

Rose Petals

SELECTIONS FROM SATSANGS WITH SRI BABUJI

Vol. 2



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Vol. 2



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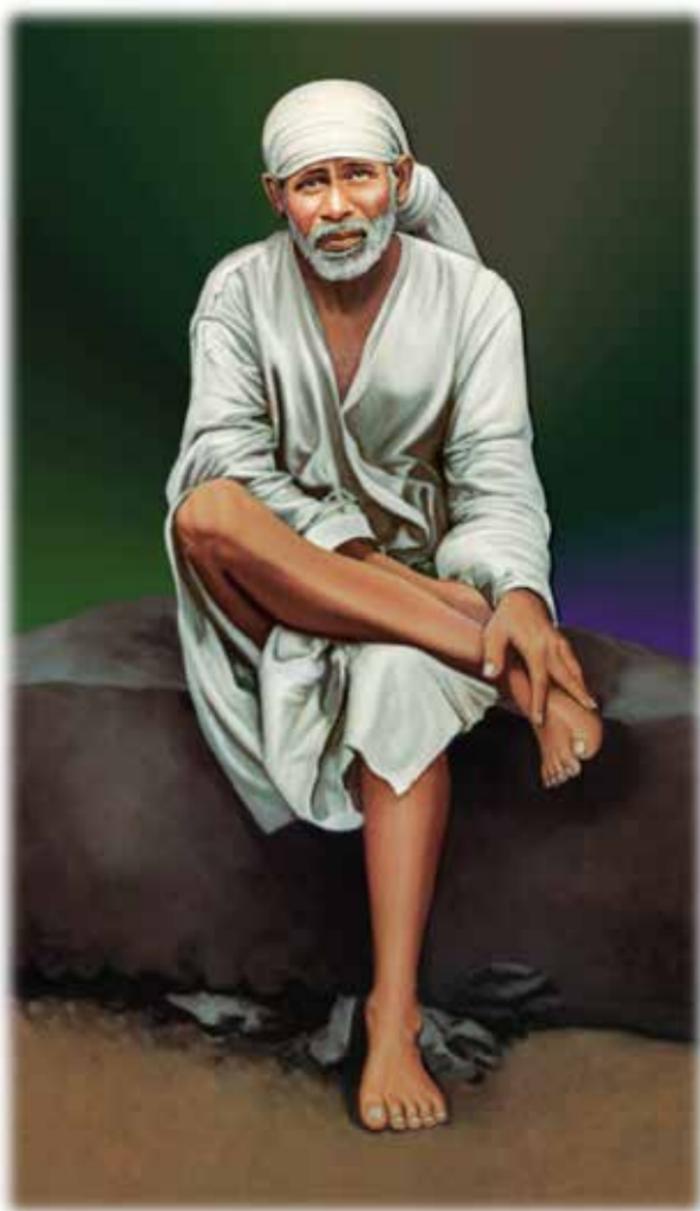
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Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi

*To Sai Baba of Shirdi
who gave us Guruji*



Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

The true spiritual journey should lead us to the reality of our actual experience which is tangible, intimate, simple, here and now.

– Sri Babuji

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made an essential contribution to the text and publication of this book.

It is again an honour to acknowledge the ongoing interest and support of Sri Babuji's wife, Smt. Anasuya Ammagaru, and his beloved daughter, Sainathuni Sruti, for *Rose Petals*. Their impeccable devotion to Sri Babuji and steadfast commitment to his work and vision are heartening sources of inspiration and encouragement.

Everyone who has contributed to this second volume of *Rose Petals* feels privileged to have worked towards making Guruji's words more widely available to seekers around the world. The endeavour has been undertaken as an expression of devotion to our Sadguru, and as a humble token of gratitude for all we have received through his grace. We offer this small volume as an aid to all those in search of fulfilment with the wish they may benefit from Sri Babuji's words of wisdom, infused as they are with the incomparable, living presence of an enlightened Master.

Ram Brown Crowell
Editor, *Rose Petals* – Vol. 2

Note on Text and Sources

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* (11e 2008) are italicized. Words in the text enclosed by square brackets have been inserted by the editors and are not part of the original satsang. The term 'guru' refers in all cases to a Self-realized teacher.

The sources of 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 topic, according to the number and date of the satsang.

Chapters 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 have been edited by Ram Brown Crowell; chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 12 have been edited by Alison Williams.

The **Glossary** has been prepared by the editor and is based on standard modern authorities and the relevant classical sources.

Preface

Rose Petals – Vol. 2 is the second volume of English satsangs to be published of Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (1954–2010), the renowned South Indian saint and Sadguru who lived and taught in the tradition of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi. During his brief but brilliant life of devotion, he became a beacon of love and source of solace for thousands of people from all walks of life. They were inspired by his love for Sai Baba, spellbound by his luminous presence and transformed by the wisdom of his satsangs in both English and Telugu.

Rose Petals – Vol. 2 contains selections edited from Sri Babuji's English satsangs given in private to small groups of devotees from 1993 to 2010. They are arranged according to themes which were published initially in digital format and appear now as the chapter headings of this book. The text has also been published in Telugu, Sri Babuji's native language, as *Sarathchandrikalu* (Moonlight Petals). A fuller account of Sri Babuji's life can be found in the Introduction to the first volume.

Sri Babuji's satsangs were brilliant, original, insightful and practical. They cover a wide range of subjects of traditional interest to seekers but from a modern, psychologically astute, non-sectarian, non-doctrinal point of view that allows his words to have relevance for those on paths

other than Sri Babuji's own. This may be referred to as *Saipatham*, the path of Sai, which was centred on devotion to his Sadguru, Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918).

Mention is sometimes made of 'teachings' in relation to Sri Babuji's satsangs but, in a sense, this is a misnomer since it is true only as a product of reflection. For Sri Babuji had no teachings as such, as he himself often said; his life and presence were his teaching. Sai Baba also gave no formal teachings; the absorptive, transforming power of his living presence was so overwhelming that beside it the need for teachings paled into insignificance. Similarly, other great saints like Sri Anandamayi Ma, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Ramana Maharshi, were renowned more for the manumitting power of their enlightened presence (*sannidhi*) than they were for their spoken satsang, as profound as that was. In other words, whatever they said was felt to be secondary to the primary, transcendent experience of their oceanic presence. A single quote from Sri Ramana will suffice to show its power: "A *jnani* has no *sankalpas* (intentions) but his *sannidhi* is the most powerful force. It can do wonders: save souls, give peace of mind, even give liberation to ripe souls. The *jnani* does save devotees, but not by *sankalpa*, which is non-existent in him, but only through his presiding presence, his *sannidhi*."

This is especially true of Sri Babuji, whose *sannidhi* was the essential background of any words he spoke, though it is necessarily tacit

in a printed version of what he said. Even so, the inscrutable living bond between his words and his presence constitutes the real satsang recorded in these pages: that bond endows his satsang with its potentially transformative power. His words perfumed with his presence form a subtle connection between Guruji and ourselves as readers or hearers which, even when acknowledged subconsciously, inspire us and uplift our hearts and spirits. Historically, imparting this inspiration has been the sacred function of satsang and, in theory, it holds as true for readers of Guruji's satsang now as it did for its hearers then, for presence is a quality of Being independent of time; indeed, on the subtle plane it is eternal. Such a recognition on the reader's part can open the salvific power of satsang to free us. This is more likely to occur if the reader knows something of the circumstances in which the satsangs took place and has some understanding of the ramifications of Sri Babuji's sublime presence at their heart. Properly understood, these considerations can magnify the beneficial effect of the satsangs presented here.

In the Introduction that follows, the place of satsang in the Indian spiritual tradition is reviewed and the circumstances of Sri Babuji's satsangs are described, so that the atmosphere in which they took place becomes more familiar to the reader. This is followed by some observations on the nature of presence and its affective

qualities in satsang, based on feedback from fellow *gurubandhus* in addition to the writer's own experience. Discussion of a saint's presence in these terms is rather a new and relatively unexplored field in Western literature on Eastern spirituality, but it is to be hoped that further knowledge will bring more awareness to this most important subject for all sincere seekers. To paraphrase what Protagoras famously wrote in his treatise *On the Gods*, "About presence, it is not possible to say precisely what it is or is not, nor how it is constituted. For there is much that prevents knowledge – the profundity of the subject and the brevity of human life."

Ram Brown Crowell
Editor, *Rose Petals – Vol. 2*



Introduction

The Fragrance of Presence in the Satsangs of Sri Sarath Babuji

The word 'satsang' in Sanskrit means literally 'company with the truth' and in this broad sense it has a very wide field of reference. It can be seen as encompassing many kinds of spiritual practice common to all forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, including scriptural study, various forms of meditation and enquiry, informal discussion of truth with a teacher or other seekers, lectures or holy stories on spiritual subjects, reading the lives of saints, and so on. But of all its varieties, satsang's classical exemplar has always been its Upanishadic form, that which takes place between a qualified guru and disciple, in which the ultimate truth is revealed or disclosed in the presence of a realized teacher.

Traditionally, therefore, satsang has had two functions to perform: to teach and to transform. It is usually held that its teaching function is performed exoterically through its words, while its transformative function is enacted esoterically through the medium of the saint's silent presence, his *sannidhi*. The capacity of words to teach coupled with the transformative power of the guru's presence is considered the optimum situation for impregnating and triggering the spiritual potential residing in the seeker's (or reader's) mind. Thus we see that satsang comprises two essential components – words and presence.

Conventional usage restricts satsang's meaning to its words without formal reference to the presence of the saint behind them. There is an excellent reason for this, of course, since the silent dimension of a saint's presence cannot be captured or reproduced in words. But it is an error of understanding to omit consideration of presence from a discussion of satsang, because it restricts satsang's referential field to a word-based, conceptually-driven view of reality, compared to the silent, boundless dimension of the guru's presence. This dimension is emphasized by Sri Babuji as follows:

“I don't believe that satsangs *per se* will make you 'enlightened' or give you knowledge, with my lectures and things – nothing! The content we speak of now I don't think is very important because I don't believe in lectures or verbal

teachings. If they were so good, Baba would have taught, given lectures, moving around the whole world. What he didn't do, why should I do? *Because what Baba does, he doesn't do by any verbal teachings.* His way is different: he gives an experience! He simply knows how to give directly, that is my experience. Even for those who can understand only through verbal teaching, verbal teachings will eventually drive them towards something non-verbal. Because words are only the beginning; at the ultimate level there are no verbs. The real transformation comes in your heart – it is not due to what I say in satsang. Because it's not the spoken word that actually affects you or transforms you. As I have said many times, I don't believe much in words at all. I simply take them as an opportunity to sit together and share happily."

A fascinating example of satsang without words is provided by the account of an educated Parsi lady, Mrs Manager, of her first meeting with Sai Baba in 1911:

"One's first impression of Sai Baba was his eyes. There was such power and penetration in his gaze that one could not long look him in the eyes. One felt he was reading one through and through. Soon one lowered one's eyes and bowed down. One felt that he was not only in one's heart but in every atom of one's body. A few words or a gesture would reveal to one that Sai Baba knew all about the past and present and even the future and everything else. There was nothing else to

do but to submit trustfully and surrender oneself to him.”¹

Here the satsang consists almost entirely of presence: there is no teaching as such – hardly a word is spoken – yet the effect is overwhelming. In such cases, the saint’s non-verbal presence can be so powerful it overpowers the need for teaching, rendering words unnecessary. Instead, his presence gives immediate access to the silent realm of reality beyond speech and thought, the matrix from which all words originate. This is the mysterious source of the supernatural, omniscient power which Mrs. Manager experiences.

We may define presence as the generic term for the essential qualities of absolute Being, characterized in the Upanishads as *Satchidananda* (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss), which the guru’s own being embodies. All beings that breathe have presence, but its most complete human manifestation is held to occur in the form of the Sadguru, whose presence manifests Being’s essential nature and contains all its liberating qualities such as brilliance, compassion, wisdom, peace and love. It is important to see that these qualities are inseparable from the nature of presence, like heat and light are of fire. They are always available, even in the guru’s disembodied state, since they are inherent in his absolute being and therefore eternal. When the guru

¹*The Incredible Sai Baba*, by Arthur Osborne (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1957; rep. 1980), p. 24.

dies (*mahasamadhi*), what drops is his form, not his being, which continues to manifest in the subtle realms beyond earthly time (*sukshmaloka*), expressing all its soterial qualities as before, indeed with an even greater intensity, unimpeded by its previous, localized form. Presumably, this truth forms the basis of faith for millions of believers in departed saints like the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and Shirdi Sai Baba, whose timeless presence must be somehow the source renewing their love and effecting their transformation.

The enduring availability of presence is highlighted by the startling fact that two of Shirdi Sai Baba's most eminent devotees, each of whom credits him with their realization, Sri Babuji and B. V. Narasimha Swami, never met Sai Baba in his earthly form. Narasimha Swami's experience occurred in 1936 and Sri Babuji's in 1974, well after Baba left this world in 1918. Thus, the transformative qualities of presence are clearly not limited by time.

For those who had the privilege of being with Sri Babuji, known affectionately as 'Guruji', his presence was a tangible, living experience. To bring his presence alive for the reader as well, we begin by describing the environment in which his satsangs took place.

Guruji did not give satsangs in public; they were always held privately, in an informal, intimate atmosphere like that of a family. There

was an ineffable sweetness to Guruji's presence that drew people to him from the early days following his pivotal experience with Poondi Swami. His charisma and wisdom made seekers love to be in his company, so whenever there was a chance to sit with him, satsang happened spontaneously and Guruji would share his love of Sai Baba. In later years, as the crowds grew, his informal satsangs became rarer, but Guruji through his grace would often join devotees in chanting *Sai nama*, allowing them in this way to be in his presence.

Guruji's satsangs were always spontaneous and essentially unannounced. They could take place any time day or night, and were held in a variety of places: at his home in Shirdi, in Tirumala, by the sea on the coast south of Chennai, in Rishikesh, on the Ganga in Varanasi, in Uttarkashi, on the roof of his simple flat in Tiruvannamalai, or even while travelling on a boat or train. This meant one had to be there in the moment to attend, which could amount to waiting many hours, or even days and weeks, and remaining near Guruji even when he travelled, so as not to miss the rare opportunity of a satsang. Those who waited did so in happy expectation, longing to see him, minds and hearts united in anticipation of entering his beloved presence. The added sense of not knowing when a satsang would happen imbued waiting with an adventurous thrill, which turned into gratitude when satsang

was given and one was fortunate enough to attend.

Satsang with Guruji was extraordinary. The atmosphere was electric, sparkling with wit, insight and humor, and charged with a refining power that brought a brilliant lucidity and depth to every aspect of experience. One felt secure and taken care of, renewed and refreshed, bathed in the grace of his timeless presence. Guruji was vibrantly alive and alert, by turns grave and light-hearted, and so full of wit and humor that the satsang often rang with laughter and expressions of wonder. Guruji was a gifted mime and raconteur who could tell stories from the Puranas or his own experience with a humorous elan and panache that often left devotees holding their sides in laughter. Even the way Guruji moved was mesmerizing – the fluid motion of his hands, the effortless grace of his gestures, had an uncanny, aesthetic effect – one couldn't take one's eyes off him. His actions seemed choreographed by a higher power, or projected like a movie from another, higher dimension, where all was harmony, beauty and perfection.

In giving satsang, it was Guruji's custom not to speak unless asked; he never discoursed unilaterally or gave lectures. When a question was asked, he replied individually, according to the needs of the person, taking other questions by turn, or he remained silent until another question was asked. Many found their unasked questions

were also answered, as if their minds had been read and responded to silently. Guruji seemed completely familiar with all the permutations of the ego's neurotic patterns and conditionings, in both their Eastern and Western forms, and in a range and depth his own background could never account for. His curative advice was expressed in psychological terms of exceptional clarity and insight, free of doctrine and jargon.

Many devotees spoke of a subtle, energetic quality to Guruji's presence, an energizing effect that made the hours slip away unnoticed. Sometimes the effects of his presence were recognized retrospectively, some days or weeks later, through a sudden insight or realization, or by darshan in a dream, or internally in other ways. This was clearly due to lingering effects from his satsang germinating over time, and it implies the effects are still potentially available to those who can appreciate and discern them. Other devotees spoke of a mysterious, dynamic effect experienced as awakening their latent spiritual potential or, conversely, as increasing the ego's resistances to transformation. This could bring up painful feelings of frustration, failure, self-reproach, etc., which one accepted was the guru's role to catalyze into awareness, making them easier to identify and overcome.

In the informal survey carried out for this Introduction, one effect turned out to be more common than expected: a feeling of stupefaction.

By this term is meant a temporary suspension of thinking, a supervening blankness, experienced as a pleasant forgetfulness of an entire field of thought or area of experience, as though the mind had gone on holiday. It can be explained as the suspension of habitual thought-patterns to enable the subject to encounter the mystery of life's transcendent dimension with less ego-interference and friction, shutting down the mind, like engaging the clutch in a car, so that consciousness can be shifted by the transcendent into a new gear. Guruji expresses this phenomenon in vivid terms:

“The real purpose of satsang is that state of mind you get when you leave after sitting here one or two hours. You don't have any intellectual or emotional pull to ask a question, even if you try. Even if you make a big effort to form a thought in your mind, it won't come! [Guruji laughs] And that state of not having a thought, even if you try – that is the real effect of satsang. Usually, our problem is how to stop thoughts; after satsang even the effort to formulate a thought is impossible. That state has nothing to do with what I have said in satsang, but it is the result, the fruit of it.”

Stupefaction was also reported in medieval Christian literature as the identifying mark of a spiritually-induced state of wonder and awe that was considered therapeutic. This view appears in Rudolf Otto's classic study, *The Idea of the Holy*, where it is discussed in terms of the Christian encounter with Being characterized by two of its

medieval Latin terms, *Mysterium* (the mysterious), and *Tremendum* (the awe-inspiring), taken here as two experiential aspects of boundless presence.²

Interestingly, stupefaction is also the devotional mood expressed by Dasganu Maharaj in the *arati* verse that Guruji quotes in Chapter 1 of this book: “In Baba’s *arati* we sing, *thaka gayi meri rasana*, that is, ‘I am dumbfounded’ (lit. ‘my tongue is exhausted’).” Here, Guruji comments, “Actually, Dasganu was expressing that stupefied feeling where one forgets oneself.” So strong are the devotional effects of Sai Baba’s presence.

How then does the Sadguru’s presence transform? One analogy Guruji used was comparing the ego to a piece of iron and the Sadguru to a magnet whose presence is a harmonizing field. This analogy appears in Chapter 4 of this book, so it is summarized briefly in edited form here:

“We are all like pieces of iron – what differentiates the iron from the magnet? In the magnet, all the molecules are in order, properly polarized; every molecule has a north and south pole. In the iron, the molecules are not polarized, there are no poles, no order, so each molecule’s magnetic field is counteracted by that of another. In fact, all the iron molecules are potentially magnets; their magnetic power is there, but it is retarded,

² *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational.* By Rudolph Otto (London: Oxford University Press, 2e 1950, rep. 1969 (orig.1e 1923); pp.25-30.

suppressed. So, in our hearts, we are like the iron molecules. We have so many different pulls, with no alignment or order, only different molecules of attraction and aversion in conflict with each other. We have so many different pulls that our so-called magnetic force is lost. So, how to make iron into a magnet? By putting it again and again into contact with a magnet – the Sadguru. The magnetic force embedded in the Sadguru will gradually polarize the different pulls and align them. Then they are harmonized, put in order.

The real contact is to be in the Sadguru's magnetic field: what transforms the iron into a magnet is not the magnet, it's the field. In this analogy, it's an energetic field, but it could also be an emotional field, like love, because what is actually happening here [in satsang] is emotion. With an actual piece of iron it is just an energetic pull. But we are not pieces of iron, we are human beings, we have a heart, we have feelings. So how we experience the field is as love – an emotion. So where that particular emotion of love is fanned, where it increases and becomes stronger, where you are more and more aware of it, yes, that is the magnetic field, the presence, of the Sadguru."

A feeling of inner alignment and enhanced clarity was a common effect of Guruji's satsang. There was also a palpable sense of sitting in a field charged with unconditional love emanating from Guruji's perfect devotion to Sai Baba, that inspired one's own heart with love.

Another analogy Guruji used to illustrate the transformative function of presence was that of the guru as an 'active mirror' that reflects not only the seeker's egoic qualities but also acts to correct and sublimate them, merging them in the flow of pure presence that is the guru's own nature. This is how Guruji describes it:

"When you are face to face with yourself [in the Sadguru's presence] then the process of unfoldment begins. And when that happens, qualities which are not so beautiful come into your awareness. The Sadguru acts just like a mirror: what you see in the mirror is yourself as you are. This is a limited analogy and no analogy is perfect: in fact, the Sadguru is a mirror that can effect change also, by making you aware of what needs to be changed and helping you to achieve it. Because he is a living mirror, he not only shows you the error, he can also remove it. That's why I call him an active mirror. He is not simply a passive mirror showing you as you are: if you are ugly – yes, you are ugly. No. He tries to remove your ugliness, your dirt, and make you clean. An ordinary mirror doesn't do this, but an active mirror will do it. There is no motivation for this – it is simply the guru's sport, his play. When the active mirror is trying to rectify you, to make you tidy, in fact what he is trying to do is to make himself tidy, from his side it is simply that. Because he doesn't see you as separate from himself, he is simply trying to help himself, he's

trying to take care. He feels you are a part of him, so from his side he is doing it for himself.”

Gurujī continues eloquently, speaking evidently from his own experience:

“A sage is in such a state that when a person approaches him, he becomes one with that person: there is no question of two. So, in his experience he is reacting to his own self in fact. When he is speaking it becomes a kind of a soliloquy to himself, as if he were speaking to himself. So, sometimes your unspoken questions are answered, your unspoken thoughts are said, and a kind of sympathetic love is triggered. All these things happen because of his oneness with us. He is acting like a mirror, an active mirror. It’s choiceless. Why he loves us is only because he sees we are part of him.”

We find this description wonderful and awe-inspiring. For all who still suffer from egoic limitation it is also a moving affirmation that unconditional love operates at the centre of the human condition in the figure of the Sadguru, whose choiceless desire is to liberate us into his own blissful state. Other than his realized presence, Nature provides no other conceivable source that could replicate its mirroring, optimizing agency.

This Introduction has endeavoured to show that Sri Babuji’s words are fragrant with his presence as an experiential reality. The distinction between words and presence in satsang is of course finally

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artificial, since in reality they occur simultaneously and inseparably, each informing the other. This is even more true of the satsangs of Sri Babuji where the fusion of words with presence was the prevailing impression. A fundamental integrity of thought, word and deed was the hallmark of Sri Babuji's life. It united all aspects of it around his unswerving devotion to Baba so effectively that his whole life became satsang, for he literally lived the truth. His living presence cannot be captured *by* his words, but it can be felt *through* his words.

Presence is the portal to Being in all its dimensions. Sri Babuji's words are the product of his presence merged totally with true nature. From this sublime union truth naturally arises, scented with the mysterious fragrance of eternal Being experienced as love and beauty, symbolized in Sufi poetry and Medieval Christianity by the rose.

Rare sages like Sri Babuji are the diamonds of humanity, whose luminous presence reflects the possibility of our own fulfilment. May all who long for fulfilment find guidance and inspiration from Sri Babuji's down to earth wisdom and the ethereal aroma of his presence, whose rose-like fragrance pervades his satsangs in *Rose Petals*.

Ram Brown Crowell
Editor, *Rose Petals – Vol. 2*

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Bodhan, 2000



Arati

Arati is a mode of congregational worship in which devotees stand facing the image of a deity or a deified saint, or the living person of an exalted saint, and join in singing hymns of adoration to him or her in unison [the *arati* service]. Normally, this singing is accompanied by musical instruments such as bells, gongs and cymbals, and the object of worship is devoutly decorated with flowery garlands while aromatic incense and musk are kept burning. Then, while the devotees sing hymns, either an officiant or a devotee slowly rotates clockwise a tray containing five small oil-traylets, lit with ghee wicks or burning camphor

as lamps, in front of the image or person selected for worship. Such a performance of waving light(s) before the image is called *arati*....”

“For the majority, worship in a congregational setting is helpful in several ways. In a communal setting devotees can pray in a space charged with the devotional fervor of a group. While singing devotional songs in unison and beating time to a rhythm a devotee can break through the isolation of the ego and merge easily into the group’s rhythm. Singing in a group also induces a sense of expanded consciousness in which one tends to lose one’s individual voice and place. The sense of being apart from the world is subtly replaced by an awareness of being part of a whole, and enrapt in the warm emotional fervor of the group, one’s isolated sense of separate identity melts away into the mainstream of collective consciousness. Besides, the intense involvement of the senses in the *arati* service – visually, in the aesthetically decorated idol; aurally, in the group singing accompanied by drums, cymbals and bells; and olfactorily, delighting in the fragrant smell of incense and garlands – all this results in the stimulation of the senses thereby inducing a kind of ethereal, rhapsodic ecstasy in the hearts of devotees.”

– Edited from: *Arati Sai Baba* by Sri Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1e 1996).



GURUJI:

In Baba's *arati* we sing, "*Thaka gayi meri rasanaa*," that is, "I am dumbfounded" [lit. 'my tongue is exhausted']. Actually, Dasganu Maharaj was expressing that stupefied feeling where one forgets oneself. Because he was singing and using poetry, he used the word 'dumbfounded'. But why did his tongue become dumb? Because his mind had become numb and he couldn't speak. Again, it's the same: what we read here, we also feel as we sing the *arati*. And, at least to some extent, when we sing the *arati* our minds should get stupefied: that is the real *arati*.



DEVOTEE:

Did you use to go to the *aratis* in Shirdi, Guruji?

GURUJI:

Yes, in the beginning I used to go to the *aratis*. I enjoy them but I don't have any attachment to them. I like to do *arati* also – I have no objection to whatever is connected with Baba. Among the *aratis*, I like Dasganu's *aratis* most. Somehow, to me the most beautiful *arati* is the one that begins, "*Sai rahama nazara karanaa*" [Lord Sai, look on us mercifully]. [*Kakad Arati, Padh X*] So, when people asked me what to do in their satsangs, I said not all the *aratis* are needed; if you want, you can just sing

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Sai rahama nazara karanaa. Then it started like that, not that I prescribed it.



DEVOTEE:

What is it about these two *aratis* that you like so much, Guruji? [*Kakad Arati, Padhs X–XI*]

GURUJI:

I like everything about them, their whole attitude, the diction, the way the sentiment is expressed and who expressed it.

DEVOTEE:

You mean Dasganu Maharaj?

GURUJI:

Yes, Dasganu Maharaj. He was an orthodox Brahmin who had some hesitation to take *prasad* from Baba's hands. Yet he was ready to say he was a broom in his masjid. Usually for a Brahmin the Muslims themselves are outcastes, low caste people, untouchables; they won't touch them. And the broom itself is untouchable, because it touches dirt and sweeps up dust. So, in a symbolic way, Dasganu is saying, "I am not here to collect your dust or your grace, my focus is not on that. It is enough for me that I collect the dust of your devotees' feet. This is my puja and I'm happy with that." There are so many expressions like

this, for example, *sathi akharakaa* [companion to the end] and *rahama nazara karanaa* [look on us mercifully]. Actually, the words he used are Islamic. If he wanted to write as a Hindu there are other words he could have chosen in Hindi. The word *nazar*, and the other words he's used, also show his erudition. It is beautifully expressed and beautifully felt. Unless he felt it he could not have written it like that.

DEVOTEE:

So the choice of *nazar* was to honour Baba as a Muslim?

GURUJI:

He was so confident that Baba was a Muslim that he wanted to express it in a Muslim fashion, so he used Islamic wording.

DEVOTEE:

Out of his reverence for Islam?

GURUJI:

Out of his devotion! Baba was his Sadguru. You can't say 'reverence' – it is devotion – so much devotion that he wants to be a broom in his masjid! Do you call that reverence? That's a light word for it! He doesn't just revere Sai Baba, he's not only being reverent – it is much more than that. Didn't you read *Arati Sai Baba*? Some of the things I felt I have tried to explain there. In my own limited

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way I tried to share my appreciation of these two *aratis* in my comments on them in the *Arati* book. But that is only a part of why I actually like them, some reasons amongst many others.



DEVOTEE:

Narasimha Swami gives the translation of *sathi akharakaa* as 'last moment's companion'.¹

GURUJI:

Yes, *sathi* means 'companion' and *akharakaa* means 'to the end'. Actually, not only 'to the end' or 'at the climax', but 'from beginning to end' – he will be there. Not like the police in a Telugu movie who will come in the last scene, but who won't be of any help, of course! Not like that! But from the beginning to the end, Baba will be there.



DEVOTEE:

Is there some inherent value in doing *arati* with others?

GURUJI:

It is just an expression, there is no inherent value

¹ *Life of Sai Baba (All Four Parts in One Composite Volume)* by H. H. Narasimha Swami. (Mylapore, Chennai: All India Sai Samaj), 1e- 2002 (Combined); orig.1e- 1955 (4 vols), p.363.

in it. The only inherent value is the way you express it and how it makes you feel. If you don't have an expression of your own and you find this is an appropriate expression for you, then use it, no problem in it. Not that you should or should not. Some people feel, "It is beautiful when I sing the *arati* and I like to do it, I feel happy." Do it then. Not that one has to sing the *arati* to Baba or otherwise he won't shower his grace: that is wrong. It is only an expression, so let it be spontaneous. If you don't have a spontaneous expression of your own, try to find one which suits you from the ones ready-made around you. For example, when you want to give your best wishes to a friend and you can't think of a poetic thought, what do you do? You go to a shop and search through all the different cards there until you find one you like, that you actually connect to. Then you buy that card and send it to your friend, on his birthday, or on Christmas, or on New Year's Day, whatever it is. It's not that everyone has to express their love as they do in the *aratis*. There are so many other ways, with beautiful poetry or pictures or designs, available in the world. Pick the one that suits you best and use it. Send your best wishes to Baba!



GURUJI:

Not everyone may be familiar with Baba's *arati*, I know. But just sitting there and happily enjoying

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listening to it and looking at Baba with respect, that is participating. Someone who knows Hindi or Marathi and can speak it, they may sing. But it's not that everyone has to sing to participate: standing there and just happily enjoying the whole thing in a group, that is also participating in *arati*, this is my view. I don't think that everybody has to sing the *arati*. But I prefer you being there and expressing your love in your own way, because being there has the advantage of being together with others who love Baba. If a person really loves someone, then they like to be around others who also do. Those people who love me, if I am at home, they say they like to see me alone, but if I go to an installation of a Baba statue where there are thousands of people, they feel happier being there. Why? Because they are among co-lovers, fellow lovers. When one's object of love is loved by so many people, then the whole expression of that love is everywhere and that gives an added enjoyment. In *arati*, what happens is, there are so many people expressing their love – to whom? To the object of our own love! Seeing Baba in Shirdi, in the Samadhi Mandir when nobody else is there, is one thing, and when all the people are singing bhajan and looking at him and the priest is doing *arati*, that is another thing. That gives more joy, because he is the object of our love and he is being so much loved. Then you see love everywhere, expressions of love, different expressions of love, everywhere. That should give you happiness, it should increase your joy.

Attend *arati*, enjoy how the people are offering *arati*. And being in the company of so many others is also beneficial, it has a good influence on your mind. That is one thing which is also true of satsang. Without our realizing it, sometimes the mind becomes dry and being in a group, surrounded by so many people's love, sitting among them, that dryness goes and we become wet with the love of our surroundings. Being in satsang or attending *arati* with others can have that influence. So try to make yourself prone to that influence, subject to that influence, and reap the benefits of that. There is a benefit in the collective expression of love, that is why I encourage it.



GURUJI:

You can be a VIP, a very, very VVIP, but not a Sai devotee, not a *devotee* – not have that feeling of egolessness. Kabir said, “*Main Ram ka kuttaa hun!*” “I am Ram’s dog!” That is what he compared himself to, and that is how he related himself to Ram, to his Baba. But we have a problem even to do namaskar two or three times to Baba’s photo! We ask, “Why can’t we treat him as a friend?” Kabir could have been a friend to Ram, in fact, but he related himself to him as his dog. Just like a dog, when you’ve given him a biscuit and he goes wagging his tail, he will always be going around you – even for only a biscuit. Feel

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like that! Never have these feelings of ego – that this man has spoken to me like this, that man has offended me, or this man has been disrespectful! We should ignore these things. Why have you come here? Focus on that! And respect for the ego – these things should not be there. Always feel like that. Whether you are in Shirdi or in front of Baba's picture, that is the feeling you should get. Dasganu Maharaj said, "*Apane masjid ka jharu Ganu hai*" [Ganu is your mosque's broom]. See what a beautiful expression it is! He never wished to be Baba's personal secretary, always standing at his side, no! Only a *jharu*! I like that expression so very much. Kabir expressed it in one way and Dasganu expressed it in another.

DEVOTEE:

What is a *jharu*?

GURUJI:

Jharu is a broom. It is the one thing which is actually untouchable. Usually people won't touch it. In India, if they touch it, they have to wash at least their feet and hands. In the house it is an untouchable object. But in the masjid, it is the only thing which had the fortune of collecting not only the dust from Baba's feet, but the dust of the devotees' feet also. It is the only thing – only the broom – that had that opportunity, that had that luck, so he's chosen that. After collecting all the dust, it stays in a corner and nobody touches it,

it's untouchable. That is his expression, you sing it daily in the *arati*. But some people complain, "Why is he doing *arati*, why can't I do it? From tomorrow, I should do *arati*!" Or, "When such an important person like me is here in the satsang, why should that man be asked to do *arati*!?" Yet in the *arati* they sing, "*Apane masjid ka jharu Ganu hai.*" How meaningless it is! So try to do the *arati* with meaning!

In the beginning Dasganu was such an orthodox person. In his Brahmin tradition, in their custom, he couldn't even take the holy water that came from Baba. He thought, "I am a high-caste Brahmin and he is a Muslim," and so many other obstructions were there. But later, he was transformed in such a way that, just like in Indian society, a pariah, a scavenger, is the lowest of castes, almost untouchable, and among objects, the tools of the scavenger, the scavenging tool – the broom – is the most untouchable, so he chose the least important object to be himself. So, in another way, he was symbolically identifying himself as a scavenger in society. See how he was in the beginning, and how transformed he became in the end!





Bodhan, 2000



The Aesthetic Experience

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you ask us to be focused, to check that every step we make is taking us towards our goal, and to drop whatever we may be doing that is not helpful to us, but what about the arts, what about beauty in our life, could that not also be part of our need?

GURUJI:

If you can experience aesthetics in your own life, in your own mind and body, what other piece of art than that is needed for us? We're breathing, we're seeing, we're thinking, we experience

so many things. What is it that is breathing? What is it that is seeing and thinking and experiencing? What is happening here? What a mystery it is! Suddenly we are happy, suddenly we are not happy. We're full of doubt, then suddenly we have so much faith. Some people give us happiness, some trigger aversion. What are all these things? See the beauty in this. To me, every one of you is a great piece of art! And the pieces of art we see outside us are only a reflection of our own self. They describe it, they are a shadow of it. Once they successfully reflect that, once they are a replica of it, then they are considered to be beautiful art, because when looking at them, we look at the aesthetics of our own life.

What I am stressing is, try to know *this* one [your own self]. Everybody's mind, everybody's thought, everybody's life, is just a piece of art. To me, you all look like different pieces of art, more beautiful than those by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. [Guruji laughs] Yes, they are beautiful works of art, but why can't we enjoy this here [pointing to his heart] just as we enjoy something which has been done on a canvas? It is so real. *This* is art! This is aesthetics! This is aesthetic experience!

I prefer that instead of going for the works of Michelangelo, everybody tries to *be* a Michelangelo and experiences their own art. [Guruji laughs] Just think how much he must have experienced his own art! Like that, experience your own

creations. There is so much art, there are so many minds – beautiful. As I am saying this, every mind is thinking in a different way – somebody is receiving it, somebody else is afraid to ask a question, somebody is sleepy, somebody else has a doubt, “What is this?” See the beauty of it!



DEVOTEE:

Baba is giving us everything in life. In spite of this I sometimes try to withdraw from all that he has given me, thinking, “What is all this? I should not be here. I should go away, withdraw from all these mundane things.” I don’t know whether this is a genuine feeling or if it happens because of concepts I’ve accumulated from things I’ve read. Or maybe it’s just a negative way of looking, not seeing the beauty of what I have in life?

GURUJI:

Whatever it is, even if it is something as profound as a scripture, if it makes you dry and drab – unaesthetic – give it up, turn your eyes away from it! Not that it is bad, but if it makes you lose the awareness of beauty it won’t be of any use.

All the scriptures are expressions of love. Try to see that. What are the Vedas, the mantras? That which the rishis, the seers, exclaimed in their ecstatic experience of Brahman – their utterances.

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They sang, they danced and those became the mantras. So, intrinsically what are they? They are the expressions of their own ecstasy, their ecstatic love, love of Brahman, that experience, whatever you call it. All the scriptures are expressions of that.

If you look at them like that you'll see their beauty. But in trying to simply master the scriptures, we make them dry, and we make our own soul dry and drab, incapable of experiencing, appreciating or feeling the beauty, the love, the ecstasy, the art. It is not science! I look at it as art. The saints and rishis are all artists. Even the divine – God – is also referred to as an artist, a *kavi*.

So everything is a piece of art. That which affects the heart is real art!



GURUJI:

Always remember this: just try to realize what an opportunity has been given to you, being in such a situation in Shirdi, or wherever it is. And most of your sorrows and problems are all your creations, they have no real meaning at all.

Life is short. Don't waste it on those things which are not at all connected to why you are here. Remember your purpose! Then the book of life will be like a good novel, a pleasure to read; otherwise it will be like a textbook. Don't read it like a textbook, something where we have to know

every word and meaning, annotate it, reproduce it, and if we can't we may fail, so there's a sense of performance. When we read a novel, how do we read? We remember things, we enjoy it, we can even reproduce it better. This life is a novel, a beautiful novel! Written by whom? Written by Baba. He is the author. Try to read it and enjoy it – don't make it a textbook!



GURUJI:

Aesthetic experience is where you feel one with something, you forget yourself. In Sanskrit it's called *rasanubhuti*, aesthetics. For instance, when you are watching a movie or a drama, or reading a very interesting book, what happens is you become one with the characters in it. You cry with them, you laugh with them. You forget that you are so-and-so. Experiencing that is aesthetics.

I often give the example of a movie, a tragedy. The Telugu movie, *Rakta Sambandham*, for instance, is a beautiful tragedy. As far as I know, any normal human being [Guruji laughs] who sees it won't leave the cinema without crying, even a very stoic or stone-hearted person. They go to see it and they cry and cry and cry there, so much. And they come out and say, "I have to go and see that movie again!" [laughter]

I know a person who has seen that movie two hundred times. Going there just to cry! [laughter]

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What is that? Crying is an unpleasant experience, so why does he crave it? Because even though he is crying, what he is getting there is an aesthetic experience, and that gives him such joy. That is the mystery of it! Why would anybody *want* to cry?

Why are Shakespeare's tragedies more famous than his comedies? If anybody wants to name a masterpiece of Shakespeare they name a tragedy. Why tragedies? Is it the sadistic nature of human beings that if somebody is suffering we become happy? No. It is because it is an aesthetic experience, not our sadistic nature, because the one who sees also cries and a sadist won't cry when somebody is suffering. That is the difference.



DEVOTEE:

When I experience something beautiful, I want to share it, I want to tell someone about it, I want to talk about it. But there aren't any adequate words, so there doesn't seem to be any way to share it.

GURUJI:

The only thing you can do is just try. Yes, we have to try. The people who experienced that love, that aesthetic experience, they also tried and tried and tried. That is what all the scriptures are. They tried to describe their experience but they failed. They said, "No, I can't describe it," but they didn't say this in the beginning. They knew it was

indescribable, but they still tried to express it. If somebody writes a poem it doesn't mean they are actually able to describe the real poetic experience, to really share that experience, but they try. The result of that effort in their heart, that is poetry.

Someone who simply gives up in the beginning can't be a poet. If, when looking at the Himalayas, he says, "Beautiful! How beautiful? Ah, I can't explain it," he can't be a poet! A poet is one who tries. "I can't explain it to you, to be honest, but I'll try." Then he takes his pen. He becomes a Wordsworth, the English poet. His words are always worthy, that's why he is words-worth. [laughter]

The longing, the spirit, the struggle behind those words, that is enough. All this longing is just like a baby crying. The mother knows whether maybe some ant or something has bitten it, or if it is asking for milk, or is not able to get to sleep, or is too hot – or in the West, maybe too cold – or whatever. The mother knows even though the baby is simply crying. What does it mean? Are there any words? The mother understands the spirit behind those different cries of 'Baaa baaa' [Guruji imitates the crying of a baby] in different modes and tunes. "Oh, this 'baaa baaa' is for that, this 'baaa baaa' is for this." [laughter] In fact, all poetry is baaa baaas. The mother understands the longing behind it.



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DEVOTEE:

Is it correct to say that we need to strive in order to become aware of choicelessness? It seems to be a paradox.

GURUJI:

Actually it is good if you experience the paradox. Yes, it is a paradox and there is such beauty in it. That is why paradox is one of the beautiful elements of poetry.

Life is a book, a beautiful poem. Try to experience its beautiful aesthetics. The whole of life becomes poetry when we see it that way. Paradox doesn't mean that there is no truth in it; it is the truth. You see it everywhere. For example, Arunachala – it is a paradox! *Aruna* means dynamic, *achala* means static. What is this static-dynamic? It's a paradox!

So try to experience the paradox. Enjoy it, don't resist it. It can give you so many beautiful insights, so many beautiful experiences. Try to experience your whole life like a poem. Read *Arunachala Padikam*, which Ramana Maharshi wrote of his own accord, without being asked by anybody. Usually he wrote only when somebody asked him to, or put a question to him, but *Arunachala Padikam* is the one work he felt like writing. To me, that is his real poem – his heart. See how many paradoxes you can find in it! He enjoys it.

It is like when we see a great mountain. It is great, but what about you? You are so small. But

is being so small a sad situation? One should be ashamed of it? No! Here we enjoy it! We forget ourselves and what we experience is the vastness there. The experience of enjoying being small is exactly what happens when you are in the presence of a Sadguru. That is why he's called guru – guru means big. He's so big that he makes us feel so little, but that does not belittle us! We enjoy it. It is a paradox again. That enjoyment, the aesthetics of it, is the relationship between us and our Sadguru.

Everywhere there is beauty, everywhere there is poetry!





Sbirdi, 2004



Start From Where You Are

GURUJI:

First, know what you want. Then that becomes the reference point to which all our life is moulded. So first try to know what it is you want. “What am I striving for? Do I really need anything at all?” If you don’t need anything, is there any need for you to suffer and feel frustrated, or to be sorry or sad, or be lost or in a ‘bad space’ – all these things? There is no need. All these things mean we want something that we are not getting. If so, then what is it that we want? Let that be the starting point.



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DEVOTEE:

My experience is that when a desire is fulfilled, the happiness that comes from that is temporary. So my question is, is there a desire the fulfilment of which brings lasting happiness, or is lasting happiness the result of not having any desires?

GURUJI:

The problem is we have desires! If you don't have any desires, no problem. Then you don't need anything, you are in lasting happiness. What prevents lasting happiness is desires. And the small fulfilment you are getting now is like having one bird in the hand, and the lasting happiness which the scriptures promise, is like the proverbial 'two birds in the bush'! You say, "I want not only the bird in my hand, I want the others also!" But the small fulfilment you are getting now is at least giving some temporary happiness, while those who are always thinking about the two in the bush, they are losing the happiness they have in hand, they don't even have that! Definitely, with a bird in the hand we are better off; at least, we are happy now. So let the path also be happy, not only the goal! Why should the path to happiness be one of suffering? Let the path to happiness be also happy. Happily we enjoy, happily we dance, in a happy mood we move towards more and more happiness. We evolve in happiness, we evolve in fulfilment! Let our temporary happiness now be expanded into something lasting, instead of there

being always two separate things: temporary happiness as one thing, and a future, lasting happiness as another thing. But they are not two! Just as, whether it is in your hand or in the bush, in both cases they are birds!

It may be beautiful to listen to, but 'erasing desires' is another dangerous concept in the idea of lasting happiness because it is not true for us. It is not grounded in our reality, because, in fact, we have so many desires. Even a small problem in our health will disturb us from trying for so-called lasting happiness, and it is this disturbance that will be going on continuously, not lasting happiness. Small, petty things will keep on happening while we are always talking about lasting happiness, that desires are bad, that we should not have desires. "But first", we say, "I should get well!" Or "Only if I'm well will I try to meditate. I can't even sit in meditation! But I would like to very much – I'd die for that! But, my God, I'm dying with neck pain! And I have this back pain, and a headache, and my eyes hurt! Also, I need my sleep. At ten o'clock I have to sleep!" Yet we talk about such profound things as 'permanent happiness', about 'getting it' and 'annihilating desires', or even 'killing the ego'! It's all just tall talk. It's not reality, it's not practical, it's not our actual case.

Rather, let us start from where we are and let us evolve from there with the reality, whatever

it may be, of who and where we are. First, self-actualization: what we are, where we are, what we need, what our problems are, what gives us happiness, what exactly is it that we want. Start from there! Then everything you get – even if you get only one percent – is real! Otherwise, all your life you'll be beating about the bush, trying to achieve something you don't really want.

Why are you sitting here? Why have you come and why are you doing all these things? You say, "To get nirvana, to get mukti, to get liberation, to get Self-realization, to get satori." It's beautiful to listen to, but are you really in need of these things? Just question yourself, examine yourself. Are they such a dire need for you? No, not really. Many people have everything in life – good food, good security, good bank balance, loving parents – everything is there. Materially, they don't find anything lacking, but still they experience something missing in their lives. They want something, they are not happy. But if you ask them, "Why aren't you happy? What makes you unhappy?", they don't have a clear answer. "Yes, we feel some frustration. Suddenly some inexplicable sadness overtakes us and we feel something is missing in life." Everyone feels they need something but they don't know what it is. You say, "Something is missing." Okay, then what is it that is missing? We do not know.

So this is the starting point for the search, the search for what is missing and how to fulfil it. You

start by reading books and listening to discourses. Then somebody tells you, "What you need – what is missing – is mukti! What have you got? Ego! So, if you kill your ego, you'll get mukti". You think, "Oh, my God, it's so simple!", and that is all. Here's the beginning of our whole delusion, of deluding ourselves, of our self-hypnotization. We start thinking, "Yes, mukti is good, I want mukti, I want Self-realization." So we read and study all about mukti and then we set out trying to get it, trying and trying, and we simply forget where we have started from.

Don't leave where you have started from! It is not needed that everyone should be missing the same thing or in the same manner. First, try to know what is missing! Then let your search be personal. Let your path be your own, let your goal be your own, and let what you get be your own. Even if you want to call the goal mukti or nirvana – okay, no problem with it. What is there in a name after all? But that nirvana should be *your* nirvana, your personal nirvana, not the Buddha's nirvana, not Sai Baba's nirvana nor Ramana Maharshi's nirvana – it should be your own nirvana! "Buddha got his nirvana, let me have my nirvana. He followed his path, let me follow my path." Then you are really following the Buddha. Isn't that what he said, "Make your own path"? Otherwise, you'll get deluded.

We try to solve a personal problem with some impersonal concepts, trying to make our personal

more and more impersonal. But it won't work. That 'impersonal' becomes an illusion and we start hypnotizing ourselves. Then it leads us away from our own reality. Some people even get schizophrenic and lose their sanity, they lose their ground and can no longer see their own reality.

It can become an endless delusion – so stop it! First, know your own reality. Accept your own reality, accept nothing else but your own experience – however profound a concept it may be, or whoever said it. Based on your own experience, start from there! First, try to know what it is that is missing. And since what is missing is abstract, how it will be fulfilled is at first also abstract. For instance, you may feel that something happens at a certain moment: "When I look at Sai Baba, something happens, I don't know what it is! But somehow love is triggered and I feel happier, more secure; I don't experience anything 'missing'. So maybe this is the way." Something is there which is triggering that: try to focus on it and make it more and more concrete, more and more clear. Yes, good, come on! Go ahead! Or, some people will find it in some other way, whatever it is. So, start from where you are, from the reality of your own experience, and try to 'get it' from there. Then what you find will be your reality, your own truth.



Start From Where You Are

DEVOTEE:

Are you trying to point us in the right direction, Guruji?

GURUJI:

I am not pointing you in any direction. I am asking you to know your own direction, what your goal is, and then go in that direction. I am not pointing out anything: nobody should point out the goal for another. It is *your* goal, it is *your* need, that's the point! So I don't point to any goal. I only make the point clear, to drive the point home. What is your goal? Every person has his own goal, they are not common goals. Just as your goal is personal, let your path also be personal. If you know your goal, then the necessity of getting it will make you invent your path – the path to your own goal. Then what you tread is *your* path. You need not tread anybody else's path, you need not try to reach someone else's goal. Let everything be yours! Then whatever you do becomes relevant, and that is what I say – let everything be relevant. Let it be yours!





Hyderabad, 1998



In the Orbit of the Magnet

GURUJI:

“What actually happens here?” You have asked this question a hundred times! “What is your path? Is it a path of surrender? Is it a path of love? If not, then what is it? *What’s happening?*” [Guruji laughs] It seems nothing is happening – and it’s true! [more laughter]

I’ve told you before and I will tell you again about the example of the magnet and a piece of iron. We are all like pieces of iron, but what is it that differentiates iron from a magnet? In the magnet all the molecules are in order, properly polarized,

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and every molecule has a north pole and a south pole. In the piece of iron, the molecules are not polarized – there are no poles and no order, so each molecule's magnetic field is counteracted, or resisted, by another molecule, yet potentially, all the iron molecules are magnets. They have the magnetic power but it is suppressed, not expressed. The magnet is different: it is exactly the same materially, nothing is changed, but each molecule is in order, polarized north to south, aligned, focused.

So, in our hearts, we are like those iron molecules. We have so many different pulls with no alignment or order, only different molecules of attraction and desire in conflict with each other. "I want money, I want comfort, I want a good house, I want to be with my family, I want to experience the comforts of the West, I want spiritual fulfilment, I want nirvana." We have so many desires and each one conflicts with the other, pulling in opposite directions. With so many things pulling us from different directions, the so-called magnetic force is lost.

So how can we make a piece of iron into a magnet? By putting it in constant touch with a magnet – the Sadguru – and 'rubbing' it on the magnet again and again. The magnetic force embedded in the Sadguru will gradually polarize the different pulls, but without changing the number of molecules. If there are ten million molecules in the iron, they won't become even

ten million and one, nor will a single molecule be lost. They will be exactly the same number but their direction will be changed, their attitude will be changed, they'll become properly polarized, harmonized, and they will be aligned and put in order.

What sadhana, what spiritual exercises, what techniques has the piece of iron done? Has it done anything? Has anything changed? In fact, it has changed: it has been transformed into a magnet. But where was the transformation? What happened? Has the piece of iron done it or has the magnet done it?

We wash our clothes and put them on the line and they become dry. How? By contact with the sun, that's all. They must be in contact with the sun. If you put them in the house or in a bucket of water, will they become dry? No. Our effort is only to put them outside on the line in the sun. And the only effort of the iron is to be in contact with the magnet, frequently in contact, not just once and then saying, "Yes, I did it, but nothing happened!" – it won't happen like that!

In the process the iron may feel some disturbance and say, "Oh my God, this is too disturbing, I don't want it!" Again it tries. At first it feels as if something were being lost, but after some time you realize you are not losing anything, and nothing is being added either – no more hair, no more nails, nothing is added. [Guruji laughs] You are as you were, but something has changed: you're

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becoming magnetized. Everything is in perfect harmony, perfect integration. That is grace.

DEVOTEE:

Does it mean that every pull should be oriented towards love of the Sadguru?

GURUJI:

That is what happens. You want a job, but it doesn't come in the way of your love for Baba. You ask, "Baba, I want a job." When the job comes, your love for Baba grows. "Oh, Baba has given me this job." Or you are sick and you ask Baba, "I want to be healthy." Then you become healthy. "Oh, Baba has given me health." Nothing is in conflict: your health, your asking, and Baba are aligned in perfect order. They are in perfect harmony.

So our whole life, and all that we are doing, will be gradually turned and focused towards the magnet. We lose nothing, nothing changes, but everything becomes oriented towards that. Then so-called spiritual growth, so-called magnetism will also come, but not by losing anything. So the path will be happy – this is what I say. Can you say the piece of iron has 'surrendered' to the magnet? Or that the piece of iron can make itself into a magnet? Or by the iron simply being there not doing anything, the magnet can make the iron another magnet? No, it is the contact. The effort to put ourselves in contact is needed.



GURUJI:

It is said, "Intrinsically you are divine; you are that, you are this," but we don't actually *know* that. We have it but we don't experience it. Yes, a piece of iron is intrinsically also a magnet, but it doesn't express or experience its magnetism. Just as a piece of iron becomes a magnet, so it is with us. The way is, we have to seek a magnet, which in our case is the Sadguru.

So what is the difference between the magnet – the Sadguru – and the one who seeks it? The basic difference is this: in the case of the magnet, the order, the integration has been achieved, and here it has not. That is why from the Sadguru's point of view everything is the same. He has already achieved that harmony, so he sees no difference. But the seeker's point of view is, "No, no, no! We are pieces of iron and you are a magnet."

DEVOTEE:

Is the magnetic force the same as love?

GURUJI:

Yes, love. Just as a piece of iron is drawn to the magnet, a seeker is drawn to the Sadguru, and in a human piece of iron the magnetism is experienced as love.

DEVOTEE:

Does the Sadguru give magnetism?

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GURUJI:

Magnetism is not given. It is already there in the piece of iron, so he only awakens it. Or by the molecules just being changed to a certain order, the seeker realizes that he's already a magnet.



GURUJI:

How to make this piece of iron a magnet? By being in constant touch with whatever you think is a magnet. Baba is our magnet. Try to be with him mentally, and if possible, physically, in close proximity – the touch!

That is what great saints like Ramana Maharshi taught. Beautifully, Ramana Maharshi actually called Arunachala a magnetic mountain. He was so much attracted to it that once he arrived there he never left the place, even after he had become a magnet himself. Arunachala was his magnet and he stuck to it like a piece of iron. If this was the practice of even a great saint, a siddha like Ramana Maharshi, then what about us? Did he need to be always at the feet of his object of love? And was it needed for Baba to be at his guru's tomb? "This is my guru's place. I want to be here." They showed us that the guru is the magnet. Baba is our magnet, Baba is our guru and we are all pieces of iron. Let us try to 'rub' our actions, our thoughts, and everything that we have on that magnet, and we'll become that! Do you follow?



DEVOTEE:

For those of us who are not able to be in the physical presence of the Sadguru, would you say something about other ways of contact and what they mean?

GURUJI:

The real contact is to be in the magnetic field. What transforms a piece of iron into a magnet is not the actual magnet, it's the field. Some people, if they can't get contact, need an extender. Suppose there is a computer, and a wireless modem is put somewhere on the first floor but you can't get the signal here on the ground floor, what do you do? You put an extender here [Guruji laughs], another modem, which makes the signal stronger, that's all. So... do anything that keeps you in the field of the signal. Are we in the field? One has to explore it in different ways. I don't want to name them. Instead of me listing them, you explore it!

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean the energetic field?

GURUJI:

In that analogy, yes, it's an energetic field. But it could be something else. It could also be an emotional field, because what is actually happening

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here is emotion. With an actual piece of iron it is just an energetic pull, but we are not pieces of iron, we are human beings. We have a heart, we have feelings, we have love, we have hatred. So how we experience the field is as love, as emotion. Where that particular emotion is fanned, where it increases and becomes stronger, where you are more and more aware of that emotion, yes, that is the field.



DEVOTEE:

Is it necessary for everyone to stay with the physical form of the Sadguru all the time?

GURUJI:

Whether it is necessary or not, we can't do it because there are other pulls. In fact, it is not necessary.

DEVOTEE:

After a while, when the mind gets focused on the Sadguru's form, doesn't that magnetism start to flow even if he is very far away? It seems that in some cases there is such a strong recognition that a person can go anywhere without feeling a loss of the magnetism.

GURUJI:

Then in that case they are in the magnetic field!

But if you really feel that you are many miles away, then you are far away. [laughter] If you realize that the guru's magnetism is also there, you haven't really gone away from him.

It is not the problem of whether the Sadguru's magnetism extends that far; it is our problem of whether we experience the magnetism. If you put a magnet and a piece of iron at a certain distance apart, there will be a magnetic pull but it won't draw the iron nearer. Then, if you bring them closer, the iron will be pulled. It is not that previously the magnetism was not there, but that the other pulls were so great that the iron was pulled back. The moment the iron is drawn, it experiences the magnetism. That is what Baba himself said. He sat for twelve years just looking at his Sadguru, focused totally on him. He said that his guru always loved and protected him wherever he was. And when his guru asked him to go, with that awareness, with that experience, he went.



GURUJI:

The attraction that a piece of iron has towards the magnet is experienced as love. The piece of iron loves the magnet. That is why it always goes near. And the magnet also loves the iron – even more. That is why it draws the iron to itself. Actually, it is the magnet which draws, which is active, although

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it seems as if it is the piece of iron that is active because it's moving towards the magnet and the magnet is static, not doing anything. But the magnet is moving it. So it is statically dynamic.

That is why I feel Ramana Maharshi's way of describing Arunachala as a magnet is so apt. He used to call Arunachala a magnetic hill, "a big magnet". The way it attracts is similar to what happens around Baba. If you also want to become magnetized and experience that harmony and get rid of your disorder and entropy, then you have to put yourself in the orbit of a magnet.

DEVOTEE:

Is being in the orbit enough or does the iron need to touch the magnet?

GURUJI:

It's enough. Being in the orbit is enough. He'll take care of the rest.

DEVOTEE:

But should we be satisfied with just being in the orbit?

GURUJI:

If the dissatisfaction is real you'll draw nearer and nearer in a closer and closer orbit. Eventually you'll merge with the sun and become one with it. Then there is nothing, no orbit at all.



GURUJI:

On its own the piece of iron can't do anything, so it needs a magnet. That magnet is called a Sadguru. By constantly thinking of him, being in contact, being in his presence, this piece of iron becomes a magnet, in a fulfilling, happy, and harmonious way. Complete fulfilment is our goal and we are all racing towards that goal! And when we get it, it becomes grace. That 'G'-factor is the guru [laughter], that which makes the race the grace – guru-G! [laughter]





Tenali, 1993



Niyama

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I have heard it said that consistency, or constancy in action – assuming that the action is good – is of more value than one good or great act.

GURUJI:

Yes. That is what people call *niyama*.

DEVOTEE:

So what is the value of having a specific *niyama*?

GURUJI:

It doesn't allow you to be cheated by your own

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mind, because it keeps you to the goal, to the purpose, so you are more oriented towards your goal. The mind is always changing or wavering, "Today, ah, satsang.... But today I feel like sitting at home in meditation. I don't want to go out now and extrovert my mind and sit in a group of people, smelling their sweat and things like that. No, I don't want to do it! [laughter] I want to sit at home and introvert my mind!"

First it starts like that. The second day our resolve loses some more strength. It's a trick of the mind to avoid going to satsang. It begins with a noble thing so that the mind will be easily convinced, so that it feels justified. Then the next day the person sleeps. The third day he goes to a movie. The fourth day he goes and chitchats. Where is satsang? It's gone! And it's like that with everything.

So a *niyama* won't allow the mind to cheat you. Cheating what? Cheating you of your own fulfilment, taking you away from the goal. These are the tricks of the mind. Unless or until you are in a perpetual state of satsang, a *niyama* is needed. Regularity, and sticking to that whatever happens.



GURUJI:

Niyama means – what you are supposed to do, a regulation.

DEVOTEE:

It's like commandments, or a code of conduct.

GURUJI:

Yes. It's a kind of code of conduct. That is the definition which is given in the *yogasastras*.



DEVOTEE:

To follow these *niyamas* doesn't one need to be able to discriminate, and also to be able to choose?

GURUJI:

That is why I always tell you to first have a goal, an object of love. All that we have to do, the whole thing, is to focus on our object of love. What are the things that we have to do in order to keep the focus focused? These you have to choose. And what are the things we should not do, which distract the focus? For this you should have discrimination. No scripture is needed to tell you what to do and what not to do. You know because it is your experience.

DEVOTEE:

You mean it comes from love rather than from a sense of discipline?

GURUJI:

Yes, from love. Then it doesn't seem like rules,

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'commandments'. It is not like that. If I simply asked you, "In the morning, walk from that wall to this wall ten times," and you don't know why you are doing it but you have to do it anyway, then it would be a commandment. But here you have to choose, to discriminate every minute: Is this helping me to focus on my object of love or not? Is this helping to concretize my abstract sense of fulfilment or not? We should always be discerning that.



GURUJI:

In 1971, when I first met my Master, he said, "Take charge of the satsang!" It meant just arranging the room and Baba's photos. They were in the cupboard, and needed to be taken out and garlanded; that was the simple satsang. He said, "You be the in-charge." I did it every Thursday for six years, except those days which I spent in Poondi.¹

That is a *niyama*: I didn't miss doing it, not even once. If floods were expected, I used to go earlier, at five o'clock, and take a raft and then reach Vidyanagar. If there was a storm or a cyclone and no buses were running, I used to walk. Even if I had a fever of 104 or 105 degrees, I would go!

¹ Guruji spent about a month in the presence of Poondi Swami in 1974, which culminated in a profound transformative experience.

“What will happen? I will die, that’s all! Will anything more happen? No. Go!” In six years I didn’t miss even once.

After I moved to Venkatagiri, in the beginning I still used to go every Thursday to Vidyanagar² and do the satsang, until Master relieved me of that. He said, “No, no, you don’t need to come any more. Now do the satsang in Venkatagiri.” So I started in Venkatagiri and continued it there, and I didn’t miss it even once. If I have taken up something... no question! I would think, “Is there anything more that could happen than death? Then be prepared for that!” Nothing will happen if you take it up. Otherwise don’t take it up. I never thought, “What will I gain by that, why should I do it, am I getting any spiritual benefit taking the trouble of walking all the way from Kota to Vidyanagar?” (I was not residing in Vidyanagar; I had to walk about six km, even in the night.) What I gained or I did not gain, I never thought of all those things. If you do it, just do it, that’s all!

If the mind ever tried to trick me I would do two things. If I had resolved to get up at three o’clock and take a bath in the cold winter, sometimes the thought would come, “Three o’clock, it’s cold, very cold, and oh, I have to get up!” When that thought came to the mind I said, “Oh, now you are

² Vidyanagar is the town where Guruji attended NBKR Arts & Science College, where he first came into contact with his Master, Sri E. Bharadwaja, an English lecturer there. Vidyanagar is about 70 km from Venkatagiri and 3 km from Kota.

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trying to trick me – come on then!” Next day what I used to do was, I put some water in an earthen storage pot and kept it there [which made it very cold], and then I got up even earlier, at 2.45 a.m. and used that water – that cold, freezing water – for my bath. Next time the mind didn’t even dare to think that thought! [laughter] Even the thought wouldn’t come to me because it knows what I would do. People used to think I was crazy, getting up at three o’clock, then taking water from the pot. [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

Did it feel like an effort?

GURUJI:

The effort was only not to let my mind trick me, immediately punishing it, that’s all. And after some time it didn’t even try to trick me: “Today I missed the bus to Vidyanagar, okay, so I’ll go tomorrow...” When that thought came, that day I would walk twice from Vidyanagar to Kota! [Guruji laughs] “Aha, so you are depending on a bus? Come on, I’ll see your end!”

DEVOTEE:

And that treatment worked on the mind?

GURUJI:

Yes, it will definitely work. Why won’t it work? [laughter]

DEVOTEE:

Like training a separate being!

GURUJI:

Whatever you call it. I didn't think of all those things. I was only concerned about not being tricked. Other people may trick me, but what's the point of me tricking myself? Self-trickery – at least I can stop that.

Of course, I don't want to tell you all this because it is too scary for you. [laughter] You need not do all these things.



DEVOTEE:

You're saying there was no effort in those days, for example when the bus didn't come or there was a storm?

GURUJI:

There was effort, but only the effort not to be cheated by the mind, only that, to that extent. There was no doubt about the *niyama*, or its value, or whether to keep it up. The examples I gave you were for not allowing the mind to trick you, that's all – only that much effort.

DEVOTEE:

But the motive then was to not break your commitment?

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GURUJI:

It was not only towards the *niyama*. It was also like that in all other respects – not allowing the mind to trick me. With a *niyama* it becomes clear because we have a reference point, we know where it is tricking us. Otherwise we do not know. We are tricked by our own mind. We don't need anybody else to trick us, to exploit us, to deceive us: we are capable of doing it ourselves.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how did you know that keeping up that *niyama* would take you to your goal?

GURUJI:

I did not know.

DEVOTEE:

But you must have known, otherwise why would you keep it up?

GURUJI:

No. I simply thought, "My guru has given me a responsibility." I took it as a blessing and then I did it, that's all. That itself will take me to the goal. Doing anything connected to Baba will definitely take me to the goal. How it takes me, I don't bother about it. That is his botheration, why should I bother about it? If it is not sufficient, that

is his fault, it is not my fault. [laughter] I'll do it, that's all.

DEVOTEE:

In a satsang recently somebody asked, "How did you get the contentment which you are experiencing now?" and you said, "I prayed to Baba and did what I had to do." But how did you know what you had to do?

GURUJI:

There was no choice for me in what I had to do: I had to focus on Baba, that's all. That is what I had to do. When you have to do something there is no choice. I didn't have any choice – I had to do it.

DEVOTEE:

You mean you couldn't *not* do it?

GURUJI:

What else could I do? I tried to do other things, but somehow I realized that my mind was not clinging to them.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you said that our efforts to overcome our conditioning come from that conditioning, and so are themselves conditioned. Most people who attempt forms of self-discipline are only

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temporarily successful in achieving their goal. So I'm wondering, in relation to your experience of successfully holding to a *niyama*, how were you able to do it! It seems so extraordinary!

GURUJI:

This *niyama* was not springing from my patterns or my background. Many people do it as part of their family tradition or customs, but I wasn't following any customs before, no *niyama*, nothing. My family background was not at all pious, spiritual or religious. [Guruji laughs] So it was not part of my conditioning. It was simply that by following it I experienced it was helpful in giving me more and more clarity about my goal, to reach my goal. In other words, I experienced it as helpful, so I did it. That is why I say, don't *set* a goal. Many people make the mistake of setting up goals, rather than realizing the goal, experiencing the goal, seeing what their need is. That is why I always ask you to know your need! Setting up a goal is different from realizing it.

DEVOTEE:

Was it the fact of keeping the *niyama* itself that you experienced as helping you towards the goal?

GURUJI:

I didn't *try* to keep it up. It was not keeping up something. It happened spontaneously. It became a part of the whole thing.



DEVOTEE:

Where do we get the strength to hold a *niyama*? Because with our tendencies we are so weak that we just follow wherever the mind takes us.

GURUJI:

I don't know where from, but I think that it is from our desire to reach the goal. Only that can give the strength.

DEVOTEE:

So that actually shows where we are?

GURUJI:

Yes. That's why I never believe what people say, I always take what they *do*.

DEVOTEE:

But for you there was a direct connection between keeping that *niyama* and reaching your goal. It was obvious to you that by keeping that *niyama* it would help you towards your goal.

GURUJI:

Yes. That is called *niyama*.





Shirdi, 1990



Light on Anger

DEVOTEE:

What is anger? How does it arise?

GURUJI:

Everybody has an image of their own self, what they think they are in the eyes of others. That is what we call ego. We use the word 'ego' very loosely. "We should erase the ego!" "The ego should not be there, it should be destroyed." But what is that ego actually? Have you ever thought of it, anybody? You say 'I' is the ego, but is that an answer? Just a simple, "I is the ego"? Then why don't you use the word 'I' instead of 'ego'?

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Normally in our experience, ego is what we think we are in the eyes of others; it's not an exact definition, but it gives us some idea.

DEVOTEE:

Why do you differentiate between what others think we are, and what we ourselves think we are?

GURUJI:

Because what we think usually depends on what others think of us. In fact, not what others think, but rather what we *think* others think of us! [Guruji laughs] We may believe that everyone thinks us to be great, while they may not actually be thinking like that. And then the problem comes: if this image is disturbed in any way, anger springs up.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, anger also sometimes comes when nobody else is there, all of a sudden.

GURUJI:

It won't come just like that. What happens is you will be recalling an incident, or you will be anticipating something, something which affects your image, this ego. Even though we may be physically alone, we are in the company of

something – a memory, or the anticipation of something. It might be the effect of something that happened before, which at the time we suppressed because of the circumstances, and then when we are alone it comes as a recollection, a memory, a shade of it. Secondly, anger may come because of misunderstanding, not being able to clearly understand something. Thirdly, we may get angry if we experience pain, or if we start to feel uncomfortable. Grossly speaking, these are the three reasons for anger. If you think of any of the instances when you get angry, it will be one of these three.

The first, remembering or anticipating something which affects our image, is quite imaginary; it doesn't have any real basis. So if we start thinking clearly and realistically and see that it is based on something imaginary, we can limit its effect to some extent. The second, lack of understanding, we can remedy by having clarity. As for the third – experiencing pain or feeling uncomfortable – the antidote is love, having a positive emotion. Unlike the first reason, this one is real! If somebody beats you, that is not imagination or a myth.

With regard to the second reason (which is connected to the first), I usually give the example of travelling on a bus or a train. You are sitting in your seat and somebody comes and steps on your toe. That causes you pain. You say, "Hey! Can't you see? Are you blind? What is this nonsense?" and you shout at him and become very angry. Then

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the person standing next to him says, "I'm sorry, Madam, but he can't see, he's blind." Immediately that same anger becomes, "Oh, I'm very, very sorry. Please excuse me. I didn't know that when I shouted at you. Please come and sit down." And then we even give our seat to him. [Guruji laughs]

Just think of the situation. What happened to your anger there? What was the mechanism behind it? What hurt you was not the physical pain. If that was the reason you would've still been angry because the pain remained, your toe still hurt. So it was not the pain that triggered anger. There was an expectation that the other person should behave properly, in a certain way towards you. So it was the lack of politeness that hurt you. When you know that he didn't mean to do it, that it was only because of some physical limitation, the whole thing changes immediately. You even get up from your seat and offer it to him and stand yourself. What has happened to the anger? How has it transformed into compassion and love? Try and apply that in the same way to different situations. "Why am I getting angry? Oh, I was expecting that from him, that's why I'm angry."

When you play with your child and she stands on your chest and starts jumping up and down, it's painful. It's definitely painful, but you say, "Oh, my sweet, come on! Jump more! Jump more!" [Guruji laughs] If pain were a reason for anger, you should be angry with the child. Why are you not getting angry then?

DEVOTEE:

Because there's love.

GURUJI:

Because there is love.



GURUJI:

We usually think that we are angry because something has happened, or because he has done this or she has done that, but that is meaningless. It is not the reason: there is something behind it. If you try to explore what that is, even though you might not be able to eradicate your anger totally, at least you'll reduce the instances of it.

Our anger shows that the image we have of ourselves, of what others think of us, is false. You think that people should respect you and love you, and behave towards you in a certain manner, but it's not happening. If it is not happening, it means that what we have understood is not true. What we think, is wrong.



GURUJI:

Why should we expect love and respect from others and why should we get angry with them? Why do we beg for affection, concern, love and all these things from other people? And then get

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angry if they don't show it? We beg for attention, and we desperately want other people to behave according to our wish. If we can understand the mechanism behind our anger, it will cease. It may come back, but again if we can understand it, it will slowly vanish.



GURUJI:

So, as I said, the second reason for your anger is that you don't have clarity, you don't have clear understanding. And the third reason is you don't have the simple love which you are always talking about. "Love, love, love! I should have love!"

DEVOTEE:

But Guruji, how to go about it? When anger flares up there is a strong physical reaction in the body, so it's almost too late then to tell myself there's a lack of love, isn't it?

GURUJI:

When any emotion is strong it triggers a bodily reaction, that's all. That bodily reaction is not important. Just shedding tears is not crying. It is the suffering, the sorrow that you feel in your heart that is the actual sorrow. Even if you cut onions you'll get tears in your eyes. [laughter] So don't bother about physical reactions. People

react in different ways, and for some, their body is more susceptible to the flush of the emotions, but I'm talking about the basic emotion itself.

DEVOTEE:

I would like to have a recipe for what to do next time it happens, or for how to catch it. Is it possible to catch it before somehow?

GURUJI:

If you understand one thing you'll be able to overcome it. For instance, if somebody comes and starts telling you their sorrows, talking about all their problems, and you get fed up and start getting angry, think about yourself in the same situation. If you have a problem you want some solace, and then maybe you come and tell me. What you expect is that I should react to you with love, with concern, with understanding. Or maybe you go to Baba and pray, "Oh, this is the way I am. I am not capable of anything much. Please accept me and take care of me." When we are trying to be accepted as we are by somebody, why can't we accept somebody else like that? We don't accept the other person, but we want to be accepted ourselves! That person just wants to tell us their difficulties. What is it that we lose by simply listening, even if we can't do anything? And if you *are* able to do something, okay, do it.



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DEVOTEE:

How can we get ourselves into a state where we do not feel this anger, this pain, this hurt?

GURUJI:

Only by having the love kindled in your heart by a Sadguru. Once you have the love in you then you don't see evil; you can see only ignorance. You sympathize with others and you can understand their aggression. What did Jesus say? Even when he was being crucified, nailed to the cross, what was it he said? "Father, they know not what they do. Forgive them." His tolerance came from that wisdom, that love. And Baba also reacted like that. He said, "If a child passes a stool on your leg, will you hit her? Will you cut off your leg?" No, because a child doesn't know what she is doing.

So saints don't feel it as aggression. If our children do some mischief, how do we look upon it? For that kind of attitude, our heart should be filled with love. The love should be springing up and filling our heart. Only then is it possible to be like that. And once you have it, all else follows. Jesus was not seeing evil at all.

DEVOTEE:

Until we get the experience of love, how can we deal with the anger that is already existing?

GURUJI:

By understanding, by concern, by sympathizing with the other person and understanding their situation. With that, the anger won't stay.





Shirdi, 2008



The Chemistry of Love

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you've spoken before about need and grace. You said receptivity to grace comes out of need and once the receptivity is there, as Baba said, there are cartloads of grace to take. What links these aspects together?

GURUJI:

If you go to a Sadguru like Baba he will take care of it, the whole process and how it happens. The only thing we have to do is to keep ourselves open, that's all. Open to it, not trying to interpret

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it, not trying to compare. If you have that love, it takes care of everything.

DEVOTEE:

Then love is the key?

GURUJI:

Yes, love. It was not from a sense of renunciation that Ramana left the world, not because he was fed up with maya or because he was atman, or because of something the scriptures said or because he wanted mukti – that is not why he left home, none of this. What actually drove him from Madurai to Arunachala was simply his love of Arunachala, that's all.

So love is the driving force. It happens in different ways in different people. It may look as if I'm bringing the teaching down to bhakti, but I'm not. Actually, love is the source – love, don't call it bhakti. It is love, whether of seeking or of the goal.

With Buddha, he loved solving the mystery of life so much, that it was his love. It was not simply intellectual questioning. That occurs to many people and they do that, they question. They find the answers in books and become arm-chair philosophers. But for Buddha it was a dire personal need to find the solution for himself, that was his love; that I call love. Whether it is love for Arunachala, love for Sai Baba, love for Truth or love of seeking Truth, all are love.



DEVOTEE:

Does the effort in our seeking need to be backed up by the will or by the heart? What kind of effort is best?

GURUJI:

The correct effort is always experienced as an expression of our love. Whether it is love towards an object, a form, or an idea, whatever it is, it is the love. Once our effort expresses our love, then it is the right effort. Not that effort which *says* it is the right effort, not from the other side, the thinking mind – that is putting the cart before the horse. It's not that first we study and learn, reading all the books, to see what method is best and then try to pick one up and implement it, trying and trying to make it work. No, it's not like that. Unless your love is triggered by the object for which the method you've chosen is a means, and that method becomes a genuine expression of your love, it won't be fruitful. And that is what we usually do. We give more stress to the method than to the object of it, and end up loving the method more than the object of our love.



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DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how can we overcome the fear of death?

GURUJI:

When you really know the principle of life, the true nature of life, then you'll realize that death is not so fearful – that is what Ramana realized. By experiencing death he knew the real principle of life, and realized that the so-called fear of death is only an illusion. We may end up with that realization like Ramana, but we should not start with that position, because that again is a delusion. We are starting with the end, the goal: "Death is an illusion. We should not fear it." But, it may not be an illusion. You should *realize* it is an illusion, that should be in your experience. And even if death is there – even if it is true – let us face it! What gives you the strength to face it is love. That is what I've been trying to tell you. Death is immaterial, it is insignificant to us, because we live in love. Whether it is love of Baba, love of the Sadguru, love of Arunachala, or love of *jnana*, it doesn't matter – it's love!

And again that love, in a different terminology, you can call a need, a want – all these human states are different shades of it. If you have that love, you need it. That creates more need and you want it more, and then you get it more. We each have a small iota of that love: try to express it! By expressing it, it grows. Because that love has been *pressed* in your heart due to so many fears, patterns,

wants and desires, you have to *ex-press* it, you have to bring it out from your heart. This is removing what the Vedantins call the *granthis* or 'knots' of the heart. It's what Ramana said, "Remove the knots of the *hridaya granthi*," meaning the heart, the seat of emotions. "True love is lurking there, so remove the knots in it. It is tied with all these desires, these pulls and patterns, these *vasanas*. Try to remove them." He expressed it that way, using Vedantic terminology – *vasana*, *hridaya granthi*. I am saying the same thing, but in a different jargon.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, in most spiritual circles they say the ego has to be destroyed, to be killed, we hear this often. It seems you are saying something different.

GURUJI:

Are such extreme expressions needed? 'Killed', 'destroyed' – it seems so harsh to me. Instead, what I say is, when you experience love, the ego gradually merges into it and becomes one with that love. It gets totally merged and absorbed in it, and loses its identity and form.



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DEVOTEE:

Guruji, in a previous satsang, you spoke about the ego being a support in the process towards fulfilment. But ultimately, when fulfilment is there, the ego has to drop. So how does it support the process and when does it drop?

GURUJI:

It is in the ego that love is kindled. And when the love grows, the ego is burnt up in the fire of love – it is no more there. It's just like fuel. Fuel is the support for fire, but after some time it disappears, it is no more there; it is present in a different way. See the oil beneath the flame of that lamp? The support for the flame is the oil, but after some time, where has the oil gone? That which supports something may lose its own existence. Just like that, our ego, our frustration, our suffering, our need for love and longing for the beloved, all these things act as fuel. So we seek a Sadguru like Sai Baba. Then, once the flame of love is kindled, slowly the flame uses up our ego as fuel and it totally vanishes. The form of the Sadguru acts like the wick, not wicked, but wick, though to you he may sometimes seem wicked! [laughter] And it is there, only in love, that by losing one gains. This is what Christ also says in the Bible, that by losing one's life, one gains it.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how can we nurture openness to transformation and change?

GURUJI:

By your desire, by your need. If you realize your need and you have an object which fulfils that, the resulting chemistry is called love, and that will nourish you. Then you will be nurtured, that is the nourishment for nurturing.

DEVOTEE:

If I know my object of love?

GURUJI:

Not object of love – your object of love depends upon your need: you love what you need, that's all. So, first, you should know what you need. Then you will love the goal, or the object which is the means to that goal, whatever it is; they are the same. The resultant chemistry is love.



DEVOTEE:

We hear various things said about effort. Sometimes it seems we should make more effort, and at other times it seems that effort itself is the obstacle. I don't really understand the role of effort.

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GURUJI:

The right effort is an expression of our love. You can't help it, you have to do it. Any effort is either an expression of our love or of our need, whatever you call it. I prefer to call it love, because love is our need, and the need has given rise to love. In whatever way it arises, it is love.

So it is only an expression. But what we have to understand is, it is not our effort that brings the result. The result is not based on our effort, but still you have to express your love. Expression only shows and increases your love and your need, so both are needed, in fact. Do you understand? Am I making myself clear?

Our effort – our so-called effort – is an expression of our need, our love, and we can't help it, we have to do it. And by expressing and expressing our need more and more, our love becomes more, it becomes stronger. And the more our need and love increase, the more are the chances of reaching our goal quickly. Indirectly, our effort is related to the result, but directly it is not the effort that gives the result, it is grace. Grace is not dependent on your effort, but on your need. Now do you understand?



DEVOTEE:

On the path of love it seems nothing less than 100% love will do.

GURUJI:

Even if it's not 100%, 10% love is also good, because it is love. If you are hungry and you don't get a full meal, will you refuse just a plate of *iddlis*? "No, I'm very hungry, I want either a full meal or no food at all!" Will you say that? No, you will take even one *iddly*.

Here also what happens is, love is going on, it is growing. Not that sometime in a convocation you'll be given a certificate; it's not like that. The love grows and the happiness grows and the fulfilment is also growing.

First it seems that two *iddlis* are enough. But after eating we know, "No, it is not enough!" and again we seek. We seek more and more until we feel no more is needed, we are full. When that happens there's no particular word for it; that state cannot be formally defined. So here, in this case, the whole path, from the starting point to the goal, is happiness and love. And because there is love, there will be fulfilment. Not that we have to suffer now and later we get some happiness. We start with happiness, we walk the path in happiness, and we end in happiness – then we are treading the right path. The suffering that people usually experience on the path is not what is normally described as suffering. It is not torture or physical pain but the human longing for love. This longing may be expressed and experienced as a kind of suffering, but it's not really suffering: there's a beauty in it. It can be thrilling even, because it is

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something we choose, so even the longing itself becomes a kind of happiness.



GURUJI:

People ask how to culture love, how to nurture it, how to develop it and make love grow. There is no method or technique to make love grow. The only thing is, when you realize that you have love and you have a need for love, and you want to realize that love, then try to create or be in an environment where that love is widely cultivated. Then it will grow on its own. When a congenial environment is provided, the plant grows, that's all. What can you do to make a plant grow? Nothing. You can only give it the support of water, fertilizer, and the proper environment. That is what you have to give, that is enough. Will you take a sapling, straighten it, and then make it grow? [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

What is the proper environment?

GURUJI:

Where nothing obstructs your love. Where there is more of a possibility you can realize love, that you can experience love. Where such a love exists in different shades in people who are sharing it in different ways, then you have the right environment. Either you have to be in that

environment or you have to create that environment. If it's not there, you have to create your own. Being dependent on having such an environment is not correct, the ability to create your own should also be there. Rice grows easily in Andhra, for instance. But here, in the Himalayas, on these high valley slopes, see how they did it. They created an environment by terracing the slopes to grow rice. With rocks they made boundaries and canals, so pools of water could collect there; they created the right environment to grow rice. It is not a proper place for rice cultivation, in fact, but they have made it so, and are growing rice. That is what you have to do.

DEVOTEE:

And how do we do that?

GURUJI:

By doing it, by creating it, by having satsang, by being with like-minded people, by sharing with like-minded people, by sharing your love!



GURUJI:

When you want to label a state like fulfilment, it's not possible. It's something you experience, you have to experience it. When you get real fulfilment, you want it to grow! And to get it more and more, and more and more, until you get

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the capacity to hold full fulfilment, whatever you think that is, your concept of full.

DEVOTEE:

What do you mean by capacity?

GURUJI:

The capacity to love and the capacity to receive. The capacity to stick to your love, to hold onto your love, to be stable in your love, not to be disturbed by any other influence. Whatever comes, that love is not disturbed: that capacity, that strength. These are all capacities.

If your computer freezes and your hard disk is empty, how do you feel? You spend hours and hours, you try Disk Warrior, Norton, TechTool, repairing permissions and connecting this and that – so many things you do, constantly, trying to bring that back. If it's something which you don't need so much, you give it up! But your love gives you that strength, thinking about various solutions, the worry, the suffering, the longing, and the joy of getting it back once it is repaired and all your files are there again. Oh! The happiness!

DEVOTEE:

Does everyone have that capacity?

GURUJI:

Yes, everyone has the capacity. The capacity is there, but that much love is not there. If the love

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is there, that itself will give you the capacity. For anybody, what gives the strength, the capacity, is the love. Everybody has the capacity.





Shirdi, 1998



Clarity and Fulfilment

GURUJI:

The other day some of our people came and said, "Guruji, we have a problem. When we are asked, 'What kind of a path is Guruji's? Is it a path of devotion?' what should we say?" Because I don't use the word devotion. "Is it *jnana marga*?" [path of knowledge]. But I don't use the word *jnana*. "Is it karma yoga?" [path of service]. But I don't use the word karma, and I'm not at all a yogi. [Guruji laughs] So they asked, "What should we say? They're asking what path you're following." So finally, I said, "Even though it is not a path, just tell them, Guruji's path is a path of clarity and fulfilment." Because that's what's important:

clarity! For everything, clarity! That clarity is needed even if so-called nirvana or mukti or moksha comes, or even Baba's *sakshatkar*. Whatever comes, you'll need clarity, even to be clear about that! For example, some people come to me and ask, "Guruji, I think that I have realized myself! Is it true I have attained Self-realization?" [Guruji laughs] "I got an experience of liberation, Guruji. Do you think I am really free?" They have a doubt even about that! That is, they don't have clarity. In fact, we don't have clarity about anything. So what we need first is clarity. Then, fulfilment is based on clarity. If our fulfilment has no clarity, we do not really experience it as fulfilment either. Fulfilment and clarity go together – the path is a path of clarity and fulfilment. Whatever additional names you give it, it doesn't really matter.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, is clarity something you achieve, or is it given to you?

GURUJI:

If you really need it, you'll get clarity, it will come. You earn your clarity – I'm asking you to earn it. I'm not saying it will be given, but that you must earn it. I'm not saying, "Simply sit and clarity will come, I will give it to you." No, I don't say that. You may experience it like that, it doesn't matter. But I am telling you – you have to earn your clarity: earn it!



GURUJI:

Many people are not able to do anything fully well. What I say to them is, try to get clarity: how much do you really want this? Is it really needed? Then, when clarity comes, for example, when they say, “My first priority is meeting my worldly and family responsibilities – that is eighty percent. Twenty percent of my need is spiritual. It’s there for sure, but the other needs are more, towards my career and family.” If you have that clarity, then when you spend twenty percent of your time in spiritual pursuits, you will experience it happily, that twenty percent, and you will also experience the other eighty percent happily. Otherwise, you’ll always be in conflict, living on the horns of a dilemma – there you are not well, here also you are not well. That is why I ask you first to get clarity. Why are you here? Don’t delude yourself and say, “Oh, we are spiritual seekers! Our lives are totally devoted to mukti and moksha, but these other needs trouble us.” No, don’t say this. Actually, for those who are really troubled by needing mukti, there won’t be these ‘other things’; they’ll be like Ramana Maharshi. But we don’t have his stature, his purity of nature, we are pulled by so many pulls. What I’m saying, as I have said many times before, is that everyone is torn and divided by their desires because we lack

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clarity and understanding. Because our desires pull us in different directions, this way and that, we experience conflict and friction in fulfilling them. But if you get clarity, you can harmonize your desires in such a way that, after putting them in proper order, they don't compete or fight with one another. Then, at least you experience your pulls in harmony.

When you have clarity about where everything stands in your heart, then you can experience every part of your life fully, without clash, without conflict. What I am asking you is to free yourself from that conflict. It is the same principle as in the example of the iron and magnet – just apply it! What is the difference between a piece of iron and a magnet? The number of molecules is exactly the same in both. What distinguishes them is that in the magnet, each molecule is aligned, polarized, and harmonized with the others; its entropy has gone, it has become a magnet. The easiest way to turn a piece of iron into a magnet is to rub it against the magnet again and again, keeping it in contact. Gradually, the iron molecules lose their entropy and become aligned and polarized by their contact with the magnet. Slowly, they become harmonized and integrated, and turn into a magnet themselves. In our case, we are all pieces of iron and Baba is the magnet. Remembering Baba, if you put your mind again and again on Baba, and place yourself as much as possible in Baba's presence, even physically, by going

to Shirdi, it's like rubbing again and again on a magnet, and you get harmonized.



GURUJI:

I am not asking you to do anything. What I'm telling you is, if you come and say that 'X' is the object of your love and therein lies your fulfilment, then I say, try to focus on it until you get it! You say, "This is my fulfilment", but you're not doing anything for it. Focus on it! You say, "I want to pass this examination. Oh, I want to very much, I want this degree!" You come to me and talk like this. What can I tell you? I say, "Yes, if you really want this, then study hard!" I'm not asking you to pass the examination, I'm not telling you to get the degree, no! But if you come to me and say, "This is the degree I want, I want to pass this examination!" then, I tell you, this is how to do it. If you say you want to pass the examination, but daily you're going to the movies and chitchatting with your friends, loitering around on the beach, I say, "This is not the way. Study hard! Sit in your room and study hard!" If you say, "No, no, I don't want to pass the exam if I have to study hard", then everything is cancelled. But then, at least you're clear about that!

So when you come and tell me, "We have come all the way from far distances for you, Guruj! We

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want to experience you fully, Guruji!"— when you say that, I can only say, "Then do it properly!" That is all I'm saying. I haven't called you here: "Come, experience my presence." No, I have never done that! You are the ones who come and say, "Oh, we are so happy here! We feel fulfilled here. We have come for you." If you have really come for me, then show it! Do it thoroughly. Otherwise, why waste your time here? Go on pursuing some other pursuits which will be of more benefit to you, more profitable for you. That is what I mean. I never try to set a goal for you, I'm only trying to help you to achieve your own goal. And your goal, *you* have to set. Then, just like a good goalkeeper, you have to keep other balls from coming in and hitting the goal.



GURUJI:

I have made it clear many times: I never advise about goals. I never say that this is the best goal or that is the second-best goal. The choice of goal is yours, you have to choose your own goal. How to choose? That I will say: the one that gives you the most happiness, that triggers the most love in your heart. Choose that goal, whatever it is. If it's social work, environmental work, or whatever, go and do it. If that gives you happiness, go! I'm not opposed to it, if that is your goal. I respect all the people who really work for their goal happily,

with dedication. I have equal respect for them. I don't say they are sidetracked or not spiritual. Everyone has to choose their own goal. And just as they are so focused on theirs, you have to be focused on yours, on loving Baba, or whatever. I advise that you choose the goal that triggers love in your heart and makes you happy. Stick to that and focus on it more and more.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how do we maintain the focus on our goal? It seems in just a moment it can be lost.

GURUJI:

There is no need to maintain a focus: when love maintains it, the focus is 'maintenance free'. If you have love, you become almost helpless – you can't be diverted from your focus! That is called focus. If you really love someone, you can't stop thinking about that person, your thoughts will always be going again and again towards him or her. But sometimes because of old habits, even though we are in love, some sad thoughts come, and even though we try to drive them away, still we find ourselves helpless. Or certain distractions will come which we can't avoid facing. But then, other things come that help to maintain focus – satsang, good company, thinking about why we are here, what our purpose is – so many good things.

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You are well-versed in them, these techniques of focusing, you can use whatever you like.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, if we accept responsibility for our own happiness or unhappiness, would we be happier?

GURUJI:

Whether you're happier or unhappy, at least the unhappiness you thought was coming from the outside stops.

DEVOTEE:

By our acceptance of responsibility?

GURUJI:

By realizing that other people are not responsible for your happiness or unhappiness. First you free them, then you'll be free from them, at least some kind of liberty and freedom.

DEVOTEE:

How is it done, Guruji, that kind of seeing? How can we truly see we are responsible?

GURUJI:

First, stop blaming others. Get clear! Then it is easy. We make it difficult by deluding ourselves and then it becomes a habit and a pattern. That's

why I tell you, if you stop it – if there is nobody in the world to blame – then at least you become clear that no one is to blame but yourself, or Baba! To blame is to ‘be lame’. [Guruji laughs]

Always, again and again, I tell you one thing: all I am saying now, people will understand in their own way, according to their own outlook and approach, based on their own problems. But the general point is, there are three things I ask you always to remember, from all the satsangs, in all the hours and hours of my talking with you, the crux of it all, are these three things.

First, you should have a goal, an objective. You should know what you want and what you are striving for. Then you should remember your objective, if at all you have one. When you come to Tiruvannamalai or to Shirdi, you have an objective or a goal – at least you think you have one. Whatever that is, are we remembering it? Why are we here, why have we come – always remember that.

Second, be on guard that this awareness of your purpose and your goal is not diluted or led astray, diverted by the situations that surround you, and to resist being pulled towards them, away from your goal. The goal and the focus are interdependent, so to know whether we are actually aware of our goal or are being pulled aside, astray from our path, is to see what we are doing and where we are going, every day.

The third point is keeping our focus, keeping contact with whatever it is that triggers our love.

Are we doing the things that keep up our focus? Are we really doing them? Are we staying aware of our objective? Is our purpose undiluted? Are we remembering it or forgetting? Just see how you spend the day – not the last twenty years, that is not necessary – just look at one day! Take a sample survey of your day and see how you've spent it. Have you asked yourself even once today, "Why have I come here? What am I doing? What am I aspiring to?" You say, "I have come here for Self-enquiry, for Ramana, for Bhagavan, for Arunachala, for Baba, for you, Guruji!" But come on, really now, how many hours – rather minutes; sorry, 'hours' is too much to say – how many minutes have you actually spent, focused on this? Answer truthfully. In the last twenty-four hours, what have you actually done towards your goal?

Just think: Why are you here? Are you remembering why you've come, what your purpose is? Are you really trying to guard yourself from the influences, from the activities, from the pulls, that take you away from your goal? And are you truly walking towards your goal, your object of love? If so, what actually are you doing for it?

And we should remember one last, basic, most important thing, which I have said again and again. The shortness of our life – how short it is! So, see how you waste time and how you spend time. We do not know where we will be tomorrow, yet we think and plan as though we were permanent

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and immortal, as though we will live to the end of creation! We plan, we store, we accumulate – is all this needed? Get clarity!





Tirumala, 1994



*Sri Poondi Swami:
The Transmitter Who Never Fails*

“Sri Poondi Swami was first seen around 1935 in a village called Kalasapakkam, about twenty miles from Tiruvannamalai in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. When he first revealed himself to public gaze, he had assumed the mien of a mad person. With his gait and well-built physique he appeared to the villagers to be a retired military man. He stayed first in the Kakkamgalai Pilliar temple and then in a dilapidated mosque by the side of the road. Later he stayed in the Draupadi temple and under trees by the roadside. He used to wear a long shirt like a garment reaching below

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his knees and would never remove it even when it became torn and bedraggled. If someone gave him another shirt, he would not remove the old shirt but wear the new one over the old. His shirt pockets would be filled to bursting with old, empty cigarette packets, cigarette stubs, and old scraps of paper which he had stuffed into them. He would never ask anyone for anything – even food or water. If anyone offered him food they would have to feed him as they would a child; he would never feed himself. If someone put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it, he would smoke. He never talked to anyone on his own. As he never bathed, his body would be dirty and his hair matted with grime. Flies would be swarming over him, attracted by the grime and dirt, but he would never bother about them. If he started to walk, he would keep walking for miles together without stopping to rest. If once he sat down, it would be days or weeks or maybe even months before an impulse made him start up again. Once he got up, he would move off and go where his fancy took him. Nobody could predict when he would sit still or move, or where he would be at any time. Nobody knew his antecedents, his parents, or where he came from. None knew his caste or creed or even his name. No one ever heard him take the name of God or speak of spiritual matters.

At first, the people of Kalasapakkam dismissed him as just another madman. It took a miracle

to show them that he was not a madman but a great mahatma who had assumed the form of a madman for his own mysterious purposes. A river named the Cheyyar flows by the side of Kalasapakkam. It is a seasonal river which flows whenever it rains in the nearby hills, but remains dry the rest of the time. The Swami used to sit in the sand of the riverbed which was burning hot in the fierce heat of the Indian summer. It used to be very difficult to walk across the riverbed because the burning sand seared your feet like a coal fire. But the Swami used to sit on the sand with no covering whatsoever, as if he were lolling on a silken mattress under the cool light of the full moon.

It was normal for the river to have flash floods whenever the surrounding hills got a heavy rain shower. Once, when the Swami was sitting on the river bed, a flash flood occurred. All those who saw him sitting on the river bed thought he must have been swept away and drowned in the flood. Once the flood had ebbed, the villagers rushed to the spot where they had last seen the Swami. To their amazement they saw him still alive, buried up to his neck in the sand. They dug him out and the Swami walked away calmly as if nothing extraordinary had happened. When the villagers saw that the Swami was still alive after being submerged in the flood for so long, they realized he must be a great mahatma and not merely an ordinary man. The Swami became famous in

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the surrounding areas and they started calling him 'Artragal Swami' or 'River Swami' (*artra* in Tamil means river). He roamed hither and thither near the village of Poondi until, around 1960, he sat down on the raised porch of a house by the side of the road. He never left that porch again for eighteen years until he attained *mahasamadhi* in 1978. The Swami was the personification of the *ajagarabhava* or the immobile, passive state, as defined in the *yogasastras*".

– from: *Example of a Perfect Saint: Sri Poondi Swami*

by Sri Babuji

(Orig. Telugu article in *Saipatham Magazine* for Jan/
Feb 1988)



DEVOTEE:

We have heard that the late Kanchipuram Shankaracharya once said, "If we are all light bulbs, Poondi Swami is the transmitter". And I wonder, Guruji, is this still his function?

GURUJI:

Yes, it is still there. The pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami, said of Poondi Swami, "If we are all bulbs, Sri Poondi Swami is the transmitter. These bulbs do not light up until the transmitter is switched on." Sometimes we switch off the lights or a bulb goes out, but the transmitter is still there. In the

transmitter, there is no bulb to show it is the transmitter – that’s the problem! [Guruji laughs] Whether the transmitter is on or not you do not know by looking at the transmitter. Looking at the bulb you can say, “Ah, yes, the transmitter is working.” Sometimes bulbs may go out, but the transmitter always works. And Poondi Swami’s job is like the transmitter: it works, it is still working. A transmitter never fails. He is the transmitter who never fails.



DEVOTEE:

When you went to see Poondi Swami, were you already a devotee of Sai Baba?

GURUJI:

Yes, Sai Baba was my Guru.

DEVOTEE:

Was Poondi Swami able to help you?

GURUJI:

He didn’t say anything. But in his presence I experienced something which transformed my whole life.



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DEVOTEE:

After your experience in Poondi, would you say that your longing increased or was answered, or both?

GURUJI:

It was answered.

DEVOTEE:

So the longing was fulfilled. But did it stop? Wasn't there the longing to experience it more and more?

GURUJI:

Yes, I am experiencing it, I am experiencing it continuously. In fact, I don't have any words for that experience. I haven't found any words in all the *sastras*. These things we shouldn't try to question or understand. There are certain things which have no words and can only be interpreted.



DEVOTEE:

How was Poondi Swami's love expressed?

GURUJI:

His love was so much that he had no other object: He was the object. And he simply sat, totally focused. He had not even the need to move out, even

one step. He was just like a mirror. For example, if a photographer had fear and approached him timidly, then that same expression would come on Swami's face, simply that. He was always like a mirror. Immediately his expression would change with the next man who came. If the man talked in a friendly, intimate manner, then Swami would also talk in a friendly, easy way with him. Whatever he expressed was not his expression, but that of the person who received it: he himself had no expression at all – he was so transparent! And he was so transparent that through him I saw Sai Baba only. That is why I always say that it is Sai Baba who gave the experience. His personality was not a veil, even to see that there was a Poondi Swami between me and Sai Baba. And I haven't seen such transparency anywhere else.

DEVOTEE:

So would you say that his love was expressed by this transparency?

GURUJI:

His love was expressed by giving whatever the people who asked him needed. If someone asked for health, he gave it; if someone came for spiritual experience, he gave it; if it was for total fulfilment, he gave it; and if it was for children, he gave it. Everything. Whatever anyone needed and asked for, he gave it with love. Not even with the restriction, "Oh, you should only ask for mukti

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– my department is only this – the mukti department. For mundane things I am not concerned!”



DEVOTEE:

Why is one person attracted to one saint and a second person to another? What dictates that choice?

GURUJI:

Nothing: it is not your choice. In fact, it was not my choice to go to Poondi. And then, I didn't expect it even – that he was such a great man. I had absolutely no notion of him; I was not even interested. I simply had to start my journey and my guru said, “Go, and stay there with him for some time, and then go anywhere you like.” That's all. I didn't have any idea what Poondi Swami would be like.

DEVOTEE:

But is that again what we talked about yesterday – the karmic bond which leads you to one person rather than another?

GURUJI:

Yes, there was the bond of my karmic relationship with him. Also, when Baba described the state of his own guru, it almost exactly tallies with the

description of Poondi Swami. I am not saying that Poondi Swami was the guru of Sai Baba. But the way that Baba described his guru – it is exactly the same description for Poondi Swami.

DEVOTEE:

How is that?

GURUJI:

Read Baba's life. Baba said to Swami Sai Sharan Anand, "My guru was just simply sitting, and he was an embodiment of love. He was not in a position to take care of his own calls of nature even, and I used to serve him, cleaning his body and feeding him." Can you show me another who fits that description? Except for Poondi Swami, I haven't seen one. Poondi Swami never took food with his hands. If he was not fed, he would simply sit there – somebody would have to feed him. If you put something in his mouth he would eat it. Not only this or that much, but however much – even if a hundred people brought food and fed him – he would eat it. What happened to all that food, we do not know. If you put anything in his hand, he would keep it there, and then somebody would have to come and take it, then throw it away. If you put a cigarette between his lips and then lit it, he would smoke. If you only put it in his hand, then he would keep it there; he wouldn't smoke it. And he used to answer his calls of nature there itself, then somebody had to come and clean it. If

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nobody gave him food, even for months, he would go without it, just like that – he never begged for food. He is absolutely the symbol of someone who doesn't require anything. He was totally free of all needs, including even his physical needs.

DEVOTEE:

And, as far as anyone knows, was this always the case? Does anyone know of a different time?

GURUJI:

No, no one knows a different time. He just appeared like that. From the beginning he was like that. When he used to walk, he would walk and walk, for about one month, without stopping anywhere: all around Kalasapakkam, Poondi, and the Cheyyar river. He'd be simply walking day and night, day and night walking. And if at all, from some external impetus – we do not know, it is not recorded – he had to sit, then he sat, that's all. He used to sit in the same place for months and months together. And if, for some reason, he was prompted to get up, then he would get up and walk, walk and walk, that's all.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, even when you had your experience sitting in front of Poondi Swami, you attributed that to Baba. Why?

GURUJI:

I never said that I attributed it to Baba. I said it was coming from Baba. I never said 'attributed'. I knew it was coming from Baba.

DEVOTEE:

Then what was Poondi Swami's role?

GURUJI:

Just like the role I am playing with you – the role of a spoon. You take soup with a spoon: but who made the soup? Who gave you the soup? And what is the soup? The spoon is only a means, and you should know how to handle it properly. If you think the spoon is giving and then try to bite into it, you'll lose your teeth, that's all! [Guruji laughs] That is why I always say, I don't do anything to you, use me only as a spoon. I am a spoon, use me properly. The one who gives is Baba.



GURUJI:

Instead of trying to verbalize my experience with Poondi Swami, I'm asking you to try to experience it. What you get here, what you experience with me, may be the fringes of that experience. If you are really interested to know what it is, try to catch hold of the fringe and go ahead, continue, go ahead! Plunge, and you will experience it. Then

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you will be able to tell me what I have experienced!
[Guruji laughs] I'd be interested in hearing it from you!
[laughter] Otherwise, if I start describing these things, it leads to dogmas, to doctrines, to giving you more concepts. If that was good, I would give it, no problem. But it's of no use. Whether something happened or not, whether it is true or not, just rely on your own experience here and now. If you are experiencing something, even the fringe of it, stick to it!





Sri Poondi Swami



Bodhi Gaya, 1995



Holy Places

DEVOTEE:

What makes a place holy?

GURUJI:

The presence of a Sadguru makes a place holy. A real holy place is one in the vicinity of a Sadguru. Why is Shirdi a holy place? Because it is Baba's place. In itself there is no Ganges there, no Himalayas, no sages who did *tapas* there, nothing. It's simply because of the presence of the Sadguru. Any place is holy because of the presence of a Sadguru.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how do we make use of the Sadguru's presence in reference to Shirdi, Poondi, Tiruvannamalai and other holy places?

GURUJI:

When you sleep on a mattress, are you aware of the presence of the mattress? After getting up you may say, "Oh, I had a good sleep, this mattress is very good!" But during sleep were you aware of it? Or the presence of it? No, but you were using the presence of it and its absence wouldn't give you the same effect. So to be aware of its presence use it as a mattress. If you use it as a dining table the effect won't be the same! [laughter] To use it as a mattress and get the effects of it, that is being aware of its presence. So that's what you have to do. In other words, the more sensitive you are to the effects of the mattress, the more aware you'll be of its presence, it will become so palpable. The point is, many people are not sensitive. For instance, it's as though your mind were like the clothes of a bus cleaner – buses and lorries in India have a driver and a cleaner, and the cleaner is the driver's assistant. See how filthy his clothes are, full of oil, dirt and everything! Now, if he comes inside in his dirty clothes and sits on this floor, will his clothes get soiled? No – if anything

at all gets soiled, it will be the floor. Some minds are like the cleaner's clothes: wherever they go, even into dirt, they don't notice the dirt at all. But, if you're wearing spotless white clothes that are very, very clean, you'll be so sensitive to dirt that you'll be afraid of sitting, even on a clean floor. So the cleaner our minds become, the more you'll sense the effect of everything on you. Like this, the moment you enter into a presence, you'll know that presence, and you'll sense the effect of it. It will be so palpable, it's not something subtle – you can feel it, you can experience it, you can touch and eat it and digest it.



GURUJI:

Any holy place becomes holy because of holy men and women. In the remote past – not a time we can grasp historically – I think there lived a saint at Arunachala, a great saint, whom people almost thought of as an incarnation, an embodiment of Siva, and he lived on the mountain and took samadhi there. Since that time, many people have seen the hill as a *tapokshetra* [place of penance], and especially in modern times, since the time of Seshadri Swami and Ramana Maharshi. So it is a place of saints.

This is also how I look at Sai Baba's samadhi – for me Arunachala is another samadhi. This is what the *Sri Arunachala Purana* says also – that

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a great yogi lived there called Arunagiri Yogi, and his tomb is on the northern peak of the hill. Ramana Maharshi also once saw the tree where the tomb was, but he couldn't go near it; he said he had no permission – even to Ramana Maharshi there was no permission! Because of Arunagiri Yogi, this particular hill has become a holy hill. And, because his tomb was so inaccessible, people couldn't go up there to worship it or do *pradakshina* of it, so the whole hill has become his samadhi. Just as in Shirdi we do *maha-pradakshina*, combining the Samadhi Mandir, Gurusthan and Dwarkamai, so in Tiruvannamalai they do *pradakshina* of Arunachala like that.

DEVOTEE:

So have these holy places become powerful from the holy people who have lived there, or are the places holy in and of themselves?

GURUJI:

In a real sense everything is holy; in fact, there is nothing unholy here. But because of a saint's presence the holiness manifests more at some places than others and these are called 'holy places'.

DEVOTEE:

Does the holiness of Arunachala get amplified by the subsequent saints and yogis who are attracted there because of the original Arunagiri Yogi?

GURUJI:

Yes. It increases because more and more channels are open. For example, it increased when Seshadri Swami came there, because some people could connect with his presence and energy, and were benefited by his kind of vibration. And then also when Ramana Maharshi came, he was another great one. So more and more people get connected. Not that it becomes more powerful, rather, that more and more people can relate to it. A hospital becomes a super-speciality hospital, that's all. Before, only those having certain kinds of diseases could be helped. But when a super-speciality hospital comes, any kind of illness can be treated. In the same way, over time some holy places develop into super-speciality spiritual centres, like Arunachala.



GURUJI:

There is another thing. The great saints said that sadhana done in a holy place, in the presence of great Sadgurus like Ramana Maharshi, gives a tenfold benefit for any effort made. This is what Baba meant when he said: "If you give me one rupee, I'll give you ten rupees!" Such holy places are called *tapokshetras*, because that effect, that power, is there. In the presence of saints you are fully exposed to their influence, to their vibration. And you should remember that if you do something

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good that gives a tenfold result, then if you do something going away from the good, it will also give a tenfold result. That is why you see businessmen in holy places – these ‘spiritual’ businessmen – they are more business-minded than any other businessmen because the effect of the location is so much more! The benefit is there, but the danger is also there. So we should utilize the benefit but be careful – it’s like walking a razor’s edge. We should always be aware that we are in the presence of great saints. If you do a good thing the result is a hundredfold, but if you do a wrong thing, the karma will also be a hundredfold. Because that is the law there: whatever you do, the result will be a hundredfold. Presence doesn’t discriminate.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what is the benefit of going to Poondi?

GURUJI:

To be in the presence of Poondi Swami. It’s as though your mind were like the milk from a cow and you put it on the stove to boil, and the best stoves I have found are in Shirdi and Poondi. To boil milk, you have to keep it on the stove. Not near the stove or by the side of the stove, but on the stove! And when the milk [of your mind] is boiled, you’ll experience the boiling as fulfil-

ment: it will overflow and saturate your mind. The flame of the stove is burning, so try to stay near the flame as long as you can. Otherwise, your milk will separate and curdle and then even the dogs won't take it – they'll run away!



GURUJI:

When we are here in Shirdi, we know it is our choice, it is our love. We have our object of love and we have our focus; we want to focus and the focus is so beautiful, but still we are not able to focus. What I tell you is, the focus is enough. And when you come and ask me, "Is there anything we have to do, Guruji? Any meditation technique like, "Who am I?" or "Who are you?" – something like that?" [laughter] I say there is nothing you have to do. It's as though you were a wet cloth in the sun, and Baba's grace is like the heat of the sun: all you have to do to become dry is to keep your cloth in the sun. The wetness – our so-called ignorance – will be dried away by the sun, there is nothing the cloth has to do. The only thing it has to do is: just keep itself in the sun, the drying happens naturally. But the problem is, the cloth doesn't always keep itself in the sun. It wants to be in the shade or, even after becoming half-dried, again it goes into the bucket! [laughter]



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DEVOTEE:

What is the best way of putting ourselves on the line and staying in the sun?

GURUJI:

People have to explore this for themselves. You should find out your own techniques. You have to be the creators, the explorers, the discoverers of your own techniques. When you have your focus, you will know – everyone has the capacity to do it. But, finally, you can't do anything yourself. The final thing needed, the drying, is only done by the sun: you can't dry yourself. But you can expose yourself to the sunlight, and that is the only thing you can or have to do. Whatever else comes in here – satsangs, *niyamas*, the so-called spiritual principles or 'commandments' – all these things come under the heading of making the line to hang your cloth in the sun. But what makes it dry is not the line, but the sun.

DEVOTEE:

Not the technique?

GURUJI:

It is only the sun that dries. The more you keep a cloth in the sun, the sooner it dries. And the sun is always ready to make it dry. Even if your cloth is in the shade, the sun still tries to dry it, and after some time it does dry it, no problem, no doubt about it. The sun is always doing this, giving its warmth.



DEVOTEE:

Is it true that it makes no difference whether I sleep, or stay awake and do *pradakshina* of Poondi Swami's samadhi? Or is there some value in wakefulness?

GURUJI:

Whatever it is, it is good. That's why I always say when someone asks me, "What is the need to go to Poondi?" I reply, just think of me as a washerman in charge of a laundry here in Tiruvannamalai – here is the laundry room, there are taps, detergents, everything – and I wash you. Afterwards, there is a line in Poondi where I hang you out to dry. Here I use detergents and scrub, but you can't be dried as quickly in the laundry room. Even though the clothes are washed inside, they have to be hung outside in the sun. So for that, there is a line in Poondi and you have to hang there in the sun to get dry. [laughter] And while you are getting dry, what is it that you have to do? Stay on the line, that's all. That is enough. That's why I say, be there 'blindly' in a sense, and just stay on the line.

DEVOTEE:

Is doing *pradakshina* of Arunachala also the same? Is going on *giri-pradakshina* also like hanging on the line?

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GURUJI:

Yes, it is also like that.



DEVOTEE:

When we are in Shirdi, is it enough just to sit each day in Gurusthan and the Samadhi Mandir for a while?

GURUJI:

If you feel it's so easy to do that 'enough', do it! The question implies, "Is that all or must I do something more?" Even if you can do something more, first try to do whatever you think is 'enough', hmm? That's enough. Again, it's just as though your clothes were washed and rinsed in the washing machine here in satsang, and then dried there at the Mandir. To make wet clothes dry, it is enough to keep them in the sun: the clothes need not do anything. But first they must be washed to remove the dirt, and then put in the sun so they dry quickly. The washing happens in satsang here, and the drying happens there – it's a washerman's job! [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

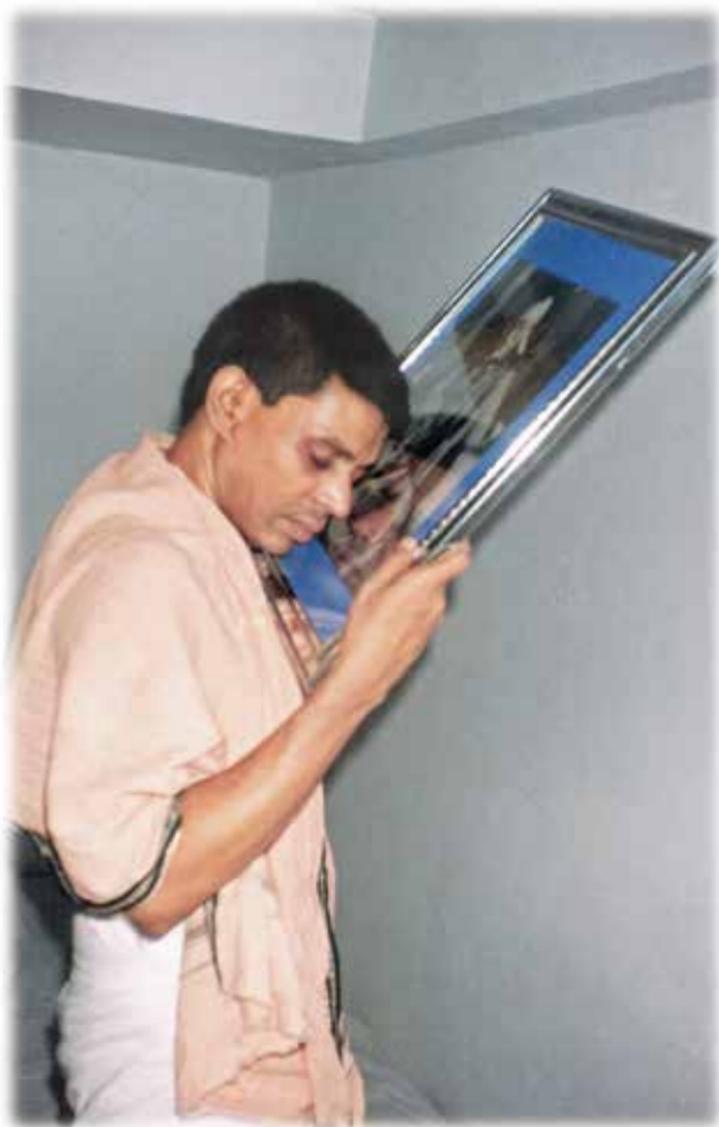
You say it doesn't make any difference whether we are here with you or away from you. But you have

talked on other occasions about the clothes being dried more quickly outside in the sun than inside the house. So does the whole cleaning process, or whatever happens when we are with you, happen more quickly when we are near you?

GURUJI:

I'm talking about the help. The help which is given is experienced in an intensified way now, when you are near. Maybe at a distance you experience it in a different way, in a less intense way, but it's not that I give more when you are here. You may experience it to a greater or lesser degree, but I'm talking about giving: my giving is always the same. Like that, the sun is always shining, and the cloth experiences that shining.





South India, 1993



The Longest Longing

GURUJI:

My favourite parable is the one about the sadhu in the forest. I have told it to you in satsang many times before, do you remember it?

There was an old man who yearned in his heart for the *sakshatkar* [vision] of Lord Vishnu. So, as it is said in the *sastras*, he went into a forest, sat under a tree and started doing *tapas*: controlling his senses, focusing, concentrating, and contemplating “Who am I?” – Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, all these things. [Guruji laughs] He was very sincere, and he was practising all that he had heard and read. One day the divine minstrel,

Narada – the angel Gabriel of Hindu mythology [Guruji laughs] – was going that way and happened to see this fellow. Somehow, intuitively, Narada liked him, so he approached and asked him, “Who are you, where have you come from and what are you doing here?” The sadhu was so happy to have the darshan of such a great sage as Narada that he explained everything to him. Narada was pleased and said, “Okay, do you have any wish?” The sadhu replied, “O Narada, I don’t have any wish. I have only one request: O great sage, next time when you go to Vaikunta, the abode of Vishnu, just ask him when he will give me darshan. Afterwards, kindly return and give me his answer.” Narada said, “Oh, it’s a simple request. Sure, I’ll take care of it. Don’t worry about it.” And he went away.

Some years passed and Narada clean forgot about it. Then one day he happened to visit Vaikunta and was chatting with Vishnu, when suddenly he remembered the old man and his question. So he asked Vishnu, “O Lord, I forgot to ask you something. Long ago I met a poor sadhu, and he was doing very intense *tapas*. He was a sincere, honest man, and I liked him very much. He had a small question: when are you going to give him darshan?” And Lord Vishnu said, “I’m sorry, Narada, I’m afraid it will be a long time – so long that he’ll have to take as many births as there are leaves on the tree which he is sitting under. That means he’ll have to undergo some thousands

of births before I give him darshan." Then Narada said, "Oh, I'm sorry, because he's a very nice chap." Vishnu said, "What to do? It's his *prarabdha* [karma], I can't help it." "As you wish, my Lord," Narada said, and he went away.

After some time, Narada happened to be going again in the forest on the same path near the sadhu. He saw the man, but didn't want to give him the sad tidings. So he was just passing him by, ignoring him. But the man saw Narada and immediately ran up to him saying, "What is this, O great sage? Why are you so cross with me? What wrong have I done, that last time without asking you came and gave me your darshan, but today you are just ignoring me and going away?" Narada replied, "Oh, it's nothing, I'm not angry with you, I was just busy. How are you? Is everything going well?" "Everything is alright," the sadhu replied, "but what about my question?" Then Narada said, "Don't worry about it, everything is fine. Go ahead, Lord Vishnu will definitely grace you – his grace is always with you. Go on, you're doing well." But the sadhu insisted, "No, no, O Narada, please answer my question." Again Narada replied, "Don't worry about the answer, come on, go ahead!" He didn't want to discourage that fellow by telling him what Lord Vishnu had said. But the man insisted and insisted, so at last Narada had no choice. He said, "What can I say, poor fellow, Lord Vishnu said you won't have his darshan until you undergo as

many births as there are leaves on this tree you're sitting under."

As he said this Narada thought, "My god, this man will have a heart attack when he hears this!" But to his great surprise, when the man heard it he started dancing with joy, shouting in ecstasy, "I'm so happy! Lord Vishnu has promised me darshan! He's going to give me darshan!" and he was dancing and dancing.

At that very moment Lord Vishnu appeared from Vaikunta and gave him darshan. At this, Narada was even more surprised and put out. [Guruji laughs] Narada sincerely wanted Lord Vishnu to give him darshan, but after telling the man it wouldn't happen for a thousand births, Narada now felt like a fool when Vishnu suddenly appeared before him!

Afterwards, as Lord Vishnu and Narada were going away together, Narada couldn't help complaining to the Lord, "What is this you have done, my Lord? You have made a fool of me in front of him! First, you told me you wouldn't give him darshan for thousands of births and I told him that. Then suddenly you gave him darshan: what will he think of me?" [Guruji laughs] Vishnu said, "What can I do, Narada? According to his *prarabdha karma*, he was due to undergo so many births before I could give him darshan. But, when you told him I would give him darshan even after so many births, the mere promise of my darshan made him so happy that his ecstasy burnt up the

karma of those years of waiting in a moment and he was ready. That is why I gave him darshan then. It is not in my hands, what can I do? I didn't mean to fool you, it just happened like that. I am helpless."

See! Again, this is the real prototype of what is said in the *Ishavasya Upanishad*, and the story [in the *Sri Sai Satcharita*, Ch. 20] about Dasganu's maid and the sari in the box. Like the sari in the box, the promise of darshan in this story can be taken in two ways: normally, people would say, "How can this be Vishnu's grace – a thousand more births? What kind of love is it? Why so many more births – can't he just burn up all my karma? Is he not capable of doing it?" But no, the sadhu doesn't think like that. His attitude is so positive that instead he shouts with joy, "Yes! He's going to give me darshan! Oh, I'm so happy!"

That ecstatic happiness and positive attitude *is the key to darshan*. That is why, if anybody puts the question to me and asks, "Why does it take so many births, what makes the process so long?" – there's no answer to it. It could be this minute, or it may take forever. "How long?" is a meaningless question. How much *longing* you have, *is* how long. So how long means how *long*, that is the answer. It is as long as your longing, your long-est longing.

It is a beautiful story. It tells hundreds, even millions of things. It is worth volumes of *sastras* to me, that one story. Even though it is a story, and a

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fiction, it doesn't matter. To me, what it conveys is the essence of the *sastras*.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, does longing end when we reach our goal?

GURUJI:

In one way yes, but as I told you, it is not only that. That is why you see even Ramana Maharshi expressed longing, even the *gopis* expressed longing. What kind of longing was it? Even Baba used to dance, singing songs of longing, expressing longing. Some of Kabir's songs express his longing for Ram, for the darshan of Ram. Do you think Ramana or Baba or Kabir hadn't fulfilled their goal? Their longing was fulfilled, but still they wanted to express it in this way. Expressing it in this way is longing, but it is a different kind of longing.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, we know that other great saints like Mirabai and Ravidas also wrote poetry expressing their longing and separation from their Beloved. Is there a commonality in their experience?

GURUJI:

Yes, there is. But it is not just longing, there is something else in it – there is joy, it is a joyous

longing. It is the experience of union expressed in separation. Do you understand?

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, is fulfilment endless? Even after reaching the goal is there longing for more and more fullness?

GURUJI:

Yes, for more and more. The whole path should be happy, that is what I am saying. If anybody just frets and fumes, they are not on the right path.

DEVOTEE:

Isn't there sometimes a sense of suffering in longing?

GURUJI:

I don't call it suffering. Sometimes longing feels to us like suffering, but it is not actually suffering. It has an aesthetic joy also. I think I explained this concept many times before, the difference between actual suffering and longing, and how that longing gave rise to so much beautiful poetry. For example, in order to describe the joy of the experience of union, Ramana Maharshi wrote *Arunachala Padikam*. If you read it, it is just an expression of his longing, of his separation. But was he really separated from the Self? No! Separation is the way he describes and expresses his experience of union, because the state of union

cannot be described. So his experience of union is described in terms of separation; it is in separation that you get the sense of union, because words only come in separation, when there are two. He expresses so much the longing, the difficulty and the suffering that comes from separation, that you can imagine how much joy there is in union. It is like explaining how much you are starving when you haven't had a meal in three days. When you eat food again, the first thing that you say is, "My God, for three days I haven't had a good meal!" See how you think of the meals you missed, not the meal you're having right now, in the moment. In order to say how much you enjoy this meal, what you say is how much you suffered without it. That says how much you are enjoying it.

So the experience of union cannot be described in words. Therefore the saints don't make the mistake of trying to describe it in words of union. Instead, they use terms of separation and longing. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, see how the *gopis* are longing for Krishna. And in the case of Ramana Maharshi, see how he is longing for Arunachala. Baba also used to sing songs of Kabir which expressed Kabir's longing for the Sadguru or Ram. This is the only way to express union because union itself cannot be directly described.

So in this kind of separation there is a joy; think of it as poetry. Of course, Ramana was describing union in terms of separation because he had

the experience of union, but even if you are still longing for union, the very idea, the very thought of your object of love, should give you happiness. What gives unhappiness is not being able to get it fully, so there is happiness and unhappiness – both are there, it is a very peculiar thing. This is the paradox of love.



DEVOTEE:

Everything takes on a sweetness when you are present with us, Guruji. How can we hold on to that when you are not with us?

GURUJI:

By trying to hold on to it, by trying to grasp it and bring it back. Try again, struggle again! That struggling should be there: real experience comes out of it. In Baba's *arati* we sing, "*Mi budato bhavabhaya dohi uddhara*" [I am drowning in the ocean of worldly desires]. [*Kakad Arati, Padh XIII*] When you are drowning, how do you gasp for breath? That kind of gasping should be there – "Haaah! haah! haah!" Then you will get the help, Baba will pull you out. Then you'll know the real value of just one breath. Now you are breathing, but you don't know the value of even a single breath which you have had millions of times. But then you'll know the value of one single breath:

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“Haa-ahh, my God!”. Again you’ll forget, then again you’ll remember, until with every breath you’ll know the value of breathing. Then every breath becomes so valuable and so blissful and so happy and so fulfilled that we begin to breathe fulfilment – we inhale and exhale fulfilment – we’ll become like that.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, we long for Baba’s presence. How can we feel it more and more?

GURUJI:

If you really need Baba’s presence he will give it, and he has been giving. And if you look back, you’ll see how sometimes, even when his presence has been given, we haven’t taken it. We ask for something but when it’s given we don’t recognize it, so we miss it. But Baba’s presence is there always.

If you want his presence and you are really honest, earnest, and sincere – call! That is the only way. Call, call, call! Do it! Then you’ll get it. After I told you this last time, for how many hours did you sit and call? If I were in your place, I would sit a minimum daily of 8 to 10 hours, calling and calling and calling. “Guruji said, ‘Call, and it will be given!’ He has given his assurance, so come on, let’s do it!” Like this let the longing grow, let

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the desire grow, let the obstacles diminish which come in the way of your longing and fulfilment – then you'll get it. Baba won't leave anybody, I tell you. Nobody will go empty-handed!





Sbirdi, 2008



*The Roar of the Sea –
Memory and Awareness*

DEVOTEE:

I want to ask about memory. It seems that my memory is getting really poor. It quite worries me at times. Is there any reason it's getting so bad, other than just ageing? How can I remember things that are important or necessary? How can I be less distracted and more fully aware?

GURUJI:

Try to rectify it. If you are forgetting some things, you may also forget that you are with me! If you forget that you put the milk on the stove to boil,

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that is a different thing – but are you remembering that you are here, that you are with me? If we forget this we also forget other things. The whole spiritual endeavour, the methods, whatever they may be, in different ways are all trying to improve our memory. They are practices of remembering. For instance, if you do *nama japa*, what are you doing? You are remembering, you are trying to keep the name in your memory, not letting the mind forget the name. And with enquiry [Self-enquiry], not forgetting to actually make the enquiry, “Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?” And if we forget, again putting the mind on it. Whatever it is, all the so-called spiritual endeavours are oriented towards improving our remembering.

DEVOTEE:

So effort is required then?

GURUJI:

If it is not effortless, yes, effort is required. If you can remember effortlessly, then no problem! And as you said, to some extent, for small things, there is also the age factor – but that is only one of the factors, and it applies only to the small or trivial things, not the very important ones. We should not forget. Forgetfulness is not good. Many people think, “Oh, in spiritual life we forget about the mundane things because we are so absorbed in the Self,” but I don’t agree. That’s bosh! [laughter]

If we have the interest, if we have the love, if we have the awareness, we will also have the memory. As I said, to some extent there's the ageing process, but that applies only to petty things.

DEVOTEE:

But if our attention is on our spiritual practice or our object of love, then won't that make us more forgetful of other things?

GURUJI:

Really, you should not forget anything, but you only remember certain things – those are the ones you experienced in the right way; the other things you didn't experience in the right way.

DEVOTEE:

So how can we remedy that?

GURUJI:

If you improve the awareness. You are in my presence now. If you always keep in mind that you are in the presence, then this awareness, this practice – or whatever you call it – will give you the memory for everything else. If you can't remember this, how will you remember the other things? Not that we should always be trying to fill our brains with all that stuff – no, there's no need! I am not saying that you have to remember everything, but when we have that awareness, the remembering becomes such that when it is

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needed, it comes, it is there. There is no need to try and remember anything: if our nature, our state of awareness is constant, when something passes we will be able to leave it at that moment, and if the need for it comes again, we can remember it. Why we forget is because at the time we are experiencing something, our awareness is not in the right state. If we are aware of things in a proper way, then when they need to come into the memory, they will come.

DEVOTEE:

What is a proper way?

GURUJI:

Try to remember why we are here. What are we getting? Are we doing that for which we say we have come here? How can we try to experience it and express it in a better way?

We say we have come for Guruji. We are staying with him, but what do we do the whole day? How are we spending it? We go shopping, going around trying to find a jacket or a skirt, exploring the whole market, and getting very tired because of the pollution and so on. Then because they are busy the whole day, some people don't even come for the 8 o'clock *arati*, or even for the *udi*. Because they are 'busy' the whole day. What do you do when you come here? Does being in the presence mean just sitting in front of me? You asked earlier about the Sankara concept of *sakshatkar*, seeing

with the heart's 'eye'. If that is really the *sakshatkar* in which you are interested, then when you are sitting here and you are aware that I am upstairs or somewhere nearby, try to feel the presence – in your own way. But we don't do this. Instead, we are chitchatting. I very rarely see people sitting quietly, trying to experience the presence, only very few people.

Don't confine your contact with me to only this half-hour, these five minutes, or one hour. Try to let it expand, then you'll understand why you are here and what you have to do. Try to have your mind in such a state that when anything comes you experience it fully, and the moment it passes it should not leave any trace.



GURUJI:

Every minute try to experience being here. Simply sit here and try to experience it. In order to boil water or to heat milk, what do you do? You put it on the stove, on the fire, so that it catches the heat of the fire.¹ If you really want to catch fire, be here and try to be on the stove! If you put the milk in the refrigerator and then light the stove, how can it be heated? [laughter]

¹ In India, cooking is generally done over a naked flame, usually on gas burners.

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As long as our focus is on the presence and the awareness, we will have the memory. Whether you forget to put the milk on the stove or not, nothing will happen, but don't forget this [the presence]. Remember this and keep it in mind! As long as you do that, no problem. And if you remember this you will also remember that, and if you forget this, you'll also forget that. That is what a great saint has said in one of the scriptures, "Forgetfulness is death." What is death? "Forgetfulness is death," he said. Let us live. Let us avoid that death.

Let us be in complete awareness – of where we are, what we are doing, what we want to achieve, what we are getting and what we are not getting, and what we have to do in order to get that which we are not getting. And let all our activities, our paths, our actions, our speech be focused and channelled to that end. Only then will your being here be of any use or of any meaning.



GURUJI:

I will tell you one thing. Now I am speaking to you and you are listening to my voice. When I am not speaking you hear the roar of the sea,² or the breeze, or a dog barking, or someone coughing, but when I'm speaking you are not aware of those

² This satsang took place when Guruji was staying on the coast near Chennai.

things. Your awareness should always be like that; all your activities should be done in the same way as listening to me speaking. As long as you are doing something, whether it is putting milk on the stove, or whatever it is, it should be like when you are listening to my voice. Then the moment you are not doing anything, your mind should be listening there to the perpetual sound of the sea. That sound is always there. In fact, even while I am speaking you are hearing it... You are hearing it, yet you are not listening to it. When you are not listening to me, you listen to the roar of the sea – the silence of the heart, the happiness, the bliss, the love. The thrill of the love is like the roar of the sea. You always hear it and all your actions are based on that hearing. When you engage in any activity, do it like you are listening to me now, and the moment you stop, you should be able to listen to the roar of the sea.

Try to experience fully in the moment. Don't ruminate – ruminating like a cow or a buffalo who has anxiously eaten some grass! What does a cow or a buffalo do? It eats avariciously because it is afraid it may not get the grass before another creature takes it, and then it slowly brings it back and tries to digest it. That is what we do, because of so many anxieties, frustrations and fears. We experience things in the world like a buffalo eating grass. And when we are alone, when we are sitting quietly, we try to bring it back and ruminate over it, digesting it. Don't live like a

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buffalo or a cow! Live like human beings who eat thoroughly [laughter] and experience fully in the moment.

DEVOTEE:

There doesn't appear to be any short way to break this ruminating habit.

GURUJI:

Let it take a long way, no problem! [laughter]

DEVOTEE:

But then it's a very long process; it may take years and years.

GURUJI:

It's not actually a long process, because you have the presence, you have the sea. Even if you forget, the only effort needed is to remember, because it is always there. You need not create the roar or this feeling – it is there. The only thing is, you are not focusing your attention on it. At least when you are here, by the sea, by the beach – the real beach – try to listen to that.

And when you say something or do something, the next minute there should not be any trace of your actions in your mind: you are already there, in that awareness. So when the need comes for action you'll do it perfectly, and this roar won't affect your memory. When you act, you act. When you are still, be still. When will you be still? When

you experience this, when you catch the fire. And to catch the fire, be near the fire, around the fire. Do it in your own way. Explore your own methods, your own techniques. I don't have a technique for it because there are umpteen techniques, thousands, millions of them, but with all of them the object is that. Then nothing will disturb you, nothing is capable of creating suffering in your heart. Any so-called suffering has to be afraid of standing in front of us, of making us suffer. It has to fail! Then our life will have a meaning.



Appendix of Sources

Abbreviation:

s – *Satsang (English)*

Chapter 1 – Arati

- 1 *Arati Sai Baba* by Sri Babuji
(Saipatham Publications, 1996)
- 2 s111 8 September 2005 Tiruvannamalai
- 3 s123 17 August 2007 Tiruvannamalai
- 4 s82 30 September 2003 Chennai
- 5 s82 30 September 2003 Chennai
- 6 s130 28 November 2007 Rishikesh
- 7 s130 28 November 2007 Rishikesh
- 8 s99 16 November 2004 Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 2 – The Aesthetic Experience

- 1 s131 23 February 2008 Tiruvannamalai
- 2 s113 26 October 2005 Tiruvannamalai
- 3 s107 23 May 2005 Tiruvannamalai
- 4 s125 18 November 2007 Pipalkote
- 5 s134 14 December 2009 Rishikesh
- 6 s133 23 November 2009 Rishikesh

Chapter 3 – Start From Where You Are

- 1 s56 29 January 2002 Chennai
- 2 s102 25 December 2004 Chennai
- s3 12 March 1997 Shirdi
- 3 s103 9 January 2005 Tiruvannamalai

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Chapter 4 – In the Orbit of the Magnet

1	s104	10 March	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s128	26 November	2007	Rishikesh
3	s99	16 November	2004	Tiruvannamalai
4	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh
5	s17	22 December	1997	Shirdi
6	s104	10 March	2005	Tiruvannamalai
7	s103	9 January	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 5 – Niyama

1	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
3	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
4	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
5	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
6	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
7	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
8	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 6 – Light on Anger

1	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
2	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
3	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
4	s2	9 March	1997	Shirdi
5	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
6	s47	1 August	1998	Shirdi

Chapter 7 – The Chemistry of Love

1	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
2	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
3	s111	8 September	2005	Tiruvannamalai
4	s102	25 December	2004	Chennai
5	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
6	s95	23 July	2004	Tiruvannamalai

7	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
8	s104	10 March	2005	Tiruvannamalai
9	s119	24 November	2006	Uttarkashi
10	s97	16 October	2004	Chennai

Chapter 8 – Clarity and Fulfilment

1	s131	23 February	2008	Tiruvannamalai
2	s131	23 February	2008	Tiruvannamalai
3	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
4	s79	18 August	2003	Chennai
5	s124	17 November	2007	Pipalkote
6	s108	19 June	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 9 – Sri Poondi Swami: The Transmitter Who Never Fails

1	<i>Example of a Perfect Saint: Sri Poondi Swami</i> by Sri Babuji, orig. Telugu article in <i>Saipatham Magazine</i> for Jan/Feb 1988			
2	s103	9 January	2005	Tiruvannamalai
3	s12	9 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
4	s123	17 August	2007	Rishikesh
5	s35	15 March	1998	Tiruvannamalai
6	s35	15 March	1998	Tiruvannamalai
7	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
8	s37	21 April	1998	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 10 – Holy Places

1	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
2	s70	3 March	2003	Tiruvannamalai
3	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
4	s108	19 June	2005	Tiruvannamalai
5	s69	4 February	2003	Tiruvannamalai
6	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
7	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai

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8	s70	3 March	2003	Tiruvannamalai
9	s3	12 March	1997	Shirdi
10	s80	25 August	2003	Chennai

Chapter 11 – The Longest Longing

1	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s130	28 November	2007	Rishikesh
	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai
	s134	14 December	2009	Rishikesh
3	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
4	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi

Chapter 12 – The Roar of the Sea – Memory and Awareness

1	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
2	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
3	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
4	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai

Glossary

ajagarabhava – Skt. ‘python-state’; yogic term for a rare state of blissful absorption so profound it obviates the need for external movement, enabling the yogi to remain motionless for long periods, like a python.

Andhra Pradesh – The Telugu-speaking state in South India formerly a part of the Madras Presidency; it achieved statehood in 1956.

arati – Skt. 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.

Arati Sai Baba – Title of a book by Sri Babuji containing text and English translation of the 4 daily *arati* services performed to Sai Baba in the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi, with a masterful introductory essay on the origin and development of the *arati* ritual in Hinduism.

Arunachala – Skt. *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 – Skt. A devotional poem in Tamil composed by Sri Ramana Maharshi in 11 stanzas,

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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*.

Arunachala Purana – Skt. 'Stories of Arunachala'. A classical composition in Tamil verse by Saiva Ellappa Navalar (17th century CE), consisting of holy stories, encomiums and legends about Arunachala.

Arunagiri Yogi – A pre-historic figure referred to by Sri Babuji as a yogic adept of extraordinary powers and attainment, like a Buddha, who lived and died on the hill. The exact location of his tomb was unknown so the whole mountain became a focus of veneration and devotion, which perhaps accounts for the historical custom of circumambulating Arunachala (*giri-pradakshina*).

Atman – Skt. '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.

Bhagavan – Skt. 'possessing fortune, blessed, divine'; devotional honorific for the personalized form of godhead.

bhajan – Skt. 'devotional singing'; singing devotional songs as a form of worship, usually congregational.

bhakti – Skt. 'devotion' (fr. Skt. 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).

Brahman – Skt. 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.

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

Dasganu Maharaj – Eminent contemporary devotee of Sri Sai Baba, author of several *aratis* to him and an early biographical account. He was renowned for his devotional singing (*kirtan*).

Dwarkamai – Skt. ‘many-gated mother’; the name Baba gave to the mosque where he lived in Shirdi.

gopis – The milkmaids of Braj (Mathura), childhood playmates of Sri Krishna, who were so entranced by their devotion that they abandoned their husbands to dance and play with him. Their transgressive love became a model for the highest form of devotion in Bengal Vaisnavism.

granthi – Skt. ‘knot, tie’.

gurubandhu – Skt. *guru*, ‘teacher’ + *bandhu*, ‘bound’; thus devotees bound to the same teacher or brother-devotees (*gurubhais*).

Gurusthan – Skt. ‘guru’s abode’; site of the neem tree beside the Samadhi Mandir where Sai Baba stayed during his first years in Shirdi, and where he said his guru’s tomb was located.

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hridaya granthi – Skt. ‘knot of the heart’. Seat of consciousness in Vedanta and Tantric yoga schools. The ‘knot’ ties the Self (Atman) to egoic consciousness (*ahankara*).

idly – A steamed cake of ground rice and black gram (*urad dal*).

Ishavasya Upanishad – A brief Upanishad belonging to the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* of the *White Yajur Veda*, considered to contain the essence of the Upanishads. It shows a strong theistic and devotional tendency, and teaches the essential unity of Brahman and the world, of being and becoming, and that worldly life and spiritual life are not incompatible.

jnana – Skt. ‘unitive knowledge’; experiential knowledge of absolute truth and Being (Brahman).

jnana marga – Skt. ‘path of knowledge’.

jnani – Knower of absolute truth (*jnana*).

Kabir – Medieval weaver-poet-saint of Benares (c.1440-1518 CE) whose iconoclastic poems in Hindi expressing his unwavering condemnation of caste, hypocrisy, and all Hindu-Muslim sectarianism, reflected his deep conviction that God is within, beyond all names and forms, and gave rise to the mystic tradition called Nirguna Bhakti, or devotion to God as the Formless Absolute. By espousing love of a Formless God beyond ritual, sect, name or attribute, Kabir was claimed by both Hindus and Muslims, and transformed medieval Hinduism into its modern, more homologous form, giving it the trans-sectarian unity, inner sectarian tolerance and universal aspects that characterize it today. Sai Baba may be seen

as a modern saint in the Nirguna Bhakti tradition of Kabir.

Kalasapakkam – The village 35 kms from Tiruvannamalai nearest to Poondi, where Sri Poondi Swami resided.

Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha – The Kamakoti monastery in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, seat (*pitha*) of the Kanchipuram Shankaracharyas.

Kanchipuram Sankaracharya – The Pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti monastery in Kanchipuram, founded by Sankara (788-820 CE), where some traditions say he died. The designation is an ecclesiastical office, but is usually taken to refer to its next to last occupant, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati.

karpura – Skt. 'camphor'.

kavi – Skt. 'poet, inspired sage, or seer'.

Krishna – Skt. 'Dark-blue One'; the most popular Hindu god of north India, considered the 8th avatar and the only full incarnation of Vishnu. His exploits as advisor to the Pandavas are narrated in the Mahabharata, where his instructions to Arjuna on the battlefield at Kurukshetra comprise the Bhagavad Gita.

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

masjid – Arabic; 'mosque'.

maya – Skt. 'illusion'; the cosmic illusion of multiplicity and difference veiling reality and the oneness of creation.

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Mirabai – Medieval Rajput princess of Chittor (1547-1614?) who left her royal life to worship Lord Krishna in Dwarka and Vrindavan, where tradition holds she was merged into an image of Krishna during worship. Her beautiful love poems and songs in dialectal Hindi are still popular and recited today.

moksha – Skt. 'freedom'; in Vedanta it is usually taken to be synonymous with Self-realization; in other classical schools it means more accurately 'release from rebirth'.

mukti – Skt. 'freed', in the sense of liberation from embodied existence.

nama japa – Skt. 'devotional chanting'; repetition of the name(s) of God or the Guru.

namaskar – Skt. '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.

Narasimha Swami – A gifted writer, scholar, lawyer and indefatigable lover of Sai Baba who did more than any other to make Baba the household name he is now in modern India. After attaining realization by Sai Baba's grace at the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi on 29 August 1936, he began his mission of spreading Baba's name throughout India and published 3 works – *Life of Sai Baba*; *Devotees' Experiences*; and *Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*

– each of which has become canonical within the Sai *Sampradaya* (spiritual tradition).

niyama – Skt. ‘observance, discipline’; unbroken observation of a rule or vow; the second limb of Patanjali’s eight-limbed yoga.

Poondi Swami – A perfect saint (*avadhut*) and adept (d. 1978), renowned for his unsurpassed spiritual state and for remaining immobile (*ajagarabhava*) the last 18 years of his life in the small village of Poondi near Tiruvannamalai. In 1974, Guruji stayed in his presence for a month which culminated in a profound experience of Self-realization.

pradakshina – Skt. ‘right-facing’; moving clockwise around a sacred object or image, keeping it always to one’s right as an act of reverence. Skt. *giri*, ‘hill’, hence doing *giri-pradakshina*, circumambulation of Mt. Arunachala as a form of devotion.

prarabdha (karma) – That portion of the accumulated effect of one’s past deeds that begins to bear fruit in this life with the birth of one’s physical body. It cannot be averted or changed but its psychological effects are destroyed by the unitive knowledge co-emergent with the experience of Self-realization (*Atma-jnana*).

prasad – Skt. ‘grace, favour’; something given by a saint or one’s guru; food that has been offered to a saint or deity and is thus considered to be blessed.

puja – Skt. ‘ceremonial worship’; ritualistic worship of a deity, saint, or sacred image, consisting traditionally of 16 ritual offerings (*sodasopacara puja*) accompanied by recitation of mantras.

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Ram/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.

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.

rasanubhuti/rasa anubhuti – Skt. *rasa*, 'taste, juice, essence' + *anubhuti*, 'experience'; *rasa* is the subtle state of experiencing a generalized delight in one's being and existence.

Ravidas (Raidas) – Medieval Bhakti saint and poet, a contemporary of Kabir (15th century CE), who was born in Benares in the *chamar* (untouchable, cobbler) caste and was an exponent of Kabir's Nirguna Bhakti. His poems ridicule caste hierarchies, temple worship, and sectarian distinctions, emphasizing devotion to the one God beyond names and forms.

rishi – Skt. 'seer of truth'; Vedic sage or poet.

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

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

sadhu – Skt. ‘holy person, ascetic’; a serious seeker who has devoted his life to a spiritual path and practice in pursuit of truth.

Sai Baba – Supreme Sadguru and perfect master, the most widely revered saint of modern India, to whom Sri Babuji’s life was devoted. He appeared in Shirdi, Maharashtra, about the middle of the 19th century, remaining there more than 50 years until the end of his life (d.1918). No one knew his antecedents, original name, or religion; his appearance was that of a Muslim fakir. The name ‘Sai Baba’ (revered father) was given him by a local priest when he arrived in Shirdi. He lived a renunciate life in a dilapidated mosque and begged for alms. His teachings transcended sectarian distinctions of custom, caste and creed, and his life manifested many miracles that showed his incomparable power, wisdom, and compassion for devotees, benefits that endure today for the millions who take refuge in him.

Sai nama – The chanting of the name of Sai Baba.

Saipatham – Skt. Telugu ‘path of Sai’; the teachings of the path of Sai Baba as expressed and exemplified in his life by Guruji; also the name of the satsang hall in Shirdi and surrounding area where Guruji’s *samadhi* is located.

Saipatham Magazine – A Telugu magazine started by Sri Babuji in 1988, dedicated to research into the life and teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba.

sakshatkar – Skt. lit. ‘happening with (in front of) the eyes’; direct darshan of god with eyes open, considered

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in the Bhakti schools of Vedanta as equivalent to Self-realization (*Atma-darshan*) in the Advaita schools of Vedanta.

samadhi – Skt. ‘trance’; meditative state of absorptive union; respectful term for the death of a saint or holy person; the tomb of a saint or holy person.

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

sankalpa – Skt. ‘wish, will, volition, intention.’ The initiating cause of all ego-driven human action.

sannidhi – Skt. ‘proximity, nearness, presence’; the spiritual essence of a realized saint containing all the essential qualities, powers, and attributes of absolute Being (*Sat*), both imminent and transcendent to time and empirical experience. In a realized saint, it is the portal to nondual Brahman in human form.

sastra/shastra – Skt. scripture; teaching, doctrine, treatise.

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

satsang – Skt. ‘company’ (*sang*) with the wise, those who are united with true Being (*Sat*); hence a gathering for this purpose.

Seshadri Swami – An accomplished adept and realized saint (1870-1929), who recognised the young Sri Ramana as a great soul (mahatma) and protected him from abuse by urchins during his initial samadhi period in the great temple when he first arrived in Tiruvannamalai, a service Bhagavan later acknowledged with respect.

Sri Seshadri Ashram is located next door to Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai.

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.

siddha – Skt. 'accomplished one'; A spiritually perfect being, especially one with the capacity to manifest supranormal powers (siddhis).

Siva/Shiva – Skt. '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.

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati – The Sankaracharya (Pontiff) of the Kamakoti monastery in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, from 1907 to 1994. He was a Self-realized saint revered for his austerities and peripatetic teaching in the traditional manner, whose wisdom, administrative ability, and purity of life made him an iconic, much-beloved representative of orthodox Hinduism.

Sri Sai Satcharita – Skt. 'The Blessed True Story of Sai'. It is 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.

Srimad Bhagavatam Mahapurana – Known also as the *Bhagavata Purana*, it was composed in 10th century CE in elegant Sanskrit. It is the major Puranic text extolling devotion to Sri Krishna, whose life and *leelas* (divine play) occupy the famous 10th Skanda (book). It has become

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the bible of bhakti for Krishna devotees, especially for Vaishnavas inspired by the ecstatic devotion of the great Bengali mystic, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1485-1534).

Swami – Skt. ‘master of one’s self’; a respectful title for a holy man or a male religious teacher; fem. ‘Swamini’.

Swami Sai Sharan Anand – Author of an important biography of Sai Baba and reminiscences of his 11 month stay with him in 1913-1914. His work, *Shri Sai the Superman* (1e 1962), is regarded as a reliable record of what he saw and experienced in Baba’s company.

tapas – Skt. ‘heat’; ascetic practices or penance; one of the observances (*niyamas*) of classical yoga mentioned by Patanjali in his *Yogasutras* (Bk II.1+32).

tapokshetra – Skt. lit. ‘place or field of *tapas*’, i.e., ascetic practice.

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 Ramana 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.

udi/udhi – Sai Baba’s name for the sacred ashes from the fire he lit and kept burning in Dwarkamai during his lifetime. It has been maintained since in unbroken succession by the Sansthan (temple authorities) and its ashes are distributed to devotees as Baba’s prasad.

Vaikunta – Skt. Vishnu’s paradise, the highest heaven, variously described as located on Mount Meru or in the northern ocean.

vasana – Skt. lit. ‘smell, odour’; subtle desire; latent tendency, predisposition; the subtle impression created in the mind by an action or enjoyment, which predisposes it to repeat the act or joy previously experienced. It is the cause of rebirth and the individualized nature of human life. In Vedanta, *vasanas* are held to be burnt up in the fire of Self-knowledge (*Atma-jnana*).

Vedas – Skt. lit. ‘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 Brahman, the nondual Absolute, both with and without form.

Vishnu – Skt. ‘Sustainer, Pervader’; one of the three major forms of the Hindu deity (Trimurti), with Brahma (Creator) and Siva (Destroyer).

yogasastras – Skt. ‘yoga scriptures’.

Yogasutras – Foundational work in Sanskrit on the Yoga Darshana (school) by Patanjali (4th century CE).



Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (1954-2010) was a charismatic South Indian saint and Sadguru whose exemplary life of devotion to the great Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918) made him a beacon of love and source of guidance for thousands of devotees in India and abroad. Spiritually precocious, his rise to attainment was meteoric, culminating in a profound transformative experience just before his 20th birthday. He devoted the rest of his life to sharing his love for Baba, showing how all aspects of life could be harmonized and united around one's chosen ideal of fulfilment. Renowned for his radiant presence, his rare public darshans in Shirdi held thousands spellbound by their magnetic spiritual power. His satsangs shine with brilliance and insight and show his innovative understanding of spiritual life and its problems, expressed in practical, non-sectarian terms, free of doctrine and jargon, relevant to all those seeking help on their path to fulfilment.

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