

Rose Petals

SELECTIONS FROM SATSANGS WITH SRI BABUJI

Vol. 3



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Vol. 3



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*To Sai Baba of Shirdi
who gave us Guruji*



Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sai Baba of Shirdi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

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

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

total dedication of his love and service to Baba.

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

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

their problems solved and their illnesses cured, blessings he always attributed to Baba's grace and love. He once said, "The whole gamut of spiritual seeking can be summed up in two words – the experience and expression of love."

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

Contents

<i>Sai Baba of Shirdi</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Sri Sarath Babuji</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Notes on Text and Sources</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xviii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xxi</i>
1 Satsang – In the Company of Truth	3
2 Hollow Man, Stuffed Man	17
3 Give the Reins to Baba	29
4 Journey to the Source	41
5 Udi – Symbol of Baba’s Grace	55
6 The Guru as Active Mirror	65
7 Longing with a Sense of Belonging	79
8 Education – Kindling the Love of Learning	91
9 On Belief	105
10 Reservoir of Grace	119
11 The Guru Principle	131
12 Transformation – The Concretization Process	147
<i>Appendix of Sources</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>Further Reading</i>	<i>177</i>

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

Everyone who participated in publishing *Rose Petals – Vol. 3* shares a sense of privilege and responsibility in presenting our beloved Sadguru's words to a wider audience. To work with Guruji's satsangs and experience his presence through them again has been deeply enriching for each of us. This volume is offered with the prayer that other seekers may benefit from the fragrance of Guruji's wisdom and love that still abides in his satsangs in *Rose Petals*.

Ram Brown Crowell
Editor, *Rose Petals – Vol. 3*
Tiruvannamalai

Note on Text and Sources

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

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

Editing credits: Chapters 1 and 2 have been edited by Alison Williams; Chapters 3 through 12 have been edited by Ram Brown Crowell.

The **Glossary** has been compiled by the editor on the basis of standard authorities; the referential field of the glosses has been confined to meanings relevant to the text.

Preface

Rose Petals – Vol. 3 is the third volume of satsangs published to honor the memory of Sri Sarath Babuji, whose exemplary life of devotion to Sai Baba of Shirdi endeared him to thousands in India and abroad. Like the two previous volumes, this book contains selections from Sri Babuji's English satsangs on the transformative process of spiritual fulfilment. The dialogues took place with small groups in an informal atmosphere at his house or while travelling, between 1993 and 2010. The individual chapters were originally made available in digital format for devotees; they are republished here in book form for the benefit of a wider readership. The text has also been translated into Telugu, Sri Babuji's native language, and published as *Sarathchandrikalu* (Moonlight Petals). What Sri Babuji shares in these pages does not derive from scriptural learning or precedent authority, but rests on the truth of his enlightened experience, amplified by intuitive insight (*pratibha*).

Sri Babuji is a modern exemplar of the classical path of *gurubhakti*, or devotion to one's teacher, as the primary means to spiritual fulfilment.¹ Like

¹ Sri Babuji preferred the more general term 'fulfilment' to 'enlightenment' or 'Self-realization', because, although it includes these aspects, fulfilment for him is a dynamic process that does not conclude with Self-realization, but continues to unfold and evolve.

his great Sadguru, Sai Baba of Shirdi, he stands in the hallowed tradition of guru-centric devotion that has distinguished Indian history, both within and outside Brahmanical orthodoxy, since Upanishadic times. What is of special interest in Sri Babuji's case is that he strips the classical path bare of its ritual and sectarian paraphernalia, and focuses on the mechanism of love and the effects of its expression. His original insights into love's expression reveal psychological principles like 'expression strengthens love', 'grace follows need', and 'to long with a sense of belonging', that help to actualize our experience of fulfilment. His innovative view of transformation as the 'concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment' fruitfully redefines all of life as the developmental quest for happiness. His elucidation of the 'gap' and the 'normalization' process mediated by the Sadguru, and his analogies of the guru-function to a magnet, window and 'active mirror', help to shed important light on the nature of the guru-devotee relationship.

Collectively, Sri Babuji's satsang constitutes a significant addition to our modern understanding of the devotional path as a means to fulfilment. The material contained in *Rose Petals – Vol. 3* is an important part of that contribution.

The Introduction that follows is offered as a perspective on the core theme of transformation that weaves through the dialogues with Sri Babuji.



Introduction

Transformation in the Satsang of Sri Sarath Babuji

The secret of all art is self-forgetfulness.

– Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Mirror of Gesture*

It is an accepted position in Indian philosophy that human life is characterized by suffering, the Buddha's First Noble Truth. Sri Babuji saw the obverse to suffering as the search for happiness and viewed it as equally universal in human experience. He forged a path to fulfilment that rested on the hallowed tradition of guru-centric devotion in India, but which was wholly modern in its approach and psychological mode of expression, free of ritual, dogmas, deities and appeal to scriptural authority. Instead, he emphasized the primacy of personal experience and the ineffable nature of one's unique search for

fulfilment and relationship to the Divine, beyond the framework of any organized faith. In this, he continued the syncretic path of his great Sadguru, Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918), whose approach was equally guru-centric and eclectic, beyond form and ritual. What Sri Babuji (hereafter 'Guruji') did was to expand our capacity to realize our fulfilment directly in our subjective experience, through his fresh insights into the mechanism and expression of love. For Guruji, life is the expression of love and the experience of its fulfilment that takes place in the context of the transformative process leading up to and beyond ego-transcendence in Self-realization. It is an 'unending love story', with transformation at its heart.

Guruji defined transformation as 'the concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment,' and held that it governs all our activities from the cradle to the grave. Everyone is trying to satisfy their innate need for fulfilment by finding successive ways to realize or 'concretize' it in experience, in all matters great and small, whether by drinking a cup of coffee, buying some new possession, having a loving relationship, or doing a spiritual practice. Even surrendering to a guru is surrendering to your own abstract sense of fulfilment which the form of the guru embodies. In every case, though the range of objects that we choose to fulfil us may vary through life from worldly to spiritual, the underlying process is the same: the attempt to make our idea of happiness

more real and tangible in our experience. Guruji saw the quest for fulfilment as intrinsic to life, so innate that it feels almost biological in nature. As he describes it,

“Every living creature is seeking some kind of fulfilment. People have different words for it – love, freedom, happiness, God, guru, security – whatever. Not everyone will relate to the same concept of happiness, but it all boils down to one thing: fulfilment. It’s not that there are spiritual seekers and non-spiritual seekers: everyone is seeking something. Some seek money, some seek fame, some family, some children, some seek comfort – there are thousands of ways to seek. It is only the method that differentiates the paths, happiness is a basic need of human nature: if it were not, spirituality would have no meaning. People’s sense of fulfilment is abstract and unclear so they believe they will be fulfilled by obtaining these things, but to some it’s still not enough.”

For those who feel something more is needed when the search for lasting fulfilment through worldly goals proves futile, the search turns within and an inner goal is visualized as giving the ‘something missing’ that external goals lack. But it is especially here that clarity about the goal and honesty about our aspirations are stressed by Guruji, since they largely determine the outcome of the search. At this point, our sense of what constitutes spiritual fulfilment is so abstract that

it is impossible to conceive how it could be concretized in experience. Thus there is a tendency for many seekers to adopt the 'ready-made' goal of another path or religion, like Self-realization, nirvana or moksha, that comes closest to their own idea of fulfilment. They then superimpose this goal on their life and try to conform to its norms and prescriptions, without determining whether it is connected to a genuine need, triggered by their love. If our aspirations are unrealistic with regard to our actual needs and life situation, then competing pulls divide and weaken our efforts toward the goal. This manifests as both internal and external conflict that give our efforts little chance of success. The answer, Guruji said, is:

"Let us start from where we are and evolve from there, with the reality, whatever it may be, of what we are. First, self-actualization, then Self-realization. Your goal depends upon your need: what you need, you love. So, first, you should know what you need. Then everything you get – even if it's only one per cent – is real *because it's yours*. Otherwise, your whole life you'll be beating about the bush, trying to achieve something you don't really need."

Guruji once said if he had to name his path, he would call it 'a path of clarity and fulfilment'. Having clarity about our true aspirations cannot be over-emphasized, because life unfolds along the lines of what we value most. Just because we think freedom is our deepest value does not mean it actually is, if

our actions do not bear this out. By clarifying our needs and aspirations through honest self-appraisal, we become more unified, clear, and realistic in our longing for fulfilment. Also, the abstract nature of spiritual goals makes personal development on the path very difficult to assess. Without clarity it becomes very easy to deceive ourselves and others which can manifest as a disconnect between what we say and what we do. This leads to one of the biggest factors preventing transformation on the path – hypocrisy or self-delusion – what Gururji called ‘the gap.’ The uncomfortable gap between what we wish to be and what we are leads us to paper over shortcomings with spiritual pretensions that compensate for any perceived lack of fulfilment. The danger of hypocrisy is that one is unaware of its existence, so there is no incentive to be undeceived, thus further transformation is hindered.

The removal of hypocrisy was referred to by Gururji as ‘normalization’ – closing the gap between mind and heart, word and deed, by being honest about who we are, about what our needs are, and speaking from experience, rather than from concepts or by quoting from a book or scripture. The integrity endowed by ending hypocrisy is fundamental to transformation and by itself opens the path to fulfilment. Gururji said, “In my view, the most courageous life to live is to face ourselves. Trying to know what we are, honestly, without any hypocrisy, without any self-deceit – that is courageous living.” It bestows the integrity

of self-acceptance, of being grounded in the truth of our own experience.

Integrity also leads to comprehending the enormity of the task ahead: the virtual impossibility of conquering the ego unaided. This is tantamount to trying to stand on one's own shoulders or, as Guruji so aptly put it, to cutting off the branch one is sitting on. How can the ego be entrusted to contrive its own extinction? The effort to do so is itself conditioned by ego. The experience of helplessness engendered by this realization leads to the humility that opens the heart to the need for a teacher. When we realize, not only conceptually, but deeply and genuinely, that we need help from someone who has already attained what we seek, then we open ourselves to the advent of the Sadguru.

The Sadguru is not only a person but the embodiment of the Guru Principle, the dynamic power inherent in nature on every plane of existence, from the sub-atomic to the transcendent. It postulates that existence (*Sat*) is always optimized towards its own fulfilment. This Principle lies at the core of the universe, like the Logos (creative Word) of Greek Philosophy and of the New Testament, that guides the unfolding of the natural order and all movement of life within it. On the human level, the Sadguru appears both with an outward form and formlessly within, as one's inner guide or guru, who represents the active principle of fulfilment. This is the optimizing force that makes liberation possible,

for freedom we do not author, but are subject to; it is bestowed by a higher power. The Guru Principle can also be seen as the potential inherent in every experience to reveal truth to us. Gururji said,

“For me every minute which Baba has given, every line and every word, every letter in the book of life is meaningful, everything should teach us something.”

This is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s famous lines, “And this our life finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.” (*As You Like It*, Act 2.sc.3). Further satsang on the Guru Principle appears as Chapter 11 of this book.

The role of the Sadguru is vital to the transformation process, because his presence embodies the absolute love and wisdom that we seek. When we experience our abstract ideal of fulfilment embodied in a person, the process of concretizing and eventually transforming us into that which we seek becomes possible. One’s highest ideal becomes more earthly, more concrete and real, more attainable. The love and attraction triggered in this sacred relationship becomes the fuel for the fire of devotion that opens the path to fulfilment, whose distinctive feature is that the goal unfolds as the path. Gururji expresses this movingly:

“Whether you call it life or sadhana, with the Sadguru everything becomes the expression of our love, that love. And when it is expressed more, it grows more. Then, whether we get

ultimate fulfilment or not, the very experience of loving gives us happiness and even while seeking, we get fulfilment. Let us be fulfilled even now on the way as well! Then the whole enterprise is a path of fulfilment.”

Guruji explains the subtle, underlying mechanism of devotion as follows:

“When you express love what happens is, you receive love. Just think about it. When any expression of love comes to fruition, you feel love – you experience it. Once love is triggered by the Sadguru, expression is needed, and the more you express it, the more you experience it. Happiness comes because of love and love always transcends ego; everyone has an iota of that love within. Thinking of the object of your love will give you the experience of love, then the more you express it, the more it grows and wants to be expressed. This is the ‘express-way’ of love.”

The statement ‘expression strengthens love’ could be called Guruji’s ‘first law of love’. When our love is strong enough then all our other pulls get gradually submerged in it and the will becomes aligned with the heart. Effort then becomes an expression of our love, as Guruji says, “The right effort is an effort from the heart.” When effort becomes spontaneous this is the ‘normalized’ state of spiritual health, where all facets of our being function in synergy to help us realize our goal of fulfilment.

The role of the ego on the path of love as the

driver of its own self-transcendence is noteworthy. Instead of being 'killed' or 'destroyed', here the ego becomes fuel for a love beyond itself – that is, for its own 'higher' nature as unconditional love, represented in that of the Sadguru. Guruji puts it graphically as follows:

“When you experience love, the ego gradually merges into it and becomes one with that love. It gets totally absorbed in it, and loses its identity and form. 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's just like fuel. Fuel is the support for fire, but after some time it is no more there. Like that, our ego, our frustration, our suffering, our need for love and longing for the beloved, all these things act as the fuel. So we seek a Sadguru, like Sai Baba. And then once the flame of love is kindled, slowly the flame uses our ego as fuel and it totally goes. And it is there – only in love – that by losing one gains.”

In the tradition of Sai worship and many other guru-centric paths, the transformation process brought about by the Sadguru is described as *apana sarika karitat*, a Sanskrit phrase meaning “turning the disciple into the likeness of the guru.”¹ Exactly how this is done is an elusive but fascinating subject that Guruji explains from his realized

¹ *Life of Sai Baba* by B.V. Narasimha Swami (Injambakkam: Sai Baba Charitable Trust, reprint in 3 vols. of the 4 vol. All India Sai Samaj 5e 1995), Vol. 2, p. 219, and Glossary, p.323; + Vol. 1, Glossary, p.278.

experience. He refers to the Sadguru metaphorically as 'the familiar stranger', who reflects our abstract yet familiar sense of fulfilment, which, at the same time, feels strange because it hasn't been concretized yet in ourselves. It is this paradox of strangeness and familiarity that connects the Sadguru to us, to what is really missing in us. The desire to remove that strangeness and make it more and more familiar is the process of concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment at the experiential level. Experiencing that unique blend of 'strange familiarity' is the first pull of the magnet, the triggering that brings us into the Sadguru's orbit. Guruji likens the Sadguru to a magnet, whose presence aligns the iron filings of the ego's desires, gradually harmonizing them, turning the devotee into a magnet like himself:

"In our case, we are all pieces of iron and Baba is the magnet. If you put your mind on Baba, remembering him again and again and placing 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 we get harmonized."

Here, presence forms the matrix for the transformative interaction between Sadguru and disciple. In another analogy, Guruji uses the simile of an 'active mirror' for the Sadguru's presence, which not only passively reflects the disciple's true nature, but also actively corrects for its ego-distortion, as the reflexive effect of the Sadguru's

unconditional love. This brilliant analogy is an original contribution to our understanding of the guru-devotee relationship and forms Chapter 6 of this book.

A third analogy used by Guruji likens the guru's function to a window that allows the seeker to experience his true, formless dimension of being:

"The guru is like a window through which we can see the limitless sky. We are conditioned by the four walls which enclose our existence, and our spiritual search begins when we recognize this. We need a window. First, we look at the window, but when we look at the sky, do we actually look at the window? We look at the sky itself. The window is a see-through mechanism. The guru is like a window, through him we look at the unlimited, unconditioned state."

The experiential effect of the Sadguru's presence shifts the seeker's identity from his ego-self to the expansive awareness of his formless being, viewed through the window of the guru's own being that in reality they share. Dissolving (*laya*) in the Sadguru's unconditional love, the seeker experiences self-forgetfulness, a clear state of knowledge and bliss, which, as it deepens, also deepens his loving bond to the Sadguru. This correlates with the disappearance of the 'I' of the seeker's body-mind narrative and the arising of an impersonal 'I' that is witness to the unfolding drama of his enlightened experience. Viewed in

this light, the transformation process is both a journey of Self-realization and of self-forgetting.

Beyond the ego's limited perspective, the whole world unfolds as a play where one can appreciate being both an actor and spectator relishing life's drama. The aesthetic experience of life as joy (*rasa*) engendered through self-forgetting, is beautifully expressed by Guruji:

“Aesthetic experience is where we feel one with something, we forget ourself. In Sanskrit, it's called *rasanubhuti*, the aesthetic experience of bliss, *rasa*. For instance we've all experienced watching a very good movie or reading an interesting book and becoming one with the characters in it. You laugh or cry with them, are happy or sad for them, and you forget that you are so-and-so, that is *rasa*. Life is a book, a beautiful poem, if we can appreciate its aesthetics. The whole of life becomes poetry when we can look at it that way. Everywhere there is beauty and poetry! Let us enjoy every minute, every breath. Life is a gift to us, not a bane or a curse. It is a gift of nature, let us enjoy it. If you are not able to enjoy it, then seek how to enjoy it. All these things – spiritual practices, satsangs – are only meant to teach you the art of enjoying your own life, that's all. Then every minute life is renewed, ever new, nothing old, nothing previous, nothing dead remains. Every minute it is new – every minute!”

This celebration of life is a culmination of the transformation process for Guruji. The liberating

relationship between Sadguru and devotee becomes a love poem and life becomes the aesthetic experience of never-ending love revealing love. Sri Babuji's life shows how finally life itself can be experienced joyfully as the art of self-forgetting in the unfolding awareness of our true nature. May his words in *Rose Petals* help us to find the joyful art of self-forgetting in our own experience of fulfilment.

Ram Brown Crowell
Tiruvannamalai
Buddha Purnima, 2014

Rose Petals



Chennai, 2001



chapter one

Satsang *In the Company of Truth*

GURUJI:

The world is so tempting. It is always trying to pounce on you and pull you down, like the gravitational force of the earth. You have to create a vacuum around you, a zero gravity environment. [Guruji laughs] And that which creates a zero gravity environment is satsang. An astronaut who wants to soar high, high, high up to the stars needs some preparation; he needs to create that zero gravity environment. If he's not fit, he can't

soar high or go up, up, up on the spiritual ladder to reach the stars.

If you want to become an astronaut, create that zero gravity environment here in satsang, then try to practise it wherever you are.



GURUJI:

Don't have the concept that satsang means always talking and discussing something, some verbal exchange. That is only one of the aspects of satsang.

Satsang has three shades of meaning. *Sangha* means company, to be familiar with, to be one with, to be in the company of. In the company of what? In the company of *Sat*, the Reality. What is, is *Sat*, Truth! *Sat-chit-ananda*, *Sat-guru*, *satyam* – all these come from there. To be in constant company with Truth – whether you call it 'I' or Brahman or whatever, that which you have not yet realized but are – that is real satsang.

So how can we catch hold of that ... that substance? As we haven't even had a glimpse of it, the solution is to be in the company of a saint. That is what all the scriptures say: be in the company of the *Satpurushas*, those who have experienced that *Sat*. To be in their presence is satsang.

But we can't always get their company, so then a different shade of satsang comes into play: reflecting on and discussing Truth – the truth of

our own being, of the universe, of how we relate to the world, and also exploring the lives of the *Satpurushas*, those who have already realized the *Sat*. That is another aspect of satsang.



GURUJI:

You may think, “What is all this sharing, satsang and all these things? They have nothing to do with my realization, with getting *that* experience!” It is just like harvesting a crop: you sow some seeds in the ground, they sprout up, and then the crop comes. But in order to enjoy the harvest, you need good fencing. It’s not a part of the harvest, but if you want to really enjoy the harvest you have to take care of the fencing, otherwise you won’t get the harvest at all.

DEVOTEE:

You are saying satsang is the fencing?

GURUJI:

Yes, because for most of us our minds are so weak we are easily influenced by the environment, so we need some kind of protection from it. Now the seed of love and grace has just been planted, so you must cover it and put a fence around it, till it becomes a big tree. When the plant of love is like a small flickering flame, the wind is dangerous to it. It needs some protection, some glass, or a chimney.

Rose Petals

If it is a big fire, it will consume everything in the environment. So if your seeking, your emotion, has become so powerful, then you yourself will influence the environment, and wherever you go satsang will be created automatically. But as long as you are influenced by the environment, you need some protection.



DEVOTEE:

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

GURUJI:

So read his life, be in contact with him, have satsang! Why are we doing these things? In order to get a clear picture, a clear conception.

DEVOTEE:

But you yourself have spoken about Baba being much vaster than the form which lived and died on this earth, in that body.

GURUJI:

It's okay. Whatever it is, you want 'that state' you were talking about, and I am telling you to do this: focus on Baba! Whether you like it or not, don't worry about it. [Laughter] Just do it!



GURUJI:

Read the biographies of saints and the reminiscences of their close devotees. For example, *Devotees' Experiences* by B. V. Narasimhaswami;¹ *Letters from Ramanashram*;² *Sai Baba the Master*.³ Read once, twice, three times, because each reading will give you some other insight.

As you told me, the environment you live in is unguarded. Create some kind of a fence, some guard, periodical get-togethers with like-minded people: that is satsang. Try to sit together morning and evening, whenever you find time. Have some regular hours and take the support of meditation with the group. Just sit in front of Baba's photo and feel his presence, either with eyes closed or, if you feel like it, keeping the eyes open, just looking at his photo.

As you have an attachment to Sri Ramana Maharshi, put his photo somewhere and just sit and look at him, with the essence of all the impressions that you have from reading those

¹Narasimhaswami, B. V., *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*, Hyderabad: Akhanda, 1989. (Orig. pub. 1962.)

²Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanashram*, Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2011. (Orig. pub. 1970.)

³Bharadwaja, A. E., *Sai Baba the Master*, Ongole: Sri Guru Paduka Publications, 2008. (Orig. pub. 1975.)

accounts of his life. Try to see how human he is, how loving, how lovable, how intimate he was with his devotees. Just sit in front of him and try to feel his love. If you feel calm, quiet and blissful, just close your eyes and enjoy the quietness, simply, not doing anything.

When you are at home, if you feel like singing some songs in your own way, some bhajan, some *nama*, just sing, in your own language – it need not be the fixed bhajan we do here. You can do it while working, for example, or when you're cooking or gardening.

It is not some kind of organization that I am interested in, but just some time to meet together, something very informal. Try to share and to develop an emotional attachment with like-minded people so that the relations you have will be increasingly with them. [Gesturing to some devotees] See these people here? If they meet, they talk about Baba, about the path, about the guru; that is their interest. And whenever they go out they meet their fellow devotees. They all move like a family, or a kind of brotherhood. If any of them are in need, the others come to their aid. That is what guards us; that is called satsang.

For most people there is always a need for that guard, that's why they have these kind of regular get-togethers. Some meet daily, others meet weekly. First they might read something – a biography of Sai Baba, or some of my works, or some teachings – and then they might do some bhajan or listen

to Baba *nama*, then some meditation, feeling the presence of Baba. Sometimes they share their experiences, depending upon their time. Those who need to attend to their work will go, and those who have leisure sit and exchange their views, sharing their experiences.



DEVOTEE:

How can we avoid what seem to be obstacles to the spiritual path?

GURUJI:

Instead of avoiding the unwanted thing, try to catch hold of the wanted thing, the desired thing. Rather than sitting near the sapling and trying to drive away the sheep and cattle which come to eat, just build a fence around it and then rest assured.

If you put all your efforts on this, satsang will develop automatically if it is needed. The world is never an obstacle to a real *sadhaka*. Nothing is, for that matter. Our misunderstanding, our intellect, our fantasies, they are the obstacles. We are the obstacle to our own path, not the outside world.

DEVOTEE:

Should we avoid those who are not interested in satsang?

GURUJI:

If they are not interested, they'll try to avoid you! [Laughter] Invite them and try to share with them what you wish to share.

Don't judge whether someone is interested or not. Try to share, that's all. If they want to participate they will, otherwise they will go away. They give us an opportunity to do satsang. Tell them about the life of Sai Baba, Bhagavan and other saints, and the path of fulfilment. Then what you feel is an obstacle will be giving you a chance to review yourself, your own thoughts. You won't lose anything. That is my way, that is devotion to our path.

Also, when talking to your friends, don't use jargon. If you use unfamiliar terminology which they think belongs to a different culture or religion, it will automatically be an obstacle for them. So try to talk to them in their own language, the language of the human experience – I prefer that! In that way you'll be touching their heart, their emotion, their needs, their sense of frustration.

We are social beings and we need some social contact. So, with all the social contacts that you already have, try to transform them into spiritual contacts. Try to share your path.



DEVOTEE:

Sometimes I feel like being with Baba alone at home during the satsang time.

GURUJI:

There are twenty-four hours to follow your own way! Do you have to follow your own way in just that one hour? [Guruji laughs] And what is that way? A way which is making you incapable of enjoying and appreciating people showering their love on your own object of love!

I prefer you to be in the satsang and express your love there, because it has the advantage of being among the co-lovers, the fellow lovers. When we see our own object of love being loved by so many, can't we enjoy that? If we have a problem with that, then there is some problem with us.

Being in the company of so many is congenial, it has a good influence on our mind. Sometimes we lose our feeling and our emotion becomes dry. At such times the others can influence us. That is one thing about a satsang: when we are in the midst of the love of so many other people, our dry minds become wet with the love of those around us, without us even realizing it. Try to make yourself prone to that influence, and reap the benefits of that. There is a benefit in a collective expression of love; that is why I encourage it.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what would be good to do in our new satsang?

GURUJI:

You have to invent how to connect in a proper way, not only simply sitting and closing your eyes, but when you open your eyes how do you react, how do you react with the world, how do you react with Baba, how do you talk about the whole spirit of it? Check these things among yourselves and then try to rectify the situation.

Try to walk the path in a vigorous way, not sitting there lounging, no! Walk, run! There's not so much time for you – for all of us, of course. So don't simply say, "Oh, there's so much time, we can do it." No. If you are interested in achieving your goal, run now! Otherwise, time will be just whiled away talking about this and that.

What is your goal? What do you want? How are you living the whole day? In the whole twenty-four hours, how much space has Baba taken in our lives? How much space have we allowed Baba to take? Think about it! Make more windows, more venues, some ventilators. That is the satsang I like, not just some ritual, sitting there with crossed legs and closed eyes, sleeping in a different posture then going away, no! Let it be lively.

Make a diary every day, not a written one – don't make it another ritual again! [Guruji laughs] I mean a mental diary. Ask yourself, how far have I gone? What are the things I have done which take me away from the goal or from my path? Don't relax! In essence, that's what I mean, don't relax.



GURUJI:

[Joking about a river-rafting trip in Rishikesh] The oars were hardly touching the water! [Guruji acts out rowing with a lot of show and effort causing much laughter] Almost everybody in the boat was acting [more laughter]. But see, the boat was moving! When there are many people, it is easy – there's always someone who is actually rowing.

So in satsang, even though our devotion may be weak, other people's devotion will row us on and on. I was watching you in the boat and I thought, "Oh, this is satsang!" [Laughter]

Actually, there is no need to row, the river will take you. You are not going against the current, and it is not still waters. There the raft was moving anyway and the only job was to steer it, and that the boatman was doing. In that way, the force of the Ganges is like Baba's power.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you talked previously about the state of perpetual satsang. Would you say something about that state?

GURUJI:

When you are hungry and you are eating food, at what level do you feel satisfied? With the first morsel? No. It leads to a second, a third, a fourth morsel. And when your stomach is full you say,

Rose Petals

“Ah! Enough,” then you relax and don’t take any more. You don’t think of hunger or food at all, and what you feel is satisfaction. Then you relax and take a siesta. And that is actually the goal. To get there, you experienced hunger, got some food and ate it. The siesta at the end is a kind of perpetual satsang. [Guruji laughs] And what you are doing now is you are taking one morsel, two morsels, and so it goes. But till when? Until you are full. Then you won’t need a plate or a dining table or a restaurant; and you won’t need satsang and you won’t need me. [Guruji laughs]



GURUJI:

I am connected with you. And when you are here, try to connect with me. And [joking] I think there is a *vague, remote* possibility that people can connect with me when they are in silence.



DEVOTEE:

You said that when we sit in meditation we see the disturbance in our mind, and that is the first step. What would be the second step in that case?

GURUJI:

It’s not that they are steps, but when you have the determination to remove those disturbances,

that would be the second step – if you want me to name them.

Having the disturbance is one thing, but we should also have the will to remove it. Our clothes may be soiled, but we should be willing to wash them, “Ah, it’s okay, never mind, my clothes are not good, but I like to wear them like this.” [Laughter] You will only be at the first step. So the second step is your determination to remove the disturbance, to wash your mind with the detergent of satsang, Baba’s name, Baba’s love. Use that detergent and start washing it.





Shirdi, 2002



chapter two

Hollow Man, Stuffed Man

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you were talking earlier about the hollow man in T. S. Eliot's poem¹ and I was wondering, what is the difference between hollowness and emptiness, between the hollowness T. S. Eliot is referring to, and the emptiness that is needed in us to allow Baba's treasure to come in?

¹ The questioner is referring to the acclaimed poem, *The Hollow Men* (1925) by T. S. Eliot. Guruji had a deep love and knowledge of English literature and excelled in the subject as a college student.

GURUJI:

Emptiness means there is nothing inside, neither positive nor negative, not even the awareness of our own limited self, this limited personality; there is only some void, which is good, in fact. What T. S. Eliot was referring to is not that. He was speaking of a hollowness which is shallow, "We are the hollow men," meaning shallow talk, shallow actions, where nothing inside is real but we keep on doing and saying something or other in order to keep our limited ego alive. That is hollowness. And he defined it in the next line, "We are the stuffed men." A stuffed man is like the scarecrow they put in fields to drive away the birds, an effigy. It looks angry but it has no feelings. People are acting just like that scarecrow, Eliot says. He sees that most people are stuffed.

We are stuffed with so many things: politics, some shallow news, some information. Early in the morning we have to read the paper immediately, or switch on the TV to get the news, and the moment we meet somebody we start exchanging the news we have collected with the news they have collected. One person stuffs the other fellow, and that fellow stuffs him back. That is how all this stuffed man activity is going on. That is 'stuffed'! [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

So when we are trying to create an environment that is conducive to keeping our focus, how can we

Hollow Man, Stuffed Man

skillfully remove the distractions, such as people we have already invited into the environment?

GURUJI:

You don't need to do anything. The moment you stop acting as a hollow man or a stuffed man, it's finished – the other stuffed men can't relate to you! For them you seem so irrelevant [laughter], so shallow. They feel you are not one of them and they will slowly drop away by themselves.

DEVOTEE:

It's frightening, though, Guruji, to totally experience one's hollowness and no one wants to explore it because it's depressing. How can we face the fear of going into that hollowness?

GURUJI:

By understanding that it is even more dangerous to be hollow and not know it, or not face it. Anyway, what you face is what you are. It's not a ghost, it's not something unknown! Why should we be afraid of facing our own selves?

DEVOTEE:

When we see through that stuffing, is that when we experience true emptiness?

GURUJI:

When this stuffing is gone, yes. Un-stuffing is done! [Guruji laughs]



GURUJI:

When you sit in meditation and try to focus on something, whether it's the void, emptiness, Baba, Buddhahood, or you're doing *vipassana* meditation or whatever, the moment you sit, thoughts come. Why do they come? What is their purpose? Just look at what thoughts are coming and you will see the hollowness, the stuffed-ness. The thoughts are all the effects of what is actually stuffed inside.

DEVOTEE:

Is everything which is not about the object of one's focus all just stuffing?

GURUJI:

Is it not? The *real* stuff is your object of love. So stuffing ourselves with meaningless things is having no real stuff, isn't it? [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

Is it a fear of losing ourselves that makes us fill up the emptiness?

GURUJI:

That's one of the reasons, yes, but usually our fear

is not so extreme that we fear losing ourselves. We stuff ourselves mostly out of habit. It's mainly our patterns, the habit energy, those things on the surface level that make us do it. If you go deeper and deeper into it and actually experience that voidness, then the fear of losing yourself will come. Usually, though, the thoughts just keep coming. It's not that you 'think' – it's rather that thoughts go on.

DEVOTEE:

Is there a way to work with that, Guruji, if one sees that process?

GURUJI:

One of the ways is to ignore those thoughts. The moment you are aware of them, simply ignore them. Don't think, "What am I thinking? Why has that thought come?" They are not worthy of that much attention! Just ignore them and focus on your object. "Suddenly I'm thinking of my family! Maybe I should follow those thoughts?" Simply stop this and they will go away. The next day those thoughts won't appear again; something else will come. Ignore them! Keep bringing your mind to your object. Ignoring the thoughts is the crucial thing. If you start analysing, another pattern will begin, and then in the name of analysis you'll be only thinking, brooding, daydreaming.

Just ignore whatever thoughts are not about the object of your focus, even the good thoughts,

Rose Petals

and put the mind on your object. After some time they get tired and won't come, and the pattern is broken.

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean a pattern of a particular way of thinking?

GURUJI:

Yes, a pattern of thinking, but usually it is very difficult to see. If you can maintain a journal you will see that certain kinds of thoughts come up with a particular frequency – negative thoughts, positive thoughts, thoughts about various things, maybe about our family, our work, or anything. Try to make a detailed journal, write in it every day and you will see how the thoughts are going on. There is a pattern. The content may change a little, but the pattern will be the same.

DEVOTEE:

So pattern and habit energy are the same thing?

GURUJI:

They're the same. I call it pattern, and in Vedantic terminology they call it *vasana* or habit energy.

DEVOTEE:

Does that mean something which has been repeated over time, again and again?

Hollow Man, Stuffed Man

GURUJI:

Yes, again and again. And they get strengthened.

DEVOTEE:

How did it start? Every pattern must have a beginning.

GURUJI:

It started when you were not aware of these things, when you were hungry, when you were crying for milk and looking for the mother. It starts the moment our mind begins functioning: two patterns, three patterns, two million patterns, three million, one billion ... it goes on like that, multiplying.



DEVOTEE:

So you are saying that the best way to overcome patterns is simply to ignore them?

GURUJI:

Yes, ignore them! Different spiritual schools have various methods, but the main technique for overcoming patterns is repeating a name or a mantra, a sound – *japa*, or whatever you call it. Actually, the whole practice of mantra is based on breaking our patterns.

DEVOTEE:

But Baba didn't give any mantras.

Rose Petals

GURUJI:

There was no need. He knows another way. He doesn't need any tool. He breaks a pattern and it's gone! At a certain moment, say in a satsang, or when we are just looking at the mountains, or at the same place we've been to a hundred times, suddenly something happens in us: a pattern is suddenly broken, just like that! Then we find that we are not the same person, our way of thinking has changed. What happened we do not know, but we notice that something has changed in us. Something is simply taken away, and something else has come in, and we feel that we are new, the world is new, the whole path is new, and we start looking at our same old friends in a new way. That *he* can do!



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what's the relationship between emptiness, which is a positive experience, and habit energy?

GURUJI:

Once you become free of patterns, you experience the emptiness, the Void, the *shunya*. It is the patterns which are making you hollow, stuffed. First we have to put the real stuff into us, so that this gas [Guruji laughs], this hollowness, will slowly go. There are two approaches to experiencing it: the Buddhist approach and the Vedic. Buddha

wanted to directly experience that emptiness. He saw that all this is just hollowness; it's not real, so get rid of it. But can you do it? It is the branch on which you are sitting. How can you cut the branch on which you yourself are sitting! So the other approach is to try and put something real in your mind, some real stuff, so that you slowly get filled and eventually you can remove that too. Actually, *shunya* [emptiness] is *purna* [fullness] and *purna* is *shunya*. In Sanskrit their meaning comes to the same thing – *shunya* is zero and *purna* again is zero, but zero infinitely full! So what the Buddha calls *shunya*, in Hinduism they call *purna*. *Purna* and *shunya* are the same, but how people view existence is different, and the technique and the approach is also different.



GURUJI:

Usually we stuff our minds with so many things. When we first get up we ask, "How is the weather? Oh, today it's cool. Oh, the sun is beautiful." And as soon as we pick up the phone, "It's cold, it's damp, it's wet, it's dry Yesterday it was like that and today the forecast is like this." Or, "How was that movie? How is the Uttaranchal government? Before it was Uttar Pradesh and how is the new government doing and who is the Chief Minister? And what is this and what is that ...?" All this *stuff*!

Rose Petals

In the first issue of *The Spectator*, the editor, Addison, wrote about why he was starting the paper.² One of the reasons he gave was to provide those kind of hollow and stuffed men something meaningful to contemplate, so that they would have something useful to stuff in their empty brains. "I want to provide them with some good stuff. The moment they get up, *The Spectator* will be there by their table, giving them something useful to ponder about society, or about themselves." I like that!

DEVOTEE:

[Jokingly] Is that also one of the things that happens for us in satsang?

GURUJI:

[Laughs] Maybe – so there will be some stuff for you to talk about which makes you focus on your object, something which is relevant, which is meaningful to you and to achieving your object. Whether or not you are talking about it I do not know, but I try. Otherwise those kind of meaningless thoughts will go on.

Why do you read newspapers? Is it not simply stuffing yourself? Just think! If it was connected

² *The Spectator* was a daily newspaper founded in London in 1711 by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Popular and influential, it ran for eighteen months. In 1828 the title was used for the launch of a political and cultural magazine that still plays a significant role in contemporary British print media.

to something practical or you were somebody who really needed the information, like a businessperson for example, there would be some meaning in it, but there isn't. Avoid stuffing yourself with things which are not relevant to you, which are not connected to your life, to achieving your goal, your object, whether practical or spiritual. Avoid that mere stuffing and unnecessary talk. It is an addiction. We do so many things that are not relevant to us.

Make it a principle not to talk about anything which is not useful to you or the other person. Whenever you talk about something it should be useful either to you or to someone else. That which is not useful to either of you is stuffing. Just check all the talking you do. See how much you are stuffing yourself and others! Most of our talk is just stuffing. Examine it and you'll know. Then you'll start talking meaningfully; your company will be meaningful and you will be in meaningful company. And then your whole life will become really meaningful.





Shirdi, 2007



chapter three

Give the Reins to Baba

GURUJI:

“Give the reins of the chariot of your life to the Sadguru and rest assured, rest happily,” that is what Baba said. But we are not able to give the reins to Baba. Even when we give them, we’ll still be checking. If you’re travelling by car at night and don’t have confidence in the driver, you can’t sleep. You’ll always be watching whether he’s really steering well, or how he is operating the lights and gears. Like this, we’ll be controlling the driver from the back seat: “Oh, be careful! Go

to the left! There, go to the right!” [Guruji laughs]
We don’t really trust.

So it’s true we can’t give up the reins of our life so easily. Some experience of real trust should be there; we should know how competent the driver is. And for that, the initial stage is, first finding a trustworthy driver! Then give him the responsibility and see how he acts, how he manages things. I say this to you again and again because our basic problem is not ignorance but helplessness. It’s not wanting to know something, like what moksha is, that is actually troubling you: is it troubling anybody? [Guruji laughs] What is troubling you is your basic helplessness; that is your experience. And the one who gives you the help should have the knowledge and the power to steer your life and environment, your material circumstances, everything, your whole life, not simply giving discourses, lectures. He should have power, power coupled with knowledge.



DEVOTEE:

Are you saying the real power comes from giving the reins to the driver?

GURUJI:

Yes, because then you utilize the power of the driver. In that way you enjoy his power.

DEVOTEE:

Do we feel the power the moment we are aware of our helplessness?

GURUJI:

In fact, it is not true that you are helpless only when you are aware of it. In other moments you are also helpless, but you may be more consciously aware of it at one moment than another. And the more we are aware of our helplessness, the more we seek power and the more we seek help. Because we are so addicted to that state of helplessness, we don't even feel we are really helpless, that is the problem. The disease has become so chronic that it has become our natural state, our natural state of health.

For example, suppose a person who was born and grew up in a city like Mumbai receives an invitation from his relatives to attend a marriage happening in a distant village. After 20 or 25 years of living in the city, for the first time in his life he leaves Mumbai, goes to the village and attends the wedding. Afterwards, he's just walking in the fields, breathing the fresh air, the beautiful fresh air. But he experiences it as something odd, something strange, like smelling some peculiar odour. So he asks one of the farmers passing by, "What is this strange smell here?" and the farmer says, "It's fresh air!" [Guruji laughs]



Rose Petals

GURUJI:

Baba said, "Give the reins to me, I will take you to your destination." You do not know how to control your life, so give the control to someone who can do it properly – who can steer you to *your* destination, not his destination. That is what Baba said: "I will take you to your destination." Whatever it is.

DEVOTEE:

Why is it so difficult to give over the reins? It seems like one wants to and doesn't want to. I really feel that split. What to do about that?

GURUJI:

Yes, it is difficult, very difficult. The thing is, you have to realize more and more that you can't control it, that in fact you have no control. As long as we think we have control we must keep on trying and trying, until we totally give up.

DEVOTEE:

But it seems we don't want to give up.

GURUJI:

Then don't give up! [Gurujī laughs] Nobody is forcing you to give up. Nobody gives up because they want to, they do it because they can't help it. There is no choice then.

DEVOTEE:

It seems we try helplessly to be in control anyway, even though we aren't very successful.

GURUJI:

All over the world, millions and millions of people are always trying, helplessly trying – I am asking you to try with help, that's the only difference.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how can we become totally focused on Baba when we still have so many other pulls?

GURUJI;

Let Baba be the source of fulfilment for all your other pulls, they are not two things in opposition. I never say only to think of Baba and not to think of your health or other worldly concerns. Your present condition is that you are gripped by so many pulls. No problem – don't see Baba in opposition to those pulls, but try to see him as a means of getting them fulfilled. That is what Baba said was his mission, to give blessings without discrimination to all. That is why he encouraged so many people to ask for whatever they needed.



Rose Petals

DEVOTEE:

Why is it, Guruji, that we don't seek the help when we need it? It seems so foolish.

GURUJI:

Because you have been trained, especially in the West, not to seek help, to be independent, to think you must help yourselves. You are told, "Try to be this, try to do that, make your own choices, be determined, stick to your resolve!", these kinds of things have been taught from nursery school onwards, so actually this is familiar. What is not familiar is asking for help, that is the problem. It's the principle of seeking help that you have to become familiar with.

DEVOTEE:

One of the most difficult things to admit is that one doesn't know.

GURUJI:

Yes, to admit one's helplessness is very difficult. That is when the issue of choice comes, we think, "We choose the Sadguru, the choice is ours." Even here we want to retain our individuality, and think we can help at least to the extent of choosing our Sadguru. But what I am telling you is, that even here you are experiencing your helplessness, that, in fact, you are really already chosen.

DEVOTEE:

Was that your own experience, Guruji?

GURUJI:

Yes. I haven't chosen Baba. I wasn't able to choose otherwise, that's all. I don't remember ever having chosen him.



DEVOTEE:

It seems almost like this process of transformation is finding out more and more, all the things I cannot do.

GURUJI:

The more you realize what you cannot do, the more you will feel your helplessness. Then the more you seek help, the more the help will come. Then you'll appreciate and relish it. There are three things: seeking help, getting help, and, when the help is given, how we relish and appreciate it. I have observed that many people are, I don't say ungrateful, but they don't have the capacity to appreciate the help when it is given.



GURUJI:

Ask for help honestly, sincerely, from your heart, then let the Sadguru help you in his own way. Don't dictate to him: "Help me like this! Don't help me like that!" [Laughter] If you're really asking for his help, realize *he knows* how to help. That

is really asking for help, when the asking is unconditional. The one who is helping you is doing it with unconditional love. So you should let him help you unconditionally, and not put any conditions on him or the help given. But that is what people do, not only you, many people do it. That is why in the last satsang I told you about this dichotomy, this dilemma, where something stops us from asking even though we are crying for help. I'm saying, okay, cry for help, but when the help comes, take it! The one giving his hand is not expecting anything from you. Only out of love, out of unconditional love, is he trying to help you: recognize that! Don't ascribe motives to his helping hand. "Why is he helping me, why? If I were in his position, I wouldn't help, so why should he help me? Something must be there, I'd better wait. First, let me know why he's helping, then I'll give my hand!" [Guruji laughs] So here we complicate ourselves, and our life passes like this. But there isn't much time to play these games – time is passing! So try to be rational, try to be practical, rise to the occasion! Give him the chance to help you fully, in whatever way he likes. Whether or not you like the way he is helping you, first give him the chance. And if you feel you are not being helped, then ask for some other helping hand. But coming to judgements without fully experiencing the help and this habit of always judging – take care of that.



GURUJI:

Baba said it very beautifully, "The moment you step into this Dwarkamai¹, your karma is over, now it is my responsibility." See how beautifully he said it! By 'stepping into Dwarkamai' he means not physically stepping in, but becoming a child of Baba. And once you have fully given the reins to him, then it is his responsibility. If there is any karma, good or bad, he is responsible.

DEVOTEE:

But it's got to be more than just words or philosophical concepts when we give our life to the Sadguru. Isn't it an act that comes from the heart?

GURUJI:

It's not an act, it's a helpless emotional reflex. Once you say, "Baba, now I don't have anything, I'm giving everything into your hands, you lead me. It's all in your hands," *that* emotional conviction, *full* conviction, that from that time on, whatever you do, it is his responsibility.

DEVOTEE:

But that seems to be beyond my control. Is it something that happens through grace?

GURUJI:

They are not two things, emotional response and

¹ Dwarkamai (lit. 'many-gated mother') is Baba's name for the mosque where he lived in Shirdi.

Rose Petals

grace. In fact, they are not opposed, because the first, as I said, is a helpless reflex. Why you have that reflex may be due to grace – it can happen from both sides. It is the act of grace and our response to grace, both.



DEVOTEE:

So you say everyone should go to Baba and ask for their needs to be fulfilled?

GURUJI:

I'm not saying everyone should go to Baba – he is the one I know. For me, he is synonymous with a real guru who uses his power with unconditional love and compassion to help us reach our destination. And of the one I know, I speak. For those who haven't found a Sadguru, yes, I suggest here is one, for sure! But I don't say he's the only one, and everybody has to go to him. I don't believe in that.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, why didn't Sai Baba give philosophical teachings?

GURUJI:

The point is, nobody expected such a thing from

him. The moment they went to him they saw his power and became aware of their helplessness. So they sought his help and they got it. And by getting his help they got his message also. Every *leela*, every incident, every miracle you see, every experience you read, conveys a message, the message which some other saints have taught verbally. And those who approached them expected that. The moment they saw them, they said, "Teach us knowledge, teach us about Brahman and atman," these kinds of questions. So the sages taught. But nobody felt a dearth that Sai Baba did not teach; they were so fulfilled there was no need of that. Teaching is needed in order to get the experience of fulfilment and to remove our helplessness. When that was achieved spontaneously in Baba's presence, where was the need of any teaching?





Gangotri, 2006



chapter four

Journey to the Source

[Context: A group of devotees were on a trip in the Himalayas with Guruji and his family]

DEVOTEE:

Why have we come here, Guruji?

GURUJI:

Yes, why have you come? You don't have a clear answer to that question. When you're asked in the moment, you can't answer. "We love Guruji

and we want to be with him” – I know that is the answer. But besides that, are you asking yourself, “Why do we love Guruji? Why do we want to be with him? If we really love him, what does Guruji want us to do here?” You should have that curiosity. Of course, there is information in the tourist guides – where this or that ghat is, where to take chai, where the best place to shop is. We can find information for all these things, but actually, one page is missing – information about what the guide wants you to do! Because no book will tell you this. You should develop your own guidebook, one with guidance from a guide [guru] who knows your needs personally, because the real tour is a guided tour. Then your whole trip enters another dimension. It’s no longer simply a tour or an excursion, everything transforms into something else. Otherwise, it remains just that – an excursion, a pleasure trip, just a sightseeing tour. But it is *not* a sight-seeing tour – it should be an *insight*-seeing tour! [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how can we use our time on tour constructively?

GURUJI:

We are all here happily. Whenever we can, we’ll do Baba’s *nama* and think of him. If possible, we’ll go

river rafting and enjoy the beautiful scenery. There is nothing wrong in enjoying these things. The main thing is to be harmonious and experience joy; whatever kills that spirit is wrong. Usually, in ordinary life you do whatever you like and decide everything yourself. Making individual choices and decisions actually strengthens individuality and builds up preferences. If you want to utilize a tour like this to lose your strong personality – that sense of separation and individuality, the ego, or whatever you call it – then this is the best way. Here you don't have to think about where you're going since you don't have a choice; you simply go along with the group happily. It's like participating in a group dance, rather than giving an individual performance, like in shake, break or go-go dancing. [Laughter] It's like a tribal dance, there is a natural beauty in it. Even while looking at it we lose ourselves. There is no sense of separation in it, the individuals are not important; all start moving like one whole. That is why these dances were invented by primitive tribes, in order to lose their separateness and become one with nature, with their environment, with their group.

You don't get many opportunities in life for this kind of experience, so whenever you get the chance you should try to use it. And utilized properly, it will help you to lose your individuality and increase your love and capacity to merge, to lose yourself. A journey like this can be the fire which melts the iceberg, the ice of the 'I-berg', the ego! [Laughter]



GURUJI:

Try to protect yourself from ego-terrorism and its disharmony and anger among you. It's natural that some things may not work out as you like. Sometimes, the food may not be properly organized, or you may become uncomfortable or inconvenienced. But we should be prepared for that – that is the group spirit! That is the team! Somebody steps on your foot and you give him an unforgiving look – these things happen when you're in a group. It happens, it's a mistake, it's not intentional. Like that, many things happen in life. Then you learn the quality of forgiving. And by learning how to forgive, what you are doing is giving up your individuality, your separateness. So that is what I was talking about, the team spirit. At least during this short two weeks' journey, let us give up our individual choices and decisions, our likes and dislikes, our sense of comfort. Of course, Baba will take care of our comfort. Usually we'll be more comfortable than when we travel individually, but that is a different matter. Recognizing this opportunity, being thankful for it and reacting with affection – that is the way. Caring for others and trying, in your words, "to love your neighbour as yourself" – you can practise all these things. It is such an ideal situation I have provided!

But, as I said, don't call it a spiritual tour or a pilgrimage, or a practice, or any of these things: it is for you to make it spiritual or not. If you ask me in what way it is spiritual or how rafting and going up a mountain or looking at all these things will help you spiritually, that is your headache. It is not a pilgrimage or anything. It is for you to make it a pilgrimage. So this is the main spirit behind the whole thing. Try to utilize it if you want – I'm not asking you to utilize it. If you want, you can do it. Otherwise, no problem.

At least when you are here, forgetting all your worries and concerns, happily enjoying, being one with the flow, how beautiful it is! No planning, not knowing what we are going to do or where we will go tomorrow. You don't often have this opportunity in life because you always plan so meticulously. But once the opportunity comes, let's utilize it! Let's be free from our strong patterns.



GURUJI:

Everything around us should teach us something. Whether you are rafting or travelling on the bus or sitting in a tea stall, everything should teach you something. Everything should go on teaching, teaching, teaching! It's not that you can learn only in satsang, every moment you should learn, you should be a perpetual student. What you learn in satsang is only a small thing, what

you learn outside satsang is more important. The only thing is, you should connect them together yourself. In Sankhya and certain schools of Vedanta they say the universe is made up of 24 elements or categories. That is why Sage Dattatreya said, "I have 24 gurus."¹ For him the whole universe was the guru, every thing, every moment. Even if somebody was making flour it taught him something, everything taught him. He gave some examples, but it doesn't mean only these. Every action, every movement of a leaf even, should be a message from the Sadguru. That is what Bhagavan meant about Dattatreya when he said, "Dattatreya had 24 gurus."² That means he looked at every form in the whole universe as his guru, and the whole universe looked to him like a *Jagadguru*. Who is a *Jagadguru*? He who sees the whole universe as his guru. So in everything, in every action, there is so much to learn that can help us connect with our path and keep our focus on it. Everything should teach us something.

DEVOTEE:

But doesn't it take a particular attitude of mind to do this?

¹ His celebrated story occurs in the *Bhagavata Purana* 11.7.32–11.9.33. A similar account is given by Eknath Maharaj (1533-1599 CE) in his *Eknathi Bhagavata* (7.341-344).

² *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words* by Arthur Osborne (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 9c 2005), p.92.

GURUJI:

Yes, an attitude of mind. That attitude of mind is loving your Sadguru, focusing on your path, not being hypocritical. Reducing the gap between your thoughts, words and deeds. If you have that attitude of sincerity, Baba will take you to higher and higher altitudes on the spiritual path.

When we are watching the flow of the Ganga, it is just like our stream of consciousness. From Rishikesh we followed it up to Devaprayag and then all the way up to Gangotri. But when we got to the so-called source, no one was there. [Murmurs of wonder and agreement]. The whole of Gangotri was for us! It was *nissangatvam*.³ Baba has shown it, he has given us that. No one else was there except the Ganga and ourselves – Baba and ourselves. In such a popular, major pilgrimage centre, the whole place was deserted and open to us! That was the wonderful thing, to see what Baba had done! Is it possible? Could anyone think of it? It was such an opportunity. We didn't expect it and when we went there, it was like that. So, when you go to the source, there it will be *nissangatvam*. You will be alone at the source, you and Baba. So the whole journey is, in fact, a kind of microcosm of our path. Baba has shown this clearly.

³ Incredibly, when Guruji and his party visited Gangotri, that day it was completely devoid of pilgrims, even of local residents. Guruji could therefore enjoy its pristine beauty in *nissangatvam*, lit. 'without company'. This Sanskrit term is also used to characterize the state of final union in Advaita Vedanta and in the mystical *Nirguna Bhakti* tradition of Kabir that includes Sai Baba.

Baba didn't neglect even so-called unreprieved pleasures. I like Wordsworth's expression 'unreprieved pleasures'. Some of you said, "We want snow!" Nothing wrong in wanting snow, it is a desire many people have. Some of you wanted to see it falling and you saw it in Auli, although it was unseasonable. When we asked if it would snow, people said, "No, not now. It will come in two or three weeks, at the end of December." But that night we went to bed and in the morning it was snowing. So even these small desires and wishes, these 'unreprieved pleasures', Baba will fulfill. What hasn't he fulfilled during the whole trip? Whether it is so big like spending time alone in Gangotri, or just enjoying playing in the snow and watching the snow fall – everything has been given.

DEVOTEE:

And Guruji, if we had come just one day later, almost certainly the snow would have made the roads impassable, making it impossible to come.

GURUJI:

Yes, it was exactly the right moment, at the right spot, when Baba sent us. We didn't plan anything. There was no need for planning, that is what I am trying to say – nothing had to be planned! Baba is there, he will take care of us, he will show us everything, give us everything. And we were having fun, happily enjoying, playing, dancing. When we came to the source, we were in the lap

of Mother Ganga, like Dwarkamai.⁴ We are her children, we have to play there! We want to be worthy children of Mother Ganga! When we are all in the lap of the Mother, why should we be afraid? If we don't have that concept and awareness, what is the use of going to Gangotri? Just think of our whole trip along these lines, and what it reveals to you. It's a totally different dimension. Let us prolong that ecstasy, that happiness, that joy, the memories of that, as long as we can. In every minute, in every moment, I see how Baba's hand is taking us, how much he is showing us, how much he is giving us.

DEVOTEE:

But isn't that so always, Guruji, not only on this trip?

GURUJI:

Yes, that's what I'm telling you. Try to make your whole life like this. Try! Not that you can, but try! At least you can have an idea of it, an abstract concept, and try to make it concrete in your life.

⁴ Dwarkamai, 'many-gated Mother', is the name Baba gave to the mosque where he stayed in Shirdi. Guruji is alluding to the first of *Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*: "This Dwaraka Mai ... wards off all danger and anxieties from her children If they are in danger, she will save them. Once a person climbs into her lap, all his troubles are over." - see *Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* by Narasimha Swami (Mylapore: All India Sai Samaj, 1999; 1e orig.1939), p.1.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, on this trip we have experienced more about not knowing, not planning, about being in the unknown. We've been travelling so it's been new all the time, but when we return home how can we keep alive that experience of newness?

GURUJI:

You don't need so much planning. If you realize it, that is enough. When it is needed, on the spot you can plan and happily go; don't be bound by your previous planning. If you book a ticket, it is you who decided, "Ah, this is the day to go," according to the situation then. But later, if something more meaningful can happen by staying back, you can change your plans, but usually we forget that. Once our decision is made, it becomes imperative for us: "Oh, I've booked a ticket, I have to go, what can I do?" What can you do? Cancel it! Or postpone it. It is only your own decision, after all. If you have a job and have to be on duty, for instance, then there is reason to hold to it. Otherwise, don't give so much importance to these kinds of small schedule changes.

First, let us experience this freedom, this little freedom that is possible now. You are always talking about *that* freedom [moksha]. At least this freedom, on this level, let us start with that. We are so conditioned, so bound by our own decisions,

that when something worthwhile attracts us more strongly, our previous plans prevent us from following it. Just take care of that. It will pave the way for a greater transformation.

When the Buddha got that state – whatever it is, we can't understand it – the first thing that happened was all planning of the mind stopped. When he decided to sit under the Bodhi tree, he had no thought of getting up. He simply sat, with no plan, not even an idea of how long to sit or whether to get up or to sit permanently – that scheduling notion was not there. He simply sat. All planning, all deliberations, all intentions of the mind dropped. Once they dropped completely, he got enlightenment. These subtle bindings and conditionings of the mind are very difficult to overcome. Try it first with ordinary things like travel plans, that will show you the art of living spontaneously. It is not so difficult or impractical. Actually, it is quite enjoyable and beautiful.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I think all of us have been really enjoying the journey. Nobody has known where we're going, or when or how [laughter], and it's a very nice feeling.

GURUJI:

What I want is to give you an idea of your own life

in a microcosm. In fact, do you know where you are going? [Guruji laughs] You are simply living. You think you are going somewhere – that you have a goal, an object, a destination – but in fact it is a myth, you do not know that. I want to give you a taste of this. Just leave aside these concepts of where we are going, why we have come, why we were born, why we are living. When we do not know these profound things, what about this small journey? If at all you want to know about the big journey, try to know about it here also, on the trip. If you take it in this way, it may give you a taste of the reins being in Baba's hands, that he's driving the chariot and knows the destination. He will take us safely, why should we worry ourselves? *He knows*. If you relate to it like this, it becomes a practice. I wish you to experience it that way, that's why I don't reveal travel plans. If you don't take it like this, it's simply a new adventure, that's all. Otherwise, what is wrong in announcing the whole schedule? Whether we follow it or not is a different matter. [Much laughter] I could give you a schedule, then say it has changed, and then change it again. Each time you'd have the illusion that you knew where you were going, just like you have in your life now – the same illusion. So this trip is a miniature, a small mirror, a reflection of your own life's journey. Our life is the macrocosm and this journey is the microcosm.

DEVOTEE:

Well, Guruji, I really pray this microcosm never ends.

GURUJI:

Yes, if you understand it, it never ends. It becomes the macrocosm, it doesn't end!





Shirdi, 1992



chapter five

Udi – Symbol of Baba's Grace

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, Baba used to give *udi* [ashes] to people every night, and you also sometimes give us *udi*. What does *udi* symbolize and how does it relate to fulfilment?

GURUJI:

Udi is the symbol of Baba's grace. To me, it carries Baba's grace because it comes from his *dhuni*, his sacred fire. These are not ordinary ashes – they

are from the sacred *dhuni* that Baba lit and sat in front of for sixty years. That fire has been kept burning continuously since then. And whenever Baba talked about his grace and his *prasad*, the only symbol that he used was *udi*. Even for fulfilling boons or answering devotees' prayers, he used *udi*. He used to say, "Sackfuls of *udi* are here, take it away in carts!" And, "My treasury is open, take it, no one will object!" What did his treasury contain? Only sackfuls of *udi*! To him, *udi* symbolized his grace, and so, when I give *udi*, I am only giving Baba's grace. I don't attach any other symbolism to it.

DEVOTEE:

Is *udi* related to the process of transformation?

GURUJI:

Yes. The grace will transform you.

DEVOTEE:

Should we take *udi* when we're at home?

GURUJI:

If you see Baba's *udi* as a sign of his grace, then you'll take it, definitely! Another aspect of that question is, "Do you want us to receive Baba's grace at home?" "Yes, I do." [Guruji laughs] But, if you don't attach so much importance to it, then you need not; I'm not particular that you have to see *udi* that way. I do, that is why I give it. And

it’s a sentimental thing because it comes from Baba’s *dhuni*. It almost has his touch, his nearness, because it comes from the sacred fire Baba sat in front of for so long. It’s a product of that fire.



DEVOTEE:

Is there a place for the ego in the longing for love?

GURUJI:

Yes, there is. Love is like a fire, and the ego acts as firewood. As long as the wood lasts, the fire is kept burning; when the wood is gone, the fire goes out. In the beginning, the wood acts as fuel for the ego as it burns, trying to merge itself into the fire of love. A log of wood resists fire because it has its own nature, it doesn’t want to be burnt. Like that, all these egos are like pieces of wood and resist burning, but, when the fire grows strong enough, they are burnt!

DEVOTEE:

But there seems to be a bit of a paradox, Guruji, because you compare the ego to a block of wood that resists being burnt, and yet at the same time there is a longing to be burnt.

GURUJI:

Both things are there, yes, it’s a paradox.

Rose Petals

DEVOTEE:

Is that why we feel conflict?

GURUJI:

Yes, all these kinds of things – conflict, fear, resistance.

DEVOTEE:

How can we have less resistance to the fire?

GURUJI:

Very dry wood is good firewood! And how does it become dry? Put it in the sun, another form of that fire. And the sun is the Sadguru. The dampness which makes the wood resist the fire are those things that take you away from that love. Anything that pushes you towards that focus is fuel. Once that fire of love starts, the ego can't resist it. And when it is totally burnt, what remains is *udi* – and this is what Baba gives us. Because his 'firewood' was totally burnt up, what remained in him was only *udi* – the power and grace of that last phase of fire when there is nothing left to burn, when everything has been burnt – that is *udi*. And to remember this, we place it on the most important part of our body, the forehead. It carries Baba's love because it comes from Baba's *dhuni*. It is a symbol of his grace, and, at the same time, a reminder of his love.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what is *tapas*?

GURUJI:

Actually, the word *tapas* comes from the Sanskrit root *tap*, meaning ‘to heat or warm up’; it is the heat from the fire of enquiry and love. If someone has a strong desire we say, “He’s burning with desire.” We use the word ‘burning’. That is *tapas*. And if someone is burning to know the truth or for the vision of the divine, or for any great, profound object – when the desire is so strong it creates a burning in them, a fire – that is *tap*. And keeping the fire up and making it grow stronger, that is *tapas*. *Tapas* doesn’t mean torturing the body or sitting cross-legged, or wandering in the Himalayas without clothes, none of these ascetic practices. The fire of the yogis’ longing for truth is so intense it produces heat in them, so they can live in the high mountains with just a loincloth, walking barefoot on the ice. Ramana Maharshi once said that before he came to Arunachala, when he had his death experience, “there was a flash of excitement, like heat,” as if he had a fever because his body produced so much heat! In ordinary life also, if you have a strong desire, you can feel your temperature rise, as though you were burning. Keeping up that fire is the real *tapas*. And, if you can keep up that fire, that is doing *nitya agnihotra*, the eternal fire worship – the real *dhuni*, the real *yagna*, the real *tapas* – burning until only the ashes remain!

DEVOTEE:

So is love a kind of *tapas*, a burning?

GURUJI:

Yes, it is *tapas* because it burns. People say, “My love is burning me, my longing is burning me up,” this is what they say. Ramana uses the same word also – burning. That fire is the fire of love – that is the fire the sages say to keep up always. Make it a perpetual fire, until you get *That*.



GURUJI:

Don't be distracted by these ideas of *tapas* and asceticism – it has to come naturally. You can see this with anyone who is actually burning with desire – he doesn't mind anything. He has no appetite and lives on little food because he is burning so much he doesn't need his digestive fire. He'll say, “I need to solve this problem, it's a burning question for me. First, I've got to solve it, then I'll take my meal.” For those who are actually burning, this is how it happens. But for those observing them it seems their heat is kindled by their ascetic practices, so people start imitating them.

When Ramana first came to Tiruvannamalai, he was sitting in Arunachaleswar Temple quite oblivious of his surroundings. He had no needs, no food. Someone gave him a few spoonfuls of milk taken from the *abhishekam*, only once in awhile,

and that was enough for him. But if you take only two or three spoonfuls of milk and then remain starving, it’s no use – you won’t become Ramana Maharshi! [Guruji laughs]

So this is the fire, the *tapas*, the real Vedic *yagna*. And all the things which kindle and increase that fire are its fuel – like having satsang, reading good books, biographies of the saints, going to holy places – this fuel lights the fire and keeps it burning. Then it bursts into flame and grows and increases until it burns up [Guruji snaps his fingers] whatever you don’t want. Then what remains, the ashes of that fire, is *udi* or *vibhuti*. *Vibhuti* in Sanskrit also means shakti, the power of *jnana* or knowledge of truth. So when we put on Baba’s *udi*, it symbolizes that.



GURUJI:

There is no clash between my material and spiritual life. There is nothing that even the richest or the poorest man can give me. It is my principle that I should not accept anything. I don’t have the necessity to get anyone’s favour because I am not dependent on anybody except Baba. I stay in my house and people come. When Sai Baba devotees come, what can I give them? I give them Baba’s *udi*. They like to have Baba’s *udi*, and I don’t have any objection to giving it and praying for them. That’s all I do, and I try to see Baba in them.



GURUJI:

Daily, after taking a bath, I think of Baba and put his *udi* on my forehead. There are some people who think it's a ritual. It looks like a ritual and if I do it daily, I suppose it is, in fact. But to me it's not like that. Putting *udi* on my Guru was the last service I rendered him [Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja, d.1989]. When he was lying on his deathbed, I came and put *udi nama* on his forehead. Then he was buried, so it was my last expression of love to him. Whenever I put on *udi*, I remember him and my last service. And that last service has the force of all the services I have done in all my fourteen years of staying with him.



GURUJI:

When you put *udi* on your forehead, it is not a custom, not a *bhasmadhara*. The ashes from the *dhuni* Baba lit and touched carry the indirect effect of his touch – the touch of my Beloved. So I take his *udi* and apply it to the most precious part of my body, my forehead, so I can experience his touch always. And if you come to me, what else can I give than his touch, so I give *udi* to you, so you also may be touched by him. To me, it is an expression of my love, not simply a custom, and it

Udi – Symbol of ‘Baba’s Grace

should be the same for you. This is not ordinary ash. It is *udi* from Baba’s *dhuni*, and it carries his grace, his touch. Every time you apply his *udi*, it is the feel of his touch. Try to see the custom this way and you will understand. Otherwise, it becomes just a fancy, like the fashion of putting on *malas*, *bindis*, this and that, imitating an Indian. It is not that everything Indian is sacred! I don’t care about customs and rituals, but I respect them, as long as they are expressions of our love.



GURUJI:

I’m telling you Baba is ready to give you so much! He’s waiting. As he said, “Cartloads of *udi* are there – take it in carts!”





Shirdi, 1999



chapter six

The Guru as Active Mirror

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, will there come a time when the suffering is less?

GURUJI:

Yes, when you know that something is missing and, even though you are not sure what it is, you find a key to it – you meet a Sadguru who triggers love in you. From that point on you are happy because at least you've found a key! Then the whole process becomes happy, and happiness

becomes the keyword, not suffering. If anyone still suffers after having found the key they don't have the right understanding, because they're missing the whole point: the aesthetics of the process. When I call it a process, don't again misunderstand by thinking Guruji initiates a process where there is much toil and suffering, and then he brings out something from deep inside. Nonsense! [Guruji laughs] It's not that you are so deep I have to lower a bucket to bring up something! No. When you are face to face with yourself in the presence of the Sadguru, a process of unfoldment begins and qualities which are not so beautiful come into awareness; no one needs to point them out. The Sadguru acts like a mirror, but it is not the mirror that shows you things, *you* see them in the mirror. Some people have a tendency to see only their ugliness in a mirror, just like some people see only the dark scars on the moon. They look at the moon and think, "Ah, beautiful, but what about those black spots?" Some people have that tendency. They don't look at the moon's beauty and the moonlight, instead they see only its black spots! Then there are others who see only beauty reflected, not ugliness. For them, the experience is one of happiness and aesthetic enjoyment.

DEVOTEE:

But when it comes to ourselves shouldn't we see the black spots too?

The Guru as Active Mirror

GURUJI:

Yes, you should see them, but you can relate to them differently.



DEVOTEE:

Isn't knowing ourselves the most valuable thing?

GURUJI:

Yes, try to know yourself, that is what Bhagavan also said. But it's not so easy. I'm trying to make it clear: don't look for the intrinsic value in objects, try instead to explore the intrinsic value in the subject – you. That is much more valuable. And in striving to make the subject clear, choose what helps you to know and explore that. It's like looking in a mirror and the mirror is the Sadguru. What is the intrinsic value of a mirror? It shows you your image fully and clearly so you can improve your appearance any way you like. All those people who stand in front of a mirror don't change their appearance in the same way. One will arrange her hair like this, another like that, according to their individual concepts of beauty.

DEVOTEE:

We've spent our whole lives forming the habit of looking outward rather than inward – are we trying now to reverse the process?

Rose Petals

GURUJI:

Yes, that is called spirituality! Spiritual endeavour is breaking that habit.

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean we should make ourselves the object?

GURUJI:

In one way, yes – both the subject and the object. The subject becomes the object, the object becomes the subject.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how do we change by focusing on the form of the Sadguru?

GURUJI:

I don't call it a change, it's more like a metamorphosis. A bird doesn't become a human being – it's more like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It's a transformation, an unfolding. Nothing is covered over, everything is uncovered, or discovered. Now everything is covered, our intrinsic values, our yearnings, everything is covered over. We're removing the cover and dis-covering something. That's what the endeavour is. And the Sadguru is just like a mirror where you can see your own values more clearly and then strive for what you long for. Just like in ordinary life, to help you remember the things you want to do, you make

a to-do list. Then, when you need to, you check the list. What is that list? Nobody has given it to you; you are the one who has written it. Your to-do list is like your scripture, your Ten Commandments, it governs what you do, how you are. The Sadguru is the mirror for your own to-do list, and if it is your own list, you fare better. If you try to follow someone else's list, nothing much will happen because it is meaningless to you.

DEVOTEE:

We need honesty when we make our own to-do list, don't we?

GURUJI:

Yes, absolute honesty. Everything is based on that. That is the fundamental requirement.

DEVOTEE:

When we look in the mirror, what is the mirror, actually?

GURUJI:

It is Baba. He is the mirror. If you really want to see yourself – how beautiful or ugly you are – you have to look into the mirror, but we are not looking. What are your needs? What attracts you to Baba? Try to see those qualities and focus on them, then see whether they're being developed in your heart. Then there will be synchronization.

Rose Petals

Are we really following our own to-do list? That is what's needed. But we're more interested in other people's to-do lists, and there comes the problem.

DEVOTEE:

But won't we always see a distorted image since our ways of looking come from our old habits?

GURUJI:

Yes, but why is this? It's because you are distorted, not the mirror. So try to put yourself in order and make yourself beautiful – that's why you need a mirror. Not simply to know the truth of how you are, but to make yourself better. If you are distorted, the mirror shows your distortion. Because you are distorted, you want to make yourself true, tidy and beautiful. Not that the mirror will make you beautiful – you have to do that yourself. The mirror only helps you to see what's needed.



DEVOTEE:

How can we identify what is false in ourselves?

GURUJI:

By wishing the falsity should go. How do you know what is false? When you are in contact with something real. The more you are in contact with the real, the more you'll know your falsity,

otherwise you won't know it at all. So a Sadguru like Baba acts as a mirror which reflects what is false in you. And the more we see our falsity, a moment comes when we are fully aware of it, and it drops. Or, it transforms itself in such a way that it starts acting like something real; this happens automatically. For instance, when you're passing a mirror and look into it, if a hair is out of place, your hand automatically goes up to correct it, and you just keep moving.

What triggers that sense of reality is a mirror, the presence of a saint that reflects reality. That's what I was saying about satsang – being in the company of the *Sat*. That will constantly give you the experience of what is real, or at least show you what is false. Otherwise, there is no way you can see your falsehood.

So, again coming to the same point, there is no other way – *nanyah pantha vidyate'yanaya*!¹ You must be near a magnet to become a magnet.



GURUJI:

One thing is definite: Baba gives you daily,

¹ Skt., 'There is no other path to freedom.'; last quarter of a famous verse in the *Purusha Suktam* (20) which praises the vision of the *Sat* (or *Virat*) *Purusha* as the only means to Self-realization and freedom (moksha). It implies the necessity of the Sadguru in whose presence the *Satpurusha* is manifested. See further in Glossary under *nanyah pantha vidyate'yanaya* for the complete verse.

Rose Petals

perpetually, hundreds of incidents to show you where you are, what your capacity is, what your preparedness is. Here, there is no mistake. The thing is, we are blind to it, we don't see it. It's not even misjudging, we don't try to judge at all! We don't even consider these things for judgement. We don't allow the case to be tried.

DEVOTEE:

Please give us an example of these small incidents.

GURUJI:

If I start giving examples, it becomes too personal, which I don't like. You have to see them for yourself. They are only small incidents, not big ones, just very small incidents. Here, no effort is needed to enquire who you are – Baba is always showing you who you are and what you are. The only thing is, we don't see it. Try to see what you are! Look into the mirror, you'll see!

DEVOTEE:

Why do we refuse to look in the mirror?

GURUJI:

Because we don't like what we see. We have our own mirror which shows us ourselves so beautifully that we don't want to look into a real mirror.



The Guru as Active Mirror

DEVOTEE:

When you say that Poondi Swami acted as a mirror, what was he reflecting?

GURUJI:

He reflected what he saw in front of him, whether it was your emotion or desire or whatever. Isn't that what a mirror does? Its surface is so smooth, it's as though it doesn't have a surface at all. And a saint is like a mirror. His emotions are so harmonized and refined, it feels as if he doesn't have anything of his own. He is a clear mirror without distortion, and what we see is ourselves.

DEVOTEE:

You stayed there day and night. Did you ever see him when nobody else was there?

GURUJI:

Sometimes there were long gaps when no one else was there.

DEVOTEE:

How was he during those gaps when he was not mirroring anybody?

GURUJI:

The same. Then he was my mirror! When I was alone, I only saw myself there. When others were with him, he reflected them also, along with me.

Rose Petals

DEVOTEE:

Was there any change in Poondi Swami when more people were there?

GURUJI:

So many people looked into the perfect mirror of Poondi Swami, saw themselves, and went away happily. What appears in front of the mirror doesn't affect the quality of the mirror. If a black object appears in front of the mirror, will the mirror take on the blackness, even though it reflects it so well? A perfect mirror won't be affected by it. It can reflect any number of objects. There is no limitation for the mirror.

DEVOTEE:

But you have to be able to see the mirror, also. Will all those people be aware of him as the mirror?

GURUJI:

If you don't see the mirror, there is no question of a Sadguru and disciples. The whole question is about your relation to the mirror. If that's not there, there's no problem. Nothing lost, nothing gained.

DEVOTEE:

What actually changes when we look into the mirror?

GURUJI:

Nothing changes by simply looking into the mirror.

The Guru as Active Mirror

If something is wrong – say, some hair is out of place – then we fix it. When it's corrected, the mirror shows the corrected form. By simply standing before the mirror, will the hair correct itself? What you see in the mirror is yourself as you are.

DEVOTEE:

Are you saying, Guruji, that the mirror is only reflecting our limitations and we have to bring about the changes ourselves?

GURUJI:

It is a limited analogy, and no analogy is perfect. In fact, the Sadguru is a mirror which effects change also, by making you aware of what needs to change and helping you to do it. Because he is a living mirror, not an inanimate mirror. Just imagine a living mirror, then you will understand. He not only shows you the error, he can remove the error.

DEVOTEE:

A magic mirror!

GURUJI:

Mmm. Magic mirror.



DEVOTEE:

You said the guru is an 'active mirror.' I want to ask, what is he mirroring?

Rose Petals

GURUJI:

Your own self.

DEVOTEE:

What does that mean?

GURUJI:

A normal mirror reflects what you are, but an active mirror tries to change you also – that's why I call it 'active'. It's not a passive mirror that simply shows you as you are: if you're ugly – yes, you're ugly. No, it tries to remove your ugliness and make you clean. An ordinary mirror doesn't do that, but an active mirror will do it, it tries to make you better. That's what I mean by 'active mirror'.

DEVOTEE:

Why does it do that? What is its motivation for doing that?

GURUJI:

No motivation. It is simply his sport, his play. When the active mirror is trying to rectify you, in fact he is rectifying himself; from his side it is simply that, because he doesn't see you as separate. He is simply taking care, trying to help. He feels we are all part of him, so from his side he is doing it for himself.

DEVOTEE:

Is it choiceless?

GURUJI:

It's choiceless. Why he loves us is because he feels we are part of him. 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 with you, it becomes a kind of a soliloquy, as though he were speaking to himself. So, sometimes your silent questions are answered, your unspoken thoughts are spoken, and a kind of sympathetic love is triggered. All these things happen because of his oneness with us. He's like an active mirror.

I think I told you once that if I try to see what metaphor I could use when I look at Baba – how his look feels – it is just like that of a mother when she has given birth and she looks at her child for the first time. How would she look at it? Just imagine! For so long the child has been part of the mother's body, it has actually been a part of herself. But now it is separate, another being, but to the mother – at least in her first look of love – it's as though she's looking at her own self. That is the look I see in Baba, and that is how a Sadguru looks at and loves the whole creation, as his own self. For the mother, as she starts treating the child as a separate being, that experience fades, it is only temporary. But to a Sadguru it continues, it doesn't change. It is everlasting.





Tirupati, 2001



chapter seven

Longing with a Sense of Belonging

DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, can prayer be used as an expression of our longing?

GURUJī:

The experience of longing is prayer. Prayer doesn't mean only a formal expression in words. If you are hungry, that is a prayer for food. If you are thirsty, your very experience of thirst is a prayer for water: you're praying. Your love, your longing

Rose Petals

for Baba, is itself a prayer. That longing should be there, as a perpetual, constant prayer. What is that longing? Deep down, it is the sense or the feeling of belonging – I belong to Baba, Baba belongs to me – and experiencing that sense of belonging. Because you are not yet able to experience it fully and concretely, in order to bring it into your tangible experience, there is longing. And as long as you have that keen experience of longing, that is prayer, that is meditation, that is the spiritual quest, that is sadhana. Do you follow what I'm saying?

DEVOTEE:

So once you have that longing and realize you belong to him, then that brings fulfilment – is that what you're saying?

GURUJI:

The experience that Baba belongs to me, and that I belong to Baba.

DEVOTEE:

Does everyone have that longing to some degree?

GURUJI:

Yes, everybody has that longing. And that longing relates to belonging. That is, to 'be longing' is also 'belonging', isn't it? Having that longing is belonging. Because you all feel that you belong to me, you long for satsang, don't you? [Guruji laughs]

Longing with a Sense of Belonging

DEVOTEES:

[In unison] Yes, Guruji! [Laughter]

GURUJI:

What is important is the experience of remembering that sense of belonging-ness: I belong to Baba and Baba belongs to me. That's enough. As long as you remember this, that is real *smarana*, real remembrance.

DEVOTEE:

Is belonging always unconditional?

GURUJI:

Whether it is conditional or unconditional, as long as you remember, it is enough. And I don't understand what you mean by 'unconditional'.

DEVOTEE:

What I meant to say was that most of the time when I have a desire and I ask Baba, if he gives, I feel that sense of belonging for only a moment, for a brief time.

GURUJI:

If you have that sense of belonging-ness, even if he doesn't give, the experience won't go. For instance, you have a child. You very much expect her to pass in first class, but if she doesn't, do you stop loving her? Why do you still love the child? Because she belongs to you! In the same

way, whether Baba fulfils your desire or not, once you have that experience of belonging-ness, everything is done. The whole work – everything – is done. You need not explore anything, you need not learn anything more. That is enough. What we are all trying to achieve here is only this: to realize our sense of belonging-ness.

Even in the case of Bhagavan, if you read his biography, his whole quest actually started with that sense of belonging-ness, his quest for identity. Ramana wrote in the note he left for his family upon leaving home, “I have, in search of my Father and in obedience to his demand, started from here” His quest was for his Father. He felt, “I belong to Him,” so he ran to Arunachala. Just read what he wrote in this perspective and you will see what I am telling you now. It sounds so simple, but it is not so simple. It is that sense of belonging: “I belong to Arunachala, He is my Father, I belong to Him.” At that young age he didn’t know who or what it was; he thought it was Arunachala. So he came here and saw the mountain. At one level he got contentment, but it was not only that, something else was there. Then he started experiencing that, “He is the Father, I am the son, He is the Father, I am the son” – that identity – answering the question of identity. He expressed this question in his own way: “Who am I?” Or, in another sense, we can ask, “Who enquires?”

DEVOTEE:

You mean enquire, "Who is my Father?"

GURUJI:

No, I mean the enquiry, 'who am I?'. It is a question of one's own identity. People experience their identity in different ways. Some may experience it as, "I am atman, I am Brahman, I am *Ishwara*." Others may experience it as Ramana Maharshi experienced it. What was his identity? The son of Arunachala.

Like that, you can experience, "I am the son of Sai Baba. I belong to him, he belongs to me." Because he belongs to you, you want to possess him, you want to experience him and all your expressions become expressions of your so-called 'possessiveness'. It may sound negative, but it is not. You want to possess him – his love, his nature, his bliss.

Again, in another sense, if we quote Ramana, he said it in a different way: "When that identity came to me, I was possessed." He used the Sanskrit word *avesham* [pervasion, suffusion, possession], as if some spirit had possessed him, not negatively, but in a very beautiful way. He was possessed by a greater identity. And that 'possession' by a greater sense of identity transforms us, because the crux of all our thoughts, all our emotions, rests on our identity, this 'I-ness'. Once our identity starts changing and transforming, then all the

other things in our life and all our experiences based on our identity, also start transforming. That is the *mula*, the root. What is the root? Identity. That is why Bhagavan said, “Know who you are. Find out, ‘who am I?’ First know your own identity.” Don’t try to identify yourself, but to know your identity – there is a difference. Unless we lose our present identity we won’t find out our real identity, whatever it is. Bhagavan didn’t say what it is; his experience was one answer, his own. Some other people’s experiences may be different, but it is enough if we know our real identity.



DEVOTEE:

Do love and longing transcend ego?

GURUJI:

Yes, love always transcends ego.

DEVOTEE:

When there is longing it presupposes a duality, of lover and Beloved, doesn’t it?

GURUJI:

Longing is what gives the pull to go beyond duality. Take two persons, a man and woman, who love each other. They each want to possess the other. Actually, duality is present: he is here, she is there, and there is longing between them. But once they

Longing with a Sense of Belonging

are together, when their union takes place, then it becomes, “I am you and you are me, we are not two, we’re united, together.” At that moment, there is no he or she – it is something else.

DEVOTEE:

Can there still be longing in that state?

GURUJI:

There is fulfilment. At that moment, fulfilment. But after fulfilment, again longing can come, because the experience of fulfilment is transitory so long as it is the product of longing based on duality. Without duality, there won’t be the longing to overcome it. So longing helps us to transcend duality, or, as Ramana said, “to use a thorn to remove another thorn.” Bhagavan’s longing was to see and experience Arunachala which brought him the fulfilment of being united with it. That is why, in the last stanza of *Arunachala Ashtakam*, Bhagavan said there are not two.¹ His longing culminated in non-duality.



DEVOTEE:

Could you say then, in a more general way, that

¹ ‘*Eight Verses to Sri Arunachala*’, v.8: “... when the soul finds the way back to its source, it will sink and be merged in Thee, Oh Arunachala, Thou ocean of bliss!” (*Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne, 6e rev., 1996, p.109).

everyone's search for fulfilment is a search for identity?

GURUJI:

Yes, for everyone it is the same. But many people are not aware of it in that way. Their problems are maybe more mundane, so this question of identity won't arise for them. Or, the question of identity may arise in a different way. For instance, they have a desire and they want to get it fulfilled, so they ask Baba. Why should Baba have to fulfil it? So, they want to create a relationship, an identity that "I am his devotee, we have a karmic relationship, I have *rinanubandha* with Baba." It's like asking, "Who am I?" with the answer, "I belong to him!" So the sense of belonging creates a relationship which gives them the means to fulfil their desires. Even here, what they are trying for is a sense of belonging-ness, which again is a quest for identity on a different level, in a different way, with a different scope and intensity. Here also it is the same: we read Baba's life, we do Baba's *nama* repeating "Sai Baba, Sai Baba" – what is all this? Creating the certainty of belonging to him, that identity! "Baba, I say your name so many times, we are familiar with each other. I am intimate with you, I belong to you, so please take care of me and fulfil my desires." The result is the sense of belonging, so here also it is a question of identity.



Longing with a Sense of Belonging

GURUJI:

Only he who comes down to where we are, and frees us here is a real Sadguru.

DEVOTEE:

But why should he come down and help us, doesn't he need some incentive?

GURUJI:

If he is a Sadguru, the incentive is not your qualifications, your sadhana, or your greatness. There is only *rinanubandha*, indebtedness, which binds a guru to you, nothing else. When Baba said it is indebtedness, the debt is on his side, not on our side. We have paid something to him and he has to repay it to us. He said, "If you give me one rupee, I will give you ten." He pays the debt back with interest! So be happy at the receiving end and enjoy it!

The literal translation of the word '*rinanu*' is not exactly 'debt'. There is more of an emotional tone to it, so I translate it as indebtedness, or connectedness or a sense of belonging. He feels that we belong to him, just as we feel Baba belongs to us. He feels, "Yes, they belong to me, they are my people, my children."

DEVOTEE:

So, he has a responsibility for us?

GURUJI:

Yes, he has that responsibility. And his respon-

sibility is shown in his responsiveness, how he responds to your wishes and prayers. To be able to respond, is being 'response-able' (responsible), isn't it? [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, if we sincerely pray to Baba, is that what puts us in the magnetic field of the Sadguru? The longing and praying?

GURUJI:

Yes. But that longing is so abstract. The words are good and they sound beautiful to say, and in poetry it is even better, but in reality, they are so abstract they are not palpable enough. We have to express our longing, so we do things like translating Baba's *Charitra* or having satsang, or drawing a picture of Baba – all these things are expressions of that longing. But we should take care that it really expresses our longing – simply drawing a picture or making a translation is of no use. We should always check whether it's really expressing our emotion and longing.

DEVOTEE:

Is it by questioning ourselves that we get clearer about how to express our longing, and that increases our happiness?

Longing with a Sense of Belonging

GURUJI:

Yes. The happiness and longing increase, and as the longing increases, you become closer to Him. The more you long, the more the 'length' between you and Him decreases [Guruji laughs], that's the beauty of it. The longing is not becoming 'longer' because, as it brings you closer, the sense of separation is less.

DEVOTEE:

But the longing is both sweet and painful, isn't it?

GURUJI:

Yes, both sides are there. It can be painful because of the separation that we feel, but longing also implies an underlying emotion of belonging. As long as that is there, the longing is also thrilling and beautiful. It is wonderful to long with a sense of belonging!





Shirdi, 2009



chapter eight

Education *Kindling the Love of Learning*

Sri Babuji established the Saibaba Central School in 1983, in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh. The school has acquired a reputation for excellence and both its administration and staff continue to implement Guruji's innovative vision for the education of children, which is embodied in the motto he wrote for the school, 'Love of Learning, Learning to Love'.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I have a question about education. What values should we transmit to our children at school and at home?

GURUJI:

The purpose of education is not to indoctrinate children with one's values. It is to make them capable and well-equipped so they can learn how to conduct themselves in the world. For example, how to read, how to write, how to learn, and if they want to know about a particular subject, how to browse and look for it on the web. These things they need to be taught.

I like giving children food for thought. Whether it is Sai Baba or atheism, rationalism or communism, whatever it is, don't indoctrinate or brainwash them. Let everything be their personal discovery. We don't need to infuse them with beliefs. Personally I am opposed to children being given religious education and I didn't do it when I was running the school. In the prayer I wrote for the School there is not even the name of Baba. It is a totally impersonal ideal, not even God. An impersonal principle, a cosmic law that the children pray to, invoking the spirit of enquiry and love. That is what I like.

Inculcate the love of learning in children, give them the ability to think, and don't limit their thinking. Do not tell them who God is. Nobody told me Sai Baba was God when I was studying.

Only later did I become a Sai Baba devotee. Let it come like that, by personal choice and discovery.

Children should be given the kind of environment where they can learn, where they can pursue and form their own values. To me, that is Baba's teaching.

DEVOTEE:

How can we create that kind of learning environment for our children?

GURUJI:

One should have free thinking, free thought. If we teach them all kinds of concepts about God or no-God, what kind of freedom is it? What kind of free thought is it if we brainwash small children? What I would do is, not give them any such concepts! If they have the desire to seek something, they will follow it. In my view, that is free thought.

DEVOTEE:

So should true education encourage children to question?

GURUJI:

Yes, there should be free, all-round development. And it should depend upon the individual. That choice, that freedom, should be given to every child, to every human being, every adult – not only the child. Questioning everything is the correct way. Let children question everything.



GURUJI:

Children should love their school. What makes them love their school? For them, school means teacher, so the teacher should be lovable, not someone with a cane. Once children love their teacher, they'll love education, what the teacher says. If they are afraid of the teacher, they'll be afraid of the school and of what they do there, which means education – they'll have an aversion to education. If they like the teacher everything is solved, so that's the main thing. They should love the teacher, he should be like their hero or heroine. Then discipline and love of learning automatically come. So, at the end of the day, when the school bell rings, how will the children react? If they shout with relief, "Hurrah, it's over!" we have failed.

Children should enjoy school. How many children enjoy their classes? They are simply going to school, studying to get marks, some merit, some rank, then entrance to a good college, or finally, go to the US – that is the dream of Indian youth today. What I am trying to say is, if we make education enjoyable, it doesn't mean we make students incapable of succeeding. They will definitely excel, easily and naturally. Such children will certainly do well in the competitive world outside.

Education – Kindling the Love of Learning



DEVOTEE:

What is the ideal environment to support the love of learning?

GURUJI:

The ideal environment is where the teaching is well-organized but the children are not aware of it. They should feel that they are learning on their own, by their own choice, not because they have to do it. Learning comes only when you want to learn, not when you must learn. If you provide an environment where children feel free to learn, not because they are obliged or forced, then that is the ideal environment. It is a utopian ideal [Guruji laughs] so we have to strike a balance between the ideal and what's practical.



DEVOTEE:

How can we help our children to learn?

GURUJI:

By igniting their love of learning through creating curiosity and a spirit of enquiry in them, an appetite for learning, a hunger for knowledge. If we can kindle this, it is enough: whether we teach them

something or not, the child will learn, anybody will learn. This is the key, the formula. Into this formula fits everything that has been researched and said about teaching: inducing and infusing curiosity. If curiosity is there, observation will naturally come. You can't simply ask children to observe nature. They will observe and think, "Okay, we are observing, so what?" Because that also is merely following an instruction. Observation like this doesn't serve the purpose. First, curiosity should be there. Then observation makes sense and serves the purpose.

What I am saying is, we should infuse the child with a spirit of enquiry. Even when we want him to learn a particular thing, we should begin by asking a question that creates curiosity in the child's mind – like the state of mind of a scientist before he makes a discovery. Especially in the natural sciences and mathematics, where many discoveries have been made, this should be easy to implement. First, motivate the child with questions that make him puzzled about something – his mind should always be puzzled. By posing questions that make the child wonder what the answer would be, interest in the answer is created. Then, when you give the answer, it is like giving food to a hungry person, not simply dumping information he won't take because it's not needed. Why do children have to know when Shakespeare was born? When was the Elizabethan period? When did Queen Victoria reign? Who cares? It's

not their need to know these things. But it's expected of them, so they learn to memorize the answers, what else can they do? You can't completely avoid memorizing when learning because we are part of the total educational structure in India. That we can't change. Students have to write exams and they have to be able to fit into society and compete with other children. So memorization cannot be totally avoided. But we can add something to it, a flavour of interest, to make it more spicy.

It all depends on our ability to create the right mood and situation depending on the maturity and stage of the child. I'm just giving some tips. It can't be applied to all children at every stage in the same way.



GURUJI:

The most critical stage of learning is when children are of pre-school age, because that is the budding stage when you can really inculcate a love of learning in them. This is the decisive time.

I have observed that people are losing their love of learning because their focus is not on learning but on remembering. Observe how children learn, and how we learn also. First, a child identifies and names things, "This is a chair, this is a table, he is so-and-so, this is a house, that is a tree." She learns to recognize objects and speak in her native language, English or Telugu, whatever her mother

tongue may be. A young child learns to speak quite well grammatically, but does she know grammar? Just go to a small child and ask, "Where is your daddy?" "My daddy went to the office," or "He went to Delhi." She uses gender and the past tense correctly – how does she know? Who taught her that grammar? So first we learn to speak by hearing others and then, when further expression is needed, the role of writing comes. But in India we begin with writing, the last stage, so the whole learning process is topsy-turvy.

The most important thing is that learning should be play for children, because learning in itself has no meaning yet for them. The moment they go to school they are taught the English alphabet, the ABC's – why should they learn the ABC's? Actually, it's meaningless! What will a small child of three understand by this?¹ First we need to become aware of what a meaningless thing we are doing. So let's try to make it more meaningful to the child in some relevant way. How? That depends upon the talent of the teacher.

This is why education often fails in creating love of learning and why so many children are becoming averse to education. They don't like going to school, and they don't like their teachers

¹ The context for Guruji's remarks is that formal education in India generally begins with kindergarten classes for children around age three with a strong focus on learning to read and write.

because they make them do things which are meaningless to them. Can we make learning more relevant and meaningful? Let us experiment and explore and try to do it. That is why I say at the beginning we should inculcate a love of learning.

The principle is that the child should not feel he is being taught. Through songs, plays, stories, and so many other ways, he can be taught. To an outsider it may look as though no teaching is being given. “What’s with these games and sports, with this singing and dancing?” But it is through activities like these that the child learns in a natural way. And learning in a natural way I like best.



DEVOTEE:

As a mother, I have a desire for my children to do well in their studies. Is that okay, even if it may not be their wish or desire?

GURUJI:

It was also like that for us when we were children. All parents expect things for their children that the children may not like; it’s the same now as then. Try to see yourself in your child and there will be no problem. It is a good wish, that wish. Children are also individuals, they have their own

Rose Petals

reasons, their own desires. They have their own image of who they are. Try your best to give them what you think is best. The only thing is, we shouldn't get too worried about it.

DEVOTEE:

But can you push?

GURUJI:

Yes, you can push. Because children need help and you can help them. We push because we love. When the mother teaches her child to walk, does she think she's inflicting punishment? The child falters and falls down, sometimes even gets bruised or injured, but still she encourages it. "Come on, go ahead! Come on, walk, walk!" When the child comes nearer, she takes three steps further back and says, "Come, come again!" Then, just when the child is about to catch hold of the parent, she steps back and calls again, "Come, come, come!" The mother is not teasing or punishing the child, or not loving it, it's not that. She wants it to learn something important. It looks as if the parent is going away – testing and teasing – and with you also now it is like that: even though you take three steps forward, the guru may take three steps back, saying, "Come again." He knows what to do.



DEVOTEE:

It is important to me that my children grow up with good morals. What is the best way to inculcate them?

GURUJI:

Morals should be taught as a science. Science means free thinking, questioning, investigating, that is science. You should try to make them investigate and explore moral values. That is the real moral science lesson, not simply telling them, “Don’t tell lies, always respect your elders and teachers.” Talk to them about the value of morality and other human values, and why they are needed.

My liking is for free thought. Tell them about scientists. Tell them not only about the life of Baba or Ramana Maharshi or Vivekananda – tell them about Newton and Einstein. Instil in them the spirit of adventure and discovery. Show them movies about the lives of different saints and scientists and stress one thing – adventure! That should be infused in them. These are moral sciences, not scriptural precepts or commandments.



GURUJI:

Observe how a child grows and becomes an adult. At some stage he simply ceases to enjoy his toys. Because he gets more enjoyment from the real

Rose Petals

world, his toys start being less attractive and give less pleasure, so they slowly drop away. That is how growth occurs. We can't make a flower bloom overnight by simply expanding its petals. We must give it water and manure, sunlight and protection, all the things that help it become a flower. Then the bud grows by itself and matures naturally into a flower.



Education – Kindling the Love of Learning

Sri Babuji's views on education are summed up in the morning prayer he wrote for the Saibaba Central School he founded:

School Pledge and Prayer

*May my mind be always given to the spirit of enquiry
and learning;
I'll never let my eye of reason be blinded
by dry and dead habit and superstitions;
I do not let my mind be subject to narrow and ugly
prejudices
of class, caste, creed, religion and nationality;
I love my country and strive to realize the ideal of being
a world citizen;
I always act towards others, as I desire them to act
toward me;
I do nothing that will bring discredit
on myself, my teachers or my fellow pupils.
May my mind be without fear and my head always
held high;
I will strive at all times to keep my school a lovely and
happy place,
so that all of us may be proud of it.
This is my solemn pledge and soul's prayer.*





Shirdi, 1996



chapter nine

On Belief

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how do we come to believe?

GURUJI:

If you want to believe you will believe. Why is believing a problem? What can you do in daily life without believing? But belief does not need to be blind. We feel that belief or faith is always blind, irrational, unreasonable, unintellectual, but it is not so. In your day-to-day life you believe so many

things; without belief, your life could not proceed. You believe your servants, your wife, your children, your friends. When you deposit money in a bank, you believe it's safe. Before travelling in a car, you have to believe in the car. You believe it's in good condition, the tyres are good, that it's been used lately with no problems. So you decide to use that car and, based on your belief, you proceed. It's a reasonable decision.

When we take a decision with right understanding, belief takes the form of conviction. When belief and conviction are connected with some emotional object, they become faith. When faith and belief are fused with understanding and reason, they become devotion. And when you have devotion and proceed, it becomes an experience.

We believe in so many things, yet we object to believing in God or the Sadguru. In all other matters we feel we are very rational, very reasonable and intelligent. But when it comes to believing in the Sadguru we think, "This is blind, this is irrational, it's unintelligent." Why is this? It's because we think we don't need what the Sadguru gives. If you need something, you will believe, and belief happens rationally, naturally. For instance, when you appoint a servant, you speak with him, you take his references, then you enquire of others, "Do you know him? Do you trust this man?" You put him on probation for some time, then if nothing unsatisfactory happens, you come to believe in him – you even

leave the whole house in his care when you go on vacation. So you believe in a watchman but not in a Sadguru like Sai Baba! What a pity!

Do you believe Neil Armstrong walked on the moon? Did you see him walking there? You saw some photographs, but couldn't they have been faked? Yet we believe these things and take the validity of such events for granted. But when we have an experience with the Sadguru we think, "Ah, maybe it was luck, or coincidence, or maybe this, maybe that"

If you want to doubt, then doubt everything in life and try to know the truth – I can appreciate that. But when you don't doubt any other aspects of your life except your spiritual practice, that is weakness. Try to doubt and question everything – even doubt your own existence – this is what Bhagavan did. He enquired, "Who am I?"

You are not sure who you are, okay, first doubt that. You believe that you are somebody, some name and identity, but it's doubtful. Bhagavan says there is a false ego and a real ego, the real 'I' [atman]. So try to see. First, doubt it – don't believe his statement either. Instead ask, "Who am I?" Then the real enquiry, Self-enquiry, starts. But you don't doubt or question like this at all. You simply believe Bhagavan's statement and go on from there, doing enquiry based on your belief. What is the use of enquiry based on a belief? I am asking you *not* to believe. Doubt, and do something with the doubt: have a real doubt!

Rose Petals

Have a real spirit of enquiry! How many people have that?

As for blind belief, I am the first person to discourage that. My belief is that a human being is a uniquely rational being. So, to be human, one should be rational. If one is not rational, then one is not being human at all. That's a logical conclusion, isn't it? One must be rational. That doesn't mean you can't believe, or that you can't doubt also. Honest doubt is good.

DEVOTEE:

Perpetual doubt is tiring.

GURUJI:

If your doubt is real, you'll find the answer to its removal. In order to invent something or to discover a natural law in physics, we must begin with a hypothesis. First, the scientist has a hypothesis and experiments with it. Only when he knows by experience that his hypothesis is right, does it become a scientific law, not before. What I am asking you is to be scientific. Doubt! And then, on the basis of that doubt, build a hypothesis. Then try to test it by your experience and know the truth, the natural law behind it, as it appears to you. The result is what I call experience.

DEVOTEE:

Sometimes I have doubted even my own existence.

GURUJI:

Have you seriously doubted it? Everyone, at one time or another, doubts their own existence, but their doubts do not continue. If you are really serious, you have to explore it until the mystery is solved – not just out of an idle curiosity. I'm not talking about idle curiosity, but real curiosity coming from a need. For real curiosity, a need must be there. So we return to my original statement, "Try to know what you need!"



DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, is it possible to live without belief?

GURUJI:

It is possible but usually people don't. If I say, "Yes, one can live without a belief," and you believe me, then you'll be living with the belief that people can live without belief! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

But is it desirable to live without beliefs?

GURUJI:

As long as they don't come in the way of your happiness, there's no problem with beliefs.

DEVOTEE:

But sometimes they are limiting and cause unhappiness.

Rose Petals

GURUJI:

They can be limiting but they can also be helpful in going beyond limitations.

DEVOTEE:

There's some belief in our limitations, I suppose.

GURUJI:

It's your belief in your limitation that makes you want to go beyond your limitations. It's actually helping you. Then it's no longer a belief but your experience.

DEVOTEE:

How does a belief in our limitation give us the push to go beyond our limitations?

GURUJI:

If you don't believe in it, you don't try to go beyond it. If you believe, "I'm happy, I'm fulfilled, I have no unhappiness, I'm not bound, I'm a realized soul," – if you believe that, you won't try to go beyond it. But what I'm saying is, your so-called belief in your limitations is not a belief, it's the truth. They're not necessarily beliefs. That is why I always tell you to rely on your experience. Usually I discourage people from accumulating beliefs, but still we have certain innocent beliefs. There's no problem with them.



GURUJI:

Here with me, there is no question of any authority above your own experience. I am not criticizing authority. I'm not saying, "Don't respect authority, don't believe in the scriptures, don't believe in gurus or the teachings." There is no question of any belief, of any faith, because the most authentic thing is your own experience, of sadness or frustration, of your own abstract sense of fulfillment. To know this no scriptures are needed. And when you meet a Sadguru, your spontaneous reaction of love to his expression of love, that is also your experience. You don't need any scripture or other authority to verify it. Even if the whole world tells you not to love that person, you love him. And if you don't feel that love, even if the whole world says, "Love him!", you won't love him. Like that, I'm asking you to take on the authority of your own experience. Take the example of a cell phone. You have a cell phone that starts giving some trouble and needs repair. What do you do? Immediately you ask a friend, "I'm having trouble with my mobile, can you recommend a good repairman?" He says, "Yes, I know a good one. He repaired mine well." Then you ask someone else where he got his repaired. Like this, you collect all the information you can. Then, on the

basis of that evidence, you give your cell phone to the best serviceman. Are you sure he can repair it? He might have repaired a thousand cell phones, but what is the guarantee he can repair yours? What makes you 'surrender' your phone to him? Simply your belief in others' experience. Is it rational or irrational? Without believing the evidence you base your decision on, how can you act in the world? But, finally, what counts is your own experience: whether *your* phone gets fixed or not. Even then, if he fails to fix it you can seek someone else.



GURUJI:

You think that reason and belief are opposed to each other and that someone who is spiritual must have belief. But I don't believe in belief at all. I don't give any importance to belief, or trust and all these things. I never believed in anything in order to gain something spiritually. I never tried to follow a belief; it is something I don't like. I had a sense of benefit, of gain, that was my experience. Where is the question of belief before a direct experience? Believe only to the extent of your experience. That is why I never ask anyone to believe in Sai Baba. Have you heard me say unless you believe in Sai Baba he won't help you? Have I ever said it? If someone said the same thing to me I would say, "How can I believe in him unless he

helps me?" I am only applying the same kind of common-sense reasoning as in the example I gave regarding the cell phone and the repairman. First, you try the best you can. You start with a belief, a reason, even a doubt. You ask, and if help is given, you experience this. Then it's no longer a question of belief, it's your experience!



DEVOTEE:

Sometimes, fears come up in your presence that cause me to hold back. What should I do?

GURUJI:

What happens when you come in contact with me is that even though the fears are there, at the same time you have an anchor. So you have the fear and also the strength, the support. You fear but you need not fear. As Baba's saying goes, "Why fear when I am here?"

DEVOTEE:

Isn't the anchor or sense of security just another belief system?

GURUJI:

If the belief really works as an anchor, you are already being transformed by it. The point is, if what you believe in doesn't give you sufficient security, then there is a problem – you will be

Rose Petals

suffering. It might start with a belief, but after you get some experiences it ceases being merely a belief and becomes an experience. Many people believe in something which they think will give them an anchor and even if it doesn't, they still cling to it.

DEVOTEE:

Yes, because there is fear.

GURUJI:

Then there will be even more fear. Not only the usual fears but also fear of losing the belief. If the so-called belief is really giving security there will be no fear at all. This leads to healthy development of the personality.



DEVOTEE:

Previously you mentioned the subject of merging the personality with the ground of being, and you gave the example of holding onto Baba like a branch, as an anchor. Could you say more about that?

GURUJI:

Your old beliefs and concepts are like the branch on which you're sitting and you are afraid it can break at any moment from being unable to bear the load of all your concepts and problems.

There's no other branch to hold onto and you're afraid another branch could be even weaker. Then something happens. The Sadguru gives you a push that triggers a new outlook and you grab this new branch that seems stronger. You don't know whether it's really stronger or not, but when you hold onto it for awhile and experience it is stronger, then you let go of the old branch. So the Sadguru has to do two things: not only push you to leave the old branch by shattering your concepts and beliefs that are the basis of your present personality and unhappiness, but also, at the experiential level, give you another branch as an anchor. Both have to be done. Otherwise, you become even more insecure. So my main object is to shift you to a stronger branch; in all my satsangs the motive is only that. I'm not interested in whether the old branch is good or bad. It all depends on how strongly you cling to your old branch. If your clinging is strong, then my shattering will be stronger! [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Is everything predetermined or is it just a belief?

GURUJI:

If you have really realized it and it's not just a theory or belief, then you can say everything is predetermined, it is fate. I don't encourage this

because it's nonsense, since you don't experience life like that. You do not know what is predetermined, how it is predetermined, whether it is actually predetermined or post-determined. [Guruji laughs] Only after something happens you may come to know. When you don't have even a single experience of predetermination, how can you claim everything is predetermined? Otherwise, it becomes a doctrine, a dogma, which is not good. So stick to your experience, try to be as scientific as possible. "This is my experience. I don't know if it is predetermined but if it is, I'll come to know."

If you know like Baba what is predetermined, then you can say it. Baba could say it because he was a competent person whose experience qualified him to speak. But we are not, so long as it is not our experience.

"Everything is Brahman, everything is atman, all is Baba," this kind of dry Vedanta, if it's not your experience, is self-deception. Try to stand firmly on your own experience. What you experience is a desire to achieve something, whatever it is, and when you think of Baba and feel connected to him, you experience some happiness. Hold onto that. That is your experience. It doesn't need any explanation, any evidence, any confirmation. It's not based on belief, it's real.

Baba's form is giving me that happiness, it's concrete. I'm depending on my experience, not on a belief or faith, or any doctrine or dogma. That's

why I always try to avoid doctrines and theories.
I want you also to stand firmly on your own
experience.





Bodan, 2000



chapter ten

Reservoir of Grace

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, when we receive Baba's grace we no longer feel helpless but, at the same time, we realize our basic helplessness. Which comes first, grace or helplessness?

GURUJI:

Your helplessness comes first, then the grace. When help is given and you know it has come from him, the whole process is grace. Grace is not a

Rose Petals

thing or substance. The whole process that makes you happy, saved and helped, is called grace.



DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, when we are helped by grace, how do we know it has come from Baba?

GURUJī:

He will make you aware of it, that is Baba's way. He not only gives you something, he also makes you aware he has given it. The experiences with Baba are infallible, unmistakable, and in that respect they are unique. If you ask for something and it is given, somehow or other you'll come to know he has given it. Somebody has an accident, the car rolls over, but he is not hurt. Then, just as he looks up, another vehicle goes by and he sees Baba's photo on the rear window! Then he knows, "I am at your back, I have taken care of you." The car was just passing by, but he saw the photo. Baba makes you aware of it – he's very particular about that! [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

How can we increase our receptivity to grace?

GURUJī:

That's a very tricky question. If you ask how to get

grace I would say, increase your receptivity. How to increase your receptivity to grace means your need has to be so great that the grace will just flood into you. So, it's the need – what is our need? What is our objective? Do we really need it? If you need it, then the need itself makes you receptive. If you are hungry, you are receptive to food. If you are thirsty, you are receptive to water. If you are not thirsty, even if I give you a glass of water, you'll reject it. You don't have the receptivity, the susceptibility to it.

So, receptivity comes out of need. And once receptivity is there, as Baba said, there are cart-loads of grace to take. Grace is always there. It is abundant, it is actually trying to flood into you. If you are receptive, you will get it: Receptivity comes out of your need. And to link these together – receptivity and need, how we get grace and how we assimilate it – for all these things, some knowledge and understanding is needed. That is what I'm trying to give you.



DEVOTEE:

Is there anything we can do to get realization?

GURUJI:

Here again comes the fundamental question: what is the way to get grace? To have the need! We think that we need realization, that we need mukti or

sakshatkar [Self-realization], but, really, we don't need it. If we really needed it, we'd get it. The only criterion for grace is need, because it is *grace*. Grace always works corresponding to need. Otherwise it is not grace, it is thrusting something upon you that you don't need. And, if I thrust something on you that you don't really need, you won't call it grace.

Try to ask yourself again, even at this stage of your seeking: "Do I really need what I'm seeking for? If not, what actually have I been trying for? And what prevents me from obtaining it?" If it is only an intellectual conception of freedom, Self-realization, nirvana or whatever, that has been driving you to do all these things and you really need something else, then fulfill that also, there's nothing wrong in it. Because if you really need something there is no question of not receiving grace.



GURUJI:

I don't say, "Grace is the only way, it's the only path, there's nothing you can do, no effort is needed." No, I don't say that. First, I am saying if you can get fulfilment by your own efforts, then come on, do it! I love it. If you don't get it, or if you are sure you can't get it by yourself, then you have no alternative than to seek grace from someone else. But when you are seeking it, don't think,

“Oh, I don’t want to beg, I want to help myself, not be at someone’s mercy.” You are already at someone’s mercy, so accept that. Or, if you want to help yourself, then help yourself. I like it. I give first preference to that.

This whole question of grace versus effort is solved by one factor: love. If you love something, you don’t have choices or preferences of your own. But, as long as you don’t experience that, it is only theoretical, of course. You can love someone so much that you give up having likings and dislikings of your own. The only solution for overcoming the complexity of human nature is love. Those for whom that love is awakened, who experience it, for them it is easy to overcome their resistances, their preferences, and their inability to accept their own helplessness. In fact, they don’t feel helpless, they feel really helped. And they don’t experience their helplessness as something bad. I have given the example of a small child – is there anyone more helpless than a small child? But she doesn’t know this, she doesn’t realize it, she’s not troubled by it. She experiences the help and love of the parents who take care of her, and she enjoys it, she revels in it. One has to become like that. Then the so-called helplessness is not negative, it becomes so beautiful. As long as somebody is there to help with love, the most beautiful thing in the world is helplessness, isn’t it? Or, if you want to help yourself, you can help yourself, as I told you. It’s good! First, do it.

Rose Petals

DEVOTEE:

But isn't experiencing the beauty of helplessness also the guru's grace, or are some people just that way by nature?

GURUJI:

It is grace. Some may experience it more fully or in a quicker way. Others resist it because of the strong hold of their past patterns. Love can melt the hardness of these patterns, but they don't want to be melted, they don't want to acknowledge love at all. They resist it.



DEVOTEE:

I was reading that Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi said that grace is always flowing and that the Sadguru can direct the grace.

GURUJI:

There is no discrepancy between the statements. Grace is always there and the Sadguru can direct it in a particular way, so it's also personal. What Bhagavan wanted to say is, it's not some kind of 'impersonal grace'. It's not simply that grace is everywhere and it's your headache whether you get it or not. [Laughter] It's not like that. Grace is everywhere but if you're not able to experience it, a guru can help you to feel it. Not that he creates grace for that purpose, rather he makes you expe-

rience and enjoy the grace that is already there, always, everywhere.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, could you explain what you mean by grace being personal?

GURUJI:

There are so many ways. See, now, such a beautiful sea breeze is blowing. I have come here for the sake of the breeze, but for twenty-four hours, I stay in my room. Only for these few minutes I come out on the terrace to enjoy the breeze, and if you are sitting where you feel the breeze, you might say, "Oh, Guruji, the breeze is coming from this direction, please come and sit here!" Then you are acting like a guru, helping me to experience the breeze by sitting there, that's all. I came following your direction, but the breeze was already there.

DEVOTEE:

So it is true to say that grace is always flowing.

GURUJI:

Yes, it is always flowing.

DEVOTEE:

Is it also true to say we are not in the right state or position to receive this grace?

Rose Petals

GURUJI:

That is also true. Then the guru's role is to direct grace, his personal grace, to help you experience the all-pervading grace.



DEVOTEE:

Does love for the Sadguru come from grace or can we make it happen?

GURUJI:

Your effort is needed when something obstructs your experience of the love that is being given you. Your effort to remove the obstruction will help you experience the love more. When you're not hungry and have no appetite, even if a rich meal is served to you, you won't relish it. It's just like that. And, sometimes, when you have an appetite and are very hungry, you don't get food. Then you also suffer.

DEVOTEE:

So how to take those obstructions away? Is it done through our own efforts or by grace of the Sadguru?

GURUJI:

Both are there.

DEVOTEE:

When there's an obstruction to receiving grace, how should we try to remove it?

GURUJI:

It depends on the individual, because everyone needs to experience grace in a particular way. Depending on this, you have to act in the way that fulfils your need. Everybody has their own way, there's no common rule. If I say, "One has to do this," it may not apply to another person.

DEVOTEE:

But, Guruji, in those moments when I feel presence the strongest, it feels like it's presence itself that's carrying me to continue experiencing it.

GURUJI:

That is my point: presence is always doing this, but you only feel it strongly at certain moments. If you try to remove the obstacles to it, you'll always be carried by presence, because presence is always there, carrying you. But because you feel your own weight so much, you don't feel you're being carried. The moment the burden of your patterns is lessened, you'll feel lighter, like you're being carried.



Rose Petals

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, would you please say more about grace?

GURUJI:

When you are trying to concretize your sense of fulfilment, and you have tried and tried and all your efforts have failed, then when help is given which is not connected to your efforts or merits, that is grace – something given in love, not as a charity.

DEVOTEE:

By the Sadguru?

GURUJI:

Whoever gives it is a Sadguru. [Guruji smiles]



DEVOTEE:

You said we 'draw' grace. Do we draw it to ourselves by prayer, by calling on Baba?

GURUJI:

'Draw' doesn't mean that it is hidden somewhere – it is always there knocking at your door. 'Drawing' means opening the door, that's all. The power is already connected to the fan. By switching on the fan, you connect it to the power, but the power is always there.

DEVOTEE:

So, in other words, it comes down to our willingness or openness to receive? Is that the key?

GURUJI:

Yes, your openness to receive. And your openness again depends upon your need. The fan may be ready, but now it is so cool we don't need it, so we don't switch it on. So simple. [Guruji laughs] But it is ready to be switched on, to cool us at any time. Grace is like that – it has no power failures. [Laughter] There is an unbounded reservoir of grace.





Sbirdi, 2008



chapter eleven

The Guru Principle

DEVOTEE:

Are we always connected to the Sadguru even if we don't know it?

GURUJI:

You are connected even before you actually meet him. For you the meeting point is when you physically see him, but for him the meeting point is far, far, far before, a time you've never thought of or even imagined. And all the circumstances in

your life have simply led you to this first meeting. In that way he has already been working on you. This is why sometimes, when someone prostrated for the first time to Baba and was introduced as so-and-so, Baba would say, "Arre! Listen to me. I have known him for the last ninety births. You need not introduce him. I know him, I brought him here!" – like that he used to speak. Once, when Shama¹ accompanied Professor Narke² to the Masjid and introduced him for the first time to Baba, Baba replied, "You introduce him to me? I have known him for thirty generations!"

DEVOTEE:

Does that mean before Sai Baba took his present birth he was taking care of them?

GURUJI:

In another form. He would have been working in another form.

DEVOTEE:

So, afterwards as well, when he is not in his body, he is working on us?

GURUJI:

The principle working through Sai Baba is the

¹ Madhava Rao Deshpande, alias Shama, an old and close devotee of Sri Sai Baba.

² Professor G. G. Narke from Poona, an eminent devotee of Sri Sai Baba.

same, and he may be working through different forms also. Baba said, "I am one among the forms. To those whom I am karmically related, to their needs I will cater."

For instance, a cell in the body is disturbed – let us say it is itchy – it needs help. Another cell in the body will then cater to its needs. And if something else is needed elsewhere, another part of the body will cater to it. It's not that Sai Baba is the only person catering to all the millions. It's the principle working through Sai Baba that is catering to all these people.



DEVOTEE:

Am I right in thinking that you said Baba does not reincarnate?

GURUJI:

Yes.

DEVOTEE:

Then what about his saying he'll reincarnate again and again as long as devotees need him?

GURUJI:

That is not reincarnation, but incarnation. There's a lot of difference between reincarnation and incarnation.

Rose Petals

DEVOTEE:

Could you say how they differ?

GURUJI:

If you think that Baba is an incarnation of the Guru Principle, then according to the needs of the devotees and the times, the Guru Principle will take different forms. Reincarnation means – Sai Baba passed away here and his soul will go and take another body and then he'll come back again. In that case, that person, the limited person whom we now call Sai Baba, is taking birth in different forms. That is reincarnation.

Incarnation is when the teaching principle assumes a certain form to cater to the needs of devotees. If you think of such an incarnation – if at all you want to call it that – as the Guru Principle catering to all devotees' needs, then as times change, it may assume different forms. If we accept this, then we have to accept that all the Sadgurus who came before Sai Baba were also incarnations of the same principle.

DEVOTEE:

Who would be other examples of the Guru Principle?

GURUJI:

Kabir was considered an incarnation of god, according to the *Kabir Panth*.

DEVOTEE:

Wouldn't Buddha and Christ also be other incarnations of the Guru Principle?

GURUJI:

Yes, it's like that.

DEVOTEE:

You said if we accept that Sai Baba is an example of the Guru Principle, then we have to accept there were others before him. But wouldn't there be limits to those who were true incarnations of the Guru Principle?

GURUJI:

Yes, but there were many. I only said, there would have been many.

DEVOTEE:

But not all?

GURUJI:

That we do not know. Whether this one or that one was an incarnation or not, we do not know because concepts differ from religion to religion. Anyhow, the saints of the past may not serve present needs. Maybe, after a hundred or two hundred years, some people may think Sai Baba no longer caters to their needs and some other form may appear. Because needs change, the times change,

and the ways in which our needs are expressed change, so the Guru Principle takes another form to fulfil them. For example, an elementary school teacher caters to the needs of children at an elementary level. Compared to the postgraduate level, an elementary school teacher is not a teacher. But what I am saying is, right from the elementary to the postgraduate level, each teacher represents the same teaching principle, catering to different needs. That is what I call the Guru Principle.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, does everyone have a Sadguru?

GURUJI:

Yes, they do. But the Sadguru has his own ways and means when to make them aware that his particular form is the Sadguru for them. Not that we choose, that we are aware of the Sadguru; the Sadguru's influence is already there, even when we are not aware of it.

DEVOTEE:

So no human being in this world is left without some kind of true spiritual guidance should he or she sincerely seek it? I mean, not just a form of god, but a specific spiritual entity who is potentially responsible for that person?

GURUJI:

Actually, they don't exist like 'entities' that have a relative existence. Rather, it is the power of fulfilment embedded in life itself. That principle is manifested when the right time comes, in one form or another. But it is the principle. When I speak about the Sadguru, what I am talking about is that principle. Take physics, for instance. All of nature is comprised of positive and negative pulls and everything contains something – the neutron, the electron, the positron and so on – and the electron is always pulled towards the centre, to become one with the nucleus. That principle of fulfilment, which doesn't make you depend on any other means of fulfilment, is what I call the Sadguru. That force is there in every being, because every being craves fulfilment. It is embedded in life so naturally it is part of life itself, almost biologically. As long as it is there, when the time comes, that principle itself will take the form of one Sadguru or another.

We usually think it is due to the Sadguru that we become aware of the possibility of spiritual experience. But the fact is, because we are already ready and susceptible to having the experience, that is why we are getting it. Why are all the other people who live around me not aware of it as you are? Because of that principle: when one is ready for it, when the longing becomes sufficient, then it relates itself to a particular form that appears, and then you go to him or her. There, gradually,

all your other pulls become submerged in that particular pull. When I say that everybody has a Sadguru, what I am talking about is this principle of everyone's desire, the longing, the innate urge to get that fulfilment which is not dependent on any other means by which we are accustomed to getting it. Everybody wants that ultimate fulfilment but they can't get it, so they go on seeking by more and more means, accumulating means, mistaking the means for the fulfilment. But still the longing is there. Some people may not be aware of it intellectually, but that principle of trying to transcend this dependence, this helplessness, remains. That force, and the concrete form of the power or principle that fulfils it, I call the Sadguru.



DEVOTEE:

What we are really searching for is a fulfilment that does not depend on outer objects, that is, an independent fulfilment. But isn't relying on the Sadguru for fulfilment another dependency?

GURUJI:

Yes. First it starts as a dependency, but that dependency will make you so independent that you come not to depend upon anything. And if you depend upon the Sadguru, the principle of the Sadguru, if you really depend upon it – not as you think you are now – but when you really depend

upon it, then you will realize that you're not dependent at all, that is the paradox.

DEVOTEE:

How does that happen, Guruji?

GURUJI:

If you depend! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

Dependency implies a dichotomy, a separation of one thing from another. Yet, what you're saying is, once this true dependence comes, there is no longer dependency.

GURUJI:

Yes, when you actually experience it, you realize it is not dependence. First, it starts as a kind of dependence, but, as it continues, it deepens. Before, the dependency was a negative experience, because it felt like a need, which is something we lack. But this dependency becomes such that its very experience gives fulfilment, because it is no longer a dependency based on need. There are no other words for it, so I say 'dependency'. I try to avoid calling it 'surrender', 'submission' or 'dependency', because these words in our ordinary experience have a negative connotation. But when it comes to this kind of dependency it is different, even though we use the same word for it, because there are no other words that express it better.



DEVOTEE:

But are we dependent on a principle or a human being? Because you were talking about a principle which then takes a form.

GURUJI:

If it takes a form and it's the form which makes the principle more concrete, then it appears that we are depending on the form also. Yes.

DEVOTEE:

Because to me, I feel I'm dependent only on the form, not the principle. How can I depend on a principle? It's so abstract, the principle.

GURUJI:

Then the concrete will take you to the abstract. Because whatever you think, the form stands for the principle. So it will make you realize the principle.

DEVOTEE:

But, Guruji, why should I want to realize the principle if I've got the form?

GURUJI:

No, you need not. Not that you want to realize it – the form wants you to realize it! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

But why, Guruji, why? Why do we have to go from the concrete to the abstract?

GURUJI:

Because He's nothing, nothing but that principle.



DEVOTEE:

Would you please say more about the Guru Principle? What are its qualities?

GURUJI:

Love – a love that always wants all other people to love and feel love, so there's no experience of dependency, no dichotomy, no difference anywhere. Not only that the form [of the Sadguru] experiences the whole creation as part of himself, but he wants the other parts of it also to have the same experience of love that he experiences.



DEVOTEE:

So, it is love for this principle we sense inside ourselves and our need for fulfilment that create the Sadguru?

GURUJI:

Yes, what I call love *is* this principle. Actually, to

explain in another way why you are here, I see it is simply because of this love, no other thing. There are no other attractions around me which could make you happy, in fact, there are many things which could make you unhappy. [Laughter] It is not so titillating to your ego, it is always so upsetting, so offending. There are no promises, no assurances, no reassurances. But that experience of “Yes, we are happy here” – even though sometimes you may not be happy – still you cannot find anywhere else where you’re happier. Like this, there has to be one experience where you feel, “There is no other way for me, this is my way to fulfilment, I can’t see any other way.” This is the starting point in spiritual life. It is what the Veda also says, *nanyah pantha* – there is no other *pantha*, no other way [to liberation].³ When someone comes to that state, that decision, then his spiritual journey begins. And that awareness, that realization, is an expression of love. He is bound to that *pantha*, that path, to that means or whatever you want to call it, by love.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, isn’t that part of a verse from the *Purusha Suktam* of the Rig Veda?

³ Part of a verse from *Purusha Suktam* (20) that praises vision of the *Satpurusha* (Supreme Person) as the only means of Self-realization and release. It implies necessity of the Sadguru in whom the *Satpurusha* is embodied. For the complete verse see the Glossary under *nanyah pantha vidyate’yanaya*.

GURUJI:

“Nanyah pantha vidyate’yanaya”. Yes, it is from the *Purusha Suktam*.

DEVOTEE:

Didn’t the rishis believe that there was no other way than seeing the *Satpurusha*⁴ revealed in the Vedas?

GURUJI:

Yes, that was their experience, they saw it like that. Whether ancient or modern, the mind is the same, the sense of fulfilment is the same, the desire is the same, the suffering is the same – and how we experience it is the same.



DEVOTEE:

For Baba, also, are things endlessly unfolding?

GURUJI:

Yes, definitely, endlessly unfolding. He is not a static person – I don’t see him like that at all. He is so paradoxical. If you say he is perfect, that there is nothing further for him, I don’t agree with that. He is so perfect that he is infinitely growing, and growing and growing, there is no end to it. What

⁴ The *Satpurusha* (or *Virat Purusha*) is the personification of Spirit in the Vedas. See further in the Glossary.

Rose Petals

we see is that element of growth, that principle of growth, of continuous unfoldment, that is so much more beautiful. I don't see him as a plucked flower, he's a flower on the tree. [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

So he embodies that principle?

GURUJI:

He embodies that principle.

DEVOTEE:

And nothing is ever complete.

GURUJI:

Nothing is ever complete. But every time it feels like it is complete it goes on completing itself, the Complete trying to complete itself. That is the beauty of the principle.

DEVOTEE:

Isn't all life trying to do that? To complete itself?

GURUJI:

Yes. Unless we understand this principle and the aesthetics of *rasa*⁵ – the beauty of the Complete trying to complete itself – then we can't under-

⁵ *Rasa* (Skt. juice, joy, essence, delight); the principle of Self-delight inherent in Brahman and a central concept of Indian Aesthetics. See further under *rasa* in the Glossary.

stand many of the scriptures also. Everything begins and ends here: “Brahman is perfect, the whole universe is manifested from Brahman.” But why did it manifest? The scriptures say, “Maya (illusion), or *avidya* (ignorance).” But how did that maya manifest? They say, “Brahman manifested the whole world from himself.” But why does he have to manifest anything? Doesn’t he have anything better to do? [Laughter] If Brahman is really perfect, complete, fulfilled, satisfied, why should he manifest himself in so many forms? Where is the need for him to do that? Or, if you say it was not Brahman, it was something else, maya, where does this maya come from, if Brahman is everywhere complete? Or, if Brahman is not complete, then he is only finite and not perfect. So these problems will persist unless you understand the principle of *rasa* – that Brahman not only exists, but exists to create more existence, to create more and more beauty, to enjoy himself more and more, simply because it is his joy to create and fulfil himself, it is his Self-delight in his own nature, his *rasa*. Not that he is incomplete, nor finite, nor imperfect, but rather he is the Perfect experiencing and enjoying his own perfection, creating playfully out of delight in his own nature. It is a very, very subtle concept, this principle of *rasa*, and the Sadguru embodies it.





Tiiruvannamalai, 2009



chapter twelve

Transformation *The Concretization Process*

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what do you mean by 'concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment'?

GURUJI:

You all have an abstract sense of what you want. People have different names for it – love, freedom, happiness, God, guru, security – whatever. Not everyone will relate to the same concept of happiness, but it all boils down to one thing: fulfilment. That is why I use the word fulfilment. For most people their sense of fulfilment is abstract and

they try to experience it in many ways: by getting a good job or promotion at work, trying to find the right partner or having good health. They think by getting these things they'll be fulfilled; each is a way of concretizing their abstract sense of fulfilment. But the more you try and try, the more you realize that it is not through these things that you really get fulfilment – there is something else. And then, when you happen to meet a Sadguru like Sai Baba, you experience with him that your sense of fulfilment becomes concretized, without any of your familiar means. You feel taken care of, there's a sense of security. Before, you felt secure if you had one lakh rupees in the bank. But now, even with no bank account and no money, with nothing that concretely gives you security, and with no promise of it, still just by looking at the Sadguru something tells you he's going to take care of you. The mind inexplicably and ineffably feels a sense of peace, happiness and security. Because of that experience, the mind is attracted to that form and becomes charmed by it.



GURUJI:

First we think our contentment lies in material fulfilment – a job, money, a good position, success – these kinds of things. So even if I tell people these are not the source, they won't listen. So, first, Baba has to give material fulfilment, so he gives

that. Once we've got it, we realize that in spite of all this so-called success and fulfilment, we are still unsatisfied and something is still lacking, but we don't know what it is. Our mind doesn't know, we can't define it. Then we start thinking, and somebody tells us about Vedanta. We read spiritual books and these things, and get ready-made answers. But instead of getting contentment, first we get contentions! [Guruji laughs] We think, "I am atman, I want realization, I want nirvana," but we don't know what nirvana actually means – it's just an abstract term that represents in a vague sense what we are lacking, it gives only a vague idea of what we need. Because it is on a purely conceptual level, it remains very, very abstract. Then, when you come in contact with a Sadguru like Sai Baba, without any other reason, simply by looking at him and being in his presence, you experience something ineffable. You can't describe what it is, but you feel a kind of contentment, a happiness which is not based on any material thing. For instance, now you are all sitting here. What kind of material comfort do you have? It's midnight, with a cold wind blowing, and most of you went on *giri pradakshina* early this morning and have been busy the whole day. In fact, now it's torture [Guruji laughs], but there is no expression of torture on your faces.

Such contentment is not based on any of our known sources of happiness. Something triggers your heart and makes you happy. We feel a sense

of security, a sense that here we're getting what we want, that Baba will take care, that he is here for us. Usually our contentment is disturbed by fears and a sense of insecurity. Some fears are reasonable and some unreasonable, but whether reasonable or not, we are disturbed by them. And the first thing we experience in the Sadguru's presence is that the sense of insecurity is not there. We feel, "Yes, Baba is here, he will take care of me, he knows what I need!" We may not have experienced his help yet, but still, inexplicably, we feel that way. And where you experience that fulfilment, that sense of security, there is the form of the true guru, the Sadguru. Actually, what is the Sadguru? He is only the outward representation of your own inner sense of fulfilment.

You have a concept of fulfilment, a vague idea of what it is. You do not know yet exactly, but you have a taste of it. And once you get that taste, you want to taste it more and more, and by tasting it, you realize and experience it more and more, whatever it is. And what you are realizing, what you are experiencing, is your own so-called fulfilment, a contentment free of fear without any sense of something missing, where there is nothing lacking and we have everything we need, and more.



DEVOTEE:

Is there a purpose to our incarnation?

Transformation – The Concretization Process

GURUJI:

There is, but you are not clear about it because it is so abstract. That is what I call your abstract sense of fulfilment. Or you can call it an abstract sense of purpose or meaning, no problem.

DEVOTEE:

So, the purpose is to find our fulfilment?

GURUJI:

I think it is. If somebody thinks it is something else and they want to express it in another way, no problem. To me 'fulfilment' is a word which expresses the general idea. For instance, when somebody wants to learn a language or gain some other knowledge, they say it's the purpose of their life and by getting it they will be fulfilled. Whether it's knowledge or an experience or money or whatever it may be, the end result is fulfilment. They are talking about the means and I am talking about the end, in any case, it's fulfilment. But I don't have any objection if somebody wants to use another word for it; after all, it's only jargon. And, as you know, I don't stick to my own jargon. [Guruji laughs] Why? Because it's only jargon.



GURUJI:

You might think you have fulfilment, but actually you do not experience it. For example, suppose

someone has deposited one lakh rupees in your bank account, but you don't have a cheque book and can't withdraw it. Do you think you are rich or poor? You are rich, but you need your cheque book to concretize it. The fact that there's one lakh rupees in your account is the abstract thing. In order to concretize it you have to draw it. This drawing process or mechanism is what I call 'concretization'. Some people may say, "You already have that ananda, you are already That." Yes, okay, that is what I'm saying too: it is your own abstract sense of fulfilment. The whole problem is, it is abstract. And our whole life is a process of trying to concretize what's abstract in us. It is true that you are not getting anything new from outside. Something is already there inside you but you do not know what its nature is, so you can't enjoy it. And the very fact that you have it and can't enjoy it makes it more painful, the frustration is even worse.

So if we understand this mechanism of abstract and concrete, then almost all the questions are answered – how you relate to yourself, to your life, to your so-called worldly and spiritual life, the need for a Sadguru, and what happens on the path – everything becomes clear. Then what you do becomes meaningful, and at least you can check yourself and verify, "Am I going on the right path, are all the things I'm doing really concretizing my abstract sense of fulfilment, or not?"



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, do we all have our own concepts of happiness?

GURUJI:

Yes, they are what I call your 'abstract sense of fulfilment'. And everything we do is always connected to our abstract sense of fulfilment. We are trying – everybody is trying – to concretize it, each in their own way, through money, politics, relationships, house, property, business, everything! What are all these things? They are only our own ways of trying to concretize our ideas of happiness. And this [the path of Sai] is also one way to concretize it. People who have tasted a little bit of this happiness, not fully, but just tasted the fringes of it, or had glimpses of it, they feel, "Oh, this is so beautiful, so wonderful, let's try to concretize it further." But other pulls, other concepts, are also there, and those patterns won't leave us so easily; they put limitations on our attempts to achieve happiness.

Theoretically, we agree that Baba's treasure house has real happiness, but we only accept this theoretically, we don't really accept it. We think, "Baba says it's in his treasury, but I don't think so. There are other things which also give us happiness, so let's try to get this from Baba, but meanwhile, let's get what we can from the world too. We should have a balanced life – Baba is good, the world is good, relationships are good,

business is good, money is good.” Each thing is giving you five percent, ten percent happiness, and all together they give you sixty percent happiness. [Guruji laughs] Good! That is how man lives.

DEVOTEE:

What about the remaining forty percent? Where is that?

GURUJI:

It's unrealized – we can't get it! That remaining forty percent is the 'something missing' that drives us to ask ourselves how to get full happiness, one hundred percent happiness. Then we come to a Sadguru where we get a glimpse of that, without depending on any other means, we can get a hundred percent happiness. Because all the other means have an inherent dependency in them, but here that dependency is less. Without any reason, without doing anything, without any obvious practice, our mind is happy, calm, composed, satisfied – inside, there is full satisfaction. Where is it coming from? It is something unfamiliar. Then we start from there, where we have the possibility of getting one hundred percent. Why we can't get that hundred percent is because each of our other pulls exercises a contrary effect on our getting it. For instance, suppose somebody wants to do business, but he also wants a family, a relationship, all these things. He wants to have

more and earn more, but his wife will object, “Why are you always going away on business? Spend more time at home!” So there is a clash. How can he balance it? He can’t get one hundred percent happiness in the family, because if he stays at home, he can’t make money. But if he only wants money, he loses the family. What, then? So he tries to balance it. Balance means compromise – forty percent here, sixty percent there, or sixty-forty – like this, percentages will come. Like that, there are hundreds of pulls in us, I’m only giving some examples. There are hundreds of pulls in the mind and body, and they pull us in different directions. Finally, one finds where there is only one pull that is not dependent upon any other, and which can give us one hundred percent happiness. Then we start from there.

DEVOTEE:

Start from where?

GURUJI:

With the Sadguru. Baba himself experienced this. That is why he says his treasury can give one hundred percent. But we don’t see that. “Are you saying so?” we ask, and then out of respect we say, “Okay, I accept it, if Baba said so, it means it’s okay.” But, really, we don’t accept it.



GURUJI:

What usually happens is that when we have a desire for something, whether it be home, children or whatever, what we want is not the object itself, but the happiness that comes from the object – that is its abstract sense in you. And when you try to catch hold of it, what you are doing is trying to materialize it. If you apply this to spiritual matters it becomes even more subtle and complex.

For example, start with this: “I want a cup of coffee.” What happens is, there is an abstract sense of satisfaction that we feel can be fulfilled by drinking coffee. So coffee triggers that abstract sense and makes it more concrete. But in this case our experience of satisfaction is on the surface. At its basis is a deeper sense of frustration, a dissatisfaction, a sense of unfulfilment. And in order to concretize the fulfilment which is missing at the base of all these things, some people enter the spiritual path. And if, at that level, the experience of unconditional love is what you feel you need to be fulfilled, then you seek an object which can give you that experience. Because, even though we have the need to express and feel love, some object must be there to trigger it, to elicit it. We search here and there for such an object, and when we find one which triggers the spontaneous flow of our love, then we express our love to it. That is the concretization process: that object, person, image, or whatever you call it, is the concrete representation of your abstract sense of fulfilment, of your own unfulfilled love.



GURUJI:

Sai Baba says, “I give my devotees what they ask for until they ask for what I want to give.” He never said what he wanted to give. People come with all kinds of desires, there is nothing higher or lower, nothing superior or inferior. Each is at his own level and Baba has to come down and fulfil them, then he takes them by their hand and guides them to his level. Not that he’ll be sitting at the top asking us, “Come up! If you come up to me, I will show you the whole mountain.” No, Baba comes down to us. For example, when your child doesn’t want to go to school and says, “I don’t want to go!” you say, “No, you should go,” because you want her to be educated. Then she says, “I want some chocolates,” and you give her some chocolates, telling her, “If you go to school, you can have more chocolates.” So she takes the chocolates and goes to school. You are giving them in order to make her go to school. Like the child, we want so many things – a profession, a promotion, some kind of success – these are the chocolates. And, like a mother, Baba gives them. It may not be his wish and he knows something higher, but we are not ready for that. At our level now we want this – a child wants her toys. We know that playing with toys is an illusion, that it shows the child’s immaturity. But do we tell the child, “Oh, these toys are unreal, why are you playing with toys?”

Rose Petals

You have to grow up and stop playing with toys!" No, what we do is give her more toys as a gesture of our love. And then, when the right age comes, automatically she'll stop playing with her toys and ask for other things. But for now, playing with toys is concretizing her abstract sense of fulfilment. So you have to give her toys, even though you know ultimately they are not her fulfilment.

And the one who caters to all the needs of people and tries to answer and fulfil them, each at their own level, he is a Sadguru.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, before coming to India my devotion was to God with no form, but since coming here my devotion has taken a form.

GURUJI:

As long as you are in a form, the abstract also has to take a form to be concrete, to be experienced. We think we express our devotion *to* a form, but actually we are expressing it *through* a form. Take the example of a window I gave you the other day. The sky is formless, without attributes, but when you look at it through a window it appears in the shape of the window. When you are within the four walls of the different conditionings of your personality, and are not able to see the so-called formless God outside, then you need a window to

see the sky. But when you look at the sky through a window, are you looking at the window or the sky? We think we are looking at the window, but in fact we are looking through the window to the sky. And the Sadguru's form is like the window. It may appear I am looking at the five-and-a-half-foot form of Sai Baba, but when I look at him, he acts like a window and my sight is always directed to the so-called divine.



Appendix of Sources

Abbreviation:

s – Satsang (English)

Chapter 1 Satsang – In the Company of Truth

1	s113	26 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s32	21 February	1998	Chitrakoot
3	s32	21 February	1998	Chitrakoot
4	s97	16 October	2004	Chennai
5	s005	March	1994	Tiruvannamalai
6	s005	March	1994	Tiruvannamalai
7	s130	28 November	2007	Rishikesh
8	s136	29 January	2010	Chennai
9	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
10	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai
11	s113	26 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai
12	s135	25 December	2009	Rishikesh

Chapter 2 Hollow Man, Stuffed Man

1	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
	s92	2 April	2004	Chennai
2	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
3	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
4	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
5	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
6	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
7	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi

Chapter 3 Give the Reins to Baba

1	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
2	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi

Rose Petals

3	s97	16 October	2004	Chennai
4	s55	19 January	2002	Chennai
5	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
6	s90	13 February	2004	Tiruvannamalai
7	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
8	s80	25 August	2003	Chennai
9	s4	15 March	1997	Shirdi
10	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi

Chapter 4 Journey to the Source

1	s117	10 November	2006	Varanasi, on boat
2	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
3	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
4	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
5	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
6	s119	24 November	2006	Uttarkashi

Chapter 5 Udi – Symbol of Baba's Grace

1	s28	18 January	1998	Shirdi
2	s90	13 February	2004	Tiruvannamalai
3	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
4	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
5	s67	18 January	2003	Chennai
6	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
7	s39	24 April	1998	Tiruvannamalai
8	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 6 The Guru as Active Mirror

1	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s137	9 March	2010	Chennai
3	s33	24 February	1998	Ganga-Kaveri train
4	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
5	s35	15 March	1998	Tiruvannamalai
6	s52	15 October	2001	Tiruvannamalai
	s32	21 February	1998	Chitrakoot

Chapter 7 Longing with a Sense of Belonging

1	s98	11 November	2004	Tiruvannamalai
2	s80	25 August	2003	Chennai
3	s102	25 December	2004	Chennai
4	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
	s114	7 December	2005	Tiruvannamalai
	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
5	s132	18 November	2009	Rishikesh

Chapter 8 Education – Kindling the Love of Learning

1	s128	26 November	2007	Rishikesh
	s94	19 July	2004	Chennai
2	s94	19 July	2004	Chennai
	s101	11 December	2004	Tiruvannamalai
3	s94	19 July	2004	Chennai
4	s101	11 December	2004	Tiruvannamalai
	s94	19 July	2004	Chennai
5	s94	19 July	2004	Chennai
	s101	11 December	2004	Tiruvannamalai
	s90	13 February	2004	Tiruvannamalai
6	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
	s66	29 December	2002	Chennai
7	s94	19 July	2004	Chennai
8	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
9	Sai Baba Central School Pledge and Prayer			

Chapter 9 On Belief

1	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
2	s135	25 December	2009	Rishikesh
3	s3	12 March	1997	Shirdi
4	s14	11 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
5	s27	17 January	1998	Shirdi

Rose Petals

6	s27	17 January	1998	Shirdi
7	s124	17 November	2007	Pipalkote

Chapter 10 Reservoir of Grace

1	s125	18 November	2007	Pipalkote
2	s125	18 November	2007	Pipalkote
3	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
4	s4	15 March	1997	Shirdi
5	s56	29 January	2002	Chennai
6	s82	30 September	2003	Chennai
7	s73	22 May	2003	Chennai
8	s36	16 April	1998	Tiruvannamalai
9	s125	18 November	2007	Pipalkote

Chapter 11 The Guru Principle

1	s30	31 January	1998	Rishikesh
2	s41B	18 May	1998	Shirdi
3	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
4	s87	12 January	2004	Chennai
5	s87	12 January	2004	Chennai
6	s87	12 January	2004	Chennai
7	s68	1 February	2003	Chennai
8	s113	26 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 12 Transformation – The Concretization Process

1	s78	8 July	2003	Chennai
2	s98	11 November	2004	Tiruvannamalai
3	s55	19 January	2002	Chennai
4	s5	30 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
5	s107	23 May	2005	Tiruvannamalai
6	s6	31 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
7	s6	31 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
8	s3	12 March	1997	Shirdi

Glossary

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

abhishekam – ‘sprinkling’; ritual bathing of a deity or saintly person as an act of consecration and worship.

ajagarabhava – ‘python-state’; yogic term for rare state of blissful absorption so profound it obviates need for external movement, enabling the adept to remain motionless for long periods without food or water, like a python.

Ammagaru – Telugu; respected mother.

ananda – bliss, joy; an inherent quality of Absolute Being according to Vedanta.

Arunachala – the holy mountain in Tiruvannamalai, in Tamil Nadu, South India, traditionally believed to be a manifest form of Siva and the historical abode of numerous saints and sages. It is where Sri Ramana Maharshi spent the last 54 years of his life.

Arunachala Ashtakam – name of a poem in eight stanzas (*ashtakam*) by Sri Ramana Maharshi in praise of Arunachala.

Arunachaleswar Temple – the great temple to Siva in Tiruvannamalai, South India, where Sri Ramana

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Maharshi lived for some months upon his first arrival in 1896.

atman – the true Self (or soul) within; Upanishadic term for the immortal Self transcending the empirical ego, held by Vedanta to be identical with Brahman, the formless, nondual Absolute.

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

avesham – pervasion, possession; the subtle infusion of grace or divine presence into a person, sacred object, or image; the term used by Sri Ramana Maharshi to describe his experience of Self-realization.

avidya – ignorance, especially of the true Self within or of Reality.

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

bhajan – devotional singing as a form of worship, usually congregational.

bhakti – (fr. *bhaj* – to share, partake of); loving devotion to the personal or impersonal form of the Absolute or Sadguru as the primary means to release and fulfilment.

bhasmadhara – Saiva ritual practice of smearing the body with ashes (*bhasma*) to denote surrender to Siva and renunciation of worldly life.

bindi – Hindi; decorative mark worn in the middle of the forehead; sectarian dot applied between the eyebrows as a sign of devotion and Hindu orthodoxy, symbolizing the ‘third eye’ of inner vision and wisdom.

Brahman – (fr. *brih* – to grow); the Supreme Reality, absolute existence, knowledge and bliss; Upanishadic term for the nondual Absolute, static as well as dynamic, both personal (*saguna*) and impersonal (*nirguna*), the ultimate source of the universe and consciousness, yet above both.

chai – Hindi; tea; the popular drink made in India by boiling together milk, water, dust tea, sugar, and sometimes ginger and other spices.

charita/charitra – behaviour, acts, deeds; a biography, narrative of a person’s life.

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

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

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

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dhuni – ‘smoke-fire’; the sacred fire kindled by wandering ascetics in many Saiva traditions, esp. *Naths* and *Nagas*, and by some Sufis, wherever they reside; the sacred fire kept burning by Sai Baba in Dwarkamai, the source of his *udi*.

Dwarkamai – ‘many-gated mother’; Baba’s name for the mosque where he lived in Shirdi.

ghat – stairs constructed on the bank of a river or pond allowing access to the water where bathing and ritual ablutions may take place.

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

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

Ishwara/Isvara – the Supreme Godhead with form (*Saguna Brahman*); the personalized form of the impersonal Absolute (*Nirguna Brahman*) adopted for worship and to facilitate a devotional relationship to the Divine.

Jagadguru – world-teacher; honorific title accorded especially to the heads of the ten great monastic orders founded by Sankaracharya.

japa – repetition of a mantra or the name(s) of God or guru.

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

Kabir – mystic genius and medieval poet-weaver-saint of Benares (c.1440-1518 CE) whose iconoclastic poems in Hindi expressing condemnation of caste, hypocrisy, and all Hindu-Muslim sectarianism, reflected his deep conviction that God is within, beyond ritual, name or form. This gave rise to the mystic tradition of *Nirguna Bhakti*, which transformed medieval Hinduism into its modern counterpart, giving it the sectarian tolerance and uniform identity that characterize it today. Both Sai Baba and Sri Babuji may be seen as modern saints in the mystical *Nirguna Bhakti* tradition of Kabir.

Kabir Panth – the path of Kabir; the historical community of saints and devotees who canonize the works attributed to Kabir and follow the distinct pattern of religious beliefs and practices associated with the devotional path of *Nirguna Bhakti* illustrated by his poetry and epitomized in his life.

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

karma – action, deed; the destiny of an individual generated by his past deeds in this or previous lives.

lakh – Hindi; one hundred thousand.

laya – fusion, merging, absorption; samadhi; term used for the dissolution of the mind and universe into the Absolute at the end of the cosmic cycle.

leela/lila – play; term used in the Brahmasutra (2.1.33) to

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describe the creation of the universe by Brahman, who creates out of sheer joy; in Bhakti Vedanta, the play of the divine love-drama on the supermundane plane that gives liberation and bliss to the lovers of God according to the manner and extent of their love; applied empirically to any act considered miraculous or of divine origin.

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

mala – garland; a rosary usually of 108 beads used for reciting a mantra or the names of god (*japa*).

mantra – ‘thought-freeing’; sacred Vedic formula; a verse, phrase, word or syllable of divine power giving rise to non-conceptual experience.

masjid – Arabic; mosque.

maya – illusion; the cosmic power of Brahman by which it manifests the world, creating the illusion of multiplicity and difference that veils the oneness of creation and the nondual nature of ultimate truth.

moksha – freedom, final liberation; technically, release from rebirth.

mukti – ‘freed’; liberation from embodied existence.

mula – root, base, origin; primary text.

nama – name; devotional chanting of the name(s) of god or guru.

nanyah pantha vidyate’yanaya – last quarter of a famous verse of the *Purusha Suktam* (Hymn of Man) in

the Rig Veda (10.90.20) praising vision of the cosmic person (*Satpurusha*) as the means of realization and release. The complete verse reads: "I have known that great *purusha* who is brilliant like the sun and beyond all darkness. One who knows him thus becomes immortal even here. There is no other path to liberation than this." (tr. Harshananda). It is one of the earliest statements of Self-realization in world literature.

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

nirvana – 'blowing out'; liberation, extinction; in Theravada Buddhism, the state of release from samsara that occurs upon extinction of craving or desire (*tanha*); in Mahayana, from the realization of 'suchness' (*tathata*), or the *Dharmakaya*, the Buddha's Body of Truth.

nissangatvam – without company, alone; poetic term for the character of ultimate union (*advaitabhava*) in *Nirguna Bhakti* and Advaita Vedanta.

nitya agnihotra – eternal fire sacrifice; the obligatory fire ritual enjoined on the first three castes for as long as they live, consisting of milk offerings twice-daily to the sacrificial fire.

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Poondi Swami – legendary saint and adept living near Tiruvannamalai, renowned for his state of ecstatic absorption, called *ajagarabhava* (python-state), in which he remained for the last 18 years of his life (d.1978). Sri Babuji had *sakshatkar* (Self-realization) while visiting him in 1974.

prasad – food offered to god or a holy person and then distributed to devotees with his/her blessings; divine grace, favor.

pratibha – supranormal intuition, mystical insight; the faculty of intuitive insight giving access to ultimate truth.

purna – full, complete, infinite; the *Plenum*, existence absolute.

Purusha Sukta(m) – the Hymn of Man in the Rig Veda (10.90), which describes the origin of the universe as the self-created sacrifice of the cosmic *purusha* (person) and its maintenance as a sacrificial activity.

Ramana Maharshi – celebrated sage of Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu (1879-1950), whose supreme degree of realization, saintly life and appearance, and pristine teaching of Advaita Vedanta, distinguished him 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 attracting seekers from around the world.

rasa – taste, juice, relish, essence, nectar, joy; the taste of joy in ecstatic union; in Indian Aesthetics, the subtle joy arising from an appreciative, generalized delight in a drama, poem, or work of art, considered a precursor

to the joy of Self-realization; in Bhakti Vedanta, it is the devotional joy of experiencing life as the love-play of the Lord's (or Sadguru's) redemptive grace leading to enlightenment, which afterward continues as unfolding fulfilment in divine love.

Rig Veda/Rg Veda – the first and oldest of the four *Vedic samhitas* or collections of hymns, dating from 1700-1200 BCE, consisting of mantras and verses praising the devas (gods) as objects of and partners in the sacrificial ritual.

rinanubandha – karmic bond or connection; prenatal relationship.

rishi – Vedic seer, sage, or poet, especially one who revealed the Vedic hymns.

Sadguru – true teacher; the perfect preceptor, an enlightened master who shows the way to fulfilment and knowledge of Reality.

sadhaka – one who practices sadhana.

sadhana – intentional spiritual practice or discipline.

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

sakshatkar – Self-realization; direct vision of a deity.

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

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sangha – the company or group of devotees around a master.

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

Sat – Truth; Reality; Absolute Being.

Sat-chit-ananda – being-consciousness-bliss; Upanishadic designation for the nature of Brahman, the Supreme Reality.

Satpurusha – true Person, Spirit personified; Vedic designation for Brahman as the cosmic Supreme Person, source of enlightened consciousness. Sri Babuji uses it to mean a Self-realized saint.

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

satya(m) – truth.

shakti/sakti – power, energy, force; the potency of a god, usually Siva, conceived as his feminine counterpart or consort, who embodies the creative power of the universe.

shunya/sunya – emptiness, non-being, the Void; doctrinal term in Madhyamika and Yogacharya Buddhism to describe the ultimate nature of Reality as empty of predicates (*shunya*), and empirical reality as empty of independent existence (*svabhava*), thus depending solely on consciousness.

smarana – remembering; continuous remembrance of a divine name or being as a form of devotion.

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

udi – Sai Baba’s name for the ash (*vibhuti*) from the sacred fire he kept burning in Dwarkamai during his lifetime and maintained since by the Sansthan temple authorities, who distribute its ashes as Baba’s *prasad*.

udi nama – act of applying *udi* to the forehead as an expression of devotion.

vasana – ‘smell, odour’; subtle desire, latent tendency, predisposition; the subtle impression created in the mind by an act or enjoyment which predisposes it to repeat the act or joy previously experienced. It accounts for rebirth and the nature of subjective experience. In Vedanta, *vasanas* are held to be burnt up in the fire of Self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*).

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

Vedas – ‘sacred knowledge’; the oldest and most sacred scriptures of the Hindus (c.1500 BCE), held to be eternal (*nitya*), without human authorship (*apauruseya*), and of divine authority; acceptance of this is a criterion of orthodoxy. They comprise four collections of hymns, the *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharva*, each called a Veda, containing Upanishads. They teach the nature and worship of Brahman, the nondual Absolute, held to be identical to the individual self freed of ego (atman).

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Realization of this identity constitutes final liberation from rebirth (moksha).

vibhuti – ash, *bhasman*; ash is a purifying substance and index of power (shakti) in Hinduism; it is used to mark the body with sectarian insignia, especially among Saivas. Gururji 's fascinating comments about *udi* (*vibhuti*) in the context of Sai worship appear as Chapter 5 of this book.

vipassana – Pali; insight, intuitive vision; the classical system of Theravada Buddhist meditation based on the *Satipatthana Sutta*, which gives insight into the true nature of reality.

Vivekananda – world-renowned saint, yogi, and social reformer (1863-1902), the most prominent disciple of his guru, the great Bengali mystic, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886). He brought his brilliant, neo-Vedantic blend of Advaita philosophy and mystic devotion to America at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1896, which was the first introduction of Vedanta to the West.

yagna – sacrifice, oblation, worship; generic term for the Vedic complex of sacrificial worship to the gods (devas) empowering a hierophantic relationship between men and gods of reciprocal benefit, described in the Bhagavad Gita (III.10-13).

Further Reading

Readers wishing to know more about the life and teachings of Sri Sarath Babuji will find further information in the following publications:

Rose Petals – Vol. 1

(2011) (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012);
The first published volume of Sri Babuji's satsangs with photographs and a biographical introduction.

Rose Petals – Vol. 2

(2012) (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2013);
The second volume of Sri Babuji's satsangs with photographs and an introduction on his presence.

Bound to Love: Experiences with Sri Babuji

by SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011). Fascinating personal accounts of devotees' life-changing experiences with Sri Babuji.

Smriti Sumalu – Flowers of Remembrance

by SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011). A devotional anthology of inspiring experiences in connection with Sri Babuji's *mahasamadhi*, with an introduction describing events of his passing. In English and Telugu.

Rose Petals

Babuji [pamphlet]

by Yvonne Weier with Geoff Dowson. (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2e 2013). An intimate biographical memoir of Sri Babuji. Pp. 36; illustrated.

A Modern Saint Inspired by Sri Bhagavan: The Life and Satsangs of Sri Sarath Babuji

by Ram Brown Crowell [article in] *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January-March, 2013), pp. 28-38. A brief biographical account of Sri Babuji's life and teaching, with photographs, highlighting the influence of Sri Ramana on his life and thought.

The books above are available at a nominal price from Saipatham Publications at: saipa@saimail.com. The first two volumes of *Rose Petals* and *Babuji* are available as eBooks from Amazon and the Apple Store. For online reading and downloads visit:

www.saibaba.com
<http://saipatham.saibaba.com>
<http://downloads.saibaba.com>
www.sribabuji.com

For source books on Shirdi Sai Baba see the useful list given in *Bound to Love* listed above.

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, known affectionately as “Guruji” (1954-2010), was brilliantly gifted and spiritually precocious, attaining realization when he was barely twenty years old. Thereafter, he spent his life in devotion to Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918), whom he considered his Sadguru, and shared the fruit of his realization with seekers drawn from around the world. Sri Babuji’s masterful satsang on the human quest for fulfilment is a treasury of psychological insight and wisdom, the outcome of his realized experience. Speaking with compassion and clarity in an idiom free from philosophical jargon, the path of loving devotion is presented in practical terms relevant to everyday life and the modern concerns of Eastern and Western seekers. Sri Babuji’s approach is personal and mystical, emphasizing emotional and intuitive faculties which are usually latent unless awakened and called into play by the guidance of an enlightened master. The satsangs in *Rose Petals – Vol. 3* illuminate this invaluable process.



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