change: the love radiating from his face, especially from his eyes. It wasn't the love I knew, the normal human love that shows a preference, a predilection for a certain person but may exclude others. How can I explain this love? It was all-encompassing, total, complete; it was a love that embraces everything. I had known my brother, had known his ways, his smiles, his loving expressions, his kindness and also his irritation and his anger. I was familiar with his humour and his seriousness. But this was different. His love went right into the deepest recesses of my heart, touching it in the most intimate manner. At the same time, he seemed to be far away, distant, high up and way beyond my reach. This wasn't my brother any more. I didn't feel free to relate to him as I always had done. In the presence of this image of divine radiance, I experienced a peace and happiness that was extraordinarily beautiful and precious, but at the same time there was some sadness at having lost my brother.

On the day of our departure Anasuya said that Guruji wanted to meet us. He was busy seeing so many people that we nearly gave up on seeing him privately. But our turn came and we went to his

room with a feeling of great happiness. As we were leaving, about ten minutes later, I heard him say my name but decided it couldn't be. I was just stepping outside when I heard him calling my name again, a little louder. I went back to him and sat down expectantly. He didn't say a word but took a small *mala*, a string of artificial white pearls, something one would use to decorate a small picture of a saint, and kept it in his hand. He closed his eyes for some time, holding the *mala* all the while. When he opened his eyes again he looked at Baba's picture, handed me the *mala* and then nodded his head to indicate that I could now depart. I left, placing the *mala* carefully in my handbag.

On reaching Chennai, my husband told me that all the problems concerning the registration of our plot of land had been solved. We only needed to go to Kovur for the final signature. We left by car taking our daughters with us. During the journey I mentioned to my husband that I told my brother about the registration and he said that everything would be fine. I took the *mala* out of my handbag, showed it to my husband and said that as it was given to me by Guruji, we should carry it with us on all important occasions. My husband was just saying, "Yes, I agree," when our car suddenly crashed violently into a truck and all hell broke loose. There was a deafening noise, immediately followed by thousands of fragments of glass shooting through the car. The shock was tremendous. We didn't understand what was happening. We shut our eyes tightly, and when we came to after some minutes we saw that the doors of the car were jammed shut. People were trying to pry them open to get us out of the wreck. The front part of the Ambassador car was completely shattered.

People were shouting, "Are you okay?" "It's incredible! They are alive!" "How could anyone survive such an accident?"

We were hardly scratched, having only a few bruises and some minor wounds, and our youngest daughter was totally unscathed. Everyone around was commenting incredulously on our narrow

escape. A man in a Tata Sierra, which had a small statue of Sai Baba on its dashboard, took care of our luggage and called for another car to take us to Nellore. At this point I remembered that it was Thursday, the day traditionally dedicated to the guru. It was uncanny. It suddenly dawned on me that Guruji had called me back to give me the mala that would protect our lives during this potentially fatal accident. We are firmly convinced that none of us would be alive today if it were not for Baba's and Guruji's protection.



After this accident, which happened in October, my husband decided that he must go to Shirdi for the New Year's celebration of 1997. He went, and felt like a complete stranger in Saipatham. He expected to be called by his nephew immediately on arrival, but throughout the day no summons came. He became more disappointed and angry by the hour. As an elder, how could his nephew treat him in this heartless way and keep him waiting like a stranger?

My husband had always been close to his nephew, Sarath Babu, carrying him in his arms as a baby, playing with him as a child and looking after his needs. It was a very special relationship. Later, they would have long discussions together. A deep friendship flowered in which they had no secrets from one another. Mavayya would provide him with clothes and books and give him special treats whenever he could. And now this boy had become a guru and wouldn't even see him! My husband decided to return to Chennai by the next train.

Exactly at that moment he was told that Guruji wanted to see him. He went in and greeted Guruji the way he had always done, freely shaking his hand and talking uninhibitedly as though he were the old Sarath Babu. Guruji responded in kind.

The next morning Bhanu Murthy handed my husband some cassettes of *satsangs* that Guruji had given. He listened to one, then to another and yet another, eventually passing the whole day immersed in Guruji's words, quite unable to stop. He was amazed

and taken aback by the clarity and simplicity of Guruji's answers. So many personal issues were resolved, so many doubts erased, so many concepts shattered, so many veils lifted. His heart became clear and open. Overwhelmed by peace and happiness, an indescribable bliss took hold of him. Even today, whenever he talks about this experience his eyes grow moist, his voice falters and all he can say is, "It was incredible. So beautiful. I can't explain it but I will never, ever forget it!"

From that moment onwards my husband stopped using the name Sarath and started to call his nephew "Guruji", though Guruji still calls him Mavayya.

The following day, before he left Shirdi for Hyderabad, Guruji called for him again and talked to him in the same normal and familiar manner as in their previous meeting. My husband, however, could not relate to him any longer in the old ways and, overcome by awe and reverence, touched his feet. Guruji gave him a small statue of Sai Baba encased in a glass dome and told him to use it for puja. He had already given us a new life by protecting us during the accident. Now he made it meaningful by giving us Baba.

My husband returned to Chennai deeply contented and beaming with joy. To this day we have never stopped worshipping the idol of Baba given by Guruji.



In 1997 I had the opportunity to participate in a small *satsang* with Guruji in Shirdi. I told him that I had been praying to Rajeshwari Devi, the goddess of my choice. But now in Shirdi with everybody worshipping Baba, I was disturbed and confused.

"What is right for me? Who should I worship, Rajeshwari or Baba?"

"You can worship whoever you choose. I have no objection to any god. But if you ask me, I can only tell you to worship Baba, because I love him. I don't know any other god but Baba. He is my one and only God."

“But Baba didn’t help me at all with my first three babies.”

“How do you know that Baba wasn’t helping you? He is always with you. He knows what is good and what is bad for you. Your two girls are Baba’s gift to you. Can’t you see how easily they blend into the atmosphere of Shirdi, how happy they are here?”

“But how do I know that they are given by Baba?”

“You want me to give you proof?”

“Yes, give it.”

“All right.”

At this point the discussion was interrupted by someone else’s question.

Some of the devotees thought that I went too far, challenging Guruji in this manner. But I could not do otherwise. It was an expression of my residual conflict and confusion. Furthermore, I had always spoken very freely with my brother. And in a mysterious way, this interchange opened that part of my heart where I had locked Baba away for many years. Suddenly, the resentment, conflict and pain disappeared. This was a turning point. Happily and wholeheartedly I started to worship Baba again. It was from this moment on that my brother became my guru. I feel blessed and unbelievably lucky to be born as his sister.

DEVOTEE: Somebody prays and their prayers get answered, while somebody else prays and their prayers don’t get answered. Why is this?

SRI BABUJI: Baba is not there only to answer prayers. He has a purpose in answering prayers. He wants to make people just like himself, so that they get the same fulfilment.

He has his own way of bringing about this transformation depending on each person’s patterns, their nature, their framework. There are many ways. He has one thousand ways of doing things. Unless you become like Baba you can’t understand it.



Once when Guruji was in Chennai and about to leave, my mother, my sister and my family were invited to see him. My sister and our daughters returned home but the rest of us stayed on after *darshan*. I was in the kitchen helping prepare the food for Guruji's journey. After a while my mother, my husband and I were summoned upstairs. On the balcony was a big armchair with a pretty carpet in front. Affectionately, Guruji invited my mother to sit in the chair and seated himself on the carpet.

My mother was embarrassed and told him to sit in the chair, but Guruji smiled and said, "Ma, it's fine. You sit here."

Though he is a great Satguru, he sat at his mother's feet like any loving son. While he was talking with us, he asked if we were bringing the children to Shirdi for Guru Purnima. At that point we did not know if we could go, and told him so.

"Bring them to Shirdi. They have been asking me many times."

We nodded our consent and said we would try. On our way home we wondered about this statement. Our girls never talked to Guruji privately. They only saw him with us and we had never heard this request of theirs.

Once at home, we questioned them and they said, "We never asked Uncle in person but we told his photo many times that we wanted to go to Shirdi for Guru Purnima."

Awestruck, we immediately prostrated to Guruji's photo. We had just received proof that there is no difference between him and his picture. I had read about similar incidents in the lives of rare great saints and also in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* but I never even remotely considered having this kind of experience myself, let alone in my own home, surrounded by my family.

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A better man

Tirupati, March 2000

I never wrote a diary about my experiences with Guruji. I always thought, “What can I write about my Guruji? What can I say about my father?” For me he is everything; he is the doer of everything. Who am I to select what is noteworthy about him and what is not?

Also, I don't yet experience the overwhelming love that a child feels for its mother or father. I am simply not capable of this kind of love. I don't even dare to say that I love Guruji because I am very aware of my lack of love in general, of my inability to love and of all my shortcomings. I look on Guruji as a very great man who has changed and is still changing my entire life. Whatever I can say about him simply shows the immense influence he has on every aspect of my existence.



In May 1985 I was transferred to Ongole. One day Balakrishna Gupta took me to the Sai Baba Temple and to Sri Bharadwaja Master, Guruji's guru. Master talked to me and gave me a mango as *prasad*. On the same visit I was introduced to Dr Reddy because I wanted to discuss my wife's health.

The next stop was the Saibaba Central School where Gupta introduced me to Guruji. This moment is still impressed in my mind: how Guruji came down the stairs – he was a young man of about thirty years – how we introduced ourselves and started talking. A lasting effect of this meeting was that I began to read the *Shri Sai Satcharita* regularly, a habit that has never stopped.

Towards the end of 1985 I was transferred again to Anantapur, a place close to Puttaparthi where the ashram of Sathya Sai Baba is located. In those days I liked the atmosphere there and often went with my family. I had no in-depth knowledge of spirituality or the guru tradition. Still I was a man of some religious inclination and did

what many Hindus do: I worshipped a god, Subramanya Swami, son of Lord Siva, went on a yearly pilgrimage to the Ayappa Temple in Kerala, followed certain customs and did certain rituals without thinking much about them. All this in the vague hope that it would be beneficial and influence my karma positively.

During a professional training course in 1988 I met an old acquaintance, Narayana Rao, whom I had known since 1977. I was intrigued by the change I noticed in him. In fact, the Narayana Rao I met then was completely different from the man I knew before. This change, plus his talk about Baba and Guruji, roused my interest. I asked him not to forget to call me when he was going to Shirdi again since I also wanted to go. After the training we went our separate ways.

I was a very busy man. I liked and needed to be busy, and work was always foremost in my mind. One day my cramped schedule was interrupted by a private phone call. Narayana Rao told me he was going to Shirdi and would book a ticket for me too if I wanted to come. After some initial hesitation – what would happen to my work? – I agreed. We were a party of five: Narayana Rao and Koteswara Rao with their wives and myself. On our arrival in Shirdi we took a room in a row of ten small simple rooms, one of which was rented by Guruji.

We stayed in Shirdi for three days. It was a blessed time during which my love for Baba developed strong roots.

Back home I continued to go to Puttaparthi, happy that the swami there was also connected with Baba. Later on my attraction for this particular type of religious expression began to wane and then dropped away altogether.

Some days after my return from Shirdi, Narayana Rao telephoned to tell me that Guruji was coming to Hyderabad. I was, as always, extremely busy but decided to put my work aside and rushed to Hyderabad. When I got to Guruji's room, Dr Reddy, Gupta, Narayana Rao and some other devotees were present. They

talked about meditation and spirituality and seemed to be experts compared to me. I thought I was a complete ignoramus beside them.

When I finally touched Guruji's feet for the first time something inexplicable happened. I felt an overwhelming desire to stay with him and serve him as best I could. A bond was formed that has tied me to him ever since. I was happy just to be near him. I never asked anything for myself, all I wanted was simply to be close to him.

This meeting with Guruji sealed my fate. Henceforth, I made every effort to see him as often as possible. My bond with him grew stronger and stronger over the years without my noticing it much, and mostly in spite of myself. How or why this happened is impossible for me to explain.

SRI BABUJI: The one who is chosen by a Satguru, he is like the foot that is in the mouth of a crocodile, that is what Ramana Maharshi said. If a crocodile catches hold of his prey, it is impossible for anybody to free themselves from its clutches. Somebody may try to resist, but what Sri Ramana says is, it's useless. It is a crocodile, we should remember. If you are able to pull out, then it is not a crocodile!

And that is the grip of love. Actually, the real crocodile, the hungry crocodile, is our craving for love. The moment we get it, what happens is we catch hold of the Satguru, like a crocodile. The Satguru is the prey, in fact, and the crocodile is us! (laughter)



At that time I had only two problems: the education of my children and my wife's health. After my elder son successfully completed his Class X exams, I asked Guruji for advice regarding his further studies. Guruji told me that it would be good to let him study science.

Back home, I discussed with my friends and my son what the right choice would be for him. Everybody agreed that it was maths. Only Guruji advised science. I thought Guruji was lacking up-to-

date information. Therefore, based on my own foolish judgement, I enrolled my son in a maths course. I did not tell Guruji about it. I told myself I didn't want to bother him, but actually I didn't want to confess what I had done.

In the first-year exams Venku failed miserably in all the subjects. I went to Guruji and complained about my son's failure. Guruji asked what subject Venku was studying and I had to reply maths, hoping that Guruji might have forgotten his former instructions.

Guruji said, "I told you that he should study science! Why have you made him study maths?"

Feeling ashamed, and having no good answer to this question, I kept quiet. Then I asked Guruji again to tell me which subject my son should be studying. I secretly hoped Guruji might say maths because Venku had already spent one whole year on that subject.

But Guruji said, "Get him to study science in a government college."

I enrolled my son in science but in an excellent private college, not a government one. After three months we found out that Venku had been avoiding classes as much as possible. He didn't like the college. The pressure was too much for him, something that would not have happened in a government college where demands and standards are usually less rigorous.

Again I went to Guruji to complain about my son's failure. Guruji asked in which college I had enrolled Venku. I had to admit that my son was in a private college and was very unhappy there.

Guruji replied, "I told you to put him in a government college, not a private one!"

I started to cry and told Guruji, between sobs, that I had done my degree in engineering and expected my sons to pass their exams. I asked Guruji to forgive me. I knew my stubbornness had messed up everything for my son and I expressed my fear about it to Guruji.

Guruji said, "I won't let it happen!" and told me to send my son with his books to Shirdi.

I knew Venku wouldn't study at all in Shirdi and, in fact, he didn't. Venku had been in Shirdi for one year when Guruji told me to enrol

him for the final exams. I did this, but without believing that he had the slightest chance of passing. He hadn't done anything: hadn't studied, hadn't attended any classes, had had no private tutoring. It was simply impossible.

My son, however, passed the exams successfully. It was all due to Guruji's grace. Then Guruji suggested that Venku study homoeopathy. Miraculously, he got a place in a reputable private college for a very nominal fee. This, too, could never have happened without Guruji's blessings. My son has been very successful in these studies and has become a doctor by Guruji's grace.

My second son has also been under Guruji's total care. Many amazing incidents happened on his route to study dentistry. Now I trust that both my sons will be successful in their professions. Guruji freed me from my constant worry and anxiety about my children's education.



My wife's ill health was my other great concern. She had been suffering from chronic asthma for many years. We didn't ask Guruji to help her, reasoning, "If so many doctors and treatments in hospitals have never done any good, what could Guruji do?" Everybody who knew us also knew about my wife's suffering. It was an extremely difficult situation, not only for her but also for me and the children because she was constantly in and out of hospital. Financially we were often in dire straits because of the hospital bills.

In those days Guruji gave homoeopathic medicine. Every day many people would consult him. He treated and cured them without ever asking or accepting money for it. I didn't ask his help for my wife because I assumed that Guruji was aware of my wife's chronic asthma and would give her medicine on his own initiative. I did not know that Guruji doesn't usually give advice if he is not asked for it.

We were spending our summer holiday in Shirdi and our happy

time was marred only by my wife's severe asthma attacks. Finally, in our last *darshan* before going back home, we asked Guruji for help. My wife vowed to take only his medicine no matter how severe her asthma might be.

My wife stayed faithful to her promise. Sometimes when the attacks were very severe we telephoned Guruji, if he was in Ongole, asking which medicines to use. But when the attacks happened in the middle of the night, I often couldn't be bothered to phone Guruji. He, however, knew and would call himself to ask about my wife's health!

Then Guruji moved from Ongole to Shirdi with his family, but not without leaving instructions for my wife's treatment with Dr Reddy. I decided to leave our children in the care of relatives in Anantapur and move with my wife to Ongole to have her closely monitored by Dr Reddy. He and his wife were kindness itself. We stayed in their house. They took care of us and would never accept any money either for meals or for the treatment. During this period I experienced for the first time how sweet and touching the love of fellow devotees can be.

My wife's asthma improved but she continued to suffer for three more years. One day I could not bear to see her agony any longer and said to Guruji, "She has been suffering all her life. I can't bear to see her like this. It would be better if you let her die rather than let her go on like this."

Guruji replied, "You see only the physical side, and her physical suffering. I have to cure some deep-rooted psychological patterns of hers, too. If I cure only her physical disease, the old patterns will remain and they are the real problem."

After this I stopped being over-anxious about my wife and left her in Guruji's hands. Her asthma has improved greatly over the years. Now she is healthy and the attacks occur very rarely.

DEVOTEE: In the first arati song it says that whoever comes to Shirdi, their desires and needs will be fulfilled. This is a strong statement.

SRI BABUJI: *People may think that it should happen immediately, by tomorrow. They are sometimes impatient and want it to be "done" immediately. And then tomorrow it may not happen. So they say that it is wrong, that it won't be fulfilled. But Baba never said it would be fulfilled immediately, "Within 24 hours or 48 hours or 36 hours, it will be fulfilled," no. When it will be fulfilled, how it will be fulfilled, he knows.*



While we were in Ongole and Dr Reddy was treating my wife, I wanted to do something and I tried to assist Dr Reddy in the school. I don't think I was much help. In fact, I think I created many problems because of my difficult personality. I felt more like a student than an assistant. I was unsociable and a bad communicator, not at all good at dealing with the parents or the teachers. I didn't much like to talk to people. When I did feel happy, I didn't know how to share it with others. I was awkward and nothing ever came out right.

I mistrusted love and didn't believe that I had any of it myself. Even now I am still overcome by bouts of anger, jealousy and envy. I am afraid that I will take all my negative aspects to the grave with me. I never thought I was worthy of love, and without Gurujii I would be convinced that there is no hope for someone like me. I pray that through his love, grace and power I may be cured of all my negative traits. I also pray that he will transform me into a better man, someone who will be pleasing to him.

Bhanu Murthy Amarambedu Rosi Reddy, born in 1948, is a government employee who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

SRI BABUJI: *If somebody loves you and cares for you as you are – accepting all your weaknesses, your worthiness and unworthiness, merits, demerits and all – what is greater bliss and blessedness than that?*



SRI BABUJI: *Baba has his own ways of making us learn and of bringing about the transformation. Let us not dictate to him how he should teach us. He knows how to teach and what to teach, when to teach and whom to teach what. So focus on learning, and on having the awareness that he loves you and he knows best what to give. He will see that you reach your destination.*

In spite of myself

Hyderabad, June 2001

In 1983 I was working as an engineer in Ongole. Bharadwaja Master, whom I had met some months before, advised me to go to Dr Reddy for treatment of my haemorrhoids. His clinic was in the front room of the first floor of a house in Santhapet. Each time I went there I noticed someone sitting at a desk and writing. Somehow intrigued by this man, I asked Dr Reddy about him and was introduced. While talking to him, I understood quickly that there was something extraordinary about him. He had an original, clear and comprehensive way of explaining things so they would stay imprinted on my mind and cause me to reflect. I was eager for my closest friend, Narayana Rao, to meet him, which he eventually did. He was equally touched and captivated. Both of us often went to see this man, Sarath Babu, who became our Guruji.

Being with Guruji, I became more aware of a bad tendency in myself. I tried to wriggle out of my responsibilities as much as possible and not face up to them. My family situation was difficult. I felt under so much pressure that whenever my friend Narayana Rao, who was very good at enjoying life, would propose an escape from it all, I would happily go along. Trying to avoid a difficult situation was such a strong habit with me that I often didn't even realize I was doing it.

Another point of discussion with Guruji was about being truthful. I often defended lying as an essential tool for operating in the world. I would argue with Guruji, trying to convince him that telling the truth was all right for spiritual people but didn't pay in the "real" world. Guruji did not criticize me directly, he simply gave many examples of what happens to people who lie. He told me one should stop lying and stick to truth in one's daily life otherwise one would inevitably run into calamity. He stressed again and again that it would be enough for me to stick to the truth and everything would be all right.

One piece of advice he repeatedly gave me was to love others and to examine if what I did was useful and helpful for them.

SRI BABUJI: All the words that come from the mouth of your guru, take them as prasad and savour them. Try to understand them, assimilate them and follow them.



In those days I was very upset with my superiors whom, I believed, had unjustly prevented my promotion. I filed a court case against them. When I complained to Guruji about them, he told me in no uncertain terms that the responsibility for the state of affairs was mine alone, and that my behaviour was at the root of it.

The court case concerning my promotion dragged on for five years before I was called for the final hearing. I was unsure what to do and went to Guruji for help. He dictated to Narayana Rao the salient points of the case and told me to pass them to my lawyer, which I duly did. During the court hearing the judge questioned my lawyer on exactly those points that Guruji had dictated. He was able to answer all the questions satisfactorily and we won the case.



In 1991 I was working in Mahaboob Nagar, a town close to Hyderabad. One day my left eye became very red and painful. Every day the pain was worse. An eye specialist diagnosed an abscess inside the eye and warned me of the danger of this condition. He gave me medication, but said that there was hardly any hope. I would, he added, almost certainly lose the eye. In a panic I went to see Narayana Rao, who insisted we go to Shirdi by the next train.

When I entered Guruji's room I forgot about my eye completely because I felt no pain at all. Guruji himself asked me about it a little later and then gave me some homoeopathic medicine. When I woke up the next morning there was hardly any pain or redness left. The eye was back to normal within a week. Later Guruji said that Baba gave me the gift of an eye. Narayana Rao asked me to think about where the cure had come from and if I realized that the medicine was just a guise.

On another occasion Guruji sent a message that I should come to Shirdi with my wife. I didn't feel like travelling and therefore did not respond to Guruji's call, using my job and my so-called responsibilities as an excuse. A second message came from Guruji and again I ignored it. Within a week my wife fell very ill with terrible pain in her belly. That night I had to take her to a hospital in Hyderabad. The doctors diagnosed a hernia and said that her situation was critical. They wanted to operate immediately. In a panic I rang up Guruji in Shirdi.

He said, "Don't worry. Go ahead with the operation."

The surgery was successful but it was very expensive. I had neither appreciated nor taken seriously Guruji's repeated messages to come to Shirdi. We paid very dearly for not following Guruji's summons. I am convinced that the operation would not have been necessary if we had gone to Shirdi. I believe that Guruji wanted to save us from this ordeal, but my carelessness and ignorance made it unavoidable. This was not the only time I behaved like that.

About a year later, in 1992, a huge abscess developed on my left

knee. It grew bigger and bigger, as did the pain, which became excruciating. The doctors said it would take at least eight months to cure if, indeed, it were possible at all. This was a horrible prospect. In my despair I visited Narayana Rao for consolation. He told me to go to the upstairs *satsang* room in which Baba's and Guruji's pictures were kept and to pray for help.

I went and did *namaskar* to the pictures and prayed desperately to Guruji for help. The pain decreased slightly but not enough to allow me to sleep that night. We wanted to contact Guruji but could not, because he was travelling and we had no idea where he was. At midnight the phone rang insistently. I heard my friend answering it. He had a big smile on his face when he told me that Guruji was coming to Hyderabad that very morning. When Guruji arrived I told him about my fear and pain. I had already made up my mind that I wanted Guruji to cure me and that I wished to go to Shirdi with him. I told him so. He said that Hyderabad had good and competent doctors who could give me a quality of treatment that I would not be able to get in such a small place as Shirdi.

I insisted, "I want to come to Shirdi with you. You must save me, Guruji! Please take this burden off me and cure me. Only you can do it."

Guruji answered, "All right."

When Guruji went back to Shirdi I was able to go with him. During the journey I was free of pain but it came back once we reached our lodging. In Shirdi Guruji handed me some homoeopathic medicine in a small bottle. He told me to take it to Baba's mosque, Dwarkamai, offer it first to Baba and take it after praying to him. I did as I was told. However, when I touched the bottle to Baba's photo in offering, it slipped out of my hand and disappeared into a crack below the picture frame. It was devastating. Feeling abandoned, orphaned and full of self-pity, I imagined that Baba had taken away the medicine because he didn't want me to be cured.

One of the priests asked me why I looked crestfallen. Hearing about the mishap, he fumbled for the bottle and retrieved it from the crack. This restored some of my confidence. I took the medicine and returned to Saipatham.

Guruji told me to walk every day from Saipatham to the mosque. I must have been quite a pitiful sight, limping to and fro and changing my blood-soaked bandages on the way. It attracted the attention of our neighbour, Mr Shah, who urged me to go by rickshaw. Guruji's instruction, however, was to walk and so I did. One day Mr Shah couldn't bear to see me limping around any more. He went to Guruji and complained about me refusing to take a rickshaw. This resulted in Guruji telling me to go by rickshaw.

Each day I had Guruji's *darshan* and received *udi* from him. Gradually the pain and bleeding lessened. Whenever I tried to show Guruji my wound, he would prevent me from taking off the bandage and tell me how the healing was progressing without even needing to look at it.

After some weeks Guruji travelled by train to Bangalore and then went on to Nellore. I went with him. Guruji had an upper berth while I was sleeping on the lower berth. In the middle of the night another man, climbing down in the dark from his berth, stepped right on my wound. I felt a terrible shooting pain and screamed out to Baba. I was shaking with fright. Had the wound, which had been healing well, opened again? Guruji got up immediately, consoled me and told me not to worry.

Guruji continued his journey while I got out at Nellore to stay with the homoeopathic doctor for ten days. Every day we had a beautiful *satsang* in the company of some fellow devotees. By Guruji's grace the wound healed completely in thirty-seven days. The doctors had said it would take at least eight months, if it could be healed at all. I finally understood that the medicine Guruji gave me wasn't what healed me. It was Guruji's grace alone that cured the abscess.



My physical travails did not end there. About a year later, in 1993, while washing my face and mouth, I detected blood in my saliva. Together with Narayana Rao I went to consult his brother, Dr Vijaya Rama Rao. He ordered several tests to be done and advised me to go into hospital.

The day I was supposed to be admitted, Guruji unexpectedly came to Hyderabad from Shirdi for a day or so. I went to where he was staying and joined the others who had come to see him but I felt I did not have much time to spend. The time for my appointment with the doctor was fast approaching and I was anxious to leave.

I said, "I have to go into hospital. I will go if you give your permission and blessings."

Guruji said, "Why are you in such a hurry? Sit for a while and then go."

In spite of my many previous experiences of being saved by Guruji it still did not occur to me to ask him to cure me. Convinced that my serious condition needed proper medical treatment, I thought I had better join the hospital and be under a doctor's supervision, so I left.

The hospital was ghastly. I hated being there. It didn't help that every day I saw at least one patient die. Guruji had returned to Shirdi and my brother and other *gurubandhus* kept him informed about my state by phone. Guruji reassured my brother, "Don't worry. He will be in and out of four hospitals and then come back home."

After several days of this torture I suddenly heard that Guruji had left Shirdi and was on his way to Hyderabad! My joy knew no bounds when a few hours later, Guruji stood at my bedside. Not only had he given his assurance over the phone, he had come personally from Shirdi to deliver it! Guruji said, "Don't worry, you will be cured." His kindness was like a healing balm and strengthened me with courage and hope. I was told that Guruji went back to Shirdi

the same day. This incident showed me how much love and concern he has for us. Even today my eyes fill with tears remembering the immense blessing of his visit.

Soon after Guruji's visit I started to feel better and was ready to leave. The doctors, however, wanted to keep me under observation for one more week, just to be on the safe side. One night my nose started bleeding profusely. The doctors immediately sent me to another hospital for a scan. While they were doing the scan, blood gushed from my nose and I fainted. They stopped the scan and tried to resuscitate me. I was unconscious for forty-eight hours. During this time the haemorrhage continued and I was given several blood transfusions. Guruji was informed by phone. He said, "Don't worry. There is no reason to be alarmed."

Dr Rao discussed my case with the other doctors and decided that I needed an angiogram. This had to be done at yet another hospital, where everything had been prepared for the surgery. The doctor there said that two veins in my lungs had ruptured, hence the haemorrhage, and that they needed to be cauterized. He also confessed that he had never done this type of operation but was confident nonetheless that he could do it. It was up to me to refuse or let him go ahead. In my mind I did *namaskar* to Guruji and prayed for him to be with me. I told the doctor that nothing could ever happen without Guruji's will and therefore to do his duty and go ahead with the operation.

The veins were cauterized. Though this was done under a local anaesthetic, the pain was worse than anything I had ever experienced. I screamed and screamed for Guruji to save me. The operation was successful and the bleeding stopped.

Dr Rao then had me transferred to his hospital where I stayed for two weeks to regain my strength. I had been in and out of four hospitals and was cured by the time I got home, exactly as Guruji said. Later I heard that Guruji suffered a severe cold and even a nose-bleed while I was in surgery. I am certain that he took on my

condition in order to save me and to lessen the pain.

While I was suffering so badly my dear friend Bhanu Murthy, who was in Shirdi and knew about the danger I was in, ran to Guruji. He clasped his feet and with tears in his eyes said, "Sir, please save my friend Gupta. He has two daughters who need to be married. Who will arrange it if he is not there? I have no daughters. I have only sons. They are less restricted. They can take care of everything. Sir, Gupta needs to live, he is needed by his family! If bad turns to worse, mine can survive without me. If a life needs to be taken, let it be mine, not Gupta's."

Looking at him with great intensity, Guruji replied, "Don't think that Gupta is important only to you. He is important to me too." Thus Bhanu Murthy understood that Guruji would save me.



It took all my personal experiences with Guruji for me to be able to see that a Satguru is necessary. How else would I be able to face and to overcome in a positive way the difficulties that arise in daily life? We all need a guide who can point out and lead us along a path that is smooth and happy, and this is what happened to me as a result of Guruji's transformative work.

Next day...Kakasaheb went to Baba and asked whether he should leave Shirdi. Baba said, "Yes." Then someone asked, "Baba, where to go?" Baba said, "High up." Then the man said, "How is the way?" Baba said, "There are many ways leading there. There is also one way from here (Shirdi). The way is difficult. There are tigers and wolves in the jungles on the way." I (Kakasaheb) asked, "But, Baba, what if we take a guide with us?" Baba answered, "Then there is no difficulty. The guide will take you straight to your destination, avoiding wolves, tigers and ditches etc. on the way. If there be no guide, there is the danger of your being lost in the jungles or falling into ditches." Mr Dabholkar was present

on this occasion and he thought that this was the answer Baba gave to the question of whether a guru was a necessity.

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter II)

It took quite some time for me to come to depend on Guruji and to be changed. He never gave me orders nor did he impart any practice or technique. He taught and is still teaching me through practical experience. I resisted Guruji's guidance and yet, in spite of myself, I began to learn, to understand and to change. It was not my intelligence or my cooperation that did it; it was solely thanks to his compassion and power. I did not change myself. He changed me because he loves me.

Guruji advised me many times to love others. Knowing him has triggered and kindled love in my heart. It is by his grace alone that I became able to start to live love in my daily life.

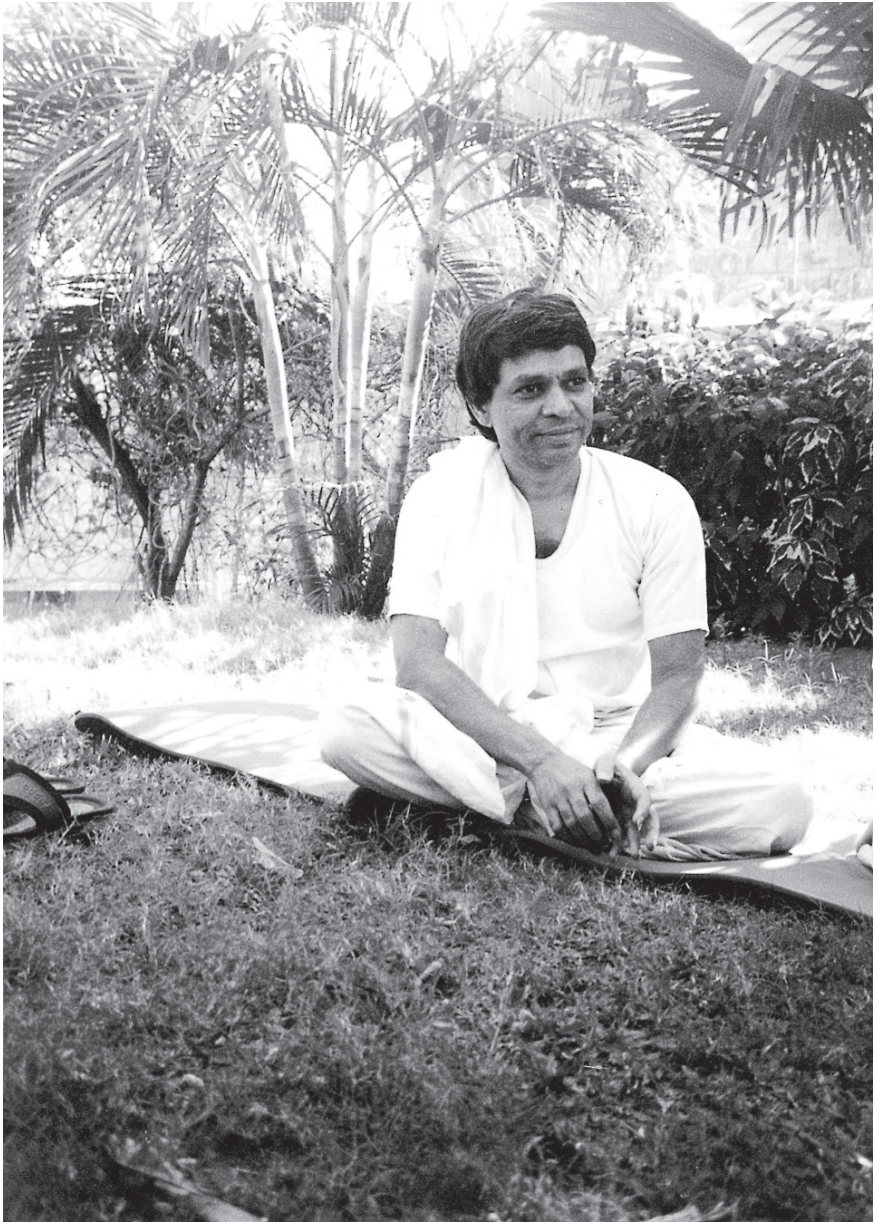
Chinni Balakrishna Gupta Sanka, born in 1943, is a government employee who lives in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, why don't you call it a path of love?

SRI BABUJI: Because it is not a path! I am not using love as a path to something, to some other destination.

DEVOTEE: Is it not a means of fulfilment?

SRI BABUJI: Love, the experience of love, is the fulfilment. It is not that through love we reach some other goal. It is the goal itself and you experience it from the beginning. Love is the start, love is the means and love is the end. It's not a means to an end, it is an end in itself. It matters only how much you are experiencing it. Every step it is full, but it wants to be fuller. You want to experience it more and more and more, in a fuller and fuller – the fullest – way. Maybe it's natural that we approach it like that in the first place, that it's seen as a means to something. But when the love grows, you realize that there's no other end to it than the love itself.



Sri Babuji, Tirumala, 1995



TWELVE

*Living and Learning
Near the Satguru*

SRI BABUJI: *The real transformation that comes in your heart is not due to what I speak. It is not the spoken word that actually affects you or transforms you. It may be inspiring and some intellectual confusion may be clarified. I am not saying it is worthless. But genuine transformation is not due to these words. And books and lectures will never transform anybody.*

Lessons for a headmaster

Chennai, June 2002

My father is a Brahmin of the old school, dedicated to the age-old traditions of Brahminical practice. He instructed me in the ancient Hindu scriptures, especially the Vedas, and made sure that I had my thread ceremony.¹ Each day I did the elaborate pujas that are part of an orthodox Brahmin's life. Even through my student years I followed the rules and customs I had been taught.

I wasn't exactly a healthy boy. I was also very emotional though I tried not to show it. The strict atmosphere at home made me very tense. After I completed my post-graduate degree in 1989, I found a job in Hyderabad, in the vigilance department of Indian Railways. My adverse work environment didn't help make me feel more at ease. The rituals and pujas of my caste that were supposed to connect me with something elevated and divine did not work for me. I was in a mess.

In this miserable situation I began to feel an inexplicable attraction to the local Sai Baba Temple and began reading the *Shri Sai Satcharita*. These pursuits didn't solve my problems, but I noticed a certain calming down and a feeling of consolation when I was in the temple or reading about Baba.

¹ Initiation ceremony of young boys from this caste into the ancient spiritual lore, which marks their "second birth".

Some further incidents occurred that made my life even more frustrating, painful and complex. At a certain point I came to the conclusion that the only way out was to end my life. On 29 June 1992 I went to Shirdi with the firm intention to commit suicide in the Samadhi Mandir at two in the afternoon. I planned to drink poison in Baba's presence and thus end my misery, with – I imagined – his blessings.

Around ten in the morning I was sitting in the hall of the dormitory opposite the Samadhi Mandir, trying to prepare myself for this step, when a Telugu man approached me. He said that he felt a bit lonely and would I mind if he sat next to me. He started to talk, saying that he was from Tenali but was working in Hyderabad; that he had been trying in vain for five endless years to be transferred to Guntur; that somebody had told him about a powerful Telugu swami in Shirdi, Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, who could solve the most difficult and complex problems in an instant, and that all one had to do was to go to Shirdi and take the swami's *darshan* and everything would be all right.

The naivety and gullibility of this man made me nearly burst out laughing, but I resolved to control myself. I thought, "What rubbish to believe that you tell somebody your problems and they disappear. That's a fairy tale. It doesn't exist." But I didn't say a thing. Why shatter his childish beliefs? And I had more important things on my agenda: I was going to end my life at two o'clock! My self-appointed companion continued to talk non-stop. I looked at my watch: one o'clock. I wanted to get rid of this man to prepare myself for the final step.

Then he said, "I have already had Sri Babuji's *darshan* and told him about my problems. He asked me to do *pradakshina* around Gurusthan, which I did last night. I must return to Hyderabad today. I want to take leave of Sri Babuji but I feel a little apprehensive and hesitant though I don't know why. Would you please come with me and give me some moral support?"

I really did not feel like going. While he had been talking I remembered a famous swami who once advised my mother not to step out of her house for one full year. She followed his order scrupulously. At a certain point she became very ill but did not leave the house to seek medical help because of the swami's order, and she died. Ever since then I have had no faith in swamis. Now this man was asking me, of all people, to accompany him to a swami! He continued to plead and nag so insistently that I had to relent and go along with him to Saipatham.

It was exactly two o'clock when I met Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji for the first time. He gave me an overwhelming smile that made me forget my plans completely. After my companion prostrated and received the blessings he asked for, Guruji turned to me and said, "Tell me."

Without thinking twice I blurted out all my frustration, pain, hopelessness and dejection. I also told him what I had come to Shirdi for. After a minute of silence he asked me to move closer. He placed some *udi* in my hand then put some on my forehead, keeping his thumb there for two or three minutes. It felt like several thousand volts were passing through me, spreading to every nerve and fibre. My whole body was shaking and shivering in reaction to the power of this "electric shock". At the same time I was flooded with indescribable contentment and bliss. Guruji's grace was rushing into me with overwhelming force, inundating me with a new will to live. As I was staggering out of the room he said that there was *satsang* each Thursday in the house of Narayana Rao in Hyderabad, and that I should participate in it.

SRI BABUJI: What can I give? I can give only Baba's touch – to be touched by him – so I give udi to you. Not as a Hindu custom. To me it is an expression of my love. And udi is the ashes from the fire in Baba's masjid that Baba himself lit. It is a remote, remote connection to his touch, the touch of my Beloved, and a symbol of his grace.

Back in Hyderabad, I contacted my companion from Shirdi to find out about his transfer. He told me it had already happened on the third day after his arrival from Shirdi, and that he would move to Guntur soon. So much for my mistrust of all swamis! His tale strengthened my feeling that Guruji really could and did help people.

I started to go to *satsang* on Thursdays. My old problems and patterns, however, had not vanished. Just the opposite: they began to resurface with a vengeance. After I had been to three *satsangs* Narayana Rao suggested I go back to Shirdi and spend some more time there, which I did. I remained in Shirdi for six weeks. Guruji allowed me to stay in a room, owned by another devotee, in the same row where he himself lived. It was a time of great beauty, significance and change for me. Guruji was very kind. Whenever I was assaulted by a doubt he would clear it or make it simply vanish. If I went to the Samadhi Mandir to ask Baba for something, Guruji would know and take care of it. He gave frequent *satsangs* in those days and thus I was able to spend many hours in his presence.

I learned about the Saibaba Central School that Guruji had founded in Ongole in 1983. One day, while sitting in the *masjid*, an idea flashed through my mind about working in this school, "What a great opportunity that would be! I would love to do it. But am I qualified for it?"

Later that same day Guruji called me in and said, "You have taken a long leave from your railway job. Why don't you go to Ongole for a while to work there as headmaster of the school?"

I was stunned and immensely happy. What an honour that Guruji suggested that I should do this work! I accepted gladly and started my work in Ongole in September 1992. I have never ceased to appreciate the great boon and honour of working in the school established by my Guruji. I wish and hope with all my heart that I will continue to be in Guruji's school for the rest of my life.

I didn't want any payment for this unique opportunity but Guruji insisted on a fixed salary for me.

One day at noon Baba came near Radhakrishnamai's house and said, "Bring me a ladder." Some men brought it and set it against a house as directed by Baba. He climbed up on the roof of Vaman Gondkar's house, passed the roof of Radhakrishnamai's house and then got down from the other corner. What object Baba had, none could know... Immediately after getting down, Baba paid rupees two to the persons who brought the ladder. Somebody asked Baba why he paid so much for this. He replied that nobody should take the labour of others in vain. The worker should be paid his dues promptly and liberally.

(Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter XVIII & XIX)



In June 1993 Guruji came to stay at the school in Ongole for a month. Every day he would walk with me on the flat roof of the building and talk to me about a variety of subjects. Since I had no experience of running a school, Guruji gave me many tips about my work. I wasn't always able to fully grasp or value his instructions immediately. He taught me by experience and changed my mental outlook drastically.

On the day of his arrival in Ongole Guruji told me not to let anybody know that he had come. I had, however, the previous day told a few staff members of his imminent arrival.

I did not confess my indiscretion to Guruji even though he asked me several times, "Did you tell anybody that I was coming?"

Then Dr Reddy arrived and said, "A teacher has come for Guruji's *darshan*. She says you told her Guruji was coming."

My face flushed with shame and embarrassment. Guruji didn't say anything. He simply looked at me and smiled. This smile told me, "Even if you tell me lies you cannot hide it from me." I never again dared try to lie to him.

One day Guruji talked to me in a very detailed manner about the questions parents would ask when they wanted to enrol their children, and how I should answer them. The following day some

parents came to ask me precisely the questions that Guruji had elaborated on. I was stunned. Without his instructions I would not have known what to say.

One evening Guruji said that many more children would be joining the school and that I should employ a woman as gatekeeper. He made it very clear that during school hours the gate should never be unattended, not even for a short while. The same evening I hired a woman and she started her job the following morning.

At around ten in the morning I needed help and asked the gatekeeper to carry a chair upstairs. Not much later the nursery school teacher came running to me in despair. A 3-year-old boy who had joined the class the previous day was missing. They had already searched every nook and cranny of the school without finding him. We searched again in vain. The consequences of not following Guruji's instructions to the letter hit me like a hammer. I wanted to talk to Guruji, but he had been working all night and had gone to sleep only at nine in the morning. Four or five times I paced up and down the stairs leading to his room, but didn't dare wake him. I was overwrought with anxiety, guilt and shame. Finally I went to my office, did *namaskar* to Baba's picture, implored him for help and then went up the stairs again. Guruji was just coming out of his room and asked what had happened. I was relieved to be able to confess my negligence to him.

He looked at me and said, "I told you to employ a woman and make sure that the gate is never unattended. This is what happens if you don't do what you are told to do." After a minute of silence he continued, "All right. Go to the boy's home and see if he is there."

Guruji went back to sleep immediately. I had not enquired at the boy's house for fear of the parents' reaction, but after Guruji's instruction I immediately sent a lady to that address. The boy was at home. We found out that he had been playing close to the unattended school gate when his grandfather happened to walk by. Seeing the boy there all by himself he decided to take him back home.

Afterwards I saw that Guruji somehow orchestrated the whole incident to teach me a lesson. If we are deaf to his instructions he will create a situation to teach us through experience.

The very next day I had to recognize that my understanding was still built on very shaky foundations. Guruji had pointed out to me the previous evening that during the late afternoon games no teacher had been at the playground. He said that I should make sure the teachers were present every day during playtime. I went immediately to the playground and asked the attendant to tell the teachers to be present. I simply passed on the message instead of delivering it myself to the persons concerned. Less than five minutes later some teachers came to my office carrying a small girl. She was bleeding profusely from a head injury where she had run into the iron pole of the slide. I rushed to Guruji.

“It was only yesterday that I told you to have some teachers on the playground at that time. My instructions should be followed to the last detail.” After a pause he continued, “All right. Take the child to the hospital to have the wound sutured.”

The girl’s wound healed in three days without leaving a scar.

It took quite some time and any number of shake-ups for me to learn to follow Guruji’s instructions precisely. I know that I myself would have been furious if somebody hadn’t followed my instructions and had created the same messes that I was responsible for, but Guruji always remained calm. He was peace and mercy personified.

SRI BABUJI: Your Satguru knows what is needed, what is required for you.

DEVOTEE: If a disciple doesn’t follow what the master says, do they still receive the master’s grace? Or does one have to be a “good” devotee in order to get the grace?

SRI BABUJI: They get the grace, but if they follow what the master says they receive it easily and can enjoy it better. Somehow or

other the master will make them follow his instructions! And at that time it doesn't feel like grace. But it is grace.



In my early days in Ongole I always ate in a small restaurant. One day, as I was about to go for lunch, Guruji gave me a small tape recorder.

“Go to the electrician and get this soldered after you’ve had your lunch.”

I thought that any work for Guruji should have priority over my physical cravings. Thus I went first to the electrician. He had gone for lunch. I waited for an hour and then decided to have my lunch and come back afterwards. By this time the restaurant was overcrowded. It took another hour to have my meal. I rushed back to the electrician and finally got the job done. In the end, two and a half hours passed before I returned to the school.

Of course, Guruji was there to receive me with the question, “Why did it take so long to get such a small job done?” Hearing my explanation, he said, “I told you to have lunch first and then go to the electrician. Why did you go first to the electrician? People never do what they are told.”

How many times Guruji needed to give me experiences of this kind! Yet he never lost patience.



One day somebody brought a ceiling fan to my office that was meant for Guruji’s room. I went upstairs. Guruji was with Sai Prasad when I told him about the fan.

He asked, “What brand is it?”

I hadn’t bothered to look at the fan. Back downstairs I read the brand name, went up again and reported it to Guruji.

He asked, “What is the colour?”

Down I went, noted the colour and ran up to tell him.

“What is the span?”

Down again for another inspection. Guruji made me go up and down about eight times.

Turning to Sai Prasad he said, “Nobody is dedicated to what they are doing. Whatever work is assigned to us should be done with complete attention and dedication. If one is dedicated to a job one will show interest in all the details.”

He went on to describe the different types of fans of various countries, how they worked, how to select the best possible fan and so on, all in minute detail. In this way Guruji taught me to pay attention to detail and to be attentive and dedicated to whatever I was doing.



Guruji gives me whatever I need. Once, in Shirdi, I told him that I couldn't stomach restaurant food any more and was thinking about cooking myself, but I was worried it would take up too much of my time.

He said, “Buy an automatic electric cooker. You can put everything in it and switch it on before going to school. It will turn off automatically, and when you come back you will have hot food ready for you.”

Back in Ongole I looked at cookers. The one that was right for me cost nearly 2,000 rupees, but I had only 1,200 rupees to spend. I wrote a letter to Guruji about it and put it next to his photo. That day I had to go to the railway station to meet some acquaintances. While waiting for the train, which was late, I met a friend of mine. Another friend of his came by and I was introduced. While we were chatting, this man told my friend about an imported electric cooker that he had got on offer for a very good price and asked him if he would like to buy it. My friend didn't need one and declined. Pointing to me, he wondered whether I, as a bachelor, might have use for it.

Eagerly I said, "Yes, I need one. How much is it?"

The answer was, "Twelve hundred rupees."

How to explain Guruji's love and the way he helps us? How to describe the emotions that flooded me while receiving my God's grace? When this man brought the cooker to the school, I showed him the letter I had written to Guruji the same morning. This is just one small example of how Guruji takes care of all my needs.



Guruji also took care of a big problem in my family. For more than seven years we had tried unsuccessfully to find a suitable husband for my sister. Many times I asked my father to go to Guruji and ask for his blessings in the matter. But my father, because of his orthodoxy, didn't want to be associated with Sai Baba in any way. It needed many failed attempts to find a husband before my father finally relented and went to Shirdi for two days. As a traditionalist he wouldn't touch any food cooked by a non-Brahmin and he lived only on fruit during his stay.

But he went to Guruji and said in *darshan*, "I have been trying unsuccessfully for seven years to find a husband for my daughter. Please bless me."

Guruji smiled and said, "*Subham*."

Back from Shirdi and entering his house in Hyderabad, my father heard the phone ring. The call was from a prospective match he had lost all hope about.

"We would like your daughter to be married to our son. Please come as soon as possible so that we can discuss all the details."

My father was amazed. What he had not been able to achieve in seven years had fallen into place with one word from Guruji! From then on my father started to respect Guruji and my whole family began to accept Baba too.

It was one of Guruji's strokes of genius that solved several issues in one go. For me, it healed an old wound. Throughout my

childhood and youth I was terrified of my father because he was too perfect. His contact with Guruji softened him, and this made me happy too.



In October 2000 I had unbearable pain in the right side of my belly. I was constantly screaming out to Baba. Dr Reddy gave me medicine but the pain didn't subside. He suspected appendicitis and took me to hospital where they diagnosed kidney stones and gave me painkillers. A scan and x-rays didn't disclose the location of the stones. The pain was driving me mad as it got worse and worse.

That day many devotees were leaving for the Vijayadasami celebrations in Shirdi. I decided to join them despite the debilitating pain. Each step was agonizing. We had to change trains in Hyderabad and I used the time there to visit a famous urologist. Even he wasn't able to see the stones but he told me to stay and have them dissolved by ultrasound. I ignored his advice and proceeded to Shirdi, taking painkillers all the way. When I told Guruji about my sorry state he said I should consult a fellow devotee, Dr Luke from England. He gave me very strong painkillers but they didn't help either.

Although I was staying right next to Saipatham in Siva Shankar's house, I had not managed to go to *satsang* because of the pain. Then it was Vijayadasami and I just couldn't miss *darshan*. I dragged my body to Saipatham and sat close to the dais. The happiness of being in Guruji's presence, mixed with the pain, brought tears to my eyes at last. I sat there crying and crying, begging him silently to stop the pain. He gave me a long, loving glance. As he left and we all stood up there was no more pain. I could hardly believe it. Ten minutes before I had been in such agony that I could only walk bent over, and now it was gone. Vanished!

Immediately I went to Gurusthan and did *pradakshina* for at least three hours. When I came back to Saipatham in the evening, I went

to the bathroom and passed nearly a dozen stones in my urine. I thought, "If Guruji can melt a devil like me, why shouldn't he be able to melt kidney stones too?"

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DEVOTEE: Guruji, many times you have said, "Life is very valuable," and "Don't waste your time," and things like that, and I wonder: why is life so valuable?

SRI BABUJI: Because it is life! Life is such a valuable thing that you can't create it on your own. It is something so unique. It has been given to you without your choice. You haven't created your life, it has come. The life that has been given, you should follow its natural course, its way and unfoldment.

Love of power, power of love

Shirdi, November 2003

Our family guru was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. My mother met this great saint in 1930 and the whole family would often go to Tiruvannamalai to be in the Maharshi's presence. I also observed some of the daily rituals of my caste, such as half an hour of meditation, the recital of the Gayatri mantra and other Sanskrit *slokas* in the morning and evening. All this was merely based on acquired habit. Religion and spirituality were of no real interest to me.

As a boy I was a pupil in a school where my father was headmaster. He was a very strict man who often caned me for the slightest breach of discipline. Going to college was like a breath of fresh air. There, it became natural for me to take charge. I was good at influencing people. I was a leader, very active in college politics and I would sometimes lead strikes. Intellectual pursuits had no attraction for

me. I had no interest in reading, studying and writing. Having an excellent memory somehow got me through my studies. However, as I often skipped class I needed four years longer than other students to get my degree in engineering. The teachers liked me nonetheless.

I liked drinking alcohol, smoking and playing cards. These were not occasional activities. I was addicted to them and indulged in them regularly. I was a compulsive socializer, a *bon vivant*, and I had no scruples about it. However, I knew how to hide from my family all these vices that are much frowned on in a traditional environment.



It was in 1984 that my life took a different turn. My close friend Balakrishna Gupta liked to join me in my escapades. Needless to say, we were not attracted to religion or gurus. Thus it was all the more surprising when Gupta told me one day about some Sai Baba devotees he had met in Ongole, the town where he was living. With admiration he talked about their guru, Acharya Bharadwaja, and he frequently mentioned one of his devotees, Sarath Babu, whom he thought to be very special. Gupta wanted me to meet him to see what I thought.

During a trip to Ongole I met Sarath Babu, the devotee my friend had spoken of so highly. I had an instant liking for this man, ten years my junior. I liked to look at him, liked his smile and his extraordinary eyes, and I liked his easy and confident manner. I felt an irresistible attraction to this young man and I always wanted to be in his company.

Guruji had a vast and thorough knowledge of many subjects. He could discuss them so naturally and convincingly that I developed an interest in many things that I had previously shunned. Guruji had a way of meeting me at my level and then taking the subject to an altogether different plane, leading to a discussion about great personalities or great saints, and most of all about Sai Baba. Guruji had an abiding interest in and a thorough knowledge of history

in general. He was familiar with the spiritual movements of all historical periods and would talk animatedly, relating them to their historical context and examining their possible value for our present time. Through no effort of mine I learned about many things.



Because I was still adhering to my traditional morning and evening meditations, I once asked Guruji why he never meditated.

He answered with a smile, "I am afraid my eyes will stick together and never open again."

I took this at face value, not thinking about it further, and not realizing that he had reached an altogether different state. He no longer needed to practise any technique as he was always in a state of meditation.

SRI BABUJI: Baba said, "Meditate on me in the form of bliss. If you are not capable of doing that, then meditate on me in this physical form." But his preference is to meditate on the bliss, on the "taste" of life.

Just think! Why do you close your eyes when you relish some delicious food? When you really enjoy something, all the symptoms of meditation will come: concentration, focus, absorption. That enjoyment, that act of relishing and experiencing the taste of life is real meditation.



In Guruji's company my vices began to fade away. He never preached abstinence and never lectured or admonished me about my bad habits. Being with him somehow made the need for escapades slowly vanish.

Once he asked me, "Why do you drink alcohol?"

"It gives me contact with people who have influence and power," I replied.

“If you stop, you will have contact with much greater people,” he responded.

I stopped drinking. I never actually liked the taste of alcohol anyway, but I did enjoy the taste of power it gave me. This was not to vanish as readily as the drinking habit itself.



In August 1987, on a Sunday afternoon, the smooth course of my life was shattered. Two of my three sons were drowned trying to retrieve a ball that had fallen into a pond near our house. A friend immediately telephoned our relatives and also Guruji. He arrived four hours later, having left Ongole instantly on hearing the news. By the next day all our relatives arrived and we buried the children.

I was completely numb and didn't shed a tear. I wasn't able to feel anything. I said to myself that God only does what is good for us, and I tried to convince my wife of this. But her grief was deep, desperate and lasted for years. For me, it took two years and a particular situation created by Guruji to allow the tears to flow and to be relieved of a grief that I was not able to feel at the time.

After the burial, I said to Guruji that I wanted to go away for a while to a place where I wasn't known and where people wouldn't constantly remind me of the calamity that had befallen us. Guruji said that he would go with me wherever I wanted and I proposed Shirdi, where I had never been.

Guruji, myself, my wife and our surviving son, as well as Gupta with his family, all went to Shirdi and stayed there for a week. It was the first of countless trips to Shirdi. I liked it there, liked the places where Baba had spent his time and enjoyed gazing at his statue in the Samadhi Mandir. But most of all I loved being with Guruji.



During the following years Guruji kept me very busy. He asked me to translate the biography of Mahalsapati, a very close devotee of

Sai Baba, from Marathi into Telugu. As I didn't speak a word of Marathi, I contacted a Maratha businessman in Hyderabad who spoke Telugu quite well. In the evening he would verbally translate the text into Telugu for me and I would take notes. I would elaborate on these later at home. Then Guruji gave me *Ramavijaya* to translate, a version of the *Ramayana* written in Marathi in the 17th century. All this was done after my working hours. On top of it all, he kept me busy with other "small" tasks, such as enquiring about water filters, pressure cookers, water heaters, sewing machines, TVs etc. He wanted precise details of all the different brands, their merits and disadvantages, cost, warranty, maintenance and so on. With each product there was always at least one detail I overlooked. He kept me so occupied that I had no time to think of anything but the work I was doing, and this naturally kept me thinking of him all the time. My habitually restless and troublesome mind slowly became quieter and more concentrated on Guruji.

One day Guruji said, "Because you are totally involved in Baba's work, your mind is not affected by the death of your sons. If you had been left by yourself and continued your usual life, you would have either gone mad or suffered a paralysis."



Some days after his Master Bharadwaja's demise in 1989, Guruji said to me, "I want to go into solitude for some time. Please take care of the *Saipatham* magazine for a while."

I was horrified, "This magazine has existed for only fifteen months! I don't know anything about running a magazine! How can we do it without you? I don't want you to leave. I can't be without you. And where will you go?"

"To Baba," he replied.

I cried and pleaded with him not to go away, begging him to cancel his plan.

Guruji smiled, "See how much you love me!"

I was stunned. It had never occurred to me that I had love for him or for anybody else. But he was right. To discover that there was some love in my heart was like a minor earthquake. It made me reflect on my behaviour towards others and towards my family. I slowly became less bossy and some caring and kindness found its way through my armour, along with some capacity to listen to others.



On my second trip to Shirdi I went with Sai Prasad. I would sit in Dwarkamai and unfamiliar emotions would arise, along with memories of things I had done, moments when I had been uncaring, selfish, arrogant or harsh – and I was full of remorse. One night while sitting in my room, I was overcome by extreme anxiety. Remembering Guruji's words about wanting to go into solitude and to Baba, it suddenly hit me that it meant he would leave us forever, would give up his body and be gone. I cried floods of tears and sobbed the whole night through. Sai Prasad tried to convince me that Guruji hadn't meant any such thing, but I was inconsolable over the idea of Guruji's death. The next day I was exhausted, but also felt very light and exhilarated, as if I had been freed from an unbearable burden.

Some days later, back in Hyderabad, Guruji came to visit. Looking at me he said, "Everything that has happened has been very good for you. The suppressed grief about your sons has been removed by Baba." Only then did I understand that my tears in Shirdi had been about my children. I also saw that Guruji had set the stage for this to happen by using the words "solitude" and "going to Baba", which my subconscious mind connected with death.



I couldn't spend as much time with Guruji as I wished because of my job, but I would join him every weekend and at every possible opportunity. One of the perks of my job was free bus tickets and

Guruji advised me to use this to my advantage and not to waste money on train fares. But when there was the opportunity of a car ride I always got excited. I was very fond of cars, about which Guruji often teased me, and I always latched on to any possibility of travelling in this manner.

He told me never to postpone my journey to Shirdi nor to wait for another person in order to have company. He knew very well that I did not like to be by myself. "Come according to your plans and don't postpone or wait for anybody," he told me.

On one occasion I planned to take the 2 p.m. bus from Hyderabad to Shirdi. On the day of my departure, Siva Shankar telephoned me in the morning to say he was going to Shirdi by car that day and asked if I would like to accompany him. I agreed on the condition that he would leave by 2 p.m. at the latest. He assured me that he would leave two hours earlier. From noon onwards he phoned repeatedly to tell me he was about to set out. Finally, he arrived at 2.30 and we left at three. We thought that by the time we had covered the 600 kilometres to Shirdi we would be ahead of the bus, but we arrived there an hour after it.

I went to the office room in Saipatham, took a shower and then looked for Amma to report that I had arrived. This was the first time ever that I was not called to Guruji immediately. I waited for an hour then Amma informed me that Guruji had already started to give *darshan* in the next room. I had to join the queue to see him. This was also the first time that I had to queue as it was usually me that took care of the *darshan* proceedings. Realizing my mistake, I was in tears by the time I touched his feet and apologized.

"You are not doing what you are told to do," he simply commented.



One day Guruji was leaving for Manmad station. I organized four cars for the devotees who wanted to see him off. Guruji told me to

give Kondayya a place in one of the cars. The cars filled up quickly and I saw that Kondayya and another devotee had been left out. I suggested that they make their way by bus.

On our arrival in Manmad Guruji's first question was, "Where is Kondayya?" and I replied that he had gone by bus.

Guruji's face as well as his words expressed his displeasure, "I would have preferred you to offer your place in the car to Kondayya and come by bus yourself."

I apologized immediately but did not admit that, because of some negative judgements I held towards Kondayya, I had not made every effort to accommodate him in one of the cars. Neither did I admit that I totally forgot what I had experienced many times – that Guruji has the power to arrange anything, even if it looks impossible, let alone a mere car journey to Manmad. Guruji told me many times that if you look after the needs of others Baba will automatically take care of your needs, but I forgot this too.

Guruji told me again and again to be loving with everybody. He never encouraged me to favour certain people or reject others because of their behaviour or actions or position. He said that everyone who came to him was sent by Baba and came as Baba's *prasad*. But I rarely reflected on my behaviour, which did not always accord with Guruji's principles, and I never thought much about the effect it might have on others.

SRI BABUJI: Baba said, "Except with rinanubandha – your past connections – nobody will come to you. And whoever comes, you must treat them hospitably; share with them whatever you have." In that way, I don't invite anybody, I don't call anybody, I don't give an appointment to anybody. If they come of their own accord, I think that they have been sent by Baba. So to me they are Baba's prasad. How should I treat Baba's prasad? That is the way I have to treat them, and I share all that I have.



Seemingly trivial incidents began to have a big effect. In the early years I used to tell Guruji everything, confess every mistake and every failure. But slowly over the years I conveniently “forgot” many so-called minor incidents, rationalizing them away. When one makes a major blunder and confesses it to Guruji, he won’t give it any importance and will make a joke of it. However, when we are careless about something that we consider insignificant, Guruji has a way of bringing it to light and of warning us to be more careful in future.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, is it necessary to confess all one’s sins or wrongdoings to the Satguru?

SRI BABUJI: If there is a resistance to doing it verbally, then it is needed.

People may think, “He knows all my faults, what is the need to tell him?” But it is only with regard to expressing their weaknesses that they take the pretext of the guru’s omniscience. When another problem comes they will go and ask him, “I have a problem. Please, Guruji, solve it.” At that point, why ask? The Satguru knows the problem, he’ll solve it – but they do not keep quiet. So it is not because of their awareness of the guru’s omniscience that they are not verbalizing their confessions. They don’t want to; their ego is coming in the way. So then there is a need to say these things.

The only principle behind it is that we should not try to conceal anything, because the effort to conceal implies so many things: keeping up the ego, trying to give a guise, a pose, an image to the guru of being a very good person, telling only the good things, and in that way subconsciously trying to deceive him.

In the Indian tradition they say, “Don’t conceal anything from a doctor or a guru.”



With an ever-increasing number of people attracted to Guruji, I took on more and more responsibilities and became extremely busy, something which I like and which comes naturally to me. It wasn't Guruji's idea that I should get involved in so many projects; I wanted to do it. Whereas before I always found time to go to Baba's *mandir* and to spend long hours with Guruji, now I felt responsible for so many things and seldom went to the *mandir*. As my time for Baba diminished, so did the opportunities to spend time with Guruji. I noticed that Guruji was calling me less often but I was too busy to stop and reflect on the cause.

Years later Guruji explained to me, "Do you remember how much time you were spending in the *mandir* in the first years in Shirdi? After a while you didn't find any time to go there at all. There are always two things that I consider with people who come: on the one hand the individual relationship I have with a person because of *rinanubandha*, and on the other hand how much they focus on the object of their love. If your focus decreases, my time with you automatically decreases too."

In my view, I was busy with selfless work for which I received no personal gain. I was taking care of devotees' accommodation, answering their questions with regard to Guruji's *darshan*, attending to the constant phone calls and to a thousand-and-one other things. Thinking that I was doing Guruji's or Baba's work, I was able to rationalize away the disappointment of spending less time with Guruji.

SRI BABUJI: There is a danger that people may justify all their actions as Baba's. Actually, I see this in people – they get their own whims and fancies, and they ascribe them to Baba. There is a safe way where you don't get confused, where there is less possibility of becoming irrational and of starting to justify your actions as Baba's: what you cannot do, and what doesn't come out of your effort, it is safe to say that is Baba's. It should be very clear. Everything else, we should not ascribe to him. Otherwise our whims and

fancies, miserliness and all these things go in the name of Baba's will. So it leads to hypocrisy and self-deception.



People saw me somehow as the chief disciple, and I behaved like one. Again this wasn't Guruji's idea. Instead he cautioned me many times, "Everybody is flattering you and dancing to your tune. But behind your back they are criticizing you and making fun of your self-importance. The power and the influence you have over others are not because of yourself. Be careful. Don't fall for their flattery."

My whole life, from my youth onwards, revolved around the issue of power. This issue was a blind spot of mine. Whenever Guruji talked about anything connected with it I would readily agree, but his words wouldn't actually reach me. My habit of organizing, managing and being the boss was overwhelming the devotee within. I forgot more and more why I had come to Guruji.



Once I agreed to assist a fellow devotee in a business deal. I was offered some recompense in kind and was very tempted to accept. At a certain point I told Guruji about it, giving a sketchy explanation of what was happening. Guruji immediately made it clear that it was not right and that I should refuse.

Then giving me a serious look he said, "In the early days I always liked your way of reporting because it was correct and truthful, and you never concealed any facts. However, this has changed. For quite some time your reporting has not been truthful. I tolerate anything but lies. A person who is not truthful has no place with me. To conceal a fact is worse than telling a blatant lie."

I cursed myself for my behaviour and begged Guruji's forgiveness. At the time it was simply one of the many occasions on which he had reprimanded me. I didn't think at all of the possibility of any

further consequences. However from that moment onward Guruji hardly ever called me to see him.

Around this time, the situation in my workplace was changing too, a development that affected the possibility of taking leave and seeing Guruji as often as I did before. I am sure it was he who arranged these circumstances. In my experience Guruji will never tell someone to go because of a mistake. He will say something, will remonstrate, will make us try to understand and then, if necessary, create the appropriate situation for us to learn. He gives us a very long rope.



An extremely painful and confusing period started for me. Why wasn't Guruji calling me? I couldn't understand what was happening.

On one of the rare occasions when I had the opportunity to talk to him I complained, "Baba says he'll never let down his devotees. Why am I let down in this manner?"

Looking at me very lovingly he said, "Who says that you are being let down? Whatever is happening is for your own good. Now you can't see it, but one day you will understand. It has to be like this; there is no other way. Nothing has changed from my side. My love for you is there as it always has been. I know it is hard for you and I know you suffer. Think about it: do you truly believe that if you suffer I don't feel it too? But for your transformation there is no other way."

My face was wet with tears as I pleaded, "I came to you because I love you. All I want is to be with you. I don't care about transformation."

Guruji replied softly, "But I do."

Many months later during another meeting I complained about being punished harshly for my misdeeds.

Guruji responded, "There is no punishment. Don't you know that

I love you? Don't you think I miss you too? If it were punishment at all – which it is not – don't you think that everything you have done would be taken into account? Not just your misdeeds but also the many good and positive things? You might have forgotten them, but I haven't. The process you are going through has to be exactly the way it is."

I asked him to tell me what to do to come closer to him quickly.

"Spend as much time as possible at Baba's *mandir* and in our *satsang* hall. Be like a person who is coming for the first time. Join in the *bhajan*, the *parayana* and the *arati*. I know you are capable of doing things very efficiently and faster than anybody else. But always remember: I am not interested in using you, I want to give you something valuable."

DEVOTEE: *What can we do to move forward?*

SRI BABUJI: *First you should have a goal, that which makes you really happy, your object of love. Then focus on your object of love. What you have to do are the things that keep the focus. The things you should not do are those that distract you from the focus.*

You must have discrimination to choose what to do. You will know based on your experience: does it intensify your focus or not?

Another time I said to him, "If you leave me, I'll go away from here."

"You are not here for my benefit," he reminded me sharply. "You are here only for you! Don't think that you, or anyone else who comes, are helping me by being here!"



The shift from being the self-appointed chief disciple, top organizer and controller, to being a nobody was exceedingly painful. How often I was overcome by feelings of isolation, dejection, anger and

sadness! How many times would I sneak out of a gathering of fellow devotees to hide my tears!

Guruji, however, knew when the pain would be too much for me to bear. Then he would see me, talk to me and give me courage. During these meetings he was unfailingly loving. He would remind me of things he had said to me and reassure me that one day I would be able to understand.



Guruji often told me to take time to be with Baba. I felt it was the right moment, finally, to follow his advice. After my retirement in February 2003 I decided to move to Shirdi. I was fortunate enough to be able to make my home in the old Saipatham where Guruji had lived for several years and which, I feel, is imbued with his holy presence. I am aware of a different quality slowly unfolding in my life. Hyperactivity is being replaced by an unfamiliar sense of relaxation and peace. I am also noticing a remarkable change in the way people relate to me. In former days they used to approach me as somebody who had standing and influence. Now they see me simply as Narayana Rao. I am encouraged by this because Guruji told me many months before that it was difficult to notice a transformation in oneself. He said, "If there is any change in you, you will automatically notice it because people will relate to you differently."



In the early days when I first met Guruji I was dedicated to him. My emotions were single-pointedly focused on him and I was in awe of his divine nature. I used to feel that Sai Baba had come back for us in the form of Guruji. Nonetheless, after the initial honeymoon years with Guruji, my old patterns re-exerted their pull. Now I feel that that precious quality of childlike love and trust is resurfacing.

I am aware of a change in my emotions. I used to get angry and

irritated very easily and would always insist on my point of view. Now I can respect the opinions of others and I am able to listen to them. I don't get hurt if somebody differs from me, and I am not hurtful to others. Somehow I feel that the worst of my suffering is over, having come to understand that Guruji exists not only for me but for uncountable numbers of people.

I still long to be physically close to Guruji. However, now I trust that he knows what is right for me and that he will call me when I am fit for it. There has been a fundamental shift within, from dwelling on the lack of physical contact to wanting to be a useful tool in Guruji's hands. Now I want to do things exactly as he would like me to do them.



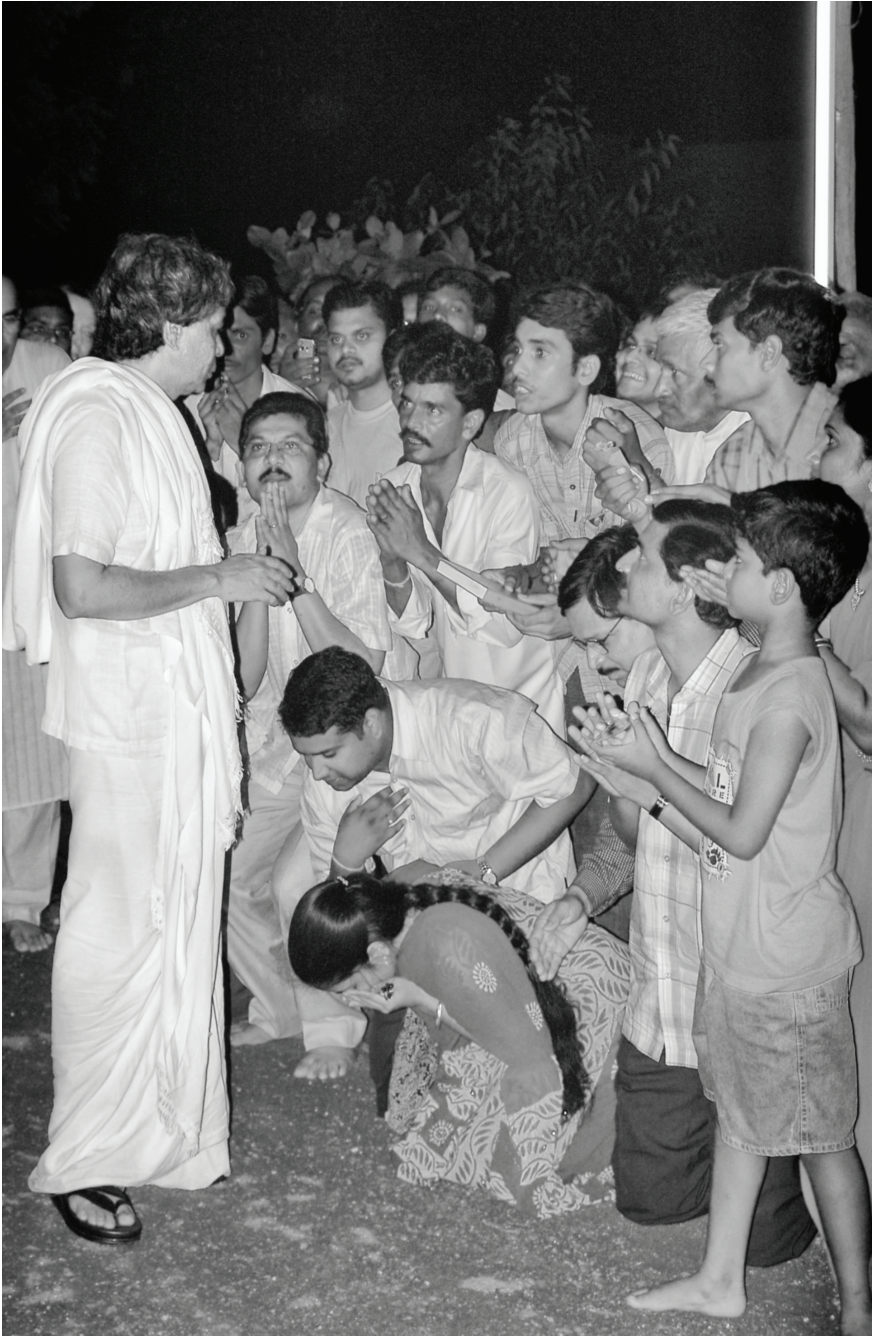
If there is any lasting change in me, it is certainly not because I understood its necessity or because I consciously wanted it. Far from it! My old habits resisted the flood of Guruji's grace with all their might. He, however, artfully, patiently and with infinite love nurtured and continues to tend to this seed, as he does with many thousands of others in his vast garden. It is he who prepares the soil. He waters, fertilizes, transplants and does the weeding and fencing. His attentive eye and loving hands are always ready to intervene and protect at the right time. It defies my imagination how he could possibly tend to so many individuals' needs meticulously and promptly, yet it is happening. I know it through my own experience and by watching the changes in other fellow devotees. He treats each and every seed that Baba has given him with the same masterful care and overwhelming transformative love. I long to be one with him.

Narayana Rao Sainathuni, born in 1945, is a retired government employee who lives in Shirdi, Maharashtra.

Bound to Love

SRI BABUJI: *Your Satguru is the one who triggers so much love in you, that just simply the act of loving in itself gives a sense of fulfilment. Not that he gives you something, but just the very fact that he is there and you love him becomes fulfilling.*

It is not about the destination; the very act of loving itself is fulfilment.



Sri Babuji, Shirdi, 2006



THIRTEEN

Indelible Moments

A shower of flowers

Tenali, January 2000

I have been fortunate enough to go with Guruji on several journeys to North India. An incident on one of these trips, which took place in the forest of Naimisaranya, an ancient pilgrim place in Uttar Pradesh, will always remain deeply impressed in my mind.

Guruji was sitting quietly by himself under a big tree and a small group of us were sitting around him at some distance. A troupe of monkeys came and gathered around us but behaved unusually well, not being any nuisance. Suddenly we saw one monkey jump up into the tree and vigorously shake the branches under which Guruji was sitting. Hundreds of yellow blossoms came gently tumbling down, settling on and around Guruji. It looked as if nature itself was worshipping him by showering him with flowers.

Sivaram Addanki, born in 1963, is a businessman who lives in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

The small photo

Shirdi, July 2001

I had a small photo of Baba and Guruji that I always liked to keep in my pocket. I wanted very much for Guruji to bless it and hoped this would happen on my next visit to Shirdi.

However, there was a crush of devotees crowding around him after *darshan* and I couldn't get near enough though I tried hard. When Guruji went through the door and closed it, I was so disappointed that tears welled up in my eyes. I had begun to cry when suddenly the door opened again and Guruji came out. He

gently took the photo out of my hand, touched it to his forehead in blessing and disappeared again behind the door.

Yugandhar Singama, born in 1979, is a student who lives in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

My heart in his hands

Shirdi, July 2003

In 1993 I was staying with my husband, Carlos, in a cottage in Varunachalam, a quiet compound full of greenery near the western slopes of Arunachala, about six kilometres from the town of Tiruvannamalai. Guruji was staying in a cottage next to ours and this is how we first met him.

I had planted a hibiscus bush in our garden. Its first flower – white with a delicate pink hue around the pistil – was so beautiful that I wanted to give it to Guruji. I picked it before getting ready for the evening *darshan*, my second *darshan* of Guruji. By the time I went to his cottage the blossom had closed and the petals were furled around the centre. What had been a beautiful delicate flower now looked like a small white stick. Should I offer this unattractive little thing to him?

I took it with me anyway and laid it at Guruji's feet, feeling somewhat embarrassed. Guruji picked it up and held the closed bloom in his hands while we were sitting with him. He then kept touching it ever so tenderly, slowly unfurling its petals. I sat there absorbed in the depth of an experience beyond my mind's grasp – it felt as though he was holding my heart in his hands, stroking it, teasing it gently into opening. When I took leave he handed me the now open flower as *prasad*.



Bound to Love

After a *satsang* with Guruji, food was served on banana leaves in the traditional South Indian style, and he invited us to eat with him. During the meal he talked to us about Baba's life.

Pointing to the leaf, he said, "I am like this banana leaf from which you are eating, but the food you eat is Baba."

After the meal the room was swept clean. Guruji pointed to the broom, "Baba is sweeping our hearts. I am just a broom in his hands. I will go on sweeping and sweeping until the heart is clean."

I could feel the sweeping in my heart as an almost physical sensation.

Yvonne Weier, born in 1959, is a meditation teacher from Switzerland who serves in Guruji's household.



Sri Babuji, Shirdi, 2005

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Glossary

acharya	Skt. 'one who teaches by conduct, an exemplar'; a scholar; a prominent religious teacher or spiritual guide. The term is also used as a respectful form of address.
aksharabhyasa	Skt. 'practice of syllables'; a ceremony in which a guru or elder guides a child's hand to write its first meaningful word, such as a mantra or the name of a deity or saint.
amma	The word for mother in many Indian languages; it is a respectful form of address for married women.
anna(s)	Hindi; a currency unit formerly used in India, equal to 1/16th of a rupee.
Anna	Telugu; 'elder brother'; a respectful form of address accorded to males older than oneself.
annaprasana	Skt. 'food tasting'; the ceremony of giving an infant solid food for the first time.
aparigraha	Skt. 'non-grasping; non-possessiveness'; the principle of not accepting anything <i>gratis</i> .
arati	Skt. "A mode of congregational worship in which devotees stand facing the image of a deity or saint, or a living saint, singing devotional songs in unison while a priest or devotee revolves a lighted oil lamp clockwise around the object of adoration. Afterwards the flame of the <i>arati</i> lamp is offered to devotees by turn; they pass their hands over the sacred flame, then quickly draw them to their eyes and faces as a gesture of drawing towards them the auspicious energy emanating from the sacred flame." – Sri Babuji, <i>Arati Sai Baba</i> (Shirdi, 1996).
arpanam, Krishna-arpanam	Skt. 'offering'; contribution; dedication; an offering to Krishna.

Arunachala	Skt. (<i>aruna</i> – red, bright, dynamic + <i>achala</i> – still, unmoving, static); the holy mountain in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, South India, traditionally believed to be a form of Shiva, and the abode of numerous saints and sages; the place where Sri Ramana Maharshi spent most of his life.
Arunachaleswara Temple	The main temple of Tiruvannamalai, dedicated to Lord Siva and one of the largest temples in India.
ashirvadam	Skt., Telugu; ‘blessing’; best wishes.
Ayurveda	Skt. (<i>ayus</i> – life + <i>veda</i> – knowledge or science); ancient Indian system of traditional medicine.
Bhagavan	Skt. ‘Lord’; used as a name for a great saint such as Ramana Maharshi.
bhajan	Skt. ‘devotional singing’; singing devotional songs as a form of worship, usually congregational.
bindi	Hindi; ‘a drop, dot’; a colourful dot applied by women between the eyebrows.
chamatkar	Skt. ‘dazzling’; a dazzling experience; a miracle.
chapati	A type of unleavened Indian bread.
Chavadi	A small building near Dwarakamai in Shirdi where Baba slept on alternate nights during the last years of his life. To commemorate this, every Thursday evening Baba’s picture is carried there in procession.
dakshina	Skt. ‘gift, offering’; the traditional fee given by a student to his guru at the conclusion of his studies, or to a priest by a sacrificer at the conclusion of a ritual; any offering given in gratitude by a student or devotee to a teacher or guru.
darshan	Skt. ‘sight, vision’; seeing or being in the presence of a deity, saint, or sacred idol, in the sense of both seeing and being seen.

dharma	Skt. 'that which upholds or supports'; the natural law, the natural order of things; a harmonious life; the ideal social law; virtuous deeds; the pious tradition; one's ethical obligation or duty.
dosa	A staple dish in South India. <i>Dosa</i> is a pancake made from a fermented batter of ground rice and lentils.
Dwarkamai	Skt. 'many-gated mother'; the name Baba gave to the mosque where he lived in Shirdi.
fakir	Arabic; 'a poor man'; wandering mendicant or holy man who lives solely on alms.
Gayatri mantra	A highly revered mantra based on a Vedic Sanskrit verse from a hymn in the <i>Rig Veda</i> .
giri pradakshina	See <i>pradakshina</i> .
Guru Purnima	Skt. 'Guru's full moon'; the annual pan-Indian celebration held on the full moon of Ashadha (July/Aug) in honour of the guru.
gurubandhu	Skt. 'guru-bound'; a person who is 'tied' (<i>bandhu</i>) to the same guru as oneself, a fellow devotee.
Gurudeva	Skt. 'Guru-god'; divine guru; a traditional term for expressing profound love and devotion to the guru.
Gurusthan	Skt. 'guru's abode'; site of the neem tree beside the Samadhi Mandir where Baba stayed during his first years in Shirdi, and where he said his guru's tomb was located.
hajj/hajji	Arabic; <i>hajj</i> : the pilgrimage to Mecca; <i>hajji</i> : one who has made this pilgrimage.
hundi	A box for depositing donations in temples in India.
-ji	An honorific used as a suffix in Hindi; e.g. Guruji, Swamiji.
jnani	Skt. one who has realized <i>jnana</i> (true knowledge); one who is fully enlightened or Self-realized.
Krishna	Skt. 'dark-blue'; one of the most popular Hindu gods, the eighth avatar or incarnation of Vishnu.

kshetra	Skt. 'place, field'; a holy place, a sacred field.
leela/lila	Skt. '(divine) play'; any act considered of divine origin; a miracle.
mahasamadhi	Skt. 'great absorption'; respectful term for the death of a saint.
mala	Skt. 'garland or necklace'; a string of prayer beads.
Mavayya	Telugu; uncle; also an affectionate term in general use for a man older than oneself.
mandir	Skt. temple.
masjid	Arabic; mosque.
mataji	Hindi (<i>mata</i> – mother + <i>ji</i>); revered mother; a respectful term used to address an older woman; title of respect for a holy woman.
maya	Skt. 'illusion'.
nama	Skt. 'name'; devotional chanting of the name(s) of God or the Guru.
nama japa	Skt. 'devotional chanting'; repetition of the name(s) of God or the Guru.
namaskar	Skt. 'greeting'; traditional form of respectful greeting with the palms pressed together before the heart; also the act of bowing or prostrating before one's object of devotion.
nishtha	Skt. (<i>na</i> – not + <i>ishta</i> – choice); 'not my choice', commonly translated as faith; one-pointed focus; one of the two things asked of Baba by his Guru (the other was <i>saburi</i>).
paan	Hindi; a mixture of spices wrapped in a betel leaf, usually chewed as a breath freshener and for digestion and then spat out. One of the active ingredients is a mild narcotic.
paramartha	Skt. (<i>parama</i> – highest, sublime + <i>artha</i> – meaning, purpose, aim); true or supreme Self-consciousness, ultimate reality.
parayana	Skt. devotional reading or study of a scripture or holy text.

paisa	One hundredth of a rupee.
Poondi Swami	A renowned saint of the highest order who lived for the last eighteen years of his life in the small village of Poondi near Tiruvannamalai. In 1974 Sri Babuji spent some weeks in his presence and had the highest devotion and respect for him.
pradakshina/ giri pradakshina	Skt. 'right-facing'; moving clockwise around a sacred object or image, keeping it always to one's right as an act of reverence. Skt. <i>giri</i> 'hill', hence <i>giri pradakshina</i> , circumambulation of the hill, Arunachala, as a form of worship.
Prakasananda	Sri Vidya Prakasananda Giri Swamy (1914-1998) was a revered saint and author from Gujarat. He wrote several literary works on Vedanta.
prasad	Skt. 'grace, favour'; something given by a saint or one's guru; food that has been offered to a saint or deity and is thus considered to be blessed.
puja	Skt. 'ceremonial worship'; ritualistic worship of a deity, saint, or image.
puri	Deep-fried unleavened bread.
Ramana Maharshi	The great sage of Arunachala (1879–1950), born Venkataraman in Tamil Nadu. At age 16 he attained Self-realization and was drawn to the holy hill, Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai, where he remained for the rest of his life, living on or near the hill, which he said was his guru. He is also called Bhagavan (Lord).
Ramayana	Skt. the ancient Sanskrit epic, whose hero is Lord Rama, ascribed to the Hindu sage Valmiki. One of the two great epics of India, the other being the <i>Mahabharata</i> .
Ramnavami	A festival that commemorates the birth of Lord Rama, the hero of the <i>Ramayana</i> . The origin of this celebration in Shirdi is given in the <i>Shri Sai Satcharita</i> , Chapter VI.
rinanubandha	Skt. 'karmic debt'; karmic connection, bond, relationship.

saburi	From Arabic <i>sabr</i> or <i>sabur</i> ; 'courageous patience and fortitude'; equanimity in the face of difficulties. Sri Babuji often referred to it as 'happily waiting'. One of the two things asked of Baba by his guru (the other was <i>nishtha</i>).
Satguru/Sadguru	Skt. 'true guru'; a fully enlightened spiritual teacher of the highest order who teaches from his or her own experience.
sadhana	Skt. (<i>sadh</i> – to succeed, attain); 'dedication to an aim, means to the goal'; spiritual practice.
sadhu	Skt. 'holy person, ascetic'; a spiritual seeker who has devoted his or her life to a spiritual path (<i>marga</i>) and practice (<i>sadhana</i>) in pursuit of truth.
Saipatham	Skt. 'path of Sai'; the area in Shirdi where devotees came to have <i>darshan</i> of Sri Babuji, including the <i>satsang</i> hall, and where his <i>samadhi</i> is worshipped; the teachings on the path of Sai Baba as expressed and exemplified by Sri Babuji.
Saipatham magazine	A Telugu magazine started by Sri Babuji in 1988, dedicated to sharing research into the life and teachings of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi.
samadhi	Skt. meditative state of absorptive union; respectful way of referring to the death of a saint or holy person; the tomb of a saint or great person.
Samadhi Mandir	The temple in Shirdi where Sai Baba's tomb is located.
sansthan	Skt., Hindi; 'institution' or 'foundation', usually charitable or governmental.
sat	Skt. 'existence, absolute being, reality, Truth'.
satsang	Skt. 'company' (<i>sang</i>) with the 'truth' (<i>sat</i>) or the wise, hence a gathering for this purpose.
Seshadri Swami	A great saint and <i>jivanmukta</i> (1870-1929), contemporary of Sri Ramana Maharshi; his ashram is located near Sri Ramanasramam.

Shirdi	A small town in Maharashtra, which was Shirdi Sai Baba's abode in the late 19th century (then a small village), now a major pilgrimage centre in India.
Shri Sai Satcharita	Skt. 'The True Story of Sai'; the first comprehensive biography of Sai Baba, written by G. R. Dabholkar (Hemadpant), his direct devotee, and sanctioned by Baba himself, authentic source for Baba's life and considered a <i>pothi</i> or sacred text by devotees.
Shiva/Siva	Skt. 'the auspicious one'; a major Hindu god, forming part of the Hindu triumvirate along with Brahma (the creator) and Vishnu (the preserver). Siva governs the aspect of destruction and transformation.
sloka	Skt. a couplet of Sanskrit verse, especially one in which each line contains sixteen syllables.
Sri/Shri	A respectful term of address for males in Hindi, equivalent to 'Mr'; also commonly prefixed to names of sacred texts (<i>Shri Sai Satcharita</i>), objects and places, to show veneration.
subham	Skt. 'auspiciousness'; indicates a form of blessing given by an elder or by a guru assuring that all will be well.
swami/svamin	Skt. 'master of one's self'; often used as a title for holy men or religious teachers.
tapas	Skt. 'heat'; focused effort leading towards bodily and spiritual purification; ascetic practices or penance.
teerth/teertham/ tirtha	Skt. 'ford' or 'crossing place'; a holy place where there is a well, pond, lake, river or sea, the waters of which are considered to be holy; a place of pilgrimage.
Telugu	The Dravidian language spoken in Andhra Pradesh, India. Sri Babuji's mother tongue.

Tirumala	The most popular temple site in India, located in Andhra Pradesh, which receives hundreds of thousands of pilgrims daily to take <i>darshan</i> of the deity, Lord Venkateshwara. With Shirdi and Tiruvannamalai, it was one of the three places where Sri Babuji most liked to stay.
Tiruvannamalai	An ancient temple town in Tamil Nadu, about 185 km from Chennai, site of the holy mountain Arunachala and its great temple to Siva; the home of Sri Ramana Maharshi from 1896 until his <i>mahasamadhi</i> in 1950, and where his ashram and <i>samadhi</i> are still active and visited by thousands of pilgrims annually from around the world. Sri Babuji gave many of his <i>satsangs</i> here.
udi	Skt. <i>vibhuti</i> – ‘ashes’; ash from the sacred fire (<i>dhuni</i>) lit and maintained by Sai Baba in his mosque that is still burning today; its ashes are distributed to devotees by the Sansthan in Shirdi as Baba’s <i>prasad</i> . Sai Baba called it <i>udi</i> .
udi darshan	A personal <i>darshan</i> of Sri Babuji when devotees had a chance to prostrate and talk to him, and when he gave <i>udi</i> by his own hand.
Ugadi	Skt. (<i>Yugadi</i> : yuga – epoch or era + <i>aadi</i> – the beginning); New Year’s Day in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, falling on the new moon of Chaitra (March / April).
Upasani Baba	The sage of Sakori (1870–1941). He was a devotee of Sai Baba who became a guru in his own right, attracted a devoted following, and had an ashram in Sakori (a village 5 km from Shirdi) which is still functioning today.
vastu/Vastu Veda	Skt. ‘science of construction’; architecture; here, it refers to the belief that one’s fortune depends on the specifications to which one’s house is built.
Vemana	Kumaragiri Vema Reddy, a 14th century Telugu poet and saint.

Vijayadasami

Skt. 'victorious tenth'; the tenth day of the annual pan-Indian festival of Dussehra (Sept/Oct) celebrated by Sai devotees as the day of Baba's *mahasamadhi* in 1918; also the celebration of Sri Babuji's birth, on Vijayadasami, 7 Oct., 1954. Dussehra (Skt. 'one who takes away ten sins') commemorates the victory of Rama over the demon Ravana, or of Durga over the Buffalo Demon, Mahisa Asura (signifying the ego).

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Bound to Love

EXPERIENCES WITH SRI BABUJI

Bound to Love offers a fascinating glimpse into the mystical relation between guru and devotee. Gathering together some of the extraordinary experiences of the devotees of Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, it shows how a loving bond develops out of the experience of needs fulfilled and prayers answered. This, in turn, exerts a mysterious transforming effect on the devotee, leading to ever-increasing happiness and fulfilment.

Sri Babuji was a renowned devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba. His spiritual greatness has been drawing thousands to him for more than thirty years for relief from problems, divine guidance and the sheer joy of basking in his blissful presence.

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