

Rose Petals

SELECTIONS FROM SATSANGS WITH SRI BABUJI

Vol. 4



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*To Sai Baba of Shirdi
who gave us Guruji*



Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi is the most popular saint of modern India. He first appeared in mid-19th century Shirdi, Maharashtra, in the guise of a young Muslim fakir, and remained there for fifty years until his *mahasamadhi* in 1918. His tomb in the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi which houses his famous white marble statue is the focus of devotion and pilgrimage for millions of devotees. His parentage, birth and antecedents are unknown, but appear to reflect a mixture of Hindu and Sufi influences, like Kabir's. 'Sai' in Urdu means 'pure' or 'holy', an attribution made by his first devotee (Sai Baba means 'Holy Father').

Sai Baba's realization was of the highest order of magnitude, beyond the confines of any religion. His manifestations of supernatural power in response to devotees' needs were legendary in his lifetime and have continued since. His incredible feats of *trikala drishti* (knowledge of past, present and future) were so awesome that only a divine omniscience could account for them. He seemed familiar with and taught from the universal core of all faiths and traditions, recommending from each whatever scriptures and practices were best suited to the needs of the devotee before him. Like Kabir, his teachings were eclectic, often cryptically

expressed, free from distinctions of caste and sect, and full of love and compassion for all beings.

The special distinction of Baba's incarnation is to grant devotees experience of their blissful nature, not through teachings, but by merely seeing or remembering him: "Meditate on me as bliss," he said, "if you can't do this, look at my form." He advocated a guru-centric approach to spiritual life based on remembrance of him and adherence to the eternal dharma of truth, non-violence and universal love. Saying, "Look to me, I look to you," he promised to answer devotees' prayers even from his tomb, asking only two things, *nishtha* and *saburi* (steadfast faith and cheerful patience), as his *gurudakshina*.

Historically, Baba can be seen as continuing the mystical *Nirguna Bhakti* tradition of Kabir that revolutionized medieval Hinduism by advocating devotion to the formless God beyond all forms of religion; this united all sects by giving them a common means of expression. It also bridged the Hindu-Muslim divide by appealing to Muslims who were enjoined by the Koran to abjure image-worship. Sai Baba's life ideally exemplified Kabir's syncretic approach to religion.

The exponential growth in Sai worship is a notable phenomenon in modern India. In less than a century since his passing his devotees now number in millions and numerous temples have been built in his name. Baba's emblematic saintly form, seated on a stone dressed in a white *kafni*

and wearing a white head cloth, left hand resting on one crossed leg, has become iconic of sainthood and is seen everywhere in homes and offices. Multitudes journey monthly to Shirdi for his darshan, to ask for his blessings, and to have their prayers answered. They come from every stratum of society – rich and poor, educated and illiterate, young and old alike – all of whom feel Baba is their own and that they belong to him. Their experience is personal, immanent and overflowing with love. To witness such myriad expressions of devotional fervour is to sense the presence of the Divine, eliciting reverent awe and wonder. Baba's darshan in Shirdi is a uniquely memorable experience in modern India.



Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (1954-2010) was a renowned South Indian saint who reached spiritual fulfilment through devotion to his great Sadguru, Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918). His birth on the same day that Baba's life-size, marble statue was inaugurated in Shirdi presaged a life of love for Sai Baba, in which thought, word and deed were united in all-consuming devotion. This fundamental integrity was the hallmark of the path he walked, the path of Sai, called *Saipatham*.

Sri Babuji's rise to spiritual attainment was meteoric. From his youth, he had an intensely enquiring mind that questioned the claims of the scriptures and organized religion. At 16, a mystical experience awakened his love for Sai Baba and brought him into closer contact with Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja, an eminent Sai devotee, who became his guru and encouraged his search for fulfilment. Under Sri Bharadwaja's guidance and inspired by Sri Ramana Maharshi's example of Self-realization, Sri Babuji undertook an intense period of sadhana which culminated in his experience of realization before the great *avadhuta*, Sri Poondi Swami, in 1974, when he was barely 20 years old. This profound transformative experience, which Sri Babuji attributed to Sai

Baba, initiated the next stage of his life that lasted to the end of it – the total dedication of his love and service to Baba.

Instead of leaving the world, Sri Babuji returned to it and later married in deference to his guru's advice, had a daughter, and lived the life of a householder. After Sri Bharadwaja's passing in 1989, Sri Babuji moved with his family to Shirdi, to be nearer the abode of his beloved Sadguru. There, in the intimacy of his home, he shared the fruit of his experience with those drawn by his wisdom and radiant love. He lived simply, did not speak publicly or establish an organization or ashram, nor did he accept donations, preferring to live on the honorarium he received from the Sai Baba Central School he founded in Ongole in 1983. As his renown spread, his darshans in Shirdi grew to attract thousands, including seekers from other countries, who were entranced by the sheer spiritual power of his silent presence while he sat with eyes closed beneath a large portrait of Baba.

All aspects of Sri Babuji's life were harmonized around his devotion to Baba. Each activity and relationship was fed by the steady flame of his love so that everything he did was an act of devotion even while living in the world and meeting the responsibilities of daily life. Whenever there were opportunities to meet with Sri Babuji and seek his guidance, he responded to questions in practical terms relevant to the questioner's needs, and always supported each person's unique path to

fulfilment. Many who came into contact with him found and continue to find their prayers answered, their problems solved and their illnesses cured, blessings he always attributed to Baba's grace and love. He once said, "The whole gamut of spiritual seeking can be summed up in two words – the experience and expression of love."

Sri Babuji attained *mahasamadhi* on 13 November 2010. His *samadhi* (*Sannidhanam*) in Saipatham, Shirdi, is alive with his luminous presence and is open to everyone throughout the year as a quiet refuge for worship, prayer and meditation.

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Rose Petals is grateful for the ongoing support of Sri Babuji's revered wife, Smt. Anasuya Ammagaru, and his beloved daughter, Sruti Sainathuni. Their unwavering devotion to Guruji's legacy and support for Saipatham remains an inspiration to all devotees.

Everyone who participated in publishing *Rose Petals – Vol. 4* feels honoured to have shared in presenting our beloved Sadguru's words to a wider audience. To work with Guruji's satsangs and experience his ineffable presence again has been a deeply rewarding experience for all of us. This volume is offered to other seekers the world over with the prayer that they may benefit as we have from the wisdom and love pervading the satsangs presented here in this volume of *Rose Petals*.

Ram Brown Crowell
Editor, *Rose Petals*
Tiruvannamalai

Note on Text and Sources

All non-English and Sanskrit words in the text are defined in the **Glossary** at the back of the book; those that do not appear in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (12e 2011) are italicized. Words enclosed by square brackets in the text have been added by the editor and are not heard in the original satsang. The terms 'guru' and 'Sadguru' denote in all cases a fully enlightened, Self-realized master.

The sources for the extracts in each chapter are listed in the **Appendix of Sources** at the end of the text. They appear there numbered in the order in which they appear in the text for each chapter, according to the number and date of the satsang.

The **Glossary** has been compiled by the editor on the basis of standard academic authorities; he has tried to limit the denotational field of the glosses to meanings relevant to the text or sufficient to identify the term for readers of this book.

Preface

Volume 4 is the latest volume of *Rose Petals* to be published in honour of Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, whose exemplary life of devotion to Sai Baba of Shirdi endeared him to thousands in India and abroad. Like previous volumes, this book contains selections from Sri Babuji's English satsangs given spontaneously in response to devotees' questions on a wide range of subjects. The dialogues took place with small groups in an informal atmosphere at his house or while travelling, between 1993 and 2010. The 12 chapters were originally made available in digital format for devotees; they are here published in book form for the benefit of a wider readership. The text has also been translated into Telugu, Sri Babuji's native tongue, and published as *Sarathchandrikalu*.

Sri Babuji's satsangs were brilliant, original and insightful. They cover many topics of traditional interest to seekers from a modern perspective that eschews the jargon of schools and texts and speaks directly to spiritual concerns in psychological terms that are common to all human experience. At the same time, Sri Babuji had no systematized form of teaching, nor advocated any one philosophy over another, always speaking in terms relevant to the individual before him. Nevertheless, since seekers face many of the same problems, it

is possible to collate Guruji's different answers to the same questions into the thematic chapters that are presented here. Gathering Guruji's various replies on the same subject enables us to appreciate the depth of his wisdom, revealing perhaps more of its relevance to our own path and search. He stressed that deep curiosity and a keen spirit of enquiry were needed to forge a genuine path to fulfilment based on the reality of our own needs and experience. Always, he inspires and coaxes us to be receptive and thrilled by the adventure of life itself and the joyous mystery of our own existence.

Guruji's path could be called the path of love. It was evident in the unwavering devotion to Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi that permeated his whole life and being in thought, word and deed. Like Baba, he was non-prescriptive, tolerant and non-sectarian in his approach, asking us to seek our fulfilment in the way that spoke most authentically to our own hearts, even at times, pointing to a 'pathless path', or a path with a million names and expressions, that would encompass everyone's unique journey to fulfilment.

The introduction that follows is offered as an invitation to readers to reflect on their own needs and desires in relation to spiritual life. It is also offered as a perspective on the fundamental qualities of integrity, curiosity and open-mindedness that Sri Babuji felt were basic to the search for fulfilment, and essential to its outcome in experience.

Above all, spirituality was a practical matter for Sri Babuji, to be experienced in one's everyday life, and his compassionate guidance to discover this for ourselves is what weaves through these dialogues with Sri Babuji.

– R.B.C.



Introduction

The Thrill of the Mystery

Hear from the heart wordless mysteries!
Understand what cannot be understood!
When the veils are burned away,
The heart will understand completely.
Ancient Love will unfold ever-fresh forms
In the heart of the Spirit, in the core of the heart.

—*Jalaluddin Rumi*¹

The human quest to find meaning in existence and to solve the mystery of life has inspired research and exploration throughout history. Study and enquiry, whether in the sciences, humanities or spirituality, has arisen to satisfy the inborn need to make the unknown known, to satisfy one's curiosity about the nature of life and, finally, to experience fulfilment and happiness in it. The search for meaning is natural, almost biological

¹ *Light upon Light Inspirations from Rumi* by Andrew Harvey (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1996), p.104

in nature, and seeks to answer characteristically human problems, questions and needs.

In earlier times, before the advent of printing, those seeking answers to spiritual questions were more isolated in their quest. If their need or passion for the truth were strong enough, they might embark on long, arduous pilgrimages to find a master who was said to know the truth or to find scriptures that had not yet reached them. The famous Chinese monk and pilgrim, Fa-hsien (337-422 CE), walked from Central China across the Himalayas and was the first to reach India. He then walked onward to thirty different countries on his pilgrimage to visit all the principal centres of Buddhism, collecting scriptures and studying under various masters. His accounts of his travels have come down to us written on silk and bamboo. The yearning to receive teachings from great masters must have been an all-consuming passion for such seekers to embark on these formidable journeys.

Since then, spiritual teachings have become unimaginably more available to seekers with the emergence of international publishing, television and the internet. Now, almost everything one wants to know is just a click away. All these advances have radically changed our relationship to acquiring spiritual knowledge. How does this affect the modern seeker's quest to find meaning in life and to solve its mystery? While there can be no doubt that the wide-spread dissemination of easily-accessed information brings huge benefits,

it must also be admitted that it can create its own problems for spiritual seekers in today's world.

We are inundated with ideas, systems, techniques and myriads of paths in today's spiritual supermarket. Never before in the history of spirituality has there been such a renaissance of Eastern and Western teachings from past ages, such a cross-cultural fertilization of ideas, and such easy availability of spiritual and philosophical texts, previously rare and confined to ancient languages, which are now translated into every major modern language. Sacred texts once secret and accessible only to initiated, qualified disciples (*adhikarin*) are now available to all without restriction.

Ready-made concepts and techniques, whether simple or advanced, suitable or not, may be chosen simply because the teaching sounds beautiful, exotic or of the highest order, rather than in answer to a burning personal need or longing, like Fa-hsien's, whose fervency called him to make huge sacrifices and commitments. Instead, we may become increasingly confused by the innumerable ideas presented, making our experience even more abstract by adopting concepts that are not relevant to our real needs and problems. As Sri Babuji says:

"If you are told that everything is transient, temporary, without substance, and that there is something beyond that you have to catch hold of, then your whole search becomes meaningless, because it is superimposed and artificial, since

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you are seeking something that you don't really need. Instead, you have to realize by experience the futility of fulfilling these transient things, then the search will become a real need for you. Otherwise, you are just imitating another seeker. So, let us not imitate, but confine ourselves to this: where lies our sorrow, our frustration, our lack? Let us tackle the problem at its own level, practically, pragmatically, down to the ground!"

When we approach our spiritual quest, we often want to be told what to believe, since not knowing or knowing falsely causes fear and anxiety. The tendency of most human beings is to use their traditional convictions and belief systems to comfort themselves, or as crutches to escape an intolerable sense of uncertainty and insecurity. But, when stances of knowing are adopted unconnected to our real needs and experience, true inquisitiveness and self-discovery are stopped in their tracks, even to the point of no longer feeling a need to continue seeking, or of 'calling off the search'. Thus, a person's spiritual development can be arrested long before it has a chance to come to fruition.

Of course, it is not so simple to let go of the safety net of our views and opinions. Since they largely form our identity, letting go of them is tantamount to cutting off the branch we're sitting on or sinking our conceptual boat before we've reached the other shore. Yet, if we don't let go of where we are, we surely cannot move forward. The critical help and security needed to accomplish this may come in the form of the

Sadguru, or in walking a path that is true to our heart, that truly is our own way, our *svadharma*. If our hearts have been awakened with love for Truth or the Sadguru, the very power of that love will act as the security that makes it possible to move beyond the constructs of the personality and its confines. As the process of clearing away our identification with the known can feel like dying, being supported by the Sadguru's love allows one to let go more readily. In *Topsy-Turvy in the Well*, (Ch. 6), Guruji alludes to this essential deconditioning process with an example from Sai Baba's own experience with his Guru. Guruji said if we were to recast Baba's account today it could be read like this:

“My Guru made me see the depths of my own being – there all my so-called knowledge, patterns and ways of knowing became topsy-turvy – and I had a glimpse of bliss. Then I stayed with the one who made me experience that.”

If required, the Sadguru may also provide certain concepts to remove the ones that are not helpful, even as a thorn is used to remove another thorn. Guruji said,

“Eventually, these kinds of concepts will also have to go, they are not the truth or reality but just a needle to remove a thorn already in your foot which is giving you pain. Once the thorn is removed, you throw the needle away.”

In his own spiritual journey, Sri Babuji found that everything, even something as simple as

breathing, presented a mystery, a problem to be solved. His experience of the perplexity of existence itself is what gave extreme urgency to his search. People kept answering him from the *sastras*, without any practical application to his needs, until he met his Master, Ekkirala Bharadwaja, who approached his enquiry in an open spirit, dismissing all *sastraic* ideas and jargon that young Babuji had accumulated. As Guruji recounted:

“By the time I met my Master, I had collected so many concepts that they had become an obstacle to readily accepting something new. My Master brushed them aside and made the whole enquiry fresh, going to the spirit of it and paring it down to the brass tacks. It was a different approach, which I liked. My search became enlivened because all the dead wood accumulated was removed and then the seeking started afresh again.”

This fresh, innocent mind is the starting point of many practices, especially in Zen, as outlined by Richard Baker in his Introduction to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*:²

“‘Zen mind’ is one of those enigmatic phrases used by Zen teachers to make you notice yourself, to go beyond words and wonder what your own mind and being are. This is the purpose of all Zen teaching – to make you wonder, and to answer that wondering with the expression

² *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki; Introduction by Richard Baker (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1973), p.13

of your deepest nature. The practice of 'Zen mind' is beginner's mind. The innocence of the first enquiry – what am I – is needed throughout Zen practice. The mind of the beginner is empty, free of expert's habits, ready to accept or to doubt and open to all possibilities."

Guruji first tried to wipe our slates clean of any ideas that were not meaningful to our search, and to 'normalize' us by bringing us back to the reality of our hearts and our authentic needs. He outlines this beautifully in *The Gap* (Ch. 9), where Guruji stresses the importance of being honest with ourselves, of shunning hypocrisy at all costs and aligning our thoughts, words and deeds into one harmonious whole. He always pointed us back to ourselves, to our own reality, having us ask one fundamental question: "What is my real need?" If we said we wanted mukti or nirvana, he would urge us to enquire deeply to find whether it was truly a desperate need or not, referring to Buddha's quest:

"Did Buddha leave the palace in order to get nirvana? No. Certain questions were so burning for him they drove him out – do you have that burning? There is no need that you should have the same kind of burning as the Buddha; people have different kinds of burning needs. What is your burning need? Find that out and then your seeking becomes personal. Everybody has their own seeking, their own way, their own path. Unless we focus on that we can't evolve."

It seems we have to be on fire, with the need either to get something or to get rid of something, to truly want to change our condition of being, for our efforts to bear fruit. Otherwise, all our sadhanas and disciplines become sterile in experience if they're not coming from the heart. In *Effort from the Heart* (Ch. 5), Guruji speaks at length about 'right effort' as effort fused with the emotion of love or burning need, and how everything else one does then becomes a part of it. This allows for an intensity of attention to be present naturally in all things.

Sri Babuji pointed out that a true teacher may push us, or even take us along with him, but he will always show us the way to our own genuine path. He never gave ready-made answers like "All is Brahman, Everything is God, Know you are Atman," as some kind of conclusion to our exploration of life's mystery. He stressed that the process of exploration itself was beautiful, and offered countless insights into the deeper truths of nature, human and divine. An example of how to enquire into everyday experience is outlined in *Boring into Boredom* (Ch. 8), where Guruji says,

"Everybody experiences boredom: explore it, examine it, dissect it, and it will reveal so many thrilling mysteries about your own self and mind. If you bore into that experience of boredom, the living waters will spring up and you'll get beautiful experiences!"

He always brought us back to our experience

of whatever was happening in the moment, and asked us to start our enquiry from there. Like beginners, fresh on the path, enlivened and excited, he wanted us to connect with our deepest yearning to solve the mystery. He stressed that the truth was far more nuanced than black and white; rather, it was often paradoxical in nature and impossible to pin down in a word or concept. As he said,

“In every satsang I’m showing you a series of paradoxes, enigmas, how the truth lies somewhere in-between. And trying to see that ‘in-between’, trying to read between the lines, that is the art of life, that is the art of spirituality. And if you want somebody to spell it out, to write a line about it, then the truth goes beyond the line again and you miss the target.”

In fact, Sri Babuji was speaking of the same essential truths revealed in the scriptures but in his own unique way, in the form of simple, accessible language stripped of all jargon. He even went so far as to say that if his words over time ever lost their aliveness in our inner experience and had become jargon, they also should be dropped. Guruji acknowledged that we can’t live without concepts, but he spoke of the dead concepts that were irrelevant and meaningless to our life, that made our lives more problematic and complicated. He wanted us to constantly discern and check to see if they were useful for our goal. On the use of concepts he said:

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“I am not opposed to concepts, I also have concepts and share them with you, but I also want you to have your concepts, based on your own experience. If a concept arises from your experience then it is good. In English ‘concept’ is a very beautiful word. To conceive means to think, to imagine, to beget something. Conception also means pregnancy, as in conceiving a child. So when you are impregnated with an experience, then you conceive real concepts. Don’t just adopt concepts, try to beget your own. There is nothing like having your own.”

He perceived each person as unique and without replica in any other time or place. Because of this he knew that one approach did not suit everyone and therefore he never advocated any philosophical system or systematic theology. He said,

“I always relate to people individually, personally. I don’t compare, everybody is unique to me, as if you were the only contact I have in the world, there is nobody else. I advise people according to their nature, according to their leanings, according to their constitution.”

Interestingly, Sri Babuji was trained as a homeopathic physician, and the homeopathic approach of viewing each person as unique in their symptomatology, constitution and treatment accorded with his enlightened way of being with each of us. He said, quite radically:

“Let us not worry about the unity of religions, let us worry about the unity of our own emo-

tions. That's where the problem lies. Try to solve that problem. And from there, from that effort, our own religion arises. Each individual has their own religion. Why are there only ten or fifteen? Let all the millions of people have millions of religions. In that sense, all the religions may be leading to the one ocean, the concretization of each one's sense of fulfilment."

When Guruji worked with us in satsangs, his reference point was always the questioner. He ascertained the person's *svadharmā* – that functional aspect of one's total structure with personal tendencies, views of fulfilment and capacity to attain it – and met us there, where he found us. Sri Babuji was free, flexible and open. He had no agenda of his own nor need to have us see the whole world from his reference point.

We see historically that often the greatest saints and sages like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Sri Shirdi Sai Baba, and Sri Ramana Maharshi are the most universal in their views. Their infinite wisdom contains all possible paths so they are unlikely to uphold one system of thought over another. Thus, when questions arose over which school of philosophy or religion Sai Baba followed, it was impossible to answer other than saying no system or all systems! Their personal power is so great that words are unnecessary and the alchemizing force of their presence itself can be sufficient to transform us. In the saint, the form and the state become so utterly fused that just by sitting in their presence we can learn and be

transformed without the intervention of language. Sri Narasimha Swami, the great devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba, expresses this beautifully in the preface to his biography, *Life of Sai Baba*:³

“In our present day civilisation, we have only understood conveyance of thought by speech. But with persons of the coming race or the fully developed human being that is represented by Baba, one of the most elementary powers is to convey the thought-impulse to action without utterance of a single word. ‘Radiating thought’ is an expression used about several great souls; a person seated before such a Mahatma feels that his whole being is permeated, controlled, communed with and moulded by the Mahatma without the use of a single word and without direction that any book be studied or any practice followed.”

Here, the entire transformative process is initiated and completed by the Sadguru. One need only be like a wet cloth drying in the sun of the Sadguru’s presence and grace – an analogy Guruji liked to use. The Sadguru moulds the mind and heart of the devotee, making him or her innocent again like a child, filled with wonder and curiosity about the meaning of life’s mystery and the way to fulfilment. Then his unconditional love inspires the devotee to respond from the deepest and most authentic part of his or her heart and be-

³ *Life of Sai Baba, Vol. 1* by B. V. Narasimha Swami (Saipuram, Madras: Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Trust, 5e rev., 1994), Preface, p.xx

ing. With the mind of a beginner and the heart of a lover, the mystery becomes a thrill and in walking the path itself one finds fulfilment. Life unfolds an aesthetic dimension of growing beauty filled with appreciation and gratitude. Guruji wanted us to approach our journey in this spirit saying,

“It is not a question of whether you solve the mystery or not. The very fact that you recognize the mystery, that you live in the mystery, that in itself is so thrilling and aesthetic. If you ask me to tell you the solution to the mystery, I won’t tell you. Just as in a movie, I won’t say this is what’s going to happen at the end – he is the villain, he is the murderer. No, you have to see the movie, I won’t tell you the story. The one who really loves the mystery, wants to experience the mystery and be thrilled!”

With Guruji, there was always the sense that ‘the story of our fulfilment’ had no ending, that there was no final point of arrival. It was, he said, like the work of an artist who feels his painting is never complete. If he ever feels it is fully complete, his art becomes stale and dry and stagnates. Guruji said:

“Our experience of fulfilment should not be static, it should be so dynamic. We should try to discover more ways of creating more fulfilment, more beauty and happiness. On and on it goes, but the impulse doesn’t come from dissatisfaction – there’s not an iota of dissatisfaction in it – but only its nature of expansion into ever-new forms. Actually, it’s quite peculiar in

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Vedanta when some say that Brahman means 'complete, perfect, absolute'. But the word Brahman itself does not mean that. It comes from the Sanskrit root, *Brh* – meaning 'to grow'. That which is ceaselessly growing, developing, unfolding is Brahman. To where? There is no end to it. It is infinitely unfolding. That is Brahman. People often misunderstand this by trying to nail it down into static concepts like perfection, goal or path, as if it were a state or station where one gets off! But the truth is not like this. It is a state that is endlessly unfolding, unfolding into infinity. It is infinitely finite and finitely infinite."

Opening to the inexhaustible mystery unleashes the heart and mind into a thrilling odyssey of discovery rather than landing us in a static place of knowing or fixed meaning. As we read these pages let us be inspired by Sri Babuji's words and hear the intimations of the mystery residing in the infinity of space between the lines. It is from this silent, sacred source that Sri Babuji gave us the sat-sangs in this volume of *Rose Petals*.

Linda Bonner (Bhakti)

Shirdi

March 2015

Rose Petals



Bodhan, 2000



chapter one

Darshan

DEVOTEE:

I would like to ask some questions about darshan. As I understand it, darshan means 'seeing' in relationship to a Sadguru or a form of God. What does that 'seeing' actually mean? Is the benefit in the way we see or is it in being seen? Do we try to embed the form in the mind, so as never to forget it, or focus on the internal experience of being in the Guru's presence? Is there a way of being in darshan that is most beneficial? I have so many questions!

GURUJI:

For all these questions there is one example I can

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give to help you understand better: When you see a movie, you're not simply seeing images moving on a screen. You say, "I'm watching a movie," but what is really happening? An interaction is going on, you identify yourself with the characters on the screen: you laugh, you cry, you get disappointed, you get angry or you may even get bored. You say you *see* a movie, but actually you aren't just seeing it, you're experiencing it. And when, just as you see a movie, you see Baba – that is darshan. It's that simple. It's not just seeing, you're experiencing something.



DEVOTEE:

How can we get the most out of those moments with you in darshan?

GURUJI:

I don't know how you can get the most out of it, but I know I come to take your darshan. I don't come to the satsang hall to give darshan, I come to receive darshan. Yes, I'm experiencing it and enjoying it!

Who am I to give darshan to anyone? It is the exalted state of Sai Baba that pulls us all to have his darshan with love and devotion. When I sit in front of all the devotees to have darshan of Baba, I am reminded of the Vedic hymn about the thousand-headed being: *Sahasra sheersha purushaha*,

sahasraksha sahasrapath – the Purusha, the Supreme Being, who has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. With thousands of heads and thousands of eyes Sai Baba is giving darshan and bestowing his gracious look. I feel I am having darshan of that universal form.



DEVOTEE:

Why is so much said about the glance of the guru and its value?

GURUJI:

Because it conveys love. Because you love the guru and what comes from the guru is love. The glance he gives you floods you with love. That is the content, the value, the governor's signature on our currency. [Guruji laughs] In fact, it's not the glance – something else is going on, some interaction is going on.

The best example I can give is when you watch a movie. It's not that the characters will come and talk to you, but there's an interaction going on. You identify yourself with someone or something else, a role. If even with a movie such an interaction is possible, why not with Baba, who, objectively speaking, really is interacting with you? Or, if you can't see the objectivity in it, at least experience it as if you're seeing a movie.

Darshan is 'seeing' and 'being' and 'experiencing', all together. It is not simply seeing. And

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when seeing and being is happening, the result is 'becoming'.

DEVOTEE:

Becoming?

GURUJI:

Seeing, being, and becoming.

DEVOTEE:

Isn't 'being seen' also an ingredient? Some texts seem to say that darshan is complete only if the guru also sees you, as well as your seeing him.

GURUJI:

Yes, he sees! How can it be incomplete?!

DEVOTEE:

That if the guru doesn't look at you, while you may see him, then it's not really darshan.

GURUJI:

Is this the only way he has to look at you? [Guruji stares pointedly with wide-open eyes] [Laughter] No! There are so many ways for him. We can only see in our usual way, but he has a thousand ways to see us!

DEVOTEE:

Ah, that's great!

GURUJI:

We have only two eyes, but Baba has thousands, unlimited numbers of eyes.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you said 'becoming' – is that a promise?
[Laughter]

GURUJI:

Yes, a promise without compromise! [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what is the *divya drishti*, the 'divine vision' of the guru?

GURUJI:

Any seeing which perceives divinity everywhere is the *divine drishti*. The guru sees divinity everywhere, that is why his look is divine. And if you can see him as the divinity, yes, that is also *divya drishti*.



DEVOTEE:

Is it possible to love the guru as he loves us?

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GURUJI:

Yes. When you become one with him, it is possible. And why does he love us? Is there something so attractive in us that he loves us so much? Nothing. Everybody loves, above all things, their own selves, and we are limited and there's so much which makes us love or hate. But for him, he sees himself in everything. To us it seems he is loving us, but to him he is loving himself – he sees his own Self everywhere. His look denotes that.

There's really no example or analogy to describe this accurately. But at least to understand it vaguely, imagine the look of a mother when she looks at her newborn baby immediately after delivery. Till then the baby has been a part of her, a part of her own self, not a separate entity. After the birth, that first look! It's as if she sees a part of herself. Then slowly the interaction begins – the child cries and wants to be given milk. The look loses its initial intensity, that initial feeling and experience of oneness.

The look that perceives everything as part of oneself is called *divya drishti*. To look at something and experience that this is also I, not different from me – to be able to see like that is *ham-sa*, is *so-ham*, *so-aham* [that I am]. It is myself. Whatever it is, it is I.



DEVOTEE:

What is very interesting and rather odd for me is

this opposition between the sacred and the ordinary world. During darshan we are very reverent and devotional, then when darshan is over our ordinary life resumes as usual.

GURUJI:

It's good. It's good that at least we feel the sacred for a few minutes. Because the more worldly and profane we are, the more we can feel the difference, the contrast.

DEVOTEE:

How do we bring this experience of the sacred that we have in darshan more into our ordinary lives?

GURUJI:

That all depends upon your purpose for being here. If your purpose is to experience what you experience during the few minutes of darshan, then you try to prolong it as much as possible. And people have different approaches, different ways of prolonging it, there is no one particular way. Or, if you don't want to prolong it, at least it's good if we don't disturb those who want to do so.

Everything depends upon your purpose, on why you are here. Usually, people tend to forget this. And, even if I tell you, "This is how you have to conduct yourself," it becomes a routine ritual and then has no benefit. It's true there is a difference between the sacred and the profane, as you

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said; it's a good point. But our purpose is to prolong the experience of darshan to such an extent that there will be no difference. The dividing line between sacred and profane should be erased: the profane appears sacred, and the sacred can appear to be profane. Everything becomes one in that exalted emotion.



GURUJI:

If anybody comes to me it is Baba's will, not mine. I try in all possible ways to repel them. [Laughter] But if still they come, it means that it's Baba's power bringing them to me, and I enjoy that. When I see them, I see Baba's power, I see Baba in them.

It always reminds me of what the *Purusha Sukta* says, "*Sahasra sheersha purushaha, sahasraksha sahasrapath*" – that Purusha, that Baba, who has a thousand heads, legs and hands, has come to give me darshan – I enjoy it. And I don't have any delusion I am helping anyone, I am simply enjoying Baba's ways. I am honestly saying it is Baba who helps you, not me.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how can we see Baba in everything? How can we achieve that?

GURUJI:

I am not asking you to see Baba in everything, just to be aware of what Baba said, "In every living creature I am there." It is enough to remember that. Not trying to superimpose our image of Baba on others, saying Baba, Baba, Baba! That's not it. [Laughter] When we relate to people, the awareness that Baba is in all living creatures is enough. And even if that awareness is not there, no problem. First try to see Baba in yourself, then we'll think of seeing Baba in others. If we cannot see Baba in ourselves, how can we see him in others? If Baba is in every creature, is he not in us, too? If he is within us, how is he within us? Where is he living? Where is he hiding? Try to find out. Then we can try to find him in all other hearts also.

Even if Baba is there and what he said is true, have we made our own heart a fitting home for him? So make it clean, just as, when I come, you clean the flat, decorate it with flowers and make everything ready. Like that, try to do the same thing in your heart.

DEVOTEE:

And how do we make our hearts clean?

GURUJI:

How do you make the flat clean when I come? You know what I like. You know, for example,

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that mosquito repellent is not good for me and so you make sure there is none around. Like that, there are so many things. You know what Baba likes and you try to remove what he doesn't like. Remove them, and Baba will come and live there happily. Then you can see him every day. You can have an interview, you can have darshan, every day, whenever you like. He comes and resides in your own flat here. [Guruji points to his heart.]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I want as much darshan of you as possible. When you're walking by, how do I get your attention so you will stop and look at me?

GURUJI:

It is natural when we are walking through a garden and the flowers are fresh, that we feel like standing there and looking at them. If the flowers' freshness is gone, what is there to look at? So, don't be like dried flowers – always keep up that freshness! Then Baba will make me stand there and look at you. Because what I see in you is that freshness, that blooming, that sap, that fragrance. Being a 'senior devotee' should not kill that freshness. Do you want to be a dried flower or a budding, blooming flower with lots of fragrance? Let our minds be like blossoming flowers which we

offer at the feet of Baba, let them not be withered and dried.

Always feel it's the first time when coming for darshan. Then you are free from the past, "We are seniors, they are newcomers, we are like this, they are like that." All these things are like the scorching sun which makes the flower wither and dry away. Nobody should feel they are 'senior'. Once we feel we are senior, we are ready to retire! [Guruji laughs] Keep up that sap! Every time is the first time – it should be like that.

When, describing Rama's form, Valmiki says, "*Kshanakshane yannavata Ramaneya roopam*," it means, *kshanakshane* – every moment, every instant; *yannavata* – it's new, renewed; *Ramaneya roopam* – Rama's form. That is, whenever you see his form, it is always new; when looking at his face you never get bored. Like that, in every moment Baba's form is so beautiful, constantly changing and renewing itself, so every moment feels like the first time you are seeing him. This *kshanakshane yannavata*, this ever-newness, permeates your whole life, your whole spiritual experience. Every instant is alive, full of sap, full of life. Then you'll be in real contact with me, or with Baba, or with Essence, or with whatever you want to call it. Experiencing that newness, that freshness, is the real darshan.





Sbirdi, 2006



chapter two

The Familiar Stranger

DEVOTEE:

The love for the Sadguru is so different from love in the ordinary, worldly sense. Is it possible to describe or capture it in any way? It seems so mysterious.

GURUJI:

There is no simple answer because your question implies so many things. What is a Sadguru? Why do we need a Sadguru? What is so-called 'ordinary love' and what is this 'mysterious love'? Is it really mysterious love or is it love of the mystery? All these things have to be answered to understand love for the Sadguru.



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DEVOTEE:

Guruji, please help me to understand the relationship between a devotee and the Sadguru.

GURUJI:

First, start with your experience. You have suffering, you have frustration. Even though you have everything, you still feel there is something missing. You don't know what it is. Sometimes you think, "Maybe this is missing, maybe that is missing, and if I get it I'll be happy." Then you try for it and when you get it, you find there is still something lacking. You have money and all the comforts, good relationships, good parents; everything is there but still you're not happy. What is missing? "Love!" you say. "Yes, my children love me, my wife loves me and my husband loves me, I have a good family. I am loved, but still I seek love – what is that love? Oh, it's not love, it's something else: *Jnana!*" So you read books on Vedanta and become even more confused – something still is missing. What is that X factor? What is the value of that X? In whatever way you work the equation, you can't solve it for X, you can't find the right answer. So, your whole life is based on an incorrect formula. Then, when you come in contact with the Sadguru, you think, "Maybe this is the X," because he connects you to what you feel is missing in yourself.

That is why I call the Sadguru a 'familiar stranger' or 'strangely familiar'. We feel, "He looks so

familiar, but he is so strange” and we don’t know why he is like that. We feel he knows the intimate corners of our heart, but we don’t know who he is or what he is doing. Is he static or dynamic? Does he love me or not? Is he doing anything or not? One minute he’s so familiar and the next moment he’s so strange. That paradox, that mixture of strangeness and familiarity, connects him to us, to what is really missing. Our experience of that strange familiarity is the first pull of the magnet – the triggering that brings us into the Sadguru’s orbit. The process of removing that strangeness and making it more and more familiar – that is the ‘concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment’.¹ So what is that strangeness? What is that missing story? That is the mystery. Let us try to grasp it. The whole process of seeking fulfilment is trying to get hold of that missing story and trying to solve the mystery, whether it is finally solved or not. That is the path, the sadhana, the spiritual endeavour.



DEVOTEE:

Even though I say love brought me here, still I feel I don’t know what love is.

¹ For a full understanding of this important term in Guruji’s thought, see *Rose Petals – Vol. 1.9* (Concretizing Fulfilment) and *Rose Petals – Vol. 3.12* (The Transformation Process).

GURUJI:

Not only you, many people do not know what love is. They think this is love or that is love. A boy and a girl look at each other: it's love at first sight. And then they say, "Oh, I love you, I love you so much!" After some time it becomes only a pattern, a habit, and slowly it withers away. Then they go on with their search for fulfilment. Some people want power or money. All these things are only a part of the exploration. Then, at some point, something happens and they feel, "Yes, this is what I want, this is my fulfilment." But even then, it is not yet really clear. For instance, take the example of Sri Ramana Maharshi. When he spoke about Arunachala, he said that even since the days of his innocence, since his childhood, he had had an inexplicable attraction to Arunachala, but he didn't know what Arunachala actually was, whether it was a hill, whether it was a name of God, or a person or a state, but somehow he felt that he knew it. Whenever he heard the name 'Arunachala' it felt so familiar, but at the same time it was so unfamiliar. So he began his exploration. He went to Arunachala and while he was there it became more familiar, but at the same time it remained so strange. There is also the example of Sai Baba. He was seeking a guru and the moment he saw him, he knew – yes! Did he know anything about him, his antecedents, his precedents? Nothing. But something told him, he knew, "He is the one." That wasn't the end of the story, it was only the

beginning. It only gave him a glimpse of something so ineffable, so mysterious, so strange, but at the same time so familiar. Then he tried to make it more and more familiar. The more familiar you become with that strangeness, with that mystery, the more you want to know it. The experience of becoming more familiar with the mystery gives you the opportunity to experience and express what you really want: this is what actually gives you fulfilment. Love arises in the experience of fulfilment, and the expression of fulfilment is love.

So it is the strangeness that pushes you towards fulfilment and makes you explore it, experience it, and express it more and more. It gives you the thrill, the sense of mystery. If you lose the strangeness, you lose the pull to explore. It is that paradox of the 'strange' with the 'familiar' that makes your life more meaningful. We know it and yet we don't know it, we have it and yet we don't have it.

DEVOTEE:

Is the sense of mystery there always, does it never go?

GURUJI:

We'll see. Let's try to solve it first. Maybe it goes, maybe it doesn't, but that itself gives you a thrill. Not that the mystery is something painful. It's thrilling! That is why people enjoy thrillers or mystery novels.



GURUJI:

If at all there is anything mysterious or mystical, it is our experience that the Sadguru loves us. How do we know he loves us? Can we prove it? What are the reasons?

DEVOTEE:

I feel it.

GURUJI:

Yes, you feel it, you have the intuition that he loves you. The whole spiritual journey is based on that experience. When you experience something it can be expressed in any way. Some people express it in their actions, others by talking. Whatever way it is, is not important. The thing is, how do you experience it? Something tells us, something is triggered inside, something abstract in our mind gets concretized. The other day, I was telling you about the Familiar Stranger. When we meet the Sadguru we have a feeling, a vague, abstract feeling, that we know him and he knows us. In what way we do not know. He is a total stranger. It is not possible to understand him, but somehow we feel that we know him. He is strange and at the same time familiar. It is a curious paradox. Usually, the more we know about somebody, the more the familiarity increases and the strangeness vanishes. But with a Sadguru, the more we

know about him, the stranger and stranger he becomes. There is an innate attraction, love is triggered in us. The familiarity relates to the love, and the strangeness relates to the mind that tries to understand and absorb. It wants to love as he loves and become one with him. If at all anybody experiences anything, it is first the love. There is a sense of security, something that tells us, "He knows me and what is good for me." How do we know? We have a feeling, an intuition. There is no proof and it is futile to try to furnish proofs for it.



GURUJI:

With the Sadguru, it is as if you have known him your whole life. But even if you stay with him for thirty, forty, fifty years, the fact is, you do not know him. He always remains a stranger, but at the same time he feels more familiar than anybody else in your life. Why? Again, no reason. All your reasoning will end up with no reason. [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

Ungraspable. I find something both frustrating and enticing in that.

GURUJI:

But that frustration is not like any other experience of frustration that we encounter. It is frustrating,

but it also gives us joy and happiness. It seems as though we are solving the mystery, but actually the mystery only becomes magnified and absorbs us more and more. There is a story in Hindu mythology about Ravana [the demon King of Lanka] wanting to attain immortality by getting the *Atma Lingam*, so he asked Lord Siva for this boon. As a result of his ardent worship, Lord Siva granted the boon, on condition that the *Atma Lingam* should never touch the ground; once placed on the earth, all its powers would return to Lord Siva. Ravana started his journey back to Lanka with the *Atma Lingam*. Sage Narada feared that with its power Ravana would create havoc on earth. So he asked Lord Ganesha [the elephant god and son of Lord Siva] to play a trick on him in which Ganesha managed to place the *Atma Lingam* on the ground. Once installed on earth, nobody could move it, not even Lord Siva. The more Ravana tried to remove it, the bigger and bigger it became. Ravana wanted to disconnect the soul from earthly experience and become immortal. But the more you try to do it, the bigger the mystery becomes. So huge! [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

Does the mystery ever get solved or does it go on growing?

GURUJI:

That also you have to find out. [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, wouldn't it be a great benefit for us to get a glimpse of that experience, the state in which the Sadguru resides? Even if it's just the smallest glimpse, wouldn't it help to clarify what we are all searching for?

GURUJI:

Once you have that glimpse, then fear disappears and you start loving the stranger. The glimpse invokes interest and curiosity in you, a sense of exploration and enquiry. Then you become an adventurer and you are pushed towards the goal. That glimpse will act as a trigger to make everything clearer – what you want, what you don't want, what you want more of – the goal becomes clear.



DEVOTEE:

Our connection to the Sadguru seems so mysterious. Somehow I feel at home with you, but at the same time I'm also a little nervous.

GURUJI:

Yes, there's fear involved in it. You're honest enough to say that you're afraid, but, in fact, all these people here have fear. [Laughter]

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DEVOTEE:

Fear of what?

GURUJI:

People have different words for it: fear of involvement, fear of losing our independence, fear of what will happen – there's a fear of the unknown. We feel safe with concepts like 'mukti', 'nirvana', and 'Who am I?' because nothing will happen! [Guruji laughs] So we happily play with these ideas and we're happy. But with the guru – it's dangerous! "Ah, be careful! Don't go near him! Stay in the crowd and just look at him from a distance." [Laughter] Yes, it's true!

Actually, there's nothing one can do about the fear. The only thing you can do about it is to familiarize yourself with the strangeness. To most people here when they see me, it's as if I'm a familiar stranger; I don't know any other way to express it. Because in your heart you feel that you know me so intimately, but at the same time I am so strange to you. And the fear that you experience is towards that strangeness, that unknown. So everybody, with different degrees of intensity, is playing with this paradox: the Familiar Stranger, who is yet strangely familiar. And that is the whole play, the whole game, the aesthetics and the joy of it. There is joy in the solving of the mystery, or even in failing to solve it. "Oh, we have solved it!" or "Ah! I realize I haven't solved it at all!" [Laughter]

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All these things will come and go, along with the fear. As I told you, everyone has fear but with different degrees of intensity. The more you familiarize yourself with the strangeness, the more the fear diminishes. When that happens, you start loving the strangeness, and that paradox of strangeness and familiarity becomes the mystic element, the mystery, the missing story.





Vijayawada, 1993



chapter three

Resistance to Love

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, it makes me very sad that you are offering to help me but something is preventing me from taking the help. Why is that so?

GURUJI:

It's due to your past habits of refusing help. Resistances arise because of so many experiences in our lives; it's different for everybody. We've experienced so many traumas that it's created a kind of emotional frigidity in us. Try to get rid of this, then you will experience the help more fully. What is actually causing the resistance is that

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frigidity. Explore every nook and corner of your heart, then abolish it, remove it! Or at least refuse to be a prey to it, to be at the mercy of the mind's pranks. Then you will get help. But you're doing both things: asking and resisting, asking and resisting. That won't take you anywhere, you'll be caught there always. It becomes so frustrating after some time, then that frustration makes you even more frigid. So the more frustration you have, the more frigid you become – it becomes a cycle, a pattern, a habit.

DEVOTEE:

So what's the way out of the cycle?

GURUJI:

That's what I'm trying to tell you. I have given you the diagnosis, now you have to take the treatment: Take the help. How to accept the help? Simply be open, wait without judgement. Don't try to judge the nature of the help; this is not the time to think about that. Take the help fully, unconditionally, wholeheartedly. And if you find yourself judging, resisting or trying to put labels on it, simply stop doing it! Otherwise it reinforces the habit. All these things, even resistances, don't come from the heart, they come from habit. Our mind is habituated to think like that, to feel like that, so again and again it repeats those tendencies. So if at all you want to do something, just stop that habit.

DEVOTEE:

But how to stop a habit?

GURUJI:

It's very difficult. It's like trying to cut off the branch you are sitting on, because *you* are the habit. So, take a new habit, one which will help you not to resist. These new habits are called 'spiritual practices' in many traditions, but to me they are nothing more than acquiring a new habit in order to destroy an old habit, "using one thorn to remove another," as Ramana Maharshi said. Because the new habit is also a thorn.

DEVOTEE:

Are the habits that get in the way labelling and judgement?

GURUJI:

Whatever holds you back and gives you resistance is what you have to stop. Let's explore it fully, whatever it is. That is real exploration. And what comes in the way of exploration are these old habits. So, if you can destroy the old habits without acquiring new ones, good. But if you cannot, then you have to acquire new habits.

All these things – sitting in satsang or meditation, reading or transcribing satsangs, going to Shirdi – are new habits, that's all. And for those who are experiencing love, these things become

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expressions of their love and they enjoy them. For those who are unable to enjoy them, it is just acquiring new habits or spiritual practices. They may experience them differently, but in fact, it's all the same. So try to stop resisting. Stop throwing the help away.



DEVOTEE:

What is the best way to weaken our resistance to the expression of love?

GURUJI:

I think it's not a question of resistance. When love wants to be expressed it seeks some concrete means. When there is no possibility of expressing your love concretely, then the memories of previous expressions return. If those were accompanied by some pain or disappointment, then those feelings are brought up as well. So it is not the weakening of resistance that is needed, but finding new concrete expressions. When new expressions are found and experienced, they slowly replace your old memories. Each person has to seek their own ways.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, is there a difference between doing work

or activities connected to the Guru as an expression of our love and sitting quietly meditating on him?

GURUJI:

If you can sit quietly and meditate, it's good, do it, I never discourage it. The question is, can you do it? If you can, then that's my first preference. Because we can't do it, we engage in activities which strengthen the ego, which increase our sense of separation and kill the experience of love. That's why I ask you to try and express whatever love you are experiencing. Love becomes strengthened when you express it and experience it. So without your knowledge, that which is an obstacle in you slowly gets weakened and removed, because in love there's no space left for yourself. All the spaces are filled by your object of love and anything related to it. Don't try to understand what is happening by analyzing these activities and asking, "What is their purpose? How are they related to my goal? What kind of sadhana is this?" and so on. This kind of questioning is not helpful. Instead, just do it!

I don't use the term 'karma yoga' to talk about these things. I let people engage in activities connected to me solely because they love to do it, that's all. It's the same for me – I also love to do it for them. Just as you can't help but do this work, I also can't help helping you; there are no other reasons. I don't think, "Oh, he is such a deserving

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person, he has done so much for me. I have to do something for him.” There is no calculation. If there’s calculation, I don’t call it love. It is something else – business! I am not a business man and I don’t want people doing business with me.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I have a resistance to the crowds when I come to festivals in Shirdi. How do I overcome this resistance?

GURUJI:

When everyone is together, the power and intensity of the experience is greater. That is why the saints and scriptures recommend attending festivals. At other times it is like sailing when there’s no wind, but attending a festival is like sailing when the wind is favourable, with sails unfurled. With less effort you’ll experience something because so many like-minded people are together and the Sadguru is foremost in everyone’s mind. All the obstructions coming in the way of experiencing love will easily be removed. Just as you said, you have an aversion to crowds – that is an obstruction. When this obstruction is removed, you’ll experience Baba’s love more and respond to it more freely. But, from Baba’s side, the love and care are always the same wherever you are.



GURUJI:

Resistance comes from longstanding habits. When Bhagavan spoke of his death experience, even he expressed a fear of death: first he was afraid something untoward was going to happen. Because he was Bhagavan, the resistance lasted only a few seconds; for us, it might have lasted a few years. [Laughter] But qualitatively it's the same, only quantitatively it may differ.

All I'm trying to say is, don't resist your expression of love. When love is spontaneously trying to express itself, don't suppress it with concepts you have loaded your brain with, like "Oh, we shouldn't do it like this, we should do it like that" or "We should sit like this" or "We should speak like that". There are no standard forms of expression. At least try to stop your resistance toward your own expression. Then your expression becomes fuller and more natural until after some time it takes you over completely.



GURUJI:

For many people, when their love is triggered, they often kill it with jargon and concepts they've learned from the *sastras* and other books, trying to give it a name. That's why I don't give it a particular name. I call it love, a strange familiarity, a pull, an attraction, a baseless and irrational feeling. Good! [Guruji laughs]

And what I see is that many people – especially

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those from the other side of the globe [Guruji laughs] – have a fear of involvement and of losing their individuality. They don't realize this fear is what is making them resist.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I want to be burning, on fire with more devotion. What can I do?

GURUJI:

First, let's realize what we want; doing is next. I think most people love the goal, no doubt about it. But they say, "Oh, my resistances, my patterns!" But what are those resistances? Just think about it. They seem so stupid. First, fear: fear of being deceived, fear of exploitation, fear of involvement or of too much involvement. "Oh, maybe we are too involved, it's not good. It's best to keep our distance." What will happen if you get involved? Exploited! But what is there in you that anybody could exploit? If you have so much, there is no need for you to come and sit here. You like this path and you are coming here, and if at all you need help, you will be helped, otherwise not. Or, if you think there's a better way, yes, happily go and choose that path. But do it, whatever it is! This fear of involvement and attachment is of no use. People come and say, "Oh, I love you, Guruji, I want to be with you always, but I have my resistances,

my patterns.” They have learnt those two words: ‘involvement’ and ‘patterns’.

If at all you love me, the real love, love of the highest order, says, “Yes, exploit me! If anything at all is there, I am ready to be exploited.” I have said a thousand times sitting here, I am ready to be exploited by you. Come on, exploit me! I’m not afraid of being exploited. [Laughter] If you have the capacity, the power, the talent, the ability to exploit me, exploit to the fullest. I’ll enjoy your exploits.

So, if you understand this, you see how unreasonable, how ridiculous, how meaningless these fears are, this fear of commitment – no, ‘commitment’ is too strong a word, maybe ‘involvement’ is better. In what else will you be involved, in order to evolve? And without involvement, how will evolvment come?



DEVOTEE:

In opening my heart, I’m encountering scars from when I’ve been hurt before in love, and those memories make me hold back. Do I just wait and pray that these hurtful scars in my heart will be taken away?

GURUJI:

First, you became aware of these scars when your heart was opening. How to cure or remove them? Love is the balm that will cure them.

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DEVOTEE:

Does the Sadguru trigger that love?

GURUJI:

Yes. The one who opens and triggers it, he will also do the open-heart surgery. [Guruji laughs] The opening is not your act. You can't open your own heart and do the surgery.

The first song of the morning *arati*, written by Tukaram¹, expresses this connection of love with worthiness. He says, "Oh, Panduranga, my Beloved, I do not know whether I have love for you in my heart or not." He doesn't even know whether what he has in his heart is love, whether he is worthy or unworthy, whether he knows how to remember his Beloved's name or not, or whether what he is saying is simply prattle. He begs his Sadguru, "Whatever it may be, whoever I am, whether I am worthy or unworthy, whether I love you or not, please cast your gracious glance on me! Please give me your love!" Not, *can* you give me your love? But, *give me* your love!

So the concept of worthiness has no place when real love is triggered in your heart: you feel you have a right to that love. It's not our worthiness which makes him give it, it's *his* worthiness which gives it. The whole concept of worthiness shifts.

¹ Tukaram (1598-1649) – Medieval poet-saint of the Varkari pilgrimage tradition to Pandharpur, Maharashtra, where Lord Panduranga (Vithoba) is worshipped as a form of Sri Krishna. Five of his poems have been incorporated into the *Shirdi Aratis*, the daily liturgy of hymns to Sai Baba.

We don't get love because we are worthy, but because the Sadguru himself is an embodiment of love, mercy and compassion. Shift the focus from your worthiness to his worthiness, that's enough.





Tirumala, 1995



chapter four

Reading the Lives of Saints

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, do you recommend reading any particular books or scriptures?

GURUJI:

As long as you feel the need to do something, then I would say there are two categories of readers. The first are those who haven't yet found an object that triggers the spontaneous flow of their love. Until that happens, they should read the lives of the saints. In that way, they may get an abstract idea of a saint's qualities, or find a concrete form which triggers their love. Once love is triggered,

the second category would be reading more about everything connected to their object of love; this then becomes an expression and nurturing of their love.

Just as you ask me, “We want to know more about you, where you were born, where you met your Master,” and so on, these kinds of things – what are these questions? Do you really need to know all these things? Are they important knowledge? No, they are an expression of your love. So, at the first stage, one sort of reading; at the second stage, another. But in general, if one feels a need for reading, then my first recommendation is to read the lives of the saints, because they are real. Whatever is my understanding of Ramana, it should be based on his life, on how he lived; that is reality. So, the first category comes before love is triggered; it is the exploration for an object of love. Once we have found it, then our reading becomes an expression of our love.

Actually, even Ramana recommended reading the lives of the saints. One day a Western gentleman was sitting in Bhagavan’s presence, reading a Vedantic commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*. There was no one else in the hall at the time, and it was one of the very rare occasions where Bhagavan spoke directly in English. He asked, “What are you reading?” The devotee replied, “I’m reading this commentary” Then Bhagavan said, “Why don’t you go to the library and read about Milarepa?” Just one year before, Evans-Wentz had visited

the ashram and presented Ramana with a copy of his biography on Milarepa, and now Bhagavan was saying, "Go and read that book!" To close Indian devotees he would also recommend reading the lives of the saints. And it was the lives of saints which also influenced Bhagavan – more than the *Brahma Sutra*, *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Upanishads* – especially the *Periya Puranam* ['Great History'], the classical Tamil work on the lives of the 63 Saivite saints [Nayanmars], which contains no philosophy at all.

Another time, a close devotee of Bhagavan's, called Krishna Bhikshu, the author of the most authentic biography of Sri Ramana in Telugu, *Sri Ramana Leela*, told me that one day he had asked, "Bhagavan, we are enjoying your presence now, but when you pass away, what will be our fate?" Then Bhagavan immediately said, "Why? The biography is there." He was almost suggesting it as a subtle substitute for his presence. So, again, he was referring to the importance of reading the lives of the saints.



DEVOTEE:

It seems impossible to really know Baba through books.

GURUJI:

It depends on what way you want to know him.

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Do you want to know the life of Sai Baba? If that's the case, then, yes, only through books, otherwise how can you know about him?

DEVOTEE:

Yesterday, I was doing *pradakshina* at Gurusthan¹ and I was really wondering how can I know him? There was something there I knew I couldn't read in a book, something more, but I don't know what it is.

GURUJI:

The question of 'more' comes when you think what you're getting is 'less'. First, let's know what is there already in the books. Then, if you still want to know more, we'll see. From the start, already thinking that books are not needed – do you think that's a wise attitude? Anything connected to Baba is important, whether it is in a book or somebody speaks of it, whatever it may be. Why is it important? Why do you want to know? Because you love him. And all these things actually foster your love for him, making your abstract sense of fulfilment more and more concrete. This is the process of concretization.

So I don't undermine the value of knowing the life of a saint; it is important too. Where Baba

¹ Gurusthan (Skt. 'Guru's abode') is the area around the Neem tree under which Baba lived when he first arrived in Shirdi, now located within the temple compound. It is considered a sacred place for *pradakshina* [circumambulation] and meditation.

lived, when he first arrived, where and how he sat, what he ate and did, where he went, what he said. Not only giving importance to his words, but wanting to know even where he answered the call of nature. Now even that place is sacred; it's called Lendi.² Everything connected to him is sacred and dear to us, that is our expression of love. Why do you go to see Khandoba temple? Did Baba stay there? What is the connection? Just because he set foot there once or twice it is significant. So when we have an object of love, everything connected to it becomes important – we become almost greedy to know more. It becomes almost an obsession. That is a characteristic, a quality of love, and a powerful means by which our love expresses itself and grows.

When love is there, you read books with interest and a curious mind, wanting to know everything about your object of love. When you read a book with love, you remember everything; otherwise, you can read and read without remembering anything. So learning is fostered by love, and if you really love Sai Baba, you'll come to know everything about him.



² Lendi is a small garden with a waterfall situated within the temple compound in Shirdi. There, suspended between two trees, hangs a perpetually-burning lamp, called Nanda Deep, which was originally lit by Sai Baba.

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DEVOTEE:

The steps to get things in the material world seem clear, but the steps towards our spiritual goal are not so clear.

GURUJI:

They are also very clear. I am telling you, think of nothing else except Baba, always focus on him. If you talk, talk about Baba. If you think, think about Baba. If you read, read about Baba. Read about his life, you'll understand. It's so clear – talk, think, read – only three words I've said. It's even easier than getting money in the material world. No problem! I have told you how to achieve your goal. It's so simple! [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, to be able to think and speak of Baba, don't we need a clear conception or experience of him to do that?

GURUJI:

That is why I advise you to read the story of his life, to have satsang and to be in contact with him in all these ways. Like that, you'll gain a clear picture, a clear conception, a clear understanding of him.

DEVOTEE:

If one's mind and heart are going to be focussed

on Baba like that all the time, then there has to be a sense of how he permeates all aspects of our life. You yourself have spoken of Baba as being much vaster than the form who lived and died on this planet.

GURUJI:

It's okay. But how he permeates, whether he permeates or not, don't worry about that for now. The point is, I'm asking you to focus on Baba. Somebody once came to me and asked, "I'm in trouble, I need money." I said, "Okay, I'll give you a job."

"But I asked you for money, not a job!" he said.
[Laughter]

"Yes, but why do you think I'm giving you a job? Precisely to get money!" It is just like that. Whatever state you want, I am telling you to focus on Baba. Whether you like it or not, that's the job I'm giving you. Just do it!



DEVOTEE:

When I read about the great saints like Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramana, they seem to go through so much in their lives. I remember you asked once, if we were given the choice, would we really want to live like Ramana? Even though I have an aspiration to get the fruit he got, I'm not sure I want to go through the difficulties of the ripening process.

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GURUJI:

What state did he reach? You speak as if you already know it.

DEVOTEE:

I don't, but we must aspire to something.

GURUJI:

Then aspire for your own fulfilment; they aspired for their fulfilment. That is why I never ask anyone to become a Ramana or a Ramakrishna. You have your own abstract sense of fulfilment, try to concretize it in your own way. Otherwise, it becomes imitation.

DEVOTEE:

Yes, but is there not a value in reading the lives of the saints?

GURUJI:

Yes, but what we have to see is their intensity of application, their dedication and their commitment. If somebody comes and gives you a lecture, "Don't be so intense, be sober, otherwise people will call you mad. Everything should have its limits," then let the lives of the great saints be a guiding light. If at all you want that state, the process should be so intense that people may call you mad! So what?! Or, if you don't want that, simply give it up. There is no question of halfway. And don't try to deceive yourselves by thinking that you are seekers like

those great saints. "Ramana did Self-enquiry, I am also doing Self-enquiry. Ramakrishna cried for Kali, I am also crying for God. Buddha was seeking the Truth, I am also seeking it." You are not! It's their dedication, their commitment and their application that we have to learn from their lives, not that we have to imitate them.

DEVOTEE:

But it seems in their cases they couldn't help being like that.

GURUJI:

If they could help it, they definitely wouldn't have been like that! [Laughter] We are the persons who can help ourselves, that is why we find ourselves like this. So sane, controlled and sober! Hmm? Their intensity was so much that they couldn't help themselves, that's why some people called them mad.



DEVOTEE:

Does a saint have preferences?

GURUJI:

They say they don't have preferences. Ramana Maharshi said he didn't even have a mind to wish something, so how could he have preferences? There were no references to have the preferences!

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[Guruji laughs] And even if they had preferences, so what? They definitely had the preference that we should all become like them. Their first preference was that everyone should be happy and free – that was their preference. Good! Nothing wrong in it. Anyhow, why do you always think about what a saint's state is like? Is it possible for you to really know? There are no means by which you can know how a saint is and how he works. Ramana Maharshi himself, when asked about the state of a *jnani*, said, "Until you gain *jnana*, you cannot understand the state of a *jnani*. There is no use asking about the work of *Iswara* [God] and the rest. Even if I tell you, can you understand it?" Again and again I tell you – mind your own business! Find out what *your* problem is and try to solve it. Let us confine ourselves to that and focus on that.

DEVOTEE:

But asking questions about a saint's state is somehow an expression of our urge to understand our own longing.

GURUJI:

To satisfy that urge is the meaning of reading the lives of the saints. Have that urge, go on exploring it, but always remember that you are only exploring. Don't jump to conclusions. Don't think that you know. If you ask me about that state and I answer, you take it as a conclusion and assume that you know, then your exploration stops there.

If you want to know whether Baba had preferences or not, explore! Go and read Baba's life. Once, twice, thrice, a hundred, a thousand times! Read it, try to find out! And when you find the answer, tell me, then I'll know too. And, whether it is true or not, I will also explore again. But your minds have become such that you only want answers; this kills the spirit of enquiry, the thrill, the excitement. It's good to have the questions and to try to find the answers, but it's the exploring itself that is so beautiful! Explore!





Sbirdi, 2008



chapter five

Effort from the Heart

GURUJI:

In many religious philosophies there is confusion about whether the state of nirvana is gradual or instantaneous. Some people say it is sudden, like satori, while others say it happens gradually, in stages, and that even the Buddha got it in stages. Still others deny this, saying that Buddha got nirvana instantaneously; his was a sudden, effortless realization. What is the truth? The truth lies somewhere in-between the two.

I will give you an example: You go to a mango orchard and see a beautiful, ripe mango growing on a tree. You pick up a stone and try to knock it down. You aim one stone and miss the target. You

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throw another stone and miss. Seven, eight, nine stones miss. The tenth stone hits the target and it falls. Tell me: did the mango fall with ten stones or one? Hmm? Tell me! If it's with one, you'd have got it with the first stone. And if you say ten stones, did all ten hit the target? No, it came down with only one stone. But the point is, the one which hit the mango was the tenth. The previous nine stones gave you the art of throwing accurately so that the tenth hit the target. Once one stone hits the target it's over, but the whole process is learning the art of hitting it. For some, it may take ten times, for others three, for others, it may take a hundred or even a thousand – or only one. If you really want the mango, you'll go on throwing until you learn the art and hit it. I say 'art', not 'science'.

DEVOTEE:

What do you mean by 'art'?

GURUJI:

Do you play badminton? When the shuttlecock comes, do you calculate its force and angle? Do you calculate its mass, the speed of the wind against it and the surface of your racquet? And then, after calculating all this – that squared, this squared – do you hit it? Does anybody do that? [Laughter]

First, when the shuttlecock comes, a beginner misses it. But with practice, you learn the art of returning it. You simply come to know. Spontaneously and effortlessly you hit the shuttle in such a

way that it goes across the net. A good athlete is an artist because he doesn't calculate.



DEVOTEE:

To make effort, do we need to have an experience or glimpse of what we seek?

GURUJI:

It is not necessary. If you are really vexed with your present condition, it is enough. Either you should feel the need to get something or to get rid of something. Often both are not there; we are not so anxious to get rid of something, and we are not burning to get something. So, our so-called sadhana becomes almost routine, something artificial which doesn't touch our heart. When I say effort is not needed, I'm referring to that routine kind of effort. But, when love for something is triggered, or you are so vexed with your present condition of being that you want to get rid of it, that is the basis for right effort.

If you are about to drown, you grab for even a blade of grass hoping it may save you – you have no choice. You don't think, "Is this blade of grass really going to save me, considering my weight and the velocity of flow?" You don't think of all these things, you simply grab whatever comes to you. This is spontaneous effort, made from great need.

When love is triggered, you want to experience it more and express it. That process may appear from the outside as an effort, but it's not really an effort. I call it an expression, because effort is such a misleading term, implying a goal, a practice, a path and so on. I am not asking you to tread a path. I haven't defined a path or promised any destination. I'm talking about spontaneous expressions of love, helpless expressions. You may call them effort, I don't mind. They are not needed to achieve anything but to experience something. They are not a means towards an end, they are themselves fulfilling. But, for those in whom this love is not triggered, even if I sit here and give discourses for a thousand years, they won't understand it. They may still ask, "What is the difference between this effort and that effort?" That difference is so subtle and so subjective that you can't define it or differentiate it. So, if you ask me the question whether effort is needed or not, what can I say? In one sense, yes; in another sense, no. So, it is futile to enter into discussion, or to form a dogma or a doctrine claiming that effort is needed or is not needed, or to say, "It all happens by grace." This doesn't mean anything. First, we have to understand what effort is, why people make effort, what their attitude is towards effort – all the different shades of meaning and connotations that effort has for different people.



GURUJI:

So effort should come from the heart, not from determination or some kind of discipline. It should mingle and fuse with your emotion. Once effort is fused with your emotion, then everything you do becomes part of it, and that emotion allows your focus to be there naturally in all things. The effort becomes an expression of your emotion. That is why I say meditation is not a way or means to achieve something, but instead to relish an experience. That is real meditation. Just imagine, you love Baba, but you haven't had a chance to sit with him for some time. Then, finally, you are happily sitting there enjoying the experience. Enjoying, not struggling to get something. If you really love Baba, do you need to make an effort to focus on him? You simply experience him. For instance, after taking a meal you feel satisfied and no longer hungry, so you take a siesta, happily relaxing. That is meditation. And how does this happen? From love. As long as you have love, it'll come naturally. Then everything becomes part of it. Everything becomes meditation, because all our actions are expressing our experience. That is why I say 'experience and express'. That is the 'express-way'!

[Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, does realization depend upon our efforts?

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GURUJI:

How realization happens, when it happens, what efforts are needed, whether practices culminate in satori or moksha or are totally unconnected to them – all these questions are just other koans in the field of spirituality. When the Buddha attained nirvana, was it because he had practised all kinds of meditations and yogas, studied different schools of philosophy, and performed austerities for six years? He came to Bodhgaya and sat down under a bodhi tree. He felt that all his extreme efforts were futile and useless. He said, “I will sit here until I find the solution to my question and discover the truth. Otherwise, I won’t get up from this seat, let me die here!” He sat, and then he attained enlightenment.

DEVOTEE:

Isn’t it a bit like the example you give of the stones and the mango?

GURUJI:

In one way yes, because Buddha realized the futility of all those practices and schools, and maybe that’s how he got the determination to sit like that. But sitting there and getting what he got, in another way, was totally unconnected to what he had practised. So we can’t say it is a culmination of practice, and we can’t simply brush aside practice saying it has nothing to do with it. It has something to do with it, but nothing to do with it!

That is the mystery.

The persons who have realized it, they say that it was sudden, instantaneous, effortless. "It just came to me," they say. And that is like the tenth stone. So in one way it's gradual, in another way sudden.



GURUJI:

For a period of time, after I came to my Master, I also explored different techniques of meditation and all these things – almost the whole gamut of spiritual practices. But the fulfilment I got had nothing to do with all the things I had done. Maybe they all added up to that experience, like the nine stones in the mango tree story, before the tenth stone hits the mark. But, when I explored all those techniques, my need was to solve a personal problem, not because they were sadhanas prescribed by the scriptures, nothing like that. It was an urgent problem for me and I just had to find some way through it, one way or another.



GURUJI:

A Buddhist will say, "You have to earn your own nirvana. Buddhas only show the way and you have to tread it." And on the devotional path they say, "There's nothing you can do, effort is not needed.

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Everything comes by Guru's grace." Which is true? Both are correct. And both are wrong, if you stick to the extreme positions. The truth lies somewhere in-between the two.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you said we need to make effort to change our patterns, but you also said we can't do anything and Baba will take care. It seems to be paradoxical.

GURUJI:

There are two reasons for that. One is, you don't trust that the Sadguru will do it. So you always ask, "What am I to do? Any practice, any meditation technique, any sadhana?" You still have a need to do something, to make some effort. The second reason is, effort is needed so that things don't get worse. [Laughter]

Baba has bought you a ticket. He has put you into the train in the first class compartment. All you have to do is stay on the train and not get down somewhere on the way. That's all. But if you see a beautiful station and think, "Oh, I want to get down here," then sticking to the train feels like a big effort. Then Baba has to give you an instruction, "Don't do it! Stay on the train, stick to it." It feels like an effort, but in fact it is not.

DEVOTEE:

But isn't staying on the train choiceless?

GURUJI:

If it is choiceless, then no effort is needed and we stay happily. The problem is, we are not in a state of choicelessness. We still have so many choices, so many things to choose from, and Baba is one among these. When there is only one choice we don't call it choice – there's nothing to choose.



DEVOTEE:

For me, it's more helpful to be told I have to make an effort, so that finally I'll come to the point where I'll give up making effort. But if someone told me from the start, "You don't need to make effort," I don't think I'd get anywhere.

GURUJI:

I'm not saying effort is not needed. I'm not saying that. Only know the limitations of effort. You make effort because you need it and you have to do what is needed. So you learn all this effort is needed to make you realize its fruitlessness, its limitations. What's going to give you the experience is grace, not effort, and when it comes you receive it, not achieve it. Effort only makes you receptive to grace. Otherwise, even if grace is given, you aren't able to receive it.



DEVOTEE:

What do you think the Buddha meant by 'right effort'?

GURUJI:

It can be understood in many ways, all of which point to the same thing. First, why do we make effort? The other day I was explaining that all human endeavours, all our efforts, are consciously or unconsciously directed to the concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment. If we keep making effort without knowing exactly what it is we want, we will realize our efforts are fruitless. So, this would not be called 'right effort'. Also, all effort implies a sense of achievement, and effort done with a strong sense of achievement is futile in most cases and bound to fail. So, it also is not the 'right effort' that the Buddha spoke of.

Just two days ago, a boy was telling me his problem in trying to study for his examinations. "I am studying and studying, preparing for my examinations, but I can't remember a thing." But, if you really look closely, that same boy who can't remember a sentence he has repeated a thousand times, can immediately tell you the words to a song from a movie released ten years ago. He'll tell you which movie, which director and even repeat the whole dialogue. Is his memory so poor? Or, he

can still recall all the characters and the author of a novel he read fifteen years ago, even though he only read it once and never tried to remember it. But, when he's trying to memorize something in his studies, he fails to remember even a single fact.

So, an effort which isn't experienced as effort is the 'right effort'. It's so effortless it doesn't feel like an effort at all. We make effort when we are pulled to do something but, at the same time, we are drawn in different directions by our other pulls, so we fail. But when all our pulls, all the emotions in our heart are harmonized and put into order, then the 'effort' springing from that harmony is 'right effort'. That's why in Sanskrit it's called *samyag vyayama*. In fact 'right effort' is not an exact translation for what the Buddha said. 'Samyag' is usually translated as 'right', but actually it means, 'that which has *samma*', a kind of evenness and unity springing from a complete and perfect harmony of the heart. Then everything we do, everything we see, everything we speak, everything we think, expresses that harmony. And that is right effort, right seeing, right thinking, right speaking, and right living.





Shirdi, 2004



chapter six

Topsy-Turvy in a Well

Baba's account in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*:

"I was hungry and thirsty and I was moved by the Vanjari's extraordinary love; we thought ourselves very learned but were strangers to kindness. The Vanjari [tradesman] was a quite illiterate, unqualified fellow and belonged to a low caste. Still, he had love in his heart and asked us to eat his bread. In this way, he who loves others disinterestedly is really enlightened and I thought acceptance of his hospitality was the best beginning of getting knowledge. So, very respectfully, I accepted the loaf of bread offered, ate it and drank water.

Then he said, "Would you like to come with me? I will show you what you want, but he alone will be successful who believes in what I say." Then he [the Guru] took me to a well, tied my feet with a rope and hung me, head downwards and feet up, from a tree near the well. I was suspended three feet above the water, which I could not reach with my hands or with my mouth. After suspending me in this manner he went away, no one knew where. After 4 or 5 hours he returned and, after taking me out quickly, asked me how I fared. "In bliss supreme, I was. How can a fool like me describe the joy I experienced?" I replied. On hearing my answer the Guru was much pleased with me, drew me near him and, stroking my head with his hand, kept me with him! He took care of me as tenderly as a mother bird does of her young ones.

He put me into his school, how beautiful it was! There I forgot my parents, all my attachments were snapped and I was liberated easily. I thought that I should embrace him and keep staring at him always. My Guru became my all in all, my home, my mother and father, everything. All my senses left their places and concentrated themselves in my eyes, and my sight was centred on him. Thus, my Guru was my sole object of meditation and I was conscious of none else. While meditating on him, my mind and intellect were silent and I had thus to keep quiet and bow to him in silence."

– *Shri Sai Satcharita* by G. R. Dabholkar, adapted by N. V. Gunaji, Chapter 32 [edited].



GURUJI:

Baba said he was in search of his guru and when he met him, his guru gave him food. Food means life. His guru put him topsy-turvy, upside down, into a well and Baba experienced unbounded happiness! That's what he said. Sai Baba often used to speak in an allegorical or symbolic way. He said his guru was a *vanjari*, a tradesman, who had a low status in society, who worked and earned his own bread. And he's the one who gave him mukti, who put him topsy-turvy in the well. Everything he thought was turned topsy-turvy, his whole being was turned upside down. On many occasions in life we can feel turned upside down, but when it happened to Baba through such a competent Sadguru, he experienced unbounded happiness. After that, he loved his guru so much he would go on looking affectionately at his face day and night. The guru was his sole object of meditation and Baba had no other goal but him. Like this, he said he spent about twelve years with him, although that may also be symbolic, of course, the twelve years.



GURUJI:

Baba said that when he was looking at his guru he forgot himself. All his vital forces became

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concentrated in his sight and he was in ecstasy. Even later, when he was apart from him, he was never deprived of his company; his guru was always with him. And that's what Baba also tells us, "Wherever you go in the wide world, I am with you, my abode is in your heart. Even if you are beyond the seven seas, my watchful glance will be upon you."

DEVOTEE:

Is this similar to what happened with Rumi and his guru, Shams, when they stayed in a room together for many weeks?¹

GURUJI:

Rumi said that he was in a state of ecstasy in the presence of his Beloved. And even later, after Shams disappeared, Rumi's ecstasy continued. Shams gave him a taste of ecstasy and it continued his whole life. That theme is there in the Sufi tradition – spending an intense, prolonged time with the Sadguru, the *murshid*, experiencing ecstasy and then the ecstasy continuing even afterward when out in the world. But don't take the utterances of a Sufi saint literally; they may be either symbolic or actual happenings, we can't

¹ Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273 CE), held to be one of the greatest Sufi poets and mystics, whose poetry in Persian was largely inspired by devotion to his teacher, the legendary Sufi mystic, Shams-i Tabrizi (d.1247 CE).

really say. Take, for example, the story of Baba hanging topsy-turvy in the well. There were certain practices of the Sufi saints which coincide with the practice of hanging upside down.²



DEVOTEE:

How are we to understand this story of Baba hanging upside down in the well?

GURUJI:

It's not that he was simply hanging in the well for twelve years. After he had a glimpse of what he was seeking, he came out of the well and stuck to the source of his bliss, his Sadguru. The aim was to get the bliss, not to remain in the well! [Guruji laughs] If we look at it symbolically, the well is not the well and the water is not the water. The well signifies depth. If we are having a spiritual experience, we feel as if we are going deeper, actually diving. Even when we need to find a solution to a question we are told, "Dive deeply, think deeply!" Not that there is actually some depth, but when we go inside, it is experienced as depth. The goal is not the well, but the water, which signifies bliss. Baba stuck to the one who gave him that bliss, his

² It was a rare ascetic practice called *Chilla-i-Ma'kusa* associated with the Chishti Order; see *Shri Sai Satcharita* by G. R. Dabholkar (Hemadpant), Tr. Kher (New Delhi: Sterling, 1999), p. 531, n.5.

Sadguru, and was totally focused on him with love. He didn't say that he had done sadhana, tantra, Self-enquiry or anything.

If we were to recast Baba's account today it could be read like this: "My Guru made me see the depths of my own being – there all my so-called knowledge, patterns and ways of knowing became topsy-turvy – and I had a glimpse of bliss. Then I stayed with the one who made me experience that." Read it that way and you'll understand the whole mystery of Baba's well experience.



DEVOTEE:

What is bliss?

GURUJI:

Fulfilment, happiness, a state where nothing is missing, where there's a sense of having everything. That experience is possible for a person like Sai Baba who was capable of focusing all his senses and vital forces on his guru and staying twelve years with him. The glimpse of that experience can come in different ways. For some, the Sadguru triggers something in their heart, a sense that, "Here, we get something" – a sense of assurance, of happiness – something inexplicable, mysterious, an attraction which gives an unpromised promise of getting fulfilment. This is what I call the abstract sense of fulfilment and the Sadguru is a concrete symbol of that.

DEVOTEE:

So, if the focus is not there in the same way as it was for Baba, will the experience be diluted?

GURUJI:

It's not actually about the focus but the readiness for such a focus. Before Baba had the well experience he didn't have the focus but he had the potentiality. He was ready for such a focus and the experience gave it to him. Before, his sense of fulfilment was abstract and then, in the well, he experienced it in a concrete way through the grace of his guru, and afterward his focus remained on him.

DEVOTEE:

So what does this readiness depend upon?

GURUJI:

The harmony of our pulls, of our emotions – that is the readiness. It is the dish in which the experience is served. I'm not saying this is the qualification. Don't go to the extreme of thinking that you have to be qualified in this way, otherwise you'll always be seeking what you don't really want and you won't get it. And, even if you get it, you won't be happy. We get according to our nature, our being, our needs and our desires, and then we evolve towards that harmony.



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DEVOTEE:

You have said that when difficulties arise we have to experience them. How can we be with unpleasant experiences while they are going on?

GURUJI:

If you can withstand it, you have to explore in your own way when you are in the middle of the difficulty. That exploration, that effort itself, will give you the strength not to run away but to face the situation in a new way, and to investigate what is actually lacking in yourself. We need that strength to get the fulfilment which is our very own, and which we have earned.

DEVOTEE:

Do we have to earn it?

GURUJI:

Even with the great saints, we see their need was so much and they had reached such maturity in their seeking for fulfilment that the Sadguru gave them the mystic experience. But it is after this that their so-called spiritual practice begins. Look at Baba's life. He met his guru. His guru hung him topsy-turvy in a well and he got that experience of bliss. But that was the beginning, not the end. He spent twelve years with his guru, totally focused on him. Is it because he was totally focused on his guru that he got it or did he get it simply by grace? And if he got it, why did

he have to spend twelve years with his guru? Is that earning it or getting it by grace? He earned it, but he earned it in such a way that he earned it with grace. If you understand this dichotomy, then you'll understand whether one has to earn it or whether it happens by grace. The distinction is so subtle and so fine, it is something in-between. And for the one who experiences it, there are no words to express it.



GURUJI:

One thing is very important: don't think in extremes of black and white. Don't judge anything unless you have the sufficient resources to do so. We only have a series of hypotheses. The truth cannot be judged or understood in black and white terms – "If it is not like this, then it should be like that; if it is not like that, then it should be like this" – the mind is trained to think in these patterns. In every satsang I show you a series of these kinds of paradoxes, these enigmas, and how the truth lies somewhere in-between. Trying to see that 'in-between', reading between the lines, is the art of life, the art of spirituality. And if you want someone to spell it out, to write lines about it, you'll miss the target because the truth lies beyond the lines. If you are happy with the meaning you get while reading the lines, no problem. But the problem is, you are not satisfied

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with it, so I'm trying to show you the meaning by redirecting your attention to the subtle beauty in-between the lines – it's poetry, not prose!

Actually, that is what Baba meant when his guru showed him bliss when he hung him topsy-turvy in the well. Does the quality of the bliss have anything to do with hanging upside down? Whether he was this way or that way, the bliss is the same.

DEVOTEE:

So in this context, what does topsy-turvy actually mean?

GURUJI:

It means the patterns and process by which we acquire knowledge and understand things have become topsy-turvy. His patterns were broken and destroyed and that was his guru's way, his poetry.



DEVOTEE:

So there must be another way of knowing that we're not familiar with because of our habitual way of thinking and understanding things.

GURUJI:

You understand in patterns only. I'm asking you to break your patterns and the most difficult pattern

is the pattern in which you understand things. You think your understanding and concepts are the patterns, but the way you understand is itself a pattern. It's at a very subtle level in you. I'm asking you to look into that.

DEVOTEE:

It sounds like you have to remake us, Guruji!

GURUJI:

That's what I'm trying to do! [Laughter] That's why I'm trying to break your patterns and divert your attention to the subtle beauty in-between the lines. What I say – the lines – is not that important. I'm only concerned about the process.



GURUJI:

One day you'll see the reality as it is. When you see the reality as it is, that's when you'll have the guts to see real love. Because then real communication begins and the old interpretations stop, when the mind doesn't work anymore. Then you see the reality. In the meantime it will go on. I think this is why all you people are here: to stop the interpretations of the mind. You have to realize that these interpretations are false, so some experience will happen that shatters your concepts and patterns. And after some time the mind becomes tired, exhausted, and then it says,

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“Ah, no more interpretations!” Then it starts seeing the reality. Then you have the first glimpses of bliss.



GURUJI:

Baba’s idea is that our concepts, our so-called knowledge, has to become topsy-turvy, and then we’ll experience bliss. The Sadguru first blasts our concepts and makes them topsy-turvy, whatever the concepts are. There are no good or bad concepts, concepts are concepts.

DEVOTEE:

Spiritual traditions use so many techniques to break our patterns and concepts. What is Baba’s way then?

GURUJI:

He simply breaks the pattern. Without need of a technique the pattern is gone! It can happen at any moment – in a satsang, or when we are just looking at a mountain or at the Ganges – things we have already done a thousand times. Something happens in us – and suddenly a pattern is broken. That’s all! Then you find you are not the same person, your way of thinking changes. What happened we do not know, but we notice something has changed in us. Something has simply been taken away and something else has come in. We feel we are new,

Topsy-Turvy in a Well

that the path is new, and the whole world takes on
a new dimension. That Baba can do!





Shirdi, 2005



chapter seven

The Unending Love Story

GURUJI:

Real love needs to be expressed.

DEVOTEE:

What are the ways we can express our love?

GURUJI:

First, experience the love, then automatically the expression will come. Everyone has a different way. If there are five children in a house, will they all love in the same way? Each will have his own expression. It is enough that we don't retard or suppress the expression with our mighty reason

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and rationality. I stress emotion not because I am afraid of the intellect or intellectual analysis, but because I know they are limited and incomplete. A mother loves her child unconditionally, without reasoning or analyzing.

Real security comes out of love. People believe faith gives security, but it is not faith, it is love. Love elicits faith. Do you think the relationship between the child and the mother is one of faith or love? A child has immense faith in the mother, yes, but why? Because she loves the mother, she depends on the mother, she is the child of the mother, that's all. It is not faith based on some reason or logic or theory. It is not based on the qualifications of the mother.

DEVOTEE:

But doesn't love take time to grow?

GURUJI:

It grows when it is expressed, it doesn't grow of its own accord. First, we must be aware that we have love, then the more it's expressed, the more it grows. What are all the rituals of bhakti? They are expressions of love. Just as a father, when he comes home from work, brings a toy or a dress for his child. The child does not want a dress or toy, she just wants her father to give her something. The more he starts giving, the more her attachment grows to the father and the more the father is attached to her. Does the father ever say,

“No, my love should be kept in my heart and not expressed, after all, what is the use of all these expressions?” Does a father ever speak like that? Rather, if he doesn’t express his love, if he doesn’t hold his child and kiss her, he himself will come to realize after some time that his love for the child has become dry. So love should always be expressed. All these rituals, people doing namas-kar, lighting incense, offering flowers, are manifestations of bhakti, they are expressions of love. As long as they are expressions of love, they are real rituals, otherwise they are worthless. Any act becomes a puja if it is an expression of love.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, can devotion be encouraged, or does it come spontaneously?

GURUJI:

The initial triggering of devotion should happen spontaneously. But once it has sprouted you can nurture it in various ways. Those things we do when we love someone, those same actions, in their effect, will trigger the same emotions. For instance, if someone composes a beautiful piece of music and, enraptured, plays it for you on his violin, then you may also become elated.

When the father feels love and holds his child and kisses her, it is a spontaneous expression of

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his love. But even when the feeling of love is not there, if he just holds her and kisses her, the same emotion is triggered.

DEVOTEE:

So action triggers emotion?

GURUJI:

Yes, you can see it in all your actions, not only with devotion. And therein lies the meaning of ritual. As long as this purpose is served, the ritual has meaning. All rituals are there because of this. Originally, they were expressions of love, actions which expressed some emotion, and by doing them, or re-enacting them, we feel the same emotion.

DEVOTEE:

But don't rituals sometimes become just mechanical?

GURUJI:

If they become mechanical there is no meaning in rituals. Then you can throw away the ritual. But, even if at some point they feel meaningless, by going back and re-enacting them, they may trigger something in you. If you have no other way, then that is the best resort to trigger your emotions and to nurture them.



DEVOTEE:

You often mention that the relationship between guru and devotee is like that between mother and child. If so, do we always remain a child? Does the child ever grow up?

GURUJI:

We are all children, grown-up children! [Laughter] Even if you don't agree, that is how I see you, whether you like it or not. What makes the child a child is how she relates to the mother. Even though she feels a sense of helplessness and insecurity, it's not expressed like that. She feels entitled to have the mother's care – it is her right because of her love. The child doesn't thank the mother for giving milk, why should she? It is the mother's natural response. The child experiences the help rather than the helplessness. As long as the mother or father is there, she feels fully connected and carefree.

DEVOTEE:

So it's okay if I demand your help?

GURUJI:

If you feel like a child! [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, sometimes when I sit with you in silence,

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I feel a kind of deep pain or sadness in my heart.
Why is this happening to me?

GURUJI:

It's good. Some people experience pain because they feel they are losing something, there is a sense of loss. Then pain can come. It is another kind of pain though, a sweet pain: it's painful, but we like it! That is why you come here again and again to sit with me. [Guruji laughs] Why do I call it sweet? Because again we want it, and when that element of love is there, the pain doesn't seem like pain. This 'pain' now, for instance, of sitting here late at night, in the cold, and you're shivering, is not painful if you have love.

When a child stands on the parent's chest and bounces up and down, it can be painful, yes, but we say, "Oh, ow, ow! Ah, again! Come on, again!" [Laughter] We love it! So it is the love which makes the whole thing different. It is a pain with a difference, suffering with a difference. And it is longing with a difference, waiting with a difference.



DEVOTEE:

Should we be doing things for God instead of for ourselves? And if we do, will our love increase?

GURUJI:

The child does things for itself, not for the father.

She plays for her own enjoyment, but she knows her toys are gifts of the father, and the more she plays and loves to play, the more she loves the parent who has given her the toys. But though she plays with the toys, the principle underlying everything is love for the one who has given the gifts. Your life, your whole life, is a gift. You may say it comes from God or Nature, or whatever you want to call it, but it is not the result of your own effort, that much is certain. That is why life is a gift.

Play with this toy of life happily, in ecstasy, but be aware that it is a gift. That awareness will keep you as a child. The child is aware of this, but, as it grows, it starts thinking independently and forgets that these gifts have been given by the parents. They are the cause and its life is the effect, but the child forgets this – the fact that its very life is a gift from the parents.



GURUJI:

Satsang is just a pretext for all of us to sit together, an opportunity to express our love. Whatever way you find to express love – just do it. That is sadhana, that is bhakti, that is yoga, *seva*, whatever you call it. Let's find out how to relate to our object of love, how to express our love and experience it. The more you express, the more you experience, so expression is needed.

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DEVOTEE:

Sometimes, when I try to concentrate, the mind refuses to do so.

GURUJI:

I am not against concentration, but I don't give much importance to it. I give more importance to the heart, to emotion, to love. Where there is strong emotion, there the mind will be easily concentrated. Concentration is a by-product of love. Once you really love Baba, then your thoughts will always be concentrated on him. That is the natural law and function of the mind, to be always concentrated on whatever or whoever we love. What effort do we make there? For example, if a boy loves a girl, he'll always be thinking of her, and in any other girl he sees, he sees *that* girl, his beloved. He can't forget her. He can't focus on anything else – his studies, his business, his daily routine – his mind is so concentrated on her. What yoga is he doing to concentrate like that? [Guruji laughs] Nothing! Simply, he loves. If you get that love, concentration happens automatically, as a by-product of love.



DEVOTEE:

How do we increase our love?

GURUJI:

By expressing it and experiencing it. Just look how it happens in mundane love. A boy and a girl see each other, and, at first sight, something is triggered [Guruji laughs] and they like one another, but does it end there? No, they make a date and go out for dinner. First, it's a half-hour, then the next date is two hours, then three hours, and by constant company their love grows. Then, at some point, they start missing each other and want more contact, more expression! "Do you like white? Then I'll put on a white dress," just to please the other, their object of love. This is how love is expressed. And by expressing it, we experience it more. It increases to such an extent that we feel, "Oh, I can't live without you, you are my life, I want to lose myself and be one with you," all this stuff will come. [Guruji laughs] Isn't it like this in ordinary, mundane love? The same principle is there in devotional love. So, it is contact! Whenever there is constant contact, the attachment grows and the love grows. The way to keep the love that you have experienced, intact – that small, flickering flame of love – is contact! And that you can do in many different ways.



DEVOTEE:

Sometimes, I feel there is too much distance between me and my Beloved. Internally too, I want to be closer.

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GURUJI:

That is good. It is the nature of love to seek intimacy, until, finally, it wants to become one. That is what you see in the case of Sri Ramakrishna and the Mother. When he was worshipping the Mother and offering flowers to her, after some time he would throw the flowers on himself. He felt the Mother so much within that he couldn't find any difference between them. Spontaneously, his hand moved that way, but he wasn't worshipping himself, he was worshipping the Mother. He felt her so much inside that he felt completely one with her.



DEVOTEE:

Love is triggered at the beginning when we meet the Sadguru. What is the end?

GURUJI:

From our side it is the beginning, the beginning of a very long, unending love story. The end is always to become one with him, as I told you. What is the culmination of any love story, even in ordinary love? To experience oneness. It is the same here with the Sadguru, but in a more profound way.

DEVOTEE:

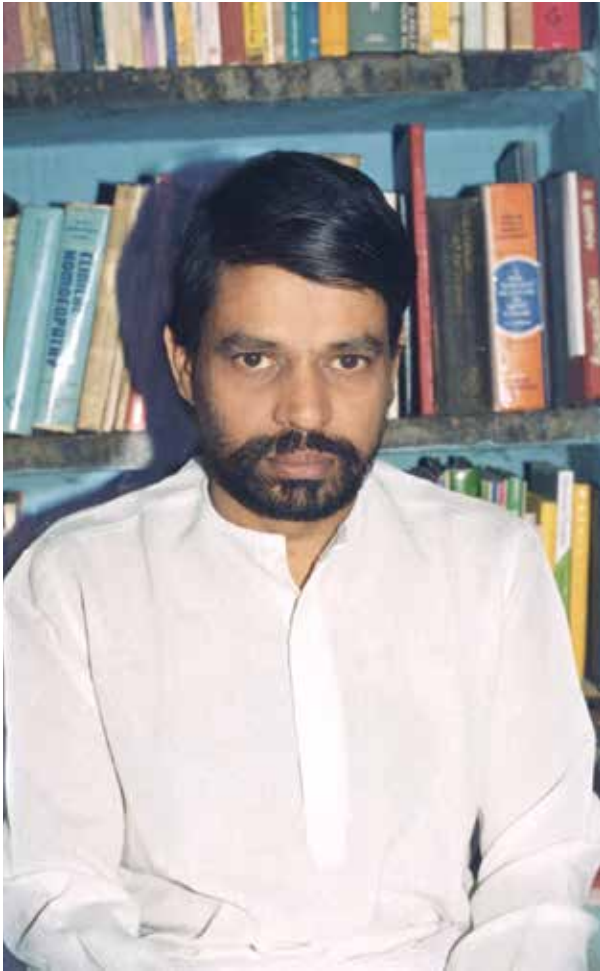
So the love we experience at the beginning is different from the love at the end?

GURUJI:

No, it's not different, it's not a practice or anything like that. Initially, the love triggered feels vague and abstract, then it gets more and more tangible until it's so concrete it's not different from us. Whatever happens in between is the unfoldment of that experience. I don't call it growth or development, but unfoldment.

When a bud unfolds, it blossoms into a flower. It's not that something is added in order to make it become a flower, or that the flower is different from the bud. It is the bud which unfolds into the flower. That is why I call it unfoldment, a blossoming. Something which is folded, hidden underneath some folds, gets slowly 'un-folded' – that is unfoldment – we see what is already there. It only becomes clearer, more concrete, 'dis-covered'. Removing the cover is 'dis-covering', isn't it? And seeing what is real, underneath the folds and the covers, is realizing! And liberating the Real from its covers, from its folds, is liberation. Whatever you want to call it, the words all point to this.





Sbirdi, 1990



chapter eight

Boring into Boredom

DEVOTEE:

Why do people try to escape reality by indulging in bad habits?

GURUJI:

Because they want to escape their feelings of worthlessness and the boredom of their lives. People try to escape through entertainment, TV, movies, novels, newspapers, chit-chatting, things like that. And, if that is not sufficient, some try alcohol and drugs. Then they may get addicted because it takes them to another state where they can escape from reality.

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DEVOTEE:

Why should they want to escape?

GURUJI:

Because their reality is so unbearable. First, you should try to know what you are negating, what you are escaping from. Usually, people don't know. Their life is simply unbearable for them, it's so boring, so they want something exciting, then they get attracted to these things. They search and search for that excitement. That is why people do all kinds of weird things, adventures which are actually dangerous to their lives. You can see how the interest in extreme sports is growing everywhere – sky diving, wild white water rafting, bungee jumping – trying to get more excitement, to escape their boredom. They have everything, nothing is lacking for them, but their comforts have made them immune to the spice of life, so there's no end to their search for excitement. And one of the reasons why people take drugs is because it affects their time sense. That is why so many so-called sadhus, doing spiritual practices, do this.

DEVOTEE:

Why is it so pleasurable to lose the sense of time?

GURUJI:

Time is the most difficult thing for us. We have to live our life somehow, so we try to find one

thousand ways to kill time, to pass the time. That is why all the pastimes are there.



DEVOTEE:

When you were talking about our conditionings you spoke about removing one pattern with another pattern. When all the patterns are removed, what remains?

GURUJI:

What will happen? Once the patterns are removed, you will have to live, just like you do now! [Guruji laughs] That is our problem. That is why you don't give up your patterns. Patterns are there to entertain you, to hold your ego. If there is no need for that, then the patterns will automatically wither away. If the experience of boredom and the craving for pastimes are conquered, your patterns will be broken.

DEVOTEE:

Did you say we have to conquer the experience of boredom?

GURUJI:

Yes, boredom. It's a wonderful experience! If you go deep into it you will get so many insights. This question of boredom looks trivial to us, but

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just think about what the experience of boredom is – why we feel bored and what is it actually that is feeling bored? Think about it. Don't give a ready-made answer. It appears easy because we have taken it so lightly, but it is not so easy. Why do we need pastimes? Why aren't we able to sit quietly for some time without doing anything? Or without thinking? After some time we'll create our own pastimes, producing our own movies inside our minds. We are the producer, director, actor and scriptwriter! Why? If you look deeply into it you'll realize a lot of things and have many good insights. It is so vital, and it shows you how hollow you are. Then you'll realize how beautifully T. S. Elliot has written his poem, *The Hollow Men*.

DEVOTEE:

You said we keep our patterns for our own entertainment?

GURUJI:

Not just entertainment, it is our need. They support our ego. If they are not there, it feels as if our ego is crumbling, so it's almost a natural reaction that we don't want to lose them or give them up.



DEVOTEE:

I have been looking into boredom, but I don't understand what it means to conquer it.

GURUJI:

Enquiring into boredom is just one way to break your patterns. For some people it opens a gate and they get an insight. Immediately they say, "Oh, my God, for so long I've been doing this! This is such an easy way to catch hold of my patterns." Perhaps this kind of approach doesn't suit you. There are a thousand ways you can approach the subject. You have to choose the way that appeals to your heart, what is suitable for you.



DEVOTEE:

When we fill our lives with pastimes, escaping from our hollowness, are we deceiving ourselves?

GURUJI:

We don't deliberately try to deceive ourselves. In fact, it is our unwillingness or resistance to face the truth of what is inside us – what we are or are not – that makes us fill our boredom. Our efforts to close our eyes to the truth of ourselves could be defined as self-deception. It's unpleasant for us to come face to face with our hollowness, our sense of inadequacy or worthlessness. So, to cover it up we resort to many things, keeping ourselves busy with some new interest, some new pastime or entertainment. Of course, everyone does this to some extent and in most cases it's not harmful. But when the effort to conceal or hide assumes

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abnormal dimensions, it can become almost like a disease.

In one way, though, all people deceive themselves, so it is quite natural. And the opposite of this is the state of the saint – the state of Self-realization. The opposite of Self-realization is self-deception, isn't it? [Laughter] What we have is self-deception. What great saints like Baba and Ramana have is Self-realization.



GURUJI:

Everyone feels boredom. What exactly is happening when you feel bored? Try to look into that hole, that bore, that emptiness in your boredom and you can see your own self. But you don't look deeply enough into your bore.

DEVOTEE:

What is a bore?

GURUJI:

A hole. If you want water, you dig a bore in the earth. People call it a 'borewell' in India.

DEVOTEE:

But, before I can investigate my boredom, I've already filled it up and it's too late.

GURUJI:

Just be still and try to see. "What is this I'm expe-

riencing now? What's actually going on for me? Why do I have such a need for this entertainment? Is it really my need? In what way does it increase my fulfilment? Why can't I live without it?" Fears come when you look into your boredom, it is very difficult.

We are all bores, dry bores [laughter], that is why we always crave some water to fill up our emptiness. But the water doesn't come because we don't bore deeply enough – try to go deeper, one foot deeper: maybe you'll find water, and it will spring up and fill your bore. Then it will give water to so many people and irrigate the land all around.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, in the last satsang we were talking about getting a glimpse of the Sadguru's state, and you said that all of us must have had a glimpse, otherwise we wouldn't be here now. I was thinking about that and wondering why it's just a glimpse and not a good long look! [Laughter]

GURUJI:

Actually, that is my question too! [Guruji laughs] Why is it only a glimpse? Why can't you have a real view? It's because you are happy with glimpses, and you enjoy playing 'hide-and-seek'! Ask yourself that question, "Why am I getting only

glimpses and not the full view?" Then you will come to know what prevents the glimpse from becoming a continual experience. Explore, "What is that glimpse? And what turns me away from it?" Actually, it's not a turning away from the glimpse, but, somehow, we want it to be only a glimpse, we enjoy it more. If the glimpse became continuous, we'd become bored because we always want something fresh, new, thrilling and exciting. And, in order to explore this particular aspect of it, let me give you a tip. Everybody experiences boredom: explore it, examine it, dissect it, and it will reveal so many thrilling mysteries about your own self and mind. As long as you experience boredom, you'll always be wanting something new, like saying, "It's enough, one week at the Ganga, we have seen it. Let's go up to the snow-capped mountains, Guruji, please?" Why do we always have the need to divert our minds to somewhere else? If you bore into that experience of boredom, the living waters will spring up and you'll get beautiful experiences!



DEVOTEE:

I've been looking into boredom, but I still haven't found an answer to it.

GURUJI:

Keep on doing it. It is not so easy because it is

embedded in you, at the basis of your being. If you really face it, you'll come to know what it is. Boredom is such an abstract experience, even the person who is experiencing it can't describe it. If I start describing it, giving you answers, you'll simply know my answers and stop your own enquiry. Just like giving the answer "I am atman" to the enquiry, "Who am I?" Where is the real enquiry [Guruji laughs] when you start with the answer? And that's what happens to many people who do Self-enquiry, they think they know the answer before they start the enquiry. They are trying to impress it upon their mind, to hypnotize themselves with the answer. So, take the question of boredom as the start of a real enquiry – within the question itself is the answer. But if I immediately give you the answer, it will kill your sense of exploration. The more you're troubled by these questions, the happier I'll be! [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

It feels like understanding boredom is important.

GURUJI:

It is important, because it relates to you. It may not be important to know about Ramana, Dattatreya or Sai Baba, but it is important to know about yourself. Why? Because it concerns you – your experience, your frustration, your seeking, your fulfilment or lack of it. I give the most value to you.



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GURUJI:

People get used to things, even to their object of love. They lose the spirit of it all and get bored, that's why everyone likes a change. When you have no other pulls, only then do you not get bored.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, do you ever get bored with anything? Do you know that feeling?

GURUJI:

Usually, people ask, "Are you not bored, Guruji, always staying within the same four walls, not going outside, doing the same thing?" People comment even about my food habits, eating the same thing everyday. And I always wonder, "Why am I not getting bored? Why am I not making some changes, some experiments with different varieties of food? [Laughter] Always that cold rice for breakfast, that same kind of chutney, the same chillies, that I have been eating for the last forty-eight years!" But I'm not bored!



GURUJI:

Somewhere it is said when a man is realized, he is reborn, renewed every minute. He's not only reborn once, he's constantly reborn, because every minute is so new to him. He's enjoying life as

Boring into Boredom

though it were new and not from past memories. This is what we have to see and experience. Then, when you're renewed every minute, there is no such thing as boredom.





Varanasi, 1995



chapter nine

The Gap

GURUJI:

My advice is to try to reduce the gap between what we think we are, what we say, and what we do, otherwise it leads to hypocrisy and a lack of awareness of our actions. And what counts, what tells us who we really are, is not what we think or say, but what we do. If you think about it, you'll come to know the gap or disparity between your actions and what you say.

For example, somebody says in satsang, "I'd love to see you in Shirdi, Guruji!" And, of all the people, exactly that person is missing when I go to Shirdi. [Guruji laughs] It always baffles me. Exactly that person is missing! And you don't

know what causes that discrepancy – whether it's concepts, pulls or impulses – usually, you don't even realize there's a discrepancy. Someone says, "I love to have your darshan during a big function when thousands of people come, it's so powerful." But exactly that person doesn't show up. [Guruji laughs] I'm not complaining or saying it is wrong or that they lose something. But I want you to see the gap. You think you want something but some subtle, inner obstacle prevents you from following through. It is so subtle but, at the same time, it expresses itself so obviously on the outside. To an outsider – at least to me – the gap is so obvious, but to the person it is invisible. They may say, "What am I doing wrong? What is the obstacle? I can't see it." So what is needed is discrimination, discernment. Think deeply, enquire honestly! It's hard, it's difficult, like walking on a razor's edge. Or, as Baba said, like crossing Nanhe Ghat¹ on a buffalo. Unfortunately, Baba has given you this buffalo [Guruji points to himself, laughing], what can you do? And there are many difficult Nanhe Ghats to cross.

Daily, I see umpteen examples and they are so obvious and conspicuous. I'm asking you to try to reduce the gap between what you think you are, what you say and what you do. Our actions should validate what we say – they are the fruit

¹ Nanhe Ghat is a notoriously steep, almost impassable mountain pass in Maharashtra, India.

that shows us what we are. As they say, you can know a tree by its fruit!

Try to focus on uniting what you think, say, and do – actualize what you are. Then, at least on that level, there will be self-realization. [Guruji laughs] When there is no gap, then we can grow.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I feel I'm a hopeless case because I seem so far away from my object of fulfilment. I'm wondering if these feelings of hopelessness can be transformed so they can become more helpful on the path.

GURUJI:

Yes, this so-called hopelessness can be used to make yourself more hopeful, which would then be reflected in your actions, and it can happen in different ways. First, what we say and what we do should be one. Because the gap between what we say and what we do can be the reason for our hopelessness. Some people try to reduce the gap between their words and deeds, others give up entirely. If you really give up, then there's no question of a gap. [Guruji laughs] But for those who are trying to reduce the gap, the crux of the matter is to unify what you think, say, and do; there should be no gap between them, this is what the scriptures say. Whatever you do should be done with

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the three *karanas* [causes] – thought, word, and deed. When these three become one, that is right action. Otherwise, hypocrisy grows and gives rise to so-called hopelessness and more hypocrisy.



GURUJI:

Try to reduce the gap between your words and actions. If you can't change your actions, at least try to change what you say. For instance, instead of saying things like, "Guruji, I can't live without you. If I'm away from you for one day, I will die!" Instead say, "No, it's not true, I can happily live away from you and, actually, if it doesn't interfere with a free lift in a car, or with the rent I've already paid for my hotel room, that is, if everything is convenient and nothing else interferes, then being with you is valuable." Accept that! That will give you a lot of clarity and self-actualization, otherwise you'll go on deceiving yourself. One thing that we should shun at all cost is hypocrisy, not being honest with ourselves. Don't let yourself be blinded by hypocrisy!



DEVOTEE:

I feel that my material needs distract me from my spiritual aspirations. This dilemma often troubles me.

GURUJI:

I am not saying that earning money or having property is bad – it's okay, but accept it. Speak honestly, "Yes, I thought I was a very spiritual person and only wanted to do sadhana, but no, that is not true. What I really want is a piece of land, a good, comfortable house, and a sound bank balance with the means to clear my debts." That is what you really want. So, have the clarity to ask Baba for it and Baba will provide it for you. Then you'll be happy. Then there will be no gap, no clash, no conflict, no guilt, no hypocrisy – good!



DEVOTEE:

What if someone needs worldly acceptance before seeking enlightenment?

GURUJI:

Then he has to seek it, because his own abstract sense of fulfilment is pointing to that. If you tell him, "That is only a transient, temporary thing, there is nothing to it. There is something beyond it which you have to catch hold of," then his whole search becomes meaningless, because it is superimposed and artificial, since he is seeking something that he doesn't really need. Instead, the person himself has to realize the futility of fulfilling these transient needs, then the search will become a real need for him. Otherwise, he is

just imitating another seeker.

Buddha had a genuine need and he searched, but there is no point in simply imitating Buddha. Are you really struggling so much to know the mysteries of life and the world? If you are, then you are a seeker and that is your need. But don't say universally that this is everyone's need. How do you sense your own fulfilment? You have to start from there. And your needs may change, because your idea of fulfilment may change over time. If at every moment you are enquiring, "I want to concretize my abstract sense of fulfilment, how can I make it concrete? How to realize it?", then even a small search, a so-called worldly search, becomes really meaningful. Otherwise, there will be a conflict. Some of the emotions you have inculcated and nourished will pull you toward the so-called spiritual, but most of your emotions will pull you toward the worldly. And that's where you stand. When it's not your real need, going for realization is like putting the cart before the horse.

DEVOTEE:

For some people it feels impossible to get the worldly things they seek.

GURUJI:

So they have to try. If they turn to spirituality because they can't get the worldly things they seek, do you think that is real spirituality? It's even

worse. Spirituality is definitely not a substitute for failing in the world. If they fail in worldly endeavours and turn to spirituality, as if it was easier or less arduous, they will repeat the same thing they did in the world. In worldly matters, the success of the endeavour can be easily seen and we can't deceive ourselves, whereas in spiritual matters we can just carry on in the name of a seeker, coining a respectable image while deceiving ourselves. Our helplessness, our inefficiency or failure, can be very cleverly covered over by the guise of a seeker. It is easy to deceive oneself, since one's true spiritual success is only known internally to the seeker, not to others.

So, you should try first to get success in the world. If your sense of fulfilment, your desire, is not fulfilled there, you will carry your sense of frustration throughout your search, throughout your so-called seeking. I wouldn't call this real seeking.



GURUJI:

Some people want to avoid work and have an easy life, and for that they need some pretext. And, of all things, spirituality seems to be the best! [Laughter] So they are not obliged to feel, "I am lazy!" or "I don't have work!" In fact, they can feel even superior to those who are working. "Oh, these people are entangled in their attachments –

to work, money, business, all these things. Look at us! How happily we are meditating!" [Guruji laughs] Of course, I'm speaking in general terms here.

DEVOTEE:

But wouldn't our progress be so much faster if we renounced the world and dedicated our life completely to the spiritual path?

GURUJI:

Concerning this, Bhagavan [Sri Ramana Maharshi] was very clear. One day a young man came to Bhagavan and asked him, "Bhagavan, I'm not interested in this world – in my work, studies, employment, marriage, children – I don't have a desire for all these things. I want to take *sannyas* and renounce the world. Please give me your blessings and permission to renounce the world." Bhagavan said, "No, young man, it is better to go back to your work and marry. I feel that is good for you." "No, Bhagavan, please excuse me, but I can't do it, I can't marry! I can't be in the world!" Again Bhagavan said, "No, that is not good for you. Go back to your work." After some time the young man got irritated and said, "You renounced the world when you were very young and came here and became a *sannyasin*. Now you are advising me not to do the thing which you yourself have done. Is there one dharma [law] for you and another for me? What was good for you, should you not also

advise the same for me?" Then Bhagavan replied, "When I left home I didn't ask anybody's permission."

It was so choiceless for Bhagavan: he had to leave. Such a man, who left like that – and we know how he was in Tiruvannamalai – he never booked a room or sought accommodation or boarding, hmm? Did he ask for dates and timings for meditation or think how fantastic it is to go on *giri pradakshina* or *parikrama* of the temple, or this or that? – nothing! When he came, even 24 hours a day was not sufficient for him to get absorbed in the Self. So, unless we get to that state where we can't extrovert our mind, there's nothing wrong with work, and, in fact, it helps.



GURUJI:

People may think they can play the role of an advanced *sadhaka*, thinking, "I want mukti, I want nirvana, I want Self-realization." If you think you want to play this role, I advise you not to play it! Know your need. What is it you really want? People say, "I want to know myself." But is it really troubling you that you don't know yourself? Do you really have a doubt as to who you are? I don't think most people have a doubt about themselves – they know who they are. Somebody has told them they are not what they think they are. "Ah!", they say, but it's only an idle curiosity, it's not a

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real need. If you really need to know, like Ramana Maharshi did, you'll know. But is it your problem? Are you suffering day and night, losing sleep, not taking food, asking, "Who am I? Who am I?" If you really act according to your needs, then you don't play roles.

Don't focus on what to do in order to get enlightenment – what *japa* you have to do, what sadhana, what Self-enquiry, what meditation, contemplation, yoga. These all depend upon your genuine need and how honest you are. Otherwise, all these means will be nothing without honesty. Ramana Maharshi was honest. One minute of Self-enquiry, a fraction of a second of Self-enquiry, he did honestly and he became realized. That honesty, that total integrity, is needed.



DEVOTEE:

Is there a reality or a truth that isn't a concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment?

GURUJI:

Fulfilment is an experience. Who bothers about some abstract truth or reality? [Guruji laughs] When people really want to experience fulfilment, then what they experience is the truth. Now you are experiencing this unhappiness, this frustration, this lack of fulfilment, and it is true. But, if you think you are already Brahman and already

fulfilled, then it's not true because that's not your experience. If it's true that you want to get rid of this unhappiness, if it's true that you make the effort and succeed in getting rid of it, then it's also true that what you will experience then is true fulfilment.

So let your whole life be true, let it be based on truth. Why do you think your own experience is false and that the truth is written somewhere in books and has to be caught hold of? At different levels they are all truths. It is enough if you are truthful to your own seeking, not to somebody else's or to something else. Be truthful to your *own* effort of concretizing your abstract sense of fulfilment – then what comes is the truth of your own fulfilment!



DEVOTEE:

What does it mean to live a courageous life?

GURUJI:

In my view, the most courageous life to live is to face ourselves. Trying to know who we are, honestly, without any hypocrisy, without any self-deceit – that is the most courageous life. Courage is needed to climb Mt. Everest, but the real courage is needed to see the truth. To me, the Buddha was the really courageous man, not Edmund Hillary or Tenzing Norgay. Of course, they were

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also courageous in one way, but the Buddha's was the real courage. Most people live the life of a coward, of a timid person, unable to face the truth and get clarity. Everywhere timidity, timidity, timidity! By being always fearful of losing our life, we lose our ability to live. To me, that is not life at all. When it is merely 'survival', where is the life in it? Hmm?



DEVOTEE:

How can we overcome our timidity and become more courageous?

GURUJI:

By facing the truth! The most difficult thing to do is to face ourselves, to face our own hypocrisy. It's like this for most people. If at all you want to get rid of anything, get rid of hypocrisy.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, the difficulty in facing ourselves is that we are so good at deceiving ourselves, at putting our masks in the way. Isn't the true direction the most difficult to face?

GURUJI:

I am not talking about directions or anything like that, only simple questions. Knowing your own hypocrisy is not very complicated. The first

thing is, to be aware of what we do, what we say,
and what we think we want. See the gap between
these three and you will come to know.





Godavari, 2000



chapter ten

Aspects of Change

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, is it useful to know if we are making progress and what are the indications?

GURUJI:

As I've said before, real progress is in how many times you don't say 'I' – "I want this! I love that! I don't like this!" – this whole 'I' business – and how harmonized you are inside and outside. How contented you feel, how happy you are, whether you have an indescribable sense of security – these are symptoms of progress.

The real progress is how your personality has been transformed and how you look at yourself

and the world; how you look at and interact with people, and how they look at you – this is what matters. Not these dazzling experiences which Baba referred to as *chamatkar*. *Chamak* means ‘dazzling’. Usually people translate it as ‘a miracle’, but it also means ‘dazzling’, that which blinds or dazzles you. Experiences such as having a convulsion, seeing a big flash of light or hearing a boom in the ears, or swooning, or being driven almost crazy or mad, are considered to be ‘spiritual experiences’. I say, what is the value of just seeing a big light? We have to see if such experiences are succeeded by a great transformation in the heart or whether they bring about a change in our personality, in our outlook, or in our fears and temptations, our likes and dislikes. Otherwise these psychic phenomena are just mental aberrations which go by the name of ‘spiritual experiences’ but are of no use. Here is not the place for them. If we get this kind of experience it has to be followed by an indescribable transformation.

Here, with Baba, you’ll find that complex patterns which have been bothering you for years and which you could not give up, simply vanish overnight, as if a burden has been lifted from your mind. A dream or experience may come in the night and in the morning you feel like a changed person. What have you done? Nothing! Such experiences can happen overnight, or with others it is gradual like the greying of the

hair. But, just like aging itself, it's a process that's bound to happen.



DEVOTEE:

People can change but then they seem to slip back into their old ways.

GURUJI:

It seems so, but it's not true. A person doesn't really slip back. In fact, not only in so-called spiritual life, but nowhere in life is there a question of slipping back.

DEVOTEE:

How is it then that some people seem to get worse?

GURUJI:

They can be better or worse but they're not exactly the same; they can't go back. Maybe going forward could also be worse! [Laughter] You can't be the same person you were a minute ago, so why talk about such long periods? It's not only like this in the human condition, it's everywhere. It's a law of nature. There is no question of going back. Whether it is going forward, whether it is progress, whether it is unfoldment, I won't try to define it, but there will be change. To make that change for the best is what we want. Change is inevitable, everybody changes, not only those who

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resort to a Sadguru. Everyone will change, but the way one changes – that is the question.

DEVOTEE:

What do you mean by “the way one changes”?

GURUJI:

The change should be toward fulfilment. We experience the same kind of frustration in different ways, varieties and intensities. What I am saying is, let the change be towards your fulfilment, towards the removal of your frustration. That’s what I call change.

DEVOTEE:

Does the core personality also change?

GURUJI:

Everything changes, not only the core!

DEVOTEE:

Do our emotions also change or do they always remain the same?

GURUJI:

It’s not that if we change, our emotions change – actually the change in the emotions is what I call change. When I speak about transformation, I mean the change in your emotions.



DEVOTEE:

You said that the most difficult pattern to break is the basic pattern of how we understand things. What is this basic pattern?

GURUJI:

Everybody has a bundle of basic emotions and a tendency to express them in a particular way. It's a kind of habit energy. And, to some extent, it is easier to change the pattern in which they are expressed than the basic emotions themselves.

DEVOTEE:

Can we do anything as long as everything is coloured by our patterns and we are not aware of them?

GURUJI:

It's not possible for you to change them by yourself. It's just like trying to cut off the branch you are sitting on – you can't do it. So, you need some other support – and here enters the role of the Sadguru. Based on his support you can leave the ground on which you usually stand. Then you will find that without your knowledge you have changed. How he changes us, we do not know; it is not our business. But we can say we are changed! This is the real transformation.

DEVOTEE:

Can our basic core emotions be changed?

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GURUJI:

The basic emotions have to be changed. It's of no use simply to change the patterns. But changing the patterns will help to mitigate some of the disharmony and tendencies that strengthen negative emotions. If there is anything you can do, you can try to do it up to this point.

DEVOTEE:

When a basic emotion is changed, what has it changed into?

GURUJI:

It is transformed into another emotion that helps you get fulfilment. Not that it is totally removed, rather it is transformed. The one who is experiencing the transformation may not see the difference, but an outsider can see the change. They say, "I see there's a big change in you, you're not the same person I knew two years ago." But the person who has experienced the transformation does not know that. He feels the same as before. But there is a transformation.

DEVOTEE:

Can certain activities like being in the Sadguru's presence, or serving him, hasten this change?

GURUJI:

For most people, when they meet their Sadguru the emotion that arises is love – love for the Sadguru

and for their fulfilment. The love for the Sadguru and for fulfilment is the same but people express it in different ways. But, because of patterns accrued over time, they tend to create obstacles to realizing the essence of the relationship. Some of these patterns and expressions create disharmony within and in the whole atmosphere around them, making it impossible for them to be happy. Even though they may have everything – and there has been no harm or loss – still their patterns are there. But they can be changed with the help of the Sadguru.

Just an hour ago I was telling Madam [Guruji's wife] the same thing when she was talking about some youngsters in our group who came the other day. They had just moved into a beautiful house and everybody liked it. But when I asked them, "How is the house?" their patterns are such they immediately said, "We are getting bored. We have no friends there." Just one week ago they moved into that house, so how can they find friends so soon? They don't see all the positive points in the new house. They have this pattern of always complaining, of seeing only what is negative. Whatever they say, even a small thing, they express it as a complaint, that is the pattern. This can be changed. Again and again you have to tell them, "This is not the way to say it. Express it in a different way, a positive way." Otherwise people take on this strong habit of always complaining and seeing things negatively.

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DEVOTEE:

Is this a general pattern of the human mind?

GURUJI:

No, it's not general, it doesn't hold for all people, and the pattern has different degrees of intensity. The underlying emotion is the same for everyone, they want to be with me, they want to see me, but some simply ignore what they have and always think about what is missing. Some of you here also have the same pattern and over time I have been trying to rid you of it. You think that I'm being very particular about whether a given expression is respectful or disrespectful, but it's not that. It's not the form but the tendency to express things in a certain way that reflects a complaining attitude toward things. Then you can't enjoy anything and you lose the simple bliss of life, always thinking about what you don't have and not realizing what you do have. By simply shifting your focus to what you do have, you could experience a major part of your fulfilment already, and the rest of it anyhow Baba will give. You can say what you don't have, no problem, but don't complain. Instead, ask for what you need!



DEVOTEE:

How is it that we don't notice the transformation in ourselves if it is so fundamental to us?

GURUJI:

Because it is not different from you. What you call 'you' is the effect of all these emotions. And only by outward symptoms and in retrospect can you say, "Oh, maybe before I would have reacted like that but now I am reacting like this." Only by your reactions can you see the change, but by itself you can't see it because you can't see yourself. It's not due to insight but to hindsight that you can see where you have changed, because the change is in you. And if at all you're so interested in this psychoanalysis business and want to analyse yourself, then try to focus on how you were before and how you are now, and see what the change is. So, first, whatever comes, you'll experience how you've changed and you'll enjoy it. And the one who has given you this much, won't he give you the rest also [total fulfilment]? By not experiencing what you have already and not being open to what you could receive, you are creating more obstacles to your fulfilment now.



DEVOTEE:

It seems there's always a choice between the inward journey and the outward journey. Is there a way to develop both?

GURUJI:

Yes, good, that is Baba's way. He doesn't tell you to

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go only inward or only outward. Both should be there. That is what happens around me, because I don't stress one at the cost of the other. Both are equally important.

DEVOTEE:

Does the balance between the inner and outer life happen naturally or is it something we have to take care of?

GURUJI:

You have to take care of it also.

DEVOTEE:

How do we know if we've got the balance?

GURUJI:

How do you know the balance anywhere? By checking it, by feeling it, by actually balancing. [Guruji laughs] Then you'll know the balance. Always be cautious and aware of what you're doing. Are you really in balance, or deviating to this side or that? Be careful or you'll fall down!

DEVOTEE:

But by what criteria do we judge that?

GURUJI:

By your experience. If you are balanced that is the criterion. When you learn to cycle what is

the criterion that says you are really cycling? You don't fall off! [Laughter] Then you have learned to balance. You fall once and you get up, again you try, and again you fall – maybe even get injured – but finally you learn to cycle. Once you learn it, even without pedalling or without hands, you can balance the bike. Without holding the handlebars you can even go into a crowded street and steer the cycle just by focussing on your centre of gravity – I used to do it! [Laughter] We used to say, “Let's not touch the handlebars all the way from home to college!” We would go from our house in Kota until we entered the college in Vidyanagar without touching the handlebars, then stop and put the cycle on its stand. So, once you master the art of balance, you can do all kinds of feats! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

But when we get caught in something we don't necessarily notice that we've fallen off.

GURUJI:

Definitely, you'll know! Even if you don't notice, your injuries will tell you that you've fallen. [Laughter] The pain, the suffering, the dissatisfaction, the sense of disappointment, the sense of frustration – all these things are 'injuries' which tell you that you haven't learned the art of balance.



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DEVOTEE:

Is there any relationship between the transformation of one's personality and being fulfilled?

GURUJI:

There should be. The reason why we are not getting fulfilment is because our personality is like it is, and, unless it changes, we won't be fulfilled. When one is having a spiritual experience it's not only the experience that matters but the experienter also has to change. Usually people focus more on the experience, instead of the experienter. They don't think of the experienter. But, actually, what changes is the state of the one who experiences – that is the transformation. The moment one's state is transformed then the experience comes. The experience is not like some object which appears.

It is the transformation in us – in our personality, in our individuality, in our ego, whatever jargon you want to use – that matters. That's why I don't stress the experience, I put the stress on you! Actually, I care more about you. I'm not one who talks much about the ultimate experience – the experience of 'That', Brahman, Buddhahood, nirvana – no. What matters to me is you.



GURUJI:

If there is some progress, then focus on that, whatever it is. If it is zero then that is a different

matter. But as far as I know nobody here is at zero, nobody.

DEVOTEE:

Where are we at?

GURUJI:

One furlong, one kilometre, two kilometres, ten kilometres, twenty kilometres [laughter] – you are all trekking, enjoy it! Enjoy nature. While trekking you don't measure how far you've gone, how many steps you've taken. "Oh, my God, I still have to walk one kilometre!" Then it's not trekking. You said you like nature, so enjoy the trekking! Trek on Saipatham, the path of Sai, not measuring the distance, not counting the steps. There is a long, long way to travel, I'm not denying that, but we have travelled even this far, let us enjoy it now! Then every step we take, from beginning to end, is beautiful.





Shirdi, 1999



chapter eleven

Helplessness & Seeking Help

DEVOTEE:

What is the remedy for the helplessness we sometimes feel?

GURUJI:

To seek help! [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

What do you mean by seeking help?

GURUJI:

When you really experience your helplessness, then you'll want to come out of that condition, that state of helplessness. The desire to come out

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of helplessness *is* seeking help. Even if you don't know it, you have already been seeking help. Inevitably you seek, and when help is given you have the experience that you've succeeded in overcoming your helplessness. It will remove your sense of frustration when you gain that help.

DEVOTEE:

Does the state of helplessness bring us closer to Baba?

GURUJI:

Helplessness creates a greater need for Baba, and once we need something, getting it is more fulfilling.

DEVOTEE:

Does it mean we stop feeling helpless?

GURUJI:

Yes, we stop feeling helpless. Then we start feeling 'help-full', full of Baba, because Baba *is* the help.



DEVOTEE:

What is the best way to seek help?

GURUJI:

To have the strong desire, the need, for help. For

instance, if you are drowning and you don't know how to swim, what do you do? You simply grab onto whatever comes to you. There's no dilemma. You don't think, "Will this stick take me to shore, is it strong enough?" No, you simply grab it!

Read the last song of the morning *arati* to Baba and you will know how to seek help. "*Mee budato bhavbhaya dohee udharaa Sri Sadguru!*" [Save me quickly, O Sadguru, I'm afraid of drowning in the ocean of samsara!¹] Fortunately, we have such good help in Baba, but we think we don't need it that much, so we always keep him in reserve. "Okay Baba, I know you can help me, it's good. Stay for some time, then when I need your help, I'll ask for it. And thanks for your offer!" [Guruji laughs]

You have needed many things in your life and you have asked for help. Nobody taught you how to seek that help. As a baby you sought help from your mother. Who taught you how to seek her help? You have travelled such long distances from your countries to come here and you have sought help on so many different levels. Who taught you those things? First, you should have the need, then the need itself shows you how to seek. It will teach you the method, the technique. Don't seek techniques – so-called 'unique', 'best' or 'advanced' techniques – there's nothing in techniques.

¹ *Shirdi Aratis, Kakad Arati*, 13 (Song to Sadguru), verse 3.

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Once we have the need we will invent our own technique. They say, "Necessity is the mother of invention." And the technique we invent for ourself, for our own good, that is the best technique.

I'm not advising you always to seek help. First, try to get it on your own, that's the best. If you can't do it, then there's no other choice – you have to seek help. So there's no question of whether a guru's help is needed or not. No, it's not like that. If you really need help, you seek and resort to a Sadguru, it's not your choice – you have no other choice. Until you experience the state where 'there is no other choice for me', you still harbour some hope. "Yes, I still have some resources, why don't I try them?" Then, do it! First, exhaust your resources. If you succeed, good! Then it's your own earning. If you can't do it, what else can you do but seek help?



DEVOTEE:

I'm always fearful about choosing my own path and making mistakes by not choosing the right thing. What can I do about this fear?

GURUJI:

You only choose what you want, your goal, your object. And if you're fearful about how to get it and don't know the way, then a Sadguru like Baba comes into the picture. If you know how to

do it on your own, good! Go ahead and try to realize your goal. But if you have fear and feel your resources aren't sufficient and don't know whether what you're doing is right or not, then, when you are so helpless, seek help from Baba. What help? Help to achieve what you want, what you need, your personal goal.



DEVOTEE:

What is the emotion in us that makes choice so important?

GURUJI:

It's your basic emotion of wanting to get rid of your state of helplessness and of always being subject to making inevitable choices. It's a kind of longing for freedom, freedom from the inability to choose.

DEVOTEE:

Then the desire to be free from helplessness is actually quite a powerful emotion.

GURUJI:

Yes, it is a very powerful emotion. It's at the basis of our whole being. Our very existence is choiceless, beyond our control. Come, ask anyone this question, "Why are you living?" The only true answer they can give is, "Because we haven't

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died yet!" What a sad state of affairs that our own existence is so helpless that we are helplessly living! It is beyond our choice. From that state of helplessness everything else springs – our trying to overcome it and to free ourselves from that sad condition.

The book of life has been given to us by nature, and we simply turn its pages without understanding a word. We don't even know by whom or why it was written, or how many pages it contains.

DEVOTEE:

You have said before that we need to find a more powerful emotion that draws all our other pulls together, but is that also choiceless, just something that comes on a page?

GURUJI:

Yes, it is choiceless but it frees you from your state of choicelessness. When you are turning the pages of the book without understanding a word, what actually helps you? You need someone who will teach you the meaning of what is written – the language, the alphabet, the grammar and syntax of it. Then you'll understand your book of life and appreciate it.

DEVOTEE:

Does this take time or can it happen suddenly?

GURUJI:

It usually takes time. How much time? That depends upon your capacity to learn.



DEVOTEE:

I don't really look for help because I don't believe I'm helpless. What can I do about this?

GURUJI:

You have to experience your helplessness fully. People experience it in different ways and get help in different ways. Buddha tried and tried, but then he came to a stage where he just experienced his helplessness and stopped all endeavours, all efforts, and sat down beneath the Bodhi tree. He just gave up. He gave up everything, everything he had been doing, and then that state – fulfilment, nirvana, 'the answer' or whatever you want to call it – instantly came to him. Even the Buddha had to experience helplessness, a giving up. But our case is different. Our endeavour, our effort, our need is not so strong, and so our need for help is also not so strong. We even need someone to show us how helpless we are! That is our state. [Laughter] Or, if we are like the Buddha and give up, good. After his awakening he said about the path, "*Buddham saranam gacchami*" [I take refuge in the Buddha]. To which Buddha he surrendered we do not know.

It's not historically recorded whether he surrendered to his own help, to his own helplessness, or to whatever else it was. It need not be in this form, it can happen in many different ways. But what the Buddha meant was, to express our helplessness and to seek help at the feet of a Buddha, a Sad-guru. One who seeks refuge is experiencing that helplessness.

This is what we also see in Baba's life – how he experienced his helplessness – but he expressed it in a different way. He used to say, "I'm a slave of Allah." See how totally dependent he was on Allah. And Ramana Maharshi expressed it yet in another way. He experienced his helplessness as an experience of death, the most helpless state. There you want to hold on to yourself, your own life, but you are helpless in keeping it. It slips away – that is death. He expressed his helplessness as death. They all experienced that state of helplessness in different ways and sought help in different ways. What helped them was also different. It's very personal. So, again I tell you, experience your helplessness, seek help, get the help and experience the help all in your own way.



DEVOTEE:

Did you say we can actually enjoy our helplessness if there is somebody there to help?

GURUJI:

Yes, because this so-called helplessness is, in fact, not really helplessness. It is experienced in a different way. Being an adult, it is very difficult for you to understand that. Just think about a small child, a month-old baby. A baby is really helpless: she can't walk, she can't protect herself or take her own food, she can't do anything on her own. Her whole survival is dependent on the mother or her caretaker. But see how happily she plays and enjoys!

Does the mother say, "You should be ashamed of your helplessness, child! You can't make your own food and for everything you're dependent on somebody! How come you're so happy?!" [Guruji laughs] As long as she has the warmth and love of the mother, the child's so-called helplessness ceases to be helplessness. We are grown-ups, but in the case of helplessness we are all simply children. We need a mother, a caretaker, who can give us that feeling of care, protection and security. Once we have it, we cease to be sad about our own helplessness because in fact we feel we are being helped. Not that you enjoy being helpless, it is just experienced in a different way. What you enjoy is the help. And that is exactly the role of Baba, why a Sadguru is needed. Without that, one can tread the path, but to most of us, it is like trying to cut off the branch we are sitting on.



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DEVOTEE:

If I still feel helplessness after I've prayed and asked for Baba's help, what am I to do? Do I just pray and wait?

GURUJI:

I have told you many times that the very experience of helplessness *is* asking for help. You don't need to formalize or verbalize it. There is nothing you can do. If there is anything you can do, you are not helpless. "I am helpless, what am I to do?"—this is a meaningless question! It's because you can't do anything that you are helpless.

DEVOTEE:

Then what can I do?

GURUJI:

[Guruji laughs] You can't 'do' anything – you can only experience the helplessness, realize how helpless you are. Many people are helpless but they don't accept it, that's the problem. What I'm asking you to do is, try to accept, to realize and actualize your helplessness, that is enough. Baba will take care of what needs to be done, what you'll do and how the help will be given. And there's no way that you can help Baba to help you! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

But isn't it necessary to actually ask for help?

GURUJI:

If it gives you satisfaction, yes. If it's part of your process of accepting and realizing your helplessness, then good, there's nothing wrong in verbalizing it. It becomes a kind of ritual, one expression of your helplessness, that's all.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, are you helping me? And, if so, why don't I feel it more?

GURUJI:

First you ask, "Are you helping me?" Yes, I am helping, but you think I am not. Then, if you think I'm not helping, I say, have you really asked for my help? If you have, what help have you actually asked for? What sort of help do you want? And, if at all I give you that help, are you ready to take it? Ask me for that help which you can receive. It's so clear. I don't think there's any need for philosophy here.

The problem is, people are afraid to ask for help. First, we should realize that we need help. I'm taking it one step further: do you *really* need help? I would advise you first to try to get it without anybody's help. Strive to get it yourself. If, after trying, you say, "I'm sorry, Guruji, I can't help myself. You have to help me," then I am ready to

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help – but then you should take it! The next thing is, our ego pops up and says, “Ah, I don’t want to take your help, I can help myself. Anyway, why do I need help? Maybe I can do it myself if he just gives a little push!” [Guruji laughs] And even if a push is given, we think, “Maybe it’s not really a push. I doubt very much whether he’s actually pushing me, maybe I’m only imagining it!” [Laughter]

So, first what is needed is clarity, absolute clarity that you can’t help yourself. That is the qualification for seeking help. Then, if the help is given – and it will be given, one hundred percent sure – you should take it. In all these matters, why people fail, why they have fear and confusion, is because they lack clarity.



GURUJI:

If you truly realize you can’t help yourself, then you seek help without any reservation. You don’t ask, “Could you give, could you advise, could you ...?” That’s no way to ask! Instead, you need to demand, “Give me! I’m begging you, I’m standing before you like a beggar, a beggar among beggars!” With that sincerity, with such openness and need, you should ask.



GURUJI:

Seeking help should not be accompanied by a sense of misery or frustration. It is in the state of utter helplessness that you will experience the help. Helplessness itself paves the way to feel the help and then you live with the sense of help, not helplessness. You experience being full of help, a happiness. Then it is positive, it is blissful, it is fulfilling. You are always in need of help and Baba is always there to give it.





Sbirdi, 1996



chapter twelve

On Death & the Love of Life

GURUJI:

Many, many problems will be solved if you realize just one thing and accept it as the bare truth. And that one thing is: how transient, how temporary, how short life is! Everybody knows this, but nobody realizes it – they do everything as if it's going to be permanent. Is there any truth, even an iota of truth, in the sense of permanence? If one realizes that, at least most of our problems change, in fact, our whole attitude towards life changes. But we live as if we were going to be permanent, as if others were going to be permanent, and as if things were going to be permanent. But for how

long? We think we have a hundred years or more, or even a thousand. And in what way are those things which we normally fret and fume over contributing to our happiness?

There is a poem in the Telugu translation of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, “*Kaare raajulu raajyamulu galugave, vaareri siri muutagattukoni poovanjaalare?*” which means, “There are so many kings who ruled big empires – where are they all now? And when they left, did they take their empires with them?” In spite of knowing this and studying history, you still think you are going to be permanent! Maybe that is why I like history – it’s my favourite subject. It shows me the impermanence, the transient nature of everything. To me, all of history is a spiritual treatise just like a Veda, an Upanishad, or a Purana. What else will teach us the impermanence of life better than history? Just think about it!

In this short span of life, we create so many problems, problems in relationships, fighting with one another. We try to amass as much wealth and as much property as we can – buying lands, building houses – then looking at them as if they were our creations, becoming attached to them. Is this really needed? Is it really wise? To me, more than anything else, the remembrance, the awareness of the bare truth of impermanence is enough: no scriptures are needed, no guru is needed to tell you this truth – it is so obvious! It is a truth which yawns in our faces. Just be aware of that, and see

how your attitude towards the world – to people, to things, to your own personality – changes. How much we are wasting our time! Can you get it back? Don't waste your time, especially in unhappy pursuits. I'm not saying, "Don't waste your time and try to completely dedicate yourself to Baba." At least try to be happy, whatever your concept of happiness is. Just like when you have to leave India to go back to the West in two or three days, how do you feel? "Oh, let's have satsang, let's have darshan, let's enjoy as much as possible!" You feel like this because you know you are leaving. But we're forgetting that our whole life is a trip like this and our leaving is scheduled already: What about that?



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what is the root of fear?

GURUJI:

Fear comes because you're afraid to lose something you love. Fear springs from love. The basic fear is the fear of death. Even that fear comes because you love your life so much you don't want to part with it. For us, death means the cessation of life, our existence, what we are; we cease to exist. We don't want that to happen because we love life so much. Whether it is happy or unhappy we want it to go on. This love of life, this urge for survival,

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is so biological that it is basic in every human being. All our fears, even those in daily life, are an outcome of love – the thought that we might lose something we love very much.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, lately a number of us have had to face the experience of family or dear friends dying, and the reality of death. I would like to ask, what do you feel is the most helpful way to approach and think about death?

GURUJI:

What I would say is, instead of thinking and trying to know how to approach death, first take care of your approach to life.

DEVOTEE:

But suppose life is not very attractive?

GURUJI:

Is death so attractive? [Guruji laughs] It's not about being attractive or not. There are two inevitabilities that everyone experiences: one we are experiencing now, the other we are going to experience. Life is inevitable, isn't it? [Guruji laughs] Death is also inevitable. Now life is at hand, so try to think of life.

DEVOTEE:

If a loved one is suffering a great deal, what can we do to help and support them in their process?

GURUJI:

It depends upon your relationship to the loved one. There's no specific theory about how to support them, each case is personal. How you want to support them and what kind of support they need differs from person to person. Just saying things like, "Don't be worried!" is only talk and not actually being supportive. What I think is, death is inevitable. People say one's whole life is based on the fear of death, but I don't see it like that. What I see is that actually, basic to human nature and our being, is the love of life. We love our life so much that the thought of it ending is fearful to us. So, are we taking care of what we love, or thinking of what we fear? If we take care of our life fully and live a fulfilled life, we need not worry about death, and anyhow it is inevitable. Life is also inevitable, we can't avoid it either. Why I say inevitable is, because for many people if they were asked, "Why are you living?" the most honest answer they could give is, "Because I haven't died yet!" [Guruji laughs] Let us not experience that sad situation. Let's find some meaning in our life, some purpose, some fulfilment. Not simply accepting its inevitability.

Let us take care of 'the bird in the hand', the life you experience now, instead of worrying about

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‘the bird in the bush’, something that will happen in the future. Talking about death which we don’t know from experience is just beating about the bush. Life is here now, you are experiencing it. Think of how to make it the best, how to get the most out of it. And if at all you want to give any support to those who are troubled with death, say these things to them. Then that is the way, the very best way to help them stop thinking about death.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, death doesn’t only bring up sadness but also questions about the very nature of life and the uncertainty of our own predicament.

GURUJI:

This is what I’m saying – it should bring up that question! The next question is: in the face of that uncertainty, what are we doing? Anyone’s death, especially of a loved one, should produce that enquiry.

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean about how we spend our time and what we’re doing with our lives?

GURUJI:

Yes. In the ordinary emotional sense it’s natural to grieve over the loss of a loved one. But who will

grieve over our death? Should we not care to leave behind at least one person who will grieve over our death? What are we doing for that?



DEVOTEE:

What can I give to someone who is close to death?

GURUJI:

As far as I know, what we can give is our prayers to Baba. Or, if you are thinking of material things, of course I am not good at advising about that. And especially for one who is close to death, nothing material may be helpful to him. What he needs is to face death happily. What will help him do that? Baba's grace! So, pray to Baba. Pray for him to die happily, pray for those who want to live, to help them live happily, and pray for yourself that you may live happily also. So pray, pray, pray, always pray! Baba, Baba, Baba! That is the solution.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, being now seventy-six, I think a lot about my last hour and my last breath, and I've read that one should hold on to the guru's feet until that last breath and then let go. But that seems a little frightening, to let go at the very end. Could you please talk about that?

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GURUJI:

Why is it frightening?

DEVOTEE:

It is frightening to let go.

GURUJI:

That is what even Ramana Maharshi says about the fear of death. When he had his experience of realization, what he experienced was the fear of death. Because there we lose ourselves, our own identity, which we have been nourishing for so long, holding onto it with a passion. That will go. For us, that is death. But, actually, we don't know what death is because we haven't died so far, so how can we be afraid of it? Maybe death is more beautiful than life, who knows? But we're afraid of death because our concept of death means losing ourselves. That is exactly what spirituality is about too. Spirituality also says when you realize yourself, you lose yourself, the ego will be erased, dissolved, and there will be no you left, there will be only That. This is a kind of definition of death for us. That is what Ramana Maharshi beautifully wrote in *Arunachala Padikam*, "I call out to all those people who are ready to commit suicide: Come! Here is a beautiful way to commit suicide. Come to Arunachala!" So holding on to our guru's feet means, in other words, we are 'courting death'.

But when our biological death happens, it will be more beautiful, more peaceful, more assuring

if we are at the guru's feet. That makes death not death at all.



DEVOTEE:

Could it be that we fear death because we've died before?

GURUJI:

Do you remember it? You don't remember it. The reason why you don't want to die is because you want to live.

DEVOTEE:

If I don't remember it, why is the thought of death usually associated with pain and suffering? Isn't it instinctive?

GURUJI:

Even though life also has suffering and pain, you want to live, and you want to mitigate your suffering and live a happy life. It is only the quality of life which you don't like, not life itself. You want to live, but with a difference: you want to live happily. So it is the love of life that makes you want to live. Love is basic, not fear.

DEVOTEE:

Could it be, Guruji, that for some *jnanis* there is

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no longer a difference between life and death? I'm thinking of Nisargadatta Maharaj. In his last talks before he passed away in 1981 he was saying that, to him, there was no longer any difference between being in the body or not, that life per se held no attraction for him because he knew a state beyond both life and death. And some people were shocked at this. In this respect could one say that knowledge is more fundamental than love?

GURUJI:

Here there is no question of love or knowledge or truth. He loved his life so much that he got true life. We love life but we don't get the real life. He loved life truly and he got true life. So his love was fulfilled. And once his love was fulfilled he had no fear of losing his life. He knew that, whether life is there or not, he is there – true life is there. Because we do not know this, we fear to lose life. But for him there was no fear.

DEVOTEE:

A *jnani* knows he'll live beyond death.

GURUJI:

Yes.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, even though I know all is transitory, I live

my life as if it's never going to end, unaware of its impermanent nature.

GURUJI:

Actually, this is everybody's case; uncertainty is always there, but nobody sees that. When we take a breath and then exhale, we can't be certain we'll take another breath or not. It's not our conscious effort or choice to breathe. If it were our choice, if it were in our hands, nobody would stop breathing! We are put into such a helpless situation but, in another way, it is such a beautiful condition. Even though it appears helpless, it is also very beautiful. So, instead of breathing in suffering and suffocating ourselves, let us enjoy happiness in every breath.



GURUJI:

I want you to be happy, happier, happiest – emanating happiness and making other people and your environment happy. So happy that it's not enough that only you should be happy, everyone around you should also be happy.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, my life has changed in the direction you are saying, and I could say I didn't do anything for it, that it is all your grace and Baba's grace. But is there anything I can do?

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GURUJI:

I'm not asking you to do anything, I'm only asking you to experience and enjoy what Baba has given you and what he is ready to give you, that's all. Why I am telling you this again and again is because I feel your lives have become routine, run-of-the-mill lives. You are losing the thrill of life – that thrill! Don't let your life become mechanical. Every day should be a new day, a fresh day, as if you didn't exist yesterday and you're not going to exist tomorrow. Today *is*, this moment is the real truth, it is the real reality. Happily live a fulfilled life, experience the art of living. Try to enjoy your life like that. And, as I told you, if you have a problem, tell me. I will take care of it. If you don't have any problems, enjoy life! [Guruji laughs] Is it such a difficult instruction?



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, are there any practices to prepare ourselves for death?

GURUJI:

It is not about preparing for death; it's about practising how to live. Learn how to live, not how to die! Anyhow, you'll die whether you practise for it or not. [Laughter] So I emphasize life. Don't be obsessed with how to die or with what happens after death. Learn the art of living, and when you

have a fulfilled life, you'll also have a fulfilled end – if at all that is the end.

If you are puzzled by the enigma of your own life and gripped by the need to understand and experience the aesthetics of your book of life, then you start to learn about it. And how do you learn? You learn from a tutor who shows you how to read and understand it. And, because the tutor helps you to understand your book of life, you'll love him. So it all comes back to love.



GURUJI:

The fundamental pull of our love for the Sadguru is the love of life. Whether we love Sai Baba, Ramana, Arunachala or anyone else, we love them because we love ourselves. We love them because they represent the perfect fulfilment of our own lives, our own existence – how we want to be! We don't like the state of affairs where our life feels lifeless. The Sadguru represents a state where life is experienced in its fullness. So it is our love of life that is expressed in our pull to the Sadguru. When we really love our own life and realize everything is life, we love all of life. Then everything becomes an extension of that. So, in a way, Sai Baba is an extension of our own life.



Appendix of Sources

Abbreviation:

s – *Satsang (English)*

Chapter 1 Darshan

1	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
3	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
4	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai
5	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai
6	s85	8 December	2003	Chennai
7	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai
8	s127	23 November	2007	Rishikesh
9	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi

Chapter 2 The Familiar Stranger

1	s131	23 February	2008	Tiruvannamalai
2	s104	10 March	2005	Tiruvannamalai
3	s58	14 February	2002	Chennai
	s99	16 November	2004	Tiruvannamalai
4	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai
5	s126	19 November	2007	Pipalkote
6	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh
7	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh

Chapter 3 Resistance to Love

1	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
2	s10	4 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
3	s76	12 June	2003	Chennai
4	s52	15 October	2001	Tiruvannamalai

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5	s9	3 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
6	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
7	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
8	s40	5 May	1998	Shirdi

Chapter 4 Reading the Lives of Saints

1	s36	16 April	1998	Tiruvannamalai
2	s43	8 June	1998	Shirdi
3	s97	16 October	2004	Chennai
4	s48	6 March	1999	Shirdi
5	s83	19 November	2003	Chennai

Chapter 5 Effort from the Heart

1	s56	29 January	2002	Chennai
2	s38	22 April	1998	Tiruvannamalai
3	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
4	s128	26 November	2007	Rishikesh
	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
5	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
6	s57	1 February	2002	Chennai
7	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
8	s5	30 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
9	s46	22 July	1998	Shirdi

Chapter 6 Topsy-Turvy in a Well

1	<i>Shri Sai Satcharita</i> – Chapter 32			
2	s13	10 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
3	s50	25 February	2001	Chennai
	s74	1 June	2003	Chennai
4	s57	1 February	2002	Chennai
5	s57	1 February	2002	Chennai
6	s57	1 February	2002	Chennai

7	s57	1 February	2002	Chennai
8	s57	1 February	2002	Chennai
9	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
10	s138	6 November	2010	Murnau
	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi

Chapter 7 The Unending Love Story

1	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
2	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
3	s9	3 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
4	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
5	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
6	s99	16 November	2004	Tiruvannamalai
7	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
8	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
9	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
10	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 8 Boring into Boredom

1	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
2	s81	24 September	2003	Chennai
3	s95	23 July	2004	Tiruvannamalai
4	s54	25 December	2001	Chennai
5	s81	24 September	2003	Chennai
6	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
	s32	21 February	1998	Chitrakoot
7	s32	21 February	1998	Chitrakoot
8	s59	3 March	2002	Chennai
9	s29	19 January	1998	Shirdi

Chapter 9 The Gap

1	s88	3 February	2004	Chennai
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2	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
3	s88	3 February	2004	Chennai
4	s88	3 February	2004	Chennai
5	s1	5 March	1997	Shirdi
6	s5	30 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
7	s104	10 March	2005	Tiruvannamalai
	s88	3 February	2004	Chennai
8	s5	30 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
9	s137	9 March	2010	Chennai
	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh
10	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh

Chapter 10 Aspects of Change

1	s70	3 March	2003	Tiruvannamalai
2	s83	19 November	2003	Chennai
	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
3	s76	12 June	2003	Chennai
4	s76	12 June	2003	Chennai
5	s117	10 November	2006	Varanasi
6	s60	21 April	2002	Chennai
7	s128	26 November	2007	Rishikesh

Chapter 11 Helplessness & Seeking Help

1	s34	25 February	1998	Chennai
	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
2	s92	2 April	2004	Chennai
3	s92	2 April	2004	Chennai
4	s34	25 February	1998	Chennai
5	s92	2 April	2004	Chennai
6	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
7	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
8	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh

9	s125	18 November	2007	Pipalkote
10	s81	24 September	2003	Chennai

Chapter 12 On Death & the Love of Life

1	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s27	17 January	1998	Shirdi
3	s131	23 February	2008	Tiruvannamalai
4	s88	3 February	2004	Chennai
5	s97	16 October	2004	Chennai
6	s137	9 March	2010	Chennai
7	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
8	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
9	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
10	s78	8 July	2003	Chennai
	s55	19 January	2002	Chennai
11	s13	10 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai

Glossary

Note: Entries are in Sanskrit unless otherwise noted; half quotes are used when the literal differs from the lexical meaning.

arati – ceremonial worship in which the flame of a ghee lamp or burning camphor is circled clockwise around the image of a deity or a (living) saint while devotional hymns are sung, usually performed as part of a prescribed sequence of ritual acts (puja) in orthodox Hinduism.

Arunachala – *aruna* ‘red, dynamic’ + *achala* ‘static, unmoving’; the holy mountain in Tiruvannamalai, in Tamil Nadu, South India, traditionally believed to be a form of Siva and historically the abode of numerous saints and sages. It is where Sri Ramana Maharshi spent the last 54 years of his life.

Arunachala Padikam – a devotional poem in Tamil composed by Sri Ramana Maharshi in 11 stanzas, expressing his longing to merge with Arunachala and the blissful effects of union. Padikam means ‘10 stanzas’, but one more was added later, so it is also referred to as the *Eleven Verses to Sri Arunachala*.

atman – the Self; the spiritual essence (soul) manifest in the human body (*jivatman*); Upanishadic term for the universal Self, transcendent to the empirical ego, held by Vedanta to be identical with Brahman, the nondual Absolute; it is the ultimate ground of consciousness and principle of life and sensation.

Atma Lingam – ‘sign of the atman’; name of a boon sought by Ravana from Siva in a story from the Puranas.

avadhuta – ‘cast off’; an enlightened saint who has ‘cast off’ body consciousness and lives aloof from society, rejoicing in the bliss of Brahman.

Bhagavad Gita – ‘The Lord’s Song’, (abbrev. ‘Gita’); sublime poem of 700 verses in Book VI of the *Mahabharata* (c.5th century BCE), in which Lord Sri Krishna reveals the nature of death, rebirth, and Self-realization to his warrior-disciple, Arjuna, along with teachings on the yogas of love, knowledge, work, and meditation as paths to salvation. It is Hinduism’s most widely accepted and respected text.

Bhagavan – The Lord; Supreme Reality endowed with infinite power, compassion and knowledge; highest epithet of Godhead, applied honorifically to Sri Ramana Maharshi as a mark of great respect and devotion.

bhakti – devotion (fr. verb root *bhaj*, ‘to share, partake of’); the practice of devotional theism or loving devotion to a personal form of the deity, customarily one’s teacher (guru), or one’s chosen form of God (*Ishtadevata*), as the prime means to release (moksha).

Bodhgaya – the site in modern Bihar where Siddhartha Gautama experienced complete, perfect enlightenment and was henceforth known as the Buddha.

Bodhi Tree – the ‘Tree of Awakening’ (*ficus religiosa*) under which the Buddha sat when after 49 days he attained complete, perfect enlightenment.

Brahma Sutra – one of the three foundational texts of

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Vedanta (along with the Vedas and Bhagavad Gita), attributed to Badarayana (2e BCE), also called the *Vedanta Sutra*. It presents the conclusions of the Upanishads in a logical manner and establishes the Brahman-Atman equation as the ultimate truth and the nature of true being as existence, consciousness and bliss (*Saccidananda*).

Brahman – Vedic term for the nondual impersonal Absolute, both formless (*nirguna*), and with form (*saguna*). It is the ultimate ground of Being (*Sat*), source of all existence and experience.

Buddha – The Awakened One; title given to Siddhartha Gautama (c. 485 - 405 BCE), the sage on whose teachings Buddhism was founded.

Buddham saranam gacchami – “I take refuge in the Buddha”; the first of the three jewels (*Tri-ratna*) comprising the Buddhist profession of faith in the three foundations of Buddhism – the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (community of monks and nuns).

chamak/chamatkar – ‘dazzling’; a miracle, or a miraculous experience.

darshan – sight, vision; seeing or being in the presence of a deity, saint or sacred image, in the sense of both seeing and being seen.

Dattatreya – 1) Puranic sage, son of Anasuya and Atri; 2) A divine incarnation with three heads considered a composite deity incorporating Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, portrayed as accompanied by four dogs representing the Vedas. He was the patron saint of a medieval sect of Nath Siddhas and is often revered today as the embodiment of the supreme guru.

dharma – truth, law (universal and particular), order (cosmic and social), teaching, religion; virtuous behaviour; the ‘eternal Way’ (*sanatana dharma*) of truth, non-violence and virtuous conduct followed by saints since time immemorial.

divya drishti – divine sight; transcendental vision, sight of the subtle dimension (*suksma loka*).

drishti – seeing; knowing, knowledge; eye, faculty of sight.

Ekkirala Bharadwaja – (1938-1989), eminent Sai devotee and spiritual teacher (*acharya*), author of an important biography of Sai Baba and Sri Babuji’s lecturer in English literature in college, who guided his sadhana and inspired his love for Sai Baba. Sri Babuji regarded him as his guru throughout his life.

Ganesha – the pan-Indian, elephant-headed god, son of Siva and Parvati, giver of good luck and remover of obstacles, who is saluted at the beginning of every undertaking and in all orthodox rites of worship.

giri pradakshina – circumambulation of a sacred object or image, keeping it always to one’s right as an act of reverence. *Giri* means ‘mountain’ or ‘hill’ in Sanskrit; hence here *giri pradakshina* means walking clockwise around Arunachala as an act of devotion. It was a favourite activity of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

gurudakshina – the fee paid by the disciple to his guru at the conclusion of his studies; any offering to the guru given as a gift of gratitude by a student, devotee or individual.

hamsa – swan, goose; yogic symbol for the natural

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sound of the Self breathing, made by the breath entering (*ham*) and exiting (*sah*) the body. When repeated quickly it becomes *so'ham*, meaning 'That I am' in Sanskrit.

Ishwara – God; personal form of the Absolute Being.

japa – repetition of mantras or the name(s) of God or the Guru.

jnana – experiential knowledge of absolute truth, grounded on intuitive insight (*pratibha*); wisdom (*prajna*).

jnani – a person who has experiential knowledge of absolute truth; a fully enlightened, Self-realized being.

kafni – Urdu; a one-piece, knee-length cotton robe worn by Muslim ascetics.

Kali – 'the black one'; goddess of destruction and wife of Lord Siva, a form of Durga or Parvati, the Divine Mother, usually represented as a black goddess with dishevelled hair, a red tongue protruding from her mouth, and a garland of skulls around her neck. Perhaps originally a tribal goddess, Kali was assimilated into the Puranic and Sanskritic traditions as a demon-destroying power of Durga, appeased by blood-sacrifice, but by the 8th century she was the focus of refined, esoteric tantric worship, particularly in Bengal, where Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a priest in her temple at Dakshineswar.

karanas – causes; plural of *karana*, cause, as in *trikarana shuddhi*, the 'triple cause of purity' of thought, word and deed, which leads to enlightenment.

karma yoga – the yoga of disinterested action, leading to

sama or *samatva*, a state of equipoise, based on purity of heart and will. (See below under '*samma*').

Khandoba Temple – Khandoba is a Maharashtrian avatar of Lord Siva, renowned for his wish-granting power and widely worshipped under this name at hundreds of temples across the Deccan, the main centre being at Jejuri, in Pune District. It was the first temple visited by Sai Baba when he came to Shirdi; its priest, Mhalsapati, was the first to call him 'Sai Baba'.

Krishna Bhikshu – a close devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi who wrote an early (1936) biography of Bhagavan in Telugu, called *Sri Ramana Leela*, the only biography seen and corrected by Sri Bhagavan and hence considered the most authentic. It was much appreciated by Guruji, who was befriended by Sri Krishna Bhikshu during his early sadhana days on the holy hill (Arunachala).

kshanakshane yannavata Ramaneya roopam – part of a sloka in Valmiki's *Ramayana* stating that Lord Rama's form is renewed 'instant by instant'.

mahasamadhi – 'great absorption'; respectful term for the death of a saint.

Milarepa – (1040-1123 CE) the most famous saint and yogi of Tibet who endured six years of trials imposed on him by his master, Marpa the Translator (1012-1097 CE), so severe he was near suicide. Afterward, Marpa transmitted to him the teachings of Naropa, particularly the practice of 'inner heat' (Tib. *tummo*), and the complete teachings of the *mahamudra*. He became the founder of the Kagyüpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, made famous in the modern era by Chögyam Trungpa (1940-1987), a master of that order.

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mukti – freed; liberation from embodied existence.

murshid – Arabic; a spiritual master and guide of a Sufi order.

namaskar – ‘I bow to you’; the traditional greeting or gesture of respect, made by bringing the palms together vertically in front of the heart; also the act of bowing or prostrating before any object of devotion.

Narada – a mythical Brahmin sage devoted to Vishnu who had the divine boon of unrestricted travel between the celestial worlds (*lokas*) while acting as a wandering minstrel and messenger to the gods. The medieval *Narada Bhakti Sutras* are ascribed to him.

Nayanmars – Tamil; ‘Lords’, ‘Leaders’; collective designation given to the 63 Tamil Saivite saints; see further under ‘Periya Puranam’.

Nirguna Bhakti – love of the formless, nondual Absolute, ‘Advaita Bhakti’; devotion to the undifferentiated Supreme Being called *Nirguna Brahman* in the Upanishads and given philosophical priority by Sankara in Advaita Vedanta. It emphasizes the mystical nature of trans-egoic love, often conceived as manifest in the figure of the Sadguru, whose grace and illuminative agency are considered essential to fulfilment. Among its classical exemplars are Kabir (1415-1518), Raidas (1450-1525) and Guru Nanak (1469-1539), and modern masters like Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918), Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (1876-1950), and Sri Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982).

nirvana – ‘blowing out’; liberation, extinction; in Theravada Buddhism, the state of release from samsara that

occurs upon extinction of craving or desire (*tanha*); in Mahayana, the realization of 'suchness' (*tathata*), or the *Dharmakaya*, the Buddha's body of Truth.

Nisargadatta Maharaj – influential modern Maharashtrian saint and *jnani* (1897-1981) who espoused a powerful, pure form of Advaita Vedanta to seekers from his home in Mumbai. His satsang, translated and published in 1973 by Maurice Frydman as *I Am That*, became a modern classic and gave Maharaj worldwide renown.

Panduranga – another name for Vithoba, the form of Sri Krishna specially beloved by the Varkaris of the pilgrimage tradition associated with Pandharpur, Maharashtra.

parikrama – to go around; to circumambulate a holy object or person in a clockwise direction as an act of veneration and respect.

Periya Puranam – 'Great Story'; an important Tamil Saiva hagiographical work by Cekkilar (12th cent. CE) that tells the life stories of the 63 Tamil Saivite saints known as Nayanmars, who flourished from 6th to 9th cent. CE in what is now Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. They gave rise to an intimate, personalized form of devotion called bhakti that was shared by their Vaishnava counterparts called Alvars. This led to the development of the medieval Sant movement in Maharashtra that culminated in the Nirguna Bhakti Mysticism of Guru Nanak, Kabir and modern saints like Sai Baba of Shirdi and Sri Anandamayi Ma.

Poondi Swami – legendary saint and adept living near Tiruvannamalai, renowned for his state of ecstatic absorption, called *ajagarabhava* (python-state), in which he remained for the last 18 years of his life (d.1978). Sri

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Babuji had *sakshatkar* (Self-realization) while visiting him in 1974.

pradakshina – ‘right-facing’; moving clockwise around a sacred object or image, keeping it always to one’s right as an act of reverence.

puja – ceremonial worship; ritualistic worship of a deity, saint, or sacred image, consisting traditionally of 16 ritual offerings accompanied by recitation of mantras.

Purana – old story; name of a large class of texts, written from 8e to 16e cent. CE, composed to make Vedic religion adaptable to popular understanding. There are 18 major puranas, 6 each glorifying Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The most famous are the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (for Vaishnavas), the *Skanda Purana* (for Saivites), and the *Markandeya Purana* (for Saktas or Mother worshippers).

purusha – person; Self, atman; *Satpurusha* – the cosmic Self.

Rama – a king of the Solar dynasty at Ayodhya (trad. 3800-3700 BCE) and 7th avatar of Vishnu, husband of Sita, whose life and deeds are told outwardly in Valmiki’s *Ramayana* and Tulsidas’ *Ramcharitamanasa*, and inwardly in the *Yogavasistha*. Lord Rama is considered the personification of Dharma and the ideal king and husband.

Ramakrishna – Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886), celebrated Bengali saint and mystic, and ecstatic devotee of the Divine Mother as Kali. By her grace, he practised the sadhanas of many religions – Sufism, Christianity, Mother Worship, Advaita Vedanta and Vaishnava Bhakti – and found that all were forms of one Truth leading to God-Realization. His great disciple,

Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902) carried this universal Oneness to the West in the form of Advaita Vedanta, which he introduced to America in 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Ramana Maharshi – the celebrated sage (1879-1950) of Mt. Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, whose rare degree of realization, saintly life and appearance, and pristine teaching of Advaita, distinguished him as among the greatest of saints. At age 16 he attained Self-realization and was drawn to the holy hill, where he stayed for the rest of his life, and where his ashram and samadhi are still active, attracting seekers from around the world.

Ravana – a great asura (demon), Lord of Lanka, renowned for his sorcery and occult, magical powers. He is the evil protagonist of the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* who steals Sita, Lord Rama's wife, thereby precipitating the war between himself and Lord Rama recorded in the *Ramayana*, where Lord Rama, aided by Hanuman and the monkey tribe, finally defeats Ravana and gets Sita back.

Saivite – a devotee or follower of Siva.

Sadguru – 'true guru'; a fully-enlightened spiritual master who is capable of guiding others towards enlightenment and realizing the truth of their essential Being.

sadhaka – one who practises sadhana.

sadhana – (fr. *sadh* – 'to succeed, attain'); self-effort; means to the goal; any spiritual discipline.

sadhu – holy person, ascetic; a serious seeker who has

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devoted his life to a spiritual path and practice in pursuit of truth.

Sahasra sheersha purushaha, sahasraksha sahasrapath – part of a famous sloka in the *Purusha Suktam*, the Creation Hymn of the Rig Veda, describing the cosmic person as having a thousand heads and eyes.

Saipatham – the path of Sai; the path of Sadguru devotion centered on Sai Baba of Shirdi as exemplified in the life and teaching of Sri Sarath Babuji; the name of the satsang hall and surrounding area in Shirdi where Sri Babuji's samadhi is located.

samadhi – trance; meditative state of absorption; respectful term for the death of a saint; the tomb of a saint or holy person.

Samadhi Mandir – The temple in Shirdi where Sai Baba's tomb is located.

samma – Pali (Skt. *sama*); balance, equanimity, poise, harmony. The fundamental virtue extolled by the Buddha and praised repeatedly in the Bhagavad Gita as the optimal condition for spiritual unfoldment.

samyag vyayama – right or correct effort, the 6th limb of the noble eight-fold path of Buddhism (*arya-astanga-marga*).

Sannidhanam – the place of Sri Babuji's tomb in Shirdi where his presence (*sannidhi*) may still be palpably experienced.

sannyasa – the last stage (*asrama*) of human life according to ancient Hindu Dharma in which a person renounces

family, possessions, caste, and worldly life in quest of God or Truth.

sannyasin – one who has taken *sannyasa* and renounced home, family, and his worldly life in order to surrender to the Divine and become a wanderer in search of God.

sastras – scripture; teaching, doctrine, treatise.

satsang – association with a great soul or discussion on spiritual subjects; sangha (association) with *Sat* (truth).

satori – Jap. The term in Japanese Zen Buddhism for the experience of awakening leading to enlightenment.

seva – selfless service undertaken on behalf of god or guru as a means of self-purification or an expression of devotion.

Shirdi – a small town in Maharashtra which was the abode of Sai Baba, now a major pilgrimage centre; it was Guruji's home from 1989 to 2010.

Shri Sai Satcharita – 'The Blessed 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. It is considered the prime authority for Baba's life and stories (*leelas*) and is regarded as a sacred text by devotees.

Siva – 'the auspicious one'; one of the three major Hindu gods forming a trinity with Brahma (the Creator) and Vishnu (the Preserver). Siva governs the aspect of destruction and transformation.

soham (sah-aham) – 'That I am', with 'so' standing for

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cosmic consciousness (Brahman) and 'aham' for individual consciousness (atman); the Self's innate mantra used in *ajapa japa*, said to be the unconscious prayer repeated by the breath itself, 'so' occurring with inhalation, 'ham' with exhalation (also the reverse according to some texts).

Sri Ramana Leela – name of an important, early biography of Sri Ramana Maharshi in Telugu written by Sri Krishna Bhikshu.

Srimad Bhagavatam – a major devotional text for Vaishnavas, second only to the Bhagavad Gita, portraying Sri Krishna's life and *leelas* and extolling love of Sri Krishna as the instrumental means of release.

Sufi – Arabic; 'wearer of wool'; member of an order of the mystical tradition of Islam called Sufism, devoted to an inner path under a guru (Sheikh, *murshid*), whose object is to achieve direct, experiential knowledge of the Real, which, through illumination (*kashf*), leads to communion with God (*fana fi'llah*). Sufism influenced, and shares many traits with the Medieval Mystical School of Nirguna Bhakti exemplified by Guru Nanak and Kabir, and modern saints such as Shirdi Sai Baba.

Tantra(s) – 'warp, loom, threads'; text; a broad class of scriptures outside the canon of the Vedas but equally ancient, whose content and authority depends on extra-Vedic revelation and direct transmission from guru to disciple, not upon Vedic mantras and sacrifices, or Brahminical rituals and observances. Tantras cover the *Saiva Agamas* and *Vaishnava Samhitas*, but the term is usually applied to texts teaching Mother Worship (*Sakta Tantras*). The Tantras look inward, not outward, and use psychic centres of the human body as focuses of esoteric worship.

Tiruvannamalai – ancient temple town in Tamil Nadu, about 185 km from Chennai, site of the holy mountain Arunachala and the great temple to Siva, Arunachaleswara, at its eastern base. It was the home of Sri Ramaana Maharshi from 1896 until his *mahasamadhi* in 1950, where his ashram and samadhi are still active and visited by thousands of pilgrims annually from around the world. It was one of Guruji's favourite places and he gave many of his satsangs there.

Upanishads – philosophical treatises attached to the Vedas containing the speculations and mystical insights of the Vedic Rishis into the nature of ultimate reality; it is termed the Vedanta Philosophy because it occurs at the end (*anta*) of the Vedas.

Valmiki – legendary sage and author of the original Sanskrit epic poem, the *Ramayana* (c. 500 BCE), considered to be the first literary poet (*adikavi*) of India known by name. He is credited with inventing the characteristic epic metre known as the sloka, which is said to have occurred to him when he heard a bird cry.

Vanjari – a tradesman; in 19th century Maharashtra, usually a man with a bullock cart selling wares and food-stuffs.

Veda(s) – 'sacred knowledge', from *vid* 'to know.' The Vedas are the oldest and most sacred scriptures of the Hindus (c.1500 BCE) and are held to be eternal, without human authorship (*apauruseya*), and of divine authority; acceptance of this is a criterion of orthodoxy. They are said to be *sruti* (that which is heard) or divinely revealed to the ancient rishis and sages. They comprise the Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva Veda, and include the Upanishads. They teach the nature and worship of

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Brahman, the nondual Absolute, both with and without form.

Vedanta – ‘end of the Vedas’; the philosophy of the identity of Brahman-atman and spiritual freedom (moksha) portrayed in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutra, upholding worship of both the personal (*saguna*) and impersonal (*nirguna*) forms of Brahman.

yoga – ‘yoke, union’; generic term for various methods of integration of the individual soul with God or universal soul (Brahman), indigenous to India from antiquity. The Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Dhyana Yogas are mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita (5e cent. BCE). Other equally ancient psycho-physical practices consisting of postures, breath control, concentration, and various trance states leading to union (yoga) were codified later classically by Patanjali in his *Yogasutras* (350-450 CE). Yoga philosophy and its attainments (siddhis, samadhis) form a common background to all forms of Indian religion.

Saipatham Publications

Saipatham Publications is dedicated to preserving and publishing materials about the life, literary works and spiritual legacy of Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, his great Sadguru Sai Baba of Shirdi, and other saints associated with Sri Babuji's life and thought. Our publications are offered primarily in English and Telugu as described below, with certain titles also available in Tamil and Kannada where indicated.

Publications in English

1. *Arati Sai Baba: The Psalm Book of Shirdi Aratis*. English Transliteration of the original Marathi Arati Songs with English Translation, Introduction and Commentary. By Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1996); Pp.67. (Under reprint). A definitive edition of Sai Baba's *Aratis* showing their historical background and devotional significance.
2. *Bound to Love: Experiences with Sri Babuji*. Compiled and edited by SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011); Pp. 241. Fascinating accounts of devotees' life-changing experiences with Sri Babuji, with photographs and Glossary.
3. *Rose Petals: Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji – Vol. 1*. Edited by Ram Brown Crowell and Alison Williams (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012); Pp.124. The first published volume of Sri Babuji's original English satsangs, with colour photographs, Glossary, and biographical Introduction.
4. *Rose Petals: Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji – Vol. 2*. Edited by Ram Brown Crowell (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2013); Pp.157. The second volume of Sri Babuji's

English satsangs, with colour photographs, Glossary, and an Introduction on the presence of Sri Babuji in his satsangs.

5. *Rose Petals: Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji – Vol. 3*. Edited by Ram Brown Crowell, with Yvonne Weier and Linda (Bhakti) Bonner (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2014); Pp.178. The third volume of selections from Sri Babuji's English satsangs, with colour photographs, Glossary, and an Introduction on transformation in the satsangs of Sri Babuji.

6. *Experiencing Sai Baba's Shirdi: A Guide*. By Alison Williams (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2e rev., 2004); Pp.153; illustrated with maps, diagrams and photographs. The most comprehensive guidebook to Shirdi and the relics, sites and stories associated with Baba's long residence there during the last 50 years of his life.

7. *Babuji [pamphlet]*. By Yvonne Weier with Geoff Dowson (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2013); Pp.36; illustrated. An intimate biographical memoir of Sri Babuji.

8. *Smriti Sumalu – Flowers of Remembrance*. By SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011); Pp.143. A collective memoir of devotees' experiences that occurred in connection with Sri Babuji's *mahasamadhi*, with Glossary and an Introduction narrating the events of his entombment in Shirdi. In English and Telugu.

Publications in Telugu

1. *Prarthana Patham [booklet]*. The daily prayer and hymn to Sri Sai Baba, adapted by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji into Telugu, from Sri Ramana Maharshi's hymn *Arunachala Padikam* in Bhagavan's *Marital Garland of Letters* (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, n.d.).

2. *Sai Bhakti Sadhana Rahasyam*. An in-depth introduction to the Sai Tradition (*Sai Sampradaya*) by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1996). In Telugu, Tamil and Kannada editions. A treasury of insights into Sai Worship and the path of devotion by Sri Sarath Babuji.
3. *Sri Sai Gurucharitra*. Selected works by Das Ganu Maharaj, with an explanatory foreword by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji. Translated from Marathi into Telugu by S.V.L. Narayana Rao (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1996).
4. *Sai Deevana*. Edited by SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011). A moving anthology of devotees' experiences with Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji.
5. *Sarathchandrikalu – Vol. 1*. By SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012). A translation into Telugu of *Rose Petals, Vol. 1*.
6. *Sarathchandrikalu – Vol. 2*. By SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2013). A translation into Telugu of *Rose Petals, Vol. 2*.
7. *Sarathchandrikalu – Vol. 3*. By SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2014). A translation into Telugu of *Rose Petals, Vol. 3*.
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