

Rose Petals

SELECTIONS FROM SATSANGS WITH SRI BABUJI

Vol. 5



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*To Sai Baba of Shirdi
who gave us Guruji*



Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sai Baba of Shirdi

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

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

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

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

The exponential growth in Sai worship is a notable phenomenon in modern India. In less than a century since his passing his devotees now number in millions and numerous temples have been built in his name. Baba's emblematic saintly form, seated on a stone dressed in a white *kafni* and wearing a white head cloth, left hand resting on one crossed leg, has become iconic of saint-

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



Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Rose Petals would not exist without the blessing of Sri Babuji's beloved wife, Smt. Anasuya Ammagaru, and his daughter, Sruti Sainathuni. Their selfless service on behalf of Guruji's legacy and the work of Saipatham is an inspiring example to all devotees.

Everyone involved in the publication of *Rose Petals* feels great pleasure in presenting our beloved Sadguru's words to the wider audience they deserve. To work with Guruji's satsangs and experience his presence again through them has been a rewarding experience for each of us. This volume is offered to other seekers the world over with the prayer that they may benefit as we have from the wisdom and love pervading the satsangs presented in this final volume of *Rose Petals*.

Ram Brown Crowell

Editor, *Rose Petals*

Tiruvannamalai, South India

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 an enlightened, Self-realized master.

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

The **Glossary** has been compiled by the editor with the assistance of standard academic authorities. In defining terms with complex fields of reference oversimplification has been avoided by balancing brevity with accuracy for the reader's benefit.

Preface

Rose Petals – Vol. 5 is the final volume of English satsangs published to honour the sacred memory of Sri Sarath Babuji, known affectionately as ‘Guruji’, the South Indian saint whose incandescent presence and radiant life of devotion to Shirdi Sai Baba inspired thousands in India and abroad. Guruji was renowned for his mesmerizing darshans in Shirdi, his luminous presence, and his brilliant satsangs in English and Telugu, which took place informally with small groups at his home or while travelling in India, from the 1980s until his passing in 2010.

The satsangs were always unplanned and spontaneous, consisting of Sri Babuji’s replies to questions asked by those present. These were recorded, transcribed, and entered into a searchable database from which selections were collated thematically across satsangs and then edited to form the chapters of this book. The original English satsang text has also been translated into Telugu, Guruji’s native tongue, and published as *Sarathchandrikalu (Rays of Moonlight)*, and translated into Spanish as *Petalos de Rosa*.

Love was the touchstone of Guruji’s life and teaching and the vibrant heart of his approach to the spiritual path: without love no search can succeed. His original, innovative path grew from his own experience and implies how the psychology of love connected with effort underlies all the different paths to the divine – whether by work,

knowledge, yoga, meditation or devotion (the classical paths of Karma, Jnana, Yoga, Dhyana or Bhakti mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita) – for in each case love partners with effort to energize the path’s culmination through grace. Most appropriately therefore, love forms the subject of the Introduction that follows.

The satsangs in this volume contain the nectar of Guruji’s wisdom and original insights concerning spiritual life. The random order of the chapters mirrors the spontaneous order in which topics appeared in the original satsangs. Guruji’s varied responses to them in different contexts reveals collectively the depth and range of his attainment, and his gift of sharing it in practical terms. This is true, for instance, of his remarks on the *Principle of Flow* (Ch.1), where Guruji shows insightfully how the common experience of watching a river reflects the operative paradox of dynamic stillness native to consciousness, which, if experienced, puts us ‘in the flow’ of choiceless awareness. In *Work – A Concrete Sense of Connection* (Ch.5) he observes that the Gita’s ideal of *Nishkama Karma* (actionless action) as the basis of Karma Yoga becomes possible only when it’s an expression of love (p.56); and in his masterful discussion on *The Question of Choice* and surrender in Ch.6, Guruji explores adeptly all the ramifications of choice, defining ‘will’ brilliantly as ‘the effect which gives us the illusion that we are making a choice’. (p.74), and remarking that real love and the path begin when “we lose ourselves, our individuality, and

merge into a greater love. When you realize there is no other way, no other choice to your destination, you take refuge. That is called *saranagati*.” (p.81).

The final chapter shows Guruji’s compassionate heart and contains some of the most eloquent satsang given in modern times on the Guru-disciple relationship. His concluding remarks are the first-hand testimony of an enlightened master and make a fitting farewell to this last volume of *Rose Petals*:

“A Sadguru will never reject anybody. That’s how Baba himself phrases it: ‘I won’t reject anybody. Will the ocean send back the rivers?’ Will the ocean reject the rivers which are coming and merging into it? No, it will never. The Sadguru is like the ocean, so there is no question of rejecting the rivers, they come and simply merge.”

Sri Babuji accepted everyone who came to him as Baba’s gift, as his *prasad*, as he so eloquently put it, meeting each with love where they stood, and, taking them by the hand, led them to their unique fulfilment. May his satsangs in *Rose Petals*, graced with his timeless presence, continue to perform this sacred service for readers.

Sri Gurave namo namah
Ram Brown Crowell
Editor, *Rose Petals*
Tiruvannamalai



Introduction

The Fire of Love

Ah, one spark flew
And burned down the house of my heart.

—Rumi

What is that mysterious spark that ignites the heart, allowing one to focus effortlessly on an object of attraction such that, with luck, it sets off the explosion that shatters and annihilates the individual self? What sets alight the spark that turns into the fire we call love?

Love is probably the most overused word in the English language, meaning anything from intense feelings of affection and attraction to deep romantic attachment or simply to finding great pleasure in something. Reasoned definitions often do not suit but instead people seem to find expression best in poetry and music – the language of the heart, the seat of emotions beyond all human un-

derstanding and control. Neurobiologists speak of love as arising in the limbic system rather than the lexical, in other words, as sensed rather than explained. Most people are familiar with, and can relate to, a state of 'being or falling in love', even though they may find it difficult to define.

In general, the concept of love involves an emotional bond to someone or something for which one yearns. On a human level this attraction is a vital expression of life ensuring continuation of the species, but in its most rarefied form as love of truth, knowledge, or God, it can take one beyond the confines of the ego-construct to Self-realization, nirvana, divine union, or whatever one wishes to call that exalted state. In the experience of love, we feel helplessly overwhelmed by a great force that eliminates all boundaries and shakes us to our very foundations. Aflame with love we burn, we long, we thrill. We yearn for our beloved object beyond all things until it becomes everything and, so absorbed, we long for union and want to be consumed.

Sri Sarath Babuji (Guruji) said the whole range of spiritual life could be summed up as 'the experience and expression of love'. The wisdom from his own experience pointed to the mobilization of that great force, love, the fuel that sets fire to our seeking and yearning to solve life's mystery. To surmount the many obstacles on the spiritual path, especially the ego's conditionings, a power beyond our own volition and choice needs to be

awakened. This need only love can fill, Gurujī said, because:

“When it comes to love, you forget yourself, everything is forgotten. You don’t mind what people think or say about you, love expresses itself like a flood. There’s no language, no *sastra*, no discourse, no book that can describe the outpouring of love. It’s the act of forgetting ourselves, of forgetting everything, of giving up everything. Nothing you remember, nothing. There’s only you and your object of love. The heart knows what it needs and wants without the mind interfering.”

Most of us feel something missing in our lives and seek to be whole and fulfilled. Even though it may be unknown and subliminal, we usually have a vague sense of that missing part, but this sense remains abstract until it becomes tangible in some object or person. Until then, the love remains dormant even though the potentiality is always there, residing in our hearts. Love becomes actualized when we come into contact with the object that seems to embody what we desperately want or need and we can’t help but feel ourselves bursting with love for it. At first, it may be for some worldly object like a good job or relationship. But when these lose their attraction and an inner lack is still felt, then people turn to spiritual life for more lasting fulfilment. Here also, as in so-called worldly life, Gurujī said:

“Your object of love depends on your need,

because you love what you need, that's all. So, first you should know what you need."

Need was a special point for Guruji. For spiritual life to be fruitful it has to arise from deep, personal need based on honest self-discovery: Do we really need to know who we are or to solve life's mystery? Do we really need to know the truth or do we need peace? One's degree of need is important also because it correlates with effort.

Guruji always insisted whether the attraction was to Truth, the Self, God, or one's Sadguru, that the 'right' effort was always infused with love and strong need. It is this combination which makes the path seem effortless, choiceless and spontaneous. Buddha's need was to find answers to life's suffering, old age and death, and this longing made him feel so restless that all his attachments became trivial, and he left his palace, family and kingdom behind. Guruji said Buddha's act of leaving was not an effort of renunciation but an expression of love – his love of truth, his longing to find the answer to his need. In the same way, Ramana Maharshi left home not out of renunciation but out of a need 'to know his Father', as he said in his note of departure. Bhagavan said, regarding giving up one's 'I-identification', that "the eagerness to do it must be equal to a man drowning, trying to rise to the surface for his life."¹ The great jnani, Nisargadatta Maharaj, said, "You may

¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2006), Talk 28, p.30.

choose any way that suits you, your earnestness will determine the rate of progress,"² and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche remarked, "The practitioner with the greatest yearning receives the greatest blessing." Masters of many lineages, Hindu, Buddhist and Sufi, have emphasized intense need and devotion are the essential qualities that urge one forward to realization and fulfilment.

We bore witness to and bathed in the presence of a being, Sri Sarath Babuji, whose every breath, every moment was dedicated to his Sadgurudeva, Sai Baba of Shirdi. We learn in Chapter 10 (Guruji's Early Years of Seeking), that Guruji had an intense need to understand the mystery of existence, to solve something that deeply puzzled him. With tenacity and his one-pointed devotion to Baba, he reached the culmination of his search. Baba's recollection of his relationship with his own master, recounted in *Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* by Narasimha Swami, is testimony to the level of intensity that animated his own *gurubhakti*:

"I sat and gazed at him; we were both filled with Bliss. I cared not to turn my eye upon anything else. Night and day I pored upon his face with an ardour of love that banished hunger and thirst. The Guru's absence, even for a second, made me restless. I meditated upon nothing but the Guru and had no goal or object other than the Guru. Unceasingly fixed upon

² *I Am That: Talks with Nisargadatta Maharaj*. Trans. by Maurice Frydman (Duram, North Carolina: Acorn Press, 1988), Ch.16, p.52.

him was my mind. Wonderful indeed, the art of my Guru! I wanted nothing but the Guru and he wanted nothing but my love.”³

Beings of such calibre as Shirdi Sai Baba, Sri Ramana Maharshi or The Buddha are rare indeed; most of us don't have such an all-consuming need or earnestness. Nonetheless, Guruji encouraged us to start where we are in complete honesty and integrity, saying that spiritual longing often begins as a small spark. Initially, it may feel like a subtle stirring, a smouldering of love in the heart. Guruji advised us to fan it into flames through expression so it grows gradually into a blaze that burns away our sense of separation from true nature. It is only through expression that love is strengthened enough to overcome the complexities of human nature and make us lose the parts of ourselves that are obstacles to fulfilment. Guruji called this fanning of the flames the great 'express-way' of love:

“We each have a small iota of love: try to express it! By expressing it, it grows. Because that love has been *pressed* in your heart due to so many fears, patterns, wants and desires, you have to *ex-press* it – to bring it out – from your heart, the seat of emotions. This is the express-way of love. It is what Vedantins call untying the *hridaya granthi*, the knots of the heart. Then you'll find that true love that lurks there.”

³ *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* by Narasimha Swami (Mylapore: All India Sai Samaj, 1999), Nos.137 + 178, pp.44 +72.

In the act of expression, we may encounter the limits imposed by our 'heart-knots', but they only become fuel for further transformation. After all, if we give ourselves over to love, all we can lose is just another idea of ourselves. Through exposing these false ideas to the fire, they are made transparent and they become simply more fuel for the fire of love. As Guruji said:

"It is in the ego the love is kindled. And when the love grows, then the ego is burnt in the fire of love, it's no more there. It's just like fuel. Fuel is the support for fire but after some time it is no longer there. In love we forget ourselves. That is the sign of love. We lose ourselves. And it is only in love, that by losing one gains. In that self-consuming love, the experience of love itself is the fulfilment. It is the beginning, it is the means, and it is the end. It is not a means to an end, it is an end in itself."

When love and its expression become the motivating force of one's life, the path itself gives fulfilment at every step of the way. Guruji therefore saw no need to give techniques or practices, since he saw no dichotomy between worldly life and spiritual practice. So whether one calls it life or sadhana, everything effortlessly becomes an expression of love. Every aspect of existence – work, family life, devotional service and spiritual practice – becomes enhanced, meaningfully complete in itself. Then everything we do, even going to the office, becomes sadhana, and meditation ensues naturally:

“Simply experiencing and enjoying the happiness that comes – that is meditation. If the intensity grows and grows into ecstasy, you forget yourself and only bliss and the joy of love remains. When there’s love, the mind automatically becomes concentrated, concentration is a by-product of love. It’s the natural function of the mind to be always concentrated on whatever or whoever we love. Is there any effort in love?”

True unconditional love is recognized most palpably in the form and presence of a realized being. When we meet an embodiment of that which we seek, an embodiment of love, we feel a quickening in our hearts and souls, a deep resonance. Love calls to Love. A spark enters the heart and sets afire the love that has been quiescent there – we slowly become the very thing we desire. In guru-centric paths like the Sai Baba tradition, the devotee’s transformation catalysed by his object of love is termed ‘*Guru-apana sarika karitat*’,⁴ that is, ‘turning the disciple into the likeness of the teacher’. Guruji said:

“You all crave for love. You give it different names: freedom, the unconditioned, liberation, nirvana, and all these things. But in your heart of hearts what you really crave for is to be loved. If you are really loved by somebody, the experience of love starts springing in your

⁴ *Life of Sai Baba* by Narasimha Swami. 3 vols. (Injambakkam, Madras: Sai Baba Charitable Trust, 2001), 2: 219; *ibid.*, Glossary, p. 323.

heart. Once it's triggered, it catches hold of you and swallows you completely, because it's your abstract sense of fulfilment made concrete. That triggering is not in your hands, there has to be someone capable of unconditionally loving you. And that person should be an embodiment of love."

The Sadguru's love is a mysterious paradox, both personal and impersonal – it feels so familiar we intuit it residing within ourselves, yet it seems so strange it exerts a magnetic power of attraction. This feeling of 'strange familiarity', Guruji said, is the first pull of the magnet bringing us into the orbit of the Sadguru, whom Guruji called the 'Familiar Stranger'. The subsequent process of exploring and deepening that love in the Guru's presence, of making it more familiar and concrete in our life-experience, constitutes the cornerstone of Guruji's approach to spiritual transformation. He called it 'the concretization of our abstract sense of fulfillment'. Sai Baba and Guruji offered and nurtured that love, meeting devotees exactly where they found them, answering their prayers, satisfying their desires, and miraculously blessing their lives, solely for the purpose of their self-transformation. Guruji explained:

"A miracle immediately gives the seeker the experience of faith and it confirms the reality of the saint or sage of being one with the whole universe, which is the goal of Realization itself. Based on that sense of increased faith, the seeker can surrender more and more

and eventually become one with the whole universe. Baba's way is to make all people like him."

On the path of Sai Baba, when one experiences fulfilment of prayers, whether mundane or spiritual, or witnesses a miracle, then faith, trust, and a bond of love develop. When these qualities grow, one is more likely to submit the mind to the Sadguru, to be 'struck'! The resulting loss of ego is a kind of death experience which only love can give the strength to bear, for it is only in love that we say, "I want to lose myself, I want to become one with you." We long for unity, to finally lose our ego-identity, to transcend all duality. When one is deeply in touch with that longing, it feels like being magnetically, gravitationally pulled towards our Beloved, towards our own heart. Not only are we drawn to truth, to God, to the Absolute, they are also drawn to us. The two are pulled together, because at the centre they are one.

The ultimate goal is always to become one with our Beloved, to merge into the infinite sky of our true nature. In Chapter 7, Guruji speaks of the Sadguru as a 'window to the sky' saying:

"A window is needed, and that is the form of the Sadguru. And when you look at the window, you are actually looking through the window, and what you see is the formless, unbounded sky outside. Sai Baba is such a window. When you look at him, it's not just his form, it's what you can see beyond it. So a Sadguru – the form of the Sadguru – is a window

through which you can see your true Self, the realization of your abstract ideal of fulfilment.”

Whether one’s path is through the form of a Sadguru or a deity or a practice like Self-enquiry, finally it is the burning fire of our love that will take us through our chosen ‘window’ to our boundless nature beyond. Guruji said:

“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. And tending the fire and making it grow and grow, that is *tapas*. 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. Love itself is a kind of *tapas*, a burning. It is that fire which one has to keep up. Always keep it up – make it a perpetual fire, until you get that which you seek.”

The fiery discipline of orienting one’s whole being towards truth or the Beloved is only possible with the unquenchable fire of love. Guruji would often say that the triggering of love is just the beginning of a very long, unending love story, in which truth infinitely reveals itself in the quiet of our heart. In other words, the heart’s fulfilment is an unfolding story of the experience and expression of love.

This Introduction to the final volume of *Rose Petals* has emphasized love’s central place in the satsangs of Sri Sarath Babuji. Whatever the topic of discussion, the experience and expression of

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love is always implied or forms the tacit backdrop to what is said. It was there in the flavour of his presence, in his smile, in his movements, in the expression of his points, in his teachings – it is the bedrock, the emanation, the alchemizing force of transmission, and grace. Guruji often noted the real effect of satsang lay in the silent communion taking place beyond his words, remarking, “satsang is just a pretext for all of us to sit together, to express and experience love.” May the reading of this volume of *Rose Petals*, be a catalyst for us to feel the spark of love that resides in our hearts. May his words fan it, add fuel to it, and make that spark catch fire, to ‘burn our house down’, and take us to fulfilment.

Linda Bonner (Bhakti)
Tiruvannamalai,
May 2016

Rose Petals



Varanasi, 2006



chapter one

The Principle of Flow

Several of the exchanges below occurred on trips that Guruji took to the Ganges in 2006 and 2007.

DEVOTEE:

It seems important to cultivate sensitivity so we can experience a deeper awareness of the subtle nature of all things. Sensitivity seems to be both a prerequisite and a product of the unfoldment process.

GURUJI:

We are sensitive to our own needs, but not to the needs of others. We can learn to be sensitive

to others in collective activities, like for instance a group project or satsang. In satsang, while I'm talking and you are listening intently, your senses are becoming more acute, more sensitive. You're making your senses better able to perform, and having more sensitive senses is being sense-able, isn't it? [Laughter] Then all aspects of the *Arya Ashtanga Marga*, the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, like right view, right speech and so on, will come to us. The senses will perform in such a way that they won't be an obstacle to what is subtle inside us, they become even sensitive to that flow, to the spiritual presence. Now you may be insensitive to that, but, as you become more sensitive in other areas of your life, you will become sensitive to that inner flow as well and start experiencing it. If you develop this sensitivity you can see and experience the principle of flow everywhere. Is that flow not in you? Is not your blood flowing? Isn't air flowing in and out? Are my words not flowing? Where is there not a flow? Everywhere there is flow, movement, dynamism. You can become sensitive to the principle of flow underlying all these different flows.

DEVOTEE:

How can we develop that sensitivity, Guruji?

GURUJI:

First, try not to be insensitive, indiscriminate. Try to be sensitive in all aspects of your life, in your

environment, in your behaviour. Then the sensitivity grows. Slowly it grows and you'll become more sensible.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I can sit for hours watching the Ganga, never getting bored. What makes it so captivating?

GURUJI:

The reason why people are fascinated by the flow of a river, or any flow, is because we are experiencing the principle of flow. When we see a flowing stream we subconsciously identify with it. It's not the flow, it's the principle of flowing that captivates us. Just stand on a bridge and watch the river flow. There won't be any change in the form of the flow but you'll never get bored. There's no monotony in it. Why? After some time the mind forgets that it is water, that it is a river, that it's flowing – it simply experiences the flow. The mind connects and identifies with it, becoming one with the flow. And what you experience then is what spiritual schools call a mystical experience.

So that is the principle behind it – the principle of flow, of flowing. Everything is flowing so fast that it appears to you as if it is all one entity. Just like a roll of film, each frame passes so quickly in front of the light source that when it is projected

on the screen it appears to be continuous. Each frame is flowing, moving so fast – twenty-four frames per second – that it appears like the reality. What makes the pieces into a movie, into one continuous whole, what connects them? That link, that something which connects the flow, mystic schools call by various names and explain in different ways. Some call it the Self [Atman], which is the continuous link of the three states [waking, dreaming and deep sleep]. And the closest experience I can think of is watching a flowing river. It shows you the principle of movement, the principle of momentum.

DEVOTEE:

Is it possible to actually experience a single frame by itself?

GURUJI:

There's no use in that. In this it differs from psychoanalysis where they want to see and dissect each frame. Or, if you mistake all the twenty-four frames as one, that also is not the reality. One has to catch hold of the principle of movement that connects the frames and makes the whole movie appear as reality. That is the goal of all spiritual schools. We experience it in parts, for instance while watching a stream or flying in an airplane. If we travel at high speed it can give us that experience because the mind subconsciously gets tuned to the principle of flow, of momentum. The mind

becomes blank. Read the experiences of the astronauts. Because of lack of gravity, the body loses its weight and they say that even their thoughts lose their gravity.

DEVOTEE:

Would a saint experience the flow and the individual frames at the same time?

GURUJI:

He experiences the *principle of flow*.

DEVOTEE:

Is it the flow that connects the frames?

GURUJI:

In one way, yes. It's not only what connects the frames, but also what moves them and makes you believe they are one entity. If it connects and doesn't move them, you'll see only a single frame! No, it's not only the connecting force, it moves – and doesn't move. It's both dynamic and static. I think I explained this is the concept behind the name Arunachala, *Aruna-achala*. *Aruna* means 'red' in Sanskrit. When you are aroused or angry, when you are emotional, you become red. The colour red in Hinduism symbolizes activity, the dynamic state. It's a sign of heat, like blushing, some activity is going on. That's why they make red the symbol of activity, it's dynamic. And *achala* is 'motionless', 'static', *a-chala* [lit. 'not-

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moving’]. So, it’s neither motionless nor full of motion, it’s something beyond.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you said that the nature of our consciousness is dynamic. Does that mean it’s always changing?

GURUJI:

No, not only changing. ‘Dynamic’ doesn’t mean only change. There’s a sense of active enjoyment in it. That is also dynamic.

DEVOTEE:

There’s some kind of movement, like the flow of a river?

GURUJI:

Yes, we experience it as a kind of movement also. Like a river, our consciousness is continuously moving, but at the same time we experience the continuity. The river mirrors our consciousness; we experience the sameness and our consciousness spontaneously sympathizes with that movement, and so it becomes one with it. And *there* is the dynamism.

Our consciousness is like a fast-flowing river. Where it comes from and where it is flowing to, we do not know. It looks like the same water,

the same Ganges. Unless there is some object floating in the river, we can't see that the water is actually moving. These objects are the different experiences in our life. We identify ourselves with them, move with them, and then feel that we are moving. But it's the movement itself that we should catch hold of. Be aware of and grasp that sense of movement, be one with it. It's not the movement of our ordinary, relative experience. It's a different kind of movement. The nearest experience I can think of is when you watch a river. We go beyond our relative experience and forget ourselves. It is very rare to be aware of such movement. A saint is at one with that movement, and looks at the whole world as though it was a flowing river.

DEVOTEE:

Without emotion?

GURUJI:

Without emotion.

DEVOTEE:

So it's emotion that takes us out, that disturbs the connection?

GURUJI:

Yes. Because you are only identifying yourself with the movement of a particular object, not with what moves it.

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DEVOTEE:

Is that why our experiences are ultimately unsatisfactory, because we are identifying with the objects rather than with what's moving them? And a saint is identified with what's moving them, rather than with the objects themselves, is that the reason?

GURUJI:

Yes. He feels one with the very principle of movement, which is natural to consciousness. Actually, not only the river, but everything, the whole universe, is moving: everything is in motion. And a saint experiences this wherever he is. He looks at everything as though he was looking at the Ganges. That is why the scriptures say that wherever a saint is, there is a *tirtha* [holy place], because he is an embodiment of the principle of the Ganges, the principle of flow. The scriptures say, *sarva tirthas*, all the *tirthas*, reside at the feet of a great saint.



DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, when I watch the continuous movement of the Ganga I experience a stillness that reflects the nature of consciousness itself. In that connection, I find some kind of peace in which my emotions are harmonized. Why isn't there the same effect when we watch television?

GURUJI:

Because there you identify yourself with certain characters. When you watch the river, it's the movement itself you identify with which reflects yourself. TV doesn't act as a mirror. You 'take on' different forms when you watch a movie and many memories and associations may get triggered. Consciousness loses itself and takes different forms, just like it does in your ordinary, daily life. People escape into television because there's not enough variety in their daily lives and they become bored.

Watching the Ganges is just like watching Baba. A Sadguru always looks new, like the river, but at the same time his form remains the same. His form is so beautiful and enchanting that the mind forgets itself and dissolves. It's not an ordinary kind of beauty, there is a dynamic principle in his form, like the flow of the Ganges, so every moment he is new, as though you were seeing him for the first time. It makes you always live in the present, with no past memories, no future plans, no thoughts. He mirrors the dynamic nature of your own consciousness and you become one with it.



GURUJI:

Baba is like flowing air, moving air, a breeze. When all the windows are closed in a room and

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the air is still, we may say, "There's no air in the room." In fact that's not true, there is air. Air is all-pervading, that's why we are alive. Why do we say there's no air? Because we don't feel it flow, so we're almost breathless. But when we open the window and there's a breeze, we say, "Ah, now I feel it!" The flow of the air is like the movement of the Self; without movement the Self is difficult to feel.



DEVOTEE:

When I sit by the Ganges, my mind calms down and my thoughts recede a little, but I'm not really able to connect this experience to the principle of flow.

GURUJI:

We are here by the side of the Ganges, so I gave the example of the river. Many people relate to it and may find it useful but that doesn't mean everyone should go and practise it. I haven't given it as a practice. I only mentioned it because some of you have had this experience. If you can't relate to it, then leave it and find something else.

If your experience is beautiful, happy, blissful and you want to sit longer and longer, then that is what I meant – when you forget the Ganges, when you forget the water, when you forget your own mind, and even my words. Nothing is left.

Then that is the correct experience.

If you're sitting at the river, thinking, "Oh, that's what Guruji meant," trying to link it to something I said, then you're missing the whole point. It should be a spontaneous experience, not an effort or a practice. Some people have had that experience and asked me, "Why is it like that?" Then I gave a little explanation about it, that's all. And there ends the story. [Guruji laughs] It's not a teaching of the 'flowing Ganges', or a 'Ganges Sutra'! [Laughter] No, nothing of the sort.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, if we have the experience of everything being in motion when we are watching the river, does that experience continue or is it just in the moment?

GURUJI:

It's just in the moment. But even though it's just in the moment, that experience can give rise to other experiences of the flow. You start experiencing that sense of movement in different aspects, in different places, even where you never expected it. Everything is flowing in the universe, not only the Ganges, and you begin to get a taste of that. It's not that the same experience continues and you have to ruminate on it. Instead, take every experience fresh in the moment and then let it go.





Shirdi, 2000



chapter two

Purity of Means

DEVOTEE:

Living in America with family and work responsibilities, I feel I miss so many opportunities to be with you. I'm afraid I won't be able to fulfil my spiritual goal.

GURUJI:

Don't think that the people who are living near me full-time are superior and that you are missing something. You haven't missed anything. Maybe they are missing something! [Guruji laughs] Baba is already fulfilling your needs and when the time comes, Baba will show you a way to fulfil this need also. Baba said, "I never let my devotees down,"

and what Baba said is law! We're all his devotees and we need not fear. There's no such thing as worthy or unworthy. In fact, we're all unworthy and it's Baba who makes us worthy. We're all just like pieces of paper, and his grace is the governor's signature which makes them currency notes. But the problem is, the paper is smeared with ink. [Laughter] Even when he writes it, we don't see the signature. So what we are doing now is making some white, blank space for his signature.

Sometimes I really wonder how people get obsessed with such petty things: how she spoke to me, how he treated me, she didn't say hello, he didn't notice me ..., so what! Have you come all this way to expect a hello from a particular friend? [Guruji laughs] Just see what kinds of thoughts you're having! Even during the ten or fifteen minutes that you sit with me, supposedly quietly, are you really quiet?

Why is the situation like this? Because you are missing three points: Why, What and How! Just remember this three-point formula, nothing else is needed. Why are we here, what are the things we should and shouldn't be doing, and how are we doing them? Whether we are doing them properly or not, nobody needs to tell us. There won't be any exams or an examiner checking your results. How you have spent the day, that itself will tell you the truth about yourself. Here you are your own examiner!



GURUJI:

We should have clarity about what we want, about what our goal is, and what the objective of our life is. We may change it later but at least we should have a clear idea of what we want now. Then, whatever we do, however much we get, we have that satisfaction, that fulfilment. Otherwise, it simply becomes mechanical, part of a pattern. That's how the world lives.

What makes someone a seeker? It's not whether one does twenty hours' sadhana or yoga, or sticks to a guru. No, these are not the signs. A seeker is one who has clarity about his goal. You say you want fulfilment. Ok, then find out what gives you fulfilment.

DEVOTEE:

So how do we go about discovering what our goal is, what our core need is?

GURUJI:

That everybody has to search out for themselves. You have to explore and find out what you want and what will help you get it. Think about it and you'll come to know. If you really *need* to know, you will explore. If you are really suffering, you look for a good doctor and take the treatment. You'll try homeopathy, Ayurveda or whatever else. If you are not really suffering, you won't search. We may not know what we really need and how to get it, but finding out is the purpose

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of our life. It's our whole search, our whole effort and endeavour.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, how can I clear my negativities and feel closer to Baba?

GURUJI:

Do you really want to be closer to Baba? If you really want to be closer to Baba, just see what you are doing for that now. What does being closer to Baba mean to you? What do you want from Baba? How can you experience Baba? That is why I always suggest that you have an object of love, a clear-cut goal, and then try to take all your steps towards it. That will take you there. Otherwise you'll be a 'rolling stone gathering no moss'. That doesn't mean you have to choose me or choose Baba. Choose anything, any object, but stick to it. First, choose your focus of love. Then the question comes, how to get closer to it? Otherwise, thinking that you are walking in one direction, you are, in fact, walking in the opposite direction. Because you don't have clarity about what you want, you're experiencing these kinds of negativities and not experiencing Baba's nearness.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, sometimes it's difficult to know what we really want because there are many different pulls at the same time.

GURUJI:

And here lies the complexity of the human mind. Because what we actually want is imbued with many things. Some things we want theoretically because we think they're good for us but we may not really want them. For instance, there are certain concepts that we brainwash ourselves with, like *mukti* or *moksha*, and we think we have to sit for six hours in meditation doing Self-enquiry, *japa* and so on. It's good. But are we really sitting like that? We come all the way to Tiruvannamalai to do Self-enquiry. So, come on, count for yourself, how many hours – 'hours' is too big a word for it [laughter] – how many minutes do you actually apply yourself to Self-enquiry?

I don't say that you don't want it – you want it, theoretically, you want it. But there are certain other things that you also want. Do you really need Self-enquiry? First, find out what you really want. And in that process you'll get a kind of self-realization, where you'll experience the reality of your own self. And once you experience and accept that reality, then you can start from there.

Don't stuff your minds with jargon, concepts and fantasies. First know what you want and find out the method to get it. Is it a reliable method?

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Has anyone been successful with it? Is what they got, what you really want? If at all any kind of analysis is needed in sadhana, this is the analysis we need. Just talking about Brahman and other such concepts is not analysis, it is discussion, discussion about something that we cannot completely understand. Dissect your whole being, then you'll find out whether there is a Self or Brahman or whatever else it may be. What you need, you'll come to know. And if you are conscious of your need, you'll automatically, instinctively, find a way to get it. It is all so natural.



DEVOTEE:

I've read somewhere, that once when Gangagir Maharaj visited Baba, he came by a shortcut to the masjid. Baba chided him, "Don't come by the shortcut; come by the regular way, the straight way." Gangagir Maharaj, anxious to see Baba quickly, came by the shortcut – what's wrong with it? Why did Baba ask him not to do it?

GURUJI:

Baba wasn't actually referring to the shortcut to the masjid, he was referring to the shortcuts that people tend to take on the spiritual path. Often what happens with spiritual groups and organizations is they start to think, "When our

views are correct and our motivations are right, we can take any steps to reach the goal because our goal is good. Let's put our people to good use. We can earn our money however we like, since we use it for the propagation of Baba." Some organizations make themselves believe that because their goals are noble, they can use any means they please to reach them. To them, only the end is important, not the means.

But the problem is, the end is always abstract. Whether good will come to them or whether they'll be able to spend the money properly to propagate Baba's name is unknown, abstract. What we've actually got in our hand is only the means, it is concrete. Whether we reach the goal quickly or not, we should always be skilful in our means. They are more important than the end. We should have a noble goal but we should not sacrifice the means for the end. You cannot achieve a pure goal through impure means. Whatever our objective is, our way of reaching it should be pure. It doesn't even matter whether we get the goal or not. As long as our means are pure we are always on track, in line with the goal. Whether we experience it perfectly or not is immaterial.

There are actually not two points that we are travelling between here. It is just circling and transforming where we are. By sticking to pure, noble and honest means, we are trying to make our goal manifest in every moment. And when we

succeed, the means become the goal and the goal becomes the means.



GURUJI:

I don't usually interfere with organizational matters around me, unless something wrong is brought to my notice. In fact, I have been known to even cancel a whole programme or activity if someone is using incorrect means. Generally, people don't like it when I make these kinds of decisions.

I often refer to Mahatma Gandhi's ways. The Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921 was becoming a great success. Gandhi said the whole Non-Cooperation Movement should be non-violent, and under no circumstances should there be violence anywhere. India is such a big country but nonetheless, everywhere there was such an immense response and people thought independence would be gained within days or weeks. Somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, in a small village named Chauri Chaura, some villagers revolted after being assaulted by the police. They attacked and burnt the police station. Only one village in the whole of India! In order to retaliate against violence, they responded with violence. It only happened in this very limited context. That's all it took and Gandhi stopped the whole movement. He said, "You are not ready for independence."

The Congress Party and all the other political parties criticized him. People said that it was a political blunder on the part of the Mahatma to stop the Non-Cooperation Movement at that moment since it would be so difficult to create that mood and momentum again. They felt it was a mistake to stop the movement when it was at its peak. 'Himalayan blunder' – that is the phrase they used. The whole Congress Party, all the national leaders were opposed to it. They asked the people not to stop. But Gandhi alone said, "Stop!" and the people listened to Gandhi and stopped. If the movement had continued for just another week or so, independence might have come, who knows? But if he had made a compromise and tolerated this one act of violence it could have led to more and more violent means. Once one makes a compromise and doesn't stick to pure means, other compromises may follow. At the beginning it may be so small, but then people are simply led away.

It took another twenty-five years for the Quit India movement to emerge again. Just because of one incident, that big movement was postponed for about twenty-five years! That is adherence to purity of means: uncompromising, unflinching, steadfast adherence to the means, to the quality of the means. I like that.





Shirdi, 2007



chapter three

The Role of Ritual

DEVOTEE:

What is meant by puja?

GURUJI:

Anything you do to express your love – that is puja, that is worship.



DEVOTEE:

When I was back home and went to the synagogue where my family used to go when I was a child,

it felt like the love was missing and some people were doing the rituals just for the sake of ritual.

GURUJI:

Traditions can become like that, not only in the Jewish tradition, but in all religions. When the rituals started they conveyed some meaning, but during the course of time they can lose their meaning and become mechanical, just dead wood. Saints come in order to breathe life into them again. And that is what Jesus said, "I have come not to destroy the law but to fulfil it." He was not opposing the Jewish tradition, he was only saying it had become so ritualized that he wanted to infuse love and meaning into it. Another tradition began, Christianity, and after some time it too became ritualized. From time to time different saints have come in order to enliven the traditions, and it's still going on. It's the same in India. When the Vedic tradition became too ritualized, the Buddha came, Mahavira came. Later Sankara came, then Ramanuja. Again, when there was a need for reform, the saints of the Goraknath tradition came. And now Sai Baba has come. After some time the Sai tradition will also become so ritualized, no doubt about it, that again another form will come to rejuvenate it. This is the course of history.



GURUJI:

If rituals become simply mechanical, without meaning, then you can throw them away. Sometimes, though, by going back and re-enacting them, they may start triggering something in you. If you have no other way, that may be the last resort to trigger your emotions and to nurture them.

DEVOTEE:

Is a new emotion triggered each time?

GURUJI:

Yes, what gets triggered, your emotional response, is not exactly the same as the emotion that originally inspired the ritual. When a composer writes a piece of music after disappointment in love, the content will be sorrowful. But, when you are listening to his music, you may feel the mood of sorrow but not the disappointment. Instead, some experience from your past may be triggered, like the loss of a friend or a relative. When you understand this, you will understand the true meaning of ritual. Then you will cease to see these things as simple cultural whims.

DEVOTEE:

Sometimes I don't feel like bowing down to somebody but I make myself do it. I'm doing it because I want to feel something afterwards, which I don't feel before I perform the action.

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Then I feel guilty that I'm not doing it for the right reasons.

GURUJI:

This is how it works, that's what I was talking about. If you understand the principle behind the ritual then you won't feel guilty about it anymore.

When you want to nurture an emotion, you have to express it. If you're not interested in devotion or you don't want to show your love, you don't have to worry about it and need not bow down in front of your object of love. But, if you want to love, and if you want to nurture that love, then these things will act as aids. Then they have some meaning. Otherwise, any ritual is meaningless, whatever it is.

DEVOTEE:

So you are saying that ritual can actually invite the experience?

GURUJI:

Yes, it can. For example, when we experience devotional love and we feel on the verge of losing it, then sometimes a ritual can help us remain in that state. But, if we simply start repeating the ritual again and again, it becomes ritualistic. Then the danger of losing the experience is greater than evoking the state through the ritual. So I don't stress ritual, but I don't object to it also. It has its

own place, its own role, its own utility, and we should relate to it like this.



GURUJI:

Certain expressions that come spontaneously can give us happiness and increase our love. Later, in moments when we don't experience that love, the mind thinks that maybe by repeating them, we'll feel that happiness again. Sometimes it works. They become our own rituals, not the standard ones from a book. Everyone has their own rituals. I have my own, too.

DEVOTEE:

So, there is a place for effort in that case?

GURUJI:

I don't call it effort. If you call it effort, no problem, but it's actually an expression of your love. If you want the experience back again, you'll act in a way to repeat it. That's different from having an idea, a concept, that this ritual is good and by doing it you'll get that experience. Simply mumbling a mantra to get an experience has no meaning. If you connect with it in a meaningful way, then it is good.

Some of the things that we think of as rituals come out of a kind of social interaction. If we go to a temple, for instance, certain procedures of

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paying respect are there and we follow them. I don't have any objection to that.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, should we follow any particular mode of worship?

GURUJI:

I don't have any mode of worship. My mode is the expression of love. I don't want to give a discourse on the Hindu *Agamas*, because it's not my way. I don't have any problem with formal modes of worship. There's nothing wrong with them but they're not so imperative. There are many ways to worship. You can use any expression which comes to your mind naturally and spontaneously.

DEVOTEE:

But it has to be appropriate to the culture, Guruji, doesn't it?

GURUJI:

It's not a question of culture but of social sensibility, of not offending anyone where you are. Even when you're in the West you have to behave in a certain way. You haven't come here to learn the details of ritual and the prescribed ways of expressions of love. You have come here to experience the love itself. First, have the love,

then we'll think about how to express it. [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, we Westerners make a lot of mistakes and at times offend Indian sentiments. Why, for instance, is it considered to be disrespectful to point our feet towards the guru or the deity?

GURUJI:

Just think about it. The feet are the lowest part of our body and are always in contact with the dirt. So pointing the lowest part of ourselves towards a respected person is not respectful. What is the most precious part of our body? Our head! You can live without a leg, you can live without a hand, but you can't live without your head. [Guruji laughs] That is the most valuable part. So, when you give your respect to a saint, you touch the lowest part of his body, his feet, with the most precious and valuable part of yours. That shows utmost respect and humility. "I am not even equal to the lowest part of you, and this is the most precious thing I can offer!" It allows us to feel the magnitude of the saint. That is why the custom of bowing and touching one's head to the feet of a respected person has emerged.

Even in English, you have the expression, 'to be at someone's feet', hmm? "I learnt it at the feet

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of my mentor,” you say, or, “I’ve put everything at her feet,” meaning you’ve given your most precious things to her, or you’re at her disposal.



GURUJI:

Whatever the ritual in whatever religion, don’t follow it simply because it is a custom. If it expresses your love in a genuine way, then do it. Then it becomes a meaningful ritual.

Every society has their standard expressions that people grow up with. When their emotion, their love, is awakened, the old rituals become the tools or means to express it. New tools of expression are not often given or easily found, so they adopt the old ways that they knew before or the ones in the culture that surrounds them. In some ways it is good, since the mind need not bother with finding new and different expressions.

For instance, someone experiences love and respect for me and they want to show it. How do they show it? In our culture, they have been told to do namaskar, to touch the feet. Before, they may have done it at the temple or at home, but without emotion. Now, with emotion, they can adopt the old ways they know from before and express their love through them authentically.



DEVOTEE:

I once heard you say that it is enough sadhana just to remember Baba. Really, is just remembering Baba enough?

GURUJI:

That question itself shows your understanding. Is it 'enough'? First, do it and then tell me! Just do that '*enough*'. [Guruji laughs] As if it were such a simple thing to always remember Baba! Is it enough, just that sadhana? Do it! If it is not enough, I will tell you. Yes, in my view it is enough *just* to remember Baba!

DEVOTEE:

Then why are so many practices given to devotees?

GURUJI:

If I simply say, "Remember Baba, love Baba," people will do it in different ways. To keep up the remembrance, certain means, some kinds of rituals or disciplines, develop. In one way, they're all practices. But once the love, the spirit of enquiry or the need is lost – when the emotions are no longer touched – then slowly a practice loses its life and vitality.

DEVOTEE:

So the practices are there to maintain that remembrance?

GURUJI:

Originally, they were meant for that. There are two kinds of practices. One is a practice which doesn't seem like a practice. For instance, when your family visits you from the West to see how your life is in India, they find you coming to my house in the morning and washing dishes and sweeping the floor. They ask, "Is this the practice that you're doing?" What do you say? Is it a practice? No. Then, what is it? How is it different from when you sweep the floor at your own house? People have their own ways of connecting, and different 'practices' emerge to help them connect. But there is a tendency for the outward forms to become more important and so the spirit gets lost.

Some new person comes and thinks, "Oh, here with Gurujī the main practice is washing dishes," and so she starts asking, "May I also come and wash dishes?" And then somebody will say that since she's not used to it, she should apprentice with some senior, experienced person! [Laughter] So, for her it becomes a practice. And then, slowly, over time, some people will move on to another place, set up an ashram and say, "What Gurujī taught was washing dishes and sweeping the floor. That is the means to realization." And then they'll build a meditation hall, with dishes and brooms inside. [Gurujī laughs] People will come, take the brooms, then sweep for one or two hours – it's a practice! Then brooming practices and techniques will sweep the world! [Laughter] "Oh, Gurujī is the

discoverer of a new technique for enlightenment!" Slowly, it will go on like that and the broom will become our emblem, our symbol. Everyone will be wearing a broom badge! [Explosive laughter]

Yes, it has happened. It has happened in all the religions. I am not simply joking. Many practices you see now in the different religions came about just like that. At some point in the past a realized soul asked a disciple to do a certain thing to express his love and connect, which then later was only emulated. And then, after years and years, they became practices.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I'm not sure I understood you correctly yesterday. Did you say when you were talking about our connection with the Sadguru, that having the desire for this connection *is* the contact?

GURUJI:

The desire itself is the contact. Desire doesn't remain passive, it's very dynamic. It always wants to put itself into action in some way or other, it always struggles. So the struggle to find different ways of being in contact will be there. If we repeat these forms of contact, and they become ritualized after some time, the forms can be mistaken for the contact. For example, if you make a daily call to Shirdi, "Hello! Please convey my namaskar to

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Guruji,” the ritual is over! [Guruji laughs] You have to create something that makes your call more meaningful, more relevant, otherwise, after a few days it becomes merely a ritual. Human beings are so capable of making anything into a ritual.



DEVOTEE:

Baba says, “He who never eats food before offering it to me, I am his slave.” I have a hard time remembering to do it, but it seems like I’m forgetting something important. Is it really so important?

GURUJI:

Don’t think of it.

DEVOTEE:

But I do.

GURUJI:

Then try to understand. And, if you really feel that you can’t understand and it’s so alien to you, simply don’t bother about it. Don’t worry about it. But you yourself are saying that you want to remember Baba. When you’re hungry and hankering after food, usually you forget the moment you get it, because you’re thinking only of your personal need. If, even at that moment you think of your Beloved, how much you must be

remembering him! You may think of Baba when you don't get food, [laughter] but the moment you get it you forget him. Here Baba says, don't forget, even in that moment.

DEVOTEE:

Please tell me how to remember.

GURUJI:

If you really love Baba, you'll remember, that's all. For instance, if you see a piece of cake, the thought immediately comes, "Oh, I'd like my Beloved to taste it." If that doesn't spontaneously come to mind then do it as an exercise. Eventually, even when you see the most delicious food, it will be as if you're looking at a stone. There will be no reactions in your mind.

The best way to achieve this is to let the love grow in you. When it grows, it happens automatically, spontaneously, without your being aware of it. It just happens. Even if you see the most delicious food, first you think, "Oh, how nice it would be if Guruji could eat it!" Not after eating, saying "Ah, that was so tasty," and then "okay, we can offer it to him also." Not like that [Guruji laughs], that is the second grade. But, if you don't think of it, no problem.

So, again, even in this, even though it seems such a great yoga, it comes naturally to those in whose hearts the love is triggered. They are doing that yoga. Once love is triggered, everything

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becomes meaningful, even if you don't understand it intellectually.



GURUJI:

Of all the senses, taste is the most difficult to conquer. That's why Yogi Vemana also said, "One who has conquered the palate has conquered it all."

DEVOTEE:

Ramana would mix everything together without distinction.

GURUJI:

Baba also used to do that. He used to take all the *bhiksha* in one pot, mix it up and then eat it.

DEVOTEE:

Does 'conquered' mean not to have any pull towards taste?

GURUJI:

Yes, no pull towards taste. Italian pizza, eh? [Checking our reactions] See how immediately your minds get excited. [Guruji laughs] And if I say *gongora* or *avakaya* pickle [Andhra foods], immediately the Andhra mind imagines the taste. That is why when someone mentions a delicacy, you experience your mouth watering because

mentally you are already trying to taste it, and the body responds like that. That subtle desire we have to conquer. Even if you see wonderful pictures of your favourite dish, your mind should not imagine the taste. It should be just like how you feel when you're looking at this chair or glass. That is real conquering. Try! We'll see how weak we are. Not that we shouldn't eat all those delicacies. But we should be aware of how we relate to them and how they impact us. That is what we should free ourselves from.

Saint Ramdas says in his beautiful poetry, "Oh, how delectable, Rama, is your name! The *rasa* [taste] that I get from your name, I enjoy so much! The aesthetic enjoyment I feel is greater than the *rasas* of all these delicacies." And he gives a long list of delicious items, saying that Rama's name is more tasty than each one, in fact, more tasty than all of them together. If we really absorb this poem, then whenever we look at delicacies we will immediately remember, they are delicious no doubt, but the name of our Beloved is even more delectable. That's how we can relate every aspect of our life to our object of love.





Shirdi, 2006



chapter four

Desires: Obstacles or Stepping Stones to Fulfilment?

DEVOTEE:

When emotions are harmonized and one feels fulfilled, does one still have desires?

GURUJI:

No, there isn't any experience of desire. Fulfilment is experienced as the absence of desire; the absence of desire *is* fulfilment. Because desire always infers some kind of lack, a void or emptiness, that has to be filled. When it is completely filled and we can honestly say, "What else could I possibly need?" then that is fulfilment.

It's like the account of the woman who came to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I don't want anything, only moksha, all my other desires are fulfilled." Bhagavan said, "Mmm, yes, yes." Again she repeated, "I don't have any other desires, please just give me moksha now, I must be going!" Bhagavan again replied, "Mmmm," that's all. Then she left the hall. The moment she left he burst out laughing, holding his belly and rocking on the sofa. The other devotees in the hall couldn't understand it and wondered why Bhagavan was laughing like that. They asked, "Bhagavan, why are you laughing at her request? What's wrong with it? We have also come for moksha." Then Bhagavan said, "If one truly has the state of no desires, of truly not wanting anything, then what remains is only moksha – freedom itself. What then is there for me to give her?"



GURUJI:

It's a contradiction when someone says, "First, free yourself from all desires, give up your attachments, transcend all these things and come to me with a clear, quiet mind. Then you are eligible and I'll give you mukti!" If one's already free of desires, what is there to give?! [Guruji laughs] That is why if anybody speaks to you like this, don't believe him.

As long as one has desires, the Sadguru must

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come down to the seeker's level, know what he is seeking, and then be able to give it. If you want material things, yes, he is ready! If you want emotional things, ok, ready; if spiritual things, yes, ready! But to say, "Ah, I specialize only in mukti! Don't talk to me about anything else! [Laughter] If you leave everything and come to me, I will help you." Nowadays, this is what we hear. Bhagavan would laugh at it.

And that is what Sai Baba also says: "I give to my devotees what they ask for, until they ask me for what I want to give them." He never told them what he wanted to give. He simply said it like that. People come to Baba with many desires, but all are equal in his eyes, there is nothing higher or lower. He comes down and fulfils everyone at their own level, takes them by their hand and guides them up to his level. Not that he's sitting on the hilltop urging us, "Come on up! If you come here to me, I'll show you the whole mountain!"



DEVOTEE:

Is there any way to strengthen the desire for mukti?

GURUJI:

That the guru will do. He has his own way of doing things. He exerts his influence and creates circumstances in such a way that our desires are

automatically brought to the surface and fulfilled – rather than suppressed or indulged – and once they are fulfilled they lose their pull. This is the core teaching of Sai Baba. His path uses the natural tendency of the mind. He fulfils our desires; he doesn't ask us to give them up, or destroy them. He doesn't say, "Desires are the cause of misery so try to kill them!" or "Mind is the source of all ignorance, *ajnana*, so erase the mind!" If we were able to erase it, why should we come to him? It is because we are not able to do it, that he is needed. He gives us the strength, offering his hand, and he leads us along the path, all the way to the end. When we fulfil our desires by our own effort, they may intensify or give rise to more desires. But when Baba fulfils them, he does so in such a way that our nature is influenced in the right manner and the needed changes come about. There is no separation between the material and the spiritual; there is no struggle, no fighting, no sense of guilt. We need not feel, "I am unworthy, I am a sinner, I have all these worldly attachments, so how can I touch the holy feet of Sai Baba?" There is nothing like that.

People usually think that spirituality is about giving up all worldly desires and endeavours, and thinking only of so-called spiritual goals: moksha, nirvana, heaven, or whatever you want to call it. But Baba never asked us to give up all these things. It may look unattractive and un-Vedantic and un-spiritual, and some people may think "What is this? There is no need to give up

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worldly things? What kind of spirituality is that?" If spirituality means what is not worldly, then, in that sense it is not. [Guruji laughs] It is a path of fulfilment that leads to fulfilment, not a path of suffering. The cause of our misery is unfulfilled desires, and so, by fulfilling them we get happiness. When we realize that these desires are being fulfilled *through* him, that he's the one who makes our fulfilment possible, then naturally we start loving him: it is not an effort. Spontaneously, effortlessly, naturally, we are drawn onto the path of love. And then, all those things which are usually considered obstacles on the spiritual path become stepping stones to our fulfilment.

So nothing obstructs a Sai devotee. And the very realization that there are no obstructions gives such a sense of security. Otherwise, if we think, "Oh, my God! We have to give up so many things!"— it can become a monster, a spiritual monster! [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, once Sri Ramana got his state of ecstasy, he remained in it, while some people get it but do not stay in it. What does it take to stay in that state once it's been experienced?

GURUJI:

They may get some experience, but not exactly what Bhagavan got. They come out of it because

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of needs coming to the surface. Bhagavan had no other needs so he was able to remain in that state. If you have other pulls, you will have to cater to them.

DEVOTEE:

So we have to be ready to receive that experience completely?

GURUJI:

That is what happens. Here, we are trying to harmonize and integrate our pulls. By increasing our love, our understanding, and our clarity about needs and goals, we try to diminish the pulls towards different things. Slowly, they are all put in a coherent order related to our main pull towards fulfilment. Over time, they lose their force as separate pulls, so that eventually only one overwhelming pull remains.

This is what happens here; people become normal after coming to me! [Guruji laughs] Not that they become exceptional or extraordinary, they become normal! [Laughter] It's the clash of different pulls and consequent lack of clarity that makes people not normal. There are certain pulls which we don't actually need, they're just reactions. For example, after an argument with someone, you feel a pull to go to Chennai and you immediately order a taxi. You really have no need to go to Chennai but you just use it as a pretext to get away. It's not a real pull but a reflex action.

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Many pulls are just reflexes. Initially, our mind is like a calm pond. The different impressions, relations, and the different sense objects are like stones thrown into the calm, stable waters of the mind. They produce ripples: the thoughts. The force that makes the water into ripples is emotion. One stone, and then another, and then another – like that, hundreds and hundreds of stones are thrown into the water, making thousands of ripples, and then the ripples all collide together, and in reaction form new ripples. Each stone, each pull we perceive carries the force of all the stones before it. We think, “I have a pull for my house, I have a pull for my daughter, for my son, for my husband, for money, for this, for that.” But, in fact, each pull is backed up by a whole mixture of other pulls. So, it is very difficult to discriminate, to get clarity, to separate one pull from another.

What I’m trying to tell you is to throw this big stone – Baba – into the pond! Ker-splash! [Laughter] But it doesn’t calm the ripples down, in fact it overrides them. The pulls may still be there but now they’re mixed up with the Baba pull. They form a wave and eventually dash against the shore, slowly recede, then they’re gone. All I’m trying to do is to toss in that big stone! I want to toss it in, but you’re very careful, you catch the stone and throw it back! [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

The other day you used the analogy of a cloth drying in the sun to explain the effect of the Sadguru's presence on drying the pulls that fragment our desire for fulfilment. You said we only need to keep ourselves out on the line, drying in the sun of Baba's grace. Is there a technique we can practise to help us remain in the sun?

GURUJI:

One technique can't help because we each have such different pulls, such different desires and patterns. Our being is not so simple, it is multi-faceted. People often think if they do *nama-japa* they'll get mukti, if they do Self-enquiry they'll get realization, or, if they do vipassana or some kind of meditation, they'll get nirvana. But it's not like that. People make the mistake of thinking they can get fulfilment through a technique. Techniques can help at a particular level and can cater to certain needs, but something has to be done that takes place on all levels of our being. And what finally happens, we need not *do*: it is done by grace, and grace alone! There is no doubt about it. But in order to make ourselves receptive to grace, to experience grace fully, certain obstacles have to be removed. To identify these obstacles and remove them we need to understand our own mind. What is actually obstructing us? Then, let us think about that: it is our patterns. For instance, why are you unable to sit quietly, focused, for even five

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minutes, if it is such a beautiful experience? You love to be in my presence and listen to satsang, but many people's minds are distracted. They can't constantly focus on what I'm saying. Maybe it is physical, because of a need for sleep, or maybe it is mental patterns. Suddenly, a sentence can trigger a thought or emotion and the mind wanders off to something you've read or heard of somewhere before. The mind makes a diversion and you miss five minutes of satsang while you're brooding about that.

So, we have to think about the structure of our mind. And mostly, what makes our mind so helpless, so weak and susceptible to the environment, is our patterns or habit energies, or what in Vedanta are called *vasanas*. Just think what our mind does, what it is comprised of. When a problem comes we try to think. We think that we are thinking, but mostly we are not thinking, we are brooding. We're remembering something that happened in the past, or we're imagining what will happen in the future. Waves of thought, different thoughts, are coming and going, coming and going, but very rarely do we actually apply our minds and think. And all our decisions – whether something is good or bad, whether we have to do it or not, what to choose or not to choose – all these decisions depend upon our emotions, our likes and dislikes.

So, if we understand these dimensions of the mind, we can stop our habits and learn how to

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keep the mind clean so it won't obstruct our focus of energy, and stop us from keeping our cloth out in the sun to dry. This is where the so-called sadhanas and techniques can be used to remove the obstacles. These different things – meditation, concentration, group sharings, *niyamas*, and so on – work on that level only. The best way to remove a habit is by adopting another habit, just as we use a thorn to remove another thorn. You have the freedom to choose whatever makes you more and more focused on the object of your love. All these things come under the realm of keeping yourself in the sun, of putting your cloth out on the line. But, always remember, the drying is done by the sun, the Sadguru's grace.



GURUJI:

If we are fortunate enough to have a Sadguru like Baba, we need not think of these practices. He knows where to give, what to give, how to give. Even a hundred years of practising mantra and tantra can't do what he can do in just a second! In just a second he can destroy a *vasana*, he can destroy a pattern! I'm not asking you to do anything, I'm just giving you some tips. It's only your patterns that come in the way of your experiencing the happiness Baba is giving. When they're removed, you'll experience the happiness more. You are getting it even now, but many people

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are not aware of it, and miss the enjoyment, the happiness, the thrill. So, whenever I say anything about removing difficulties or obstacles, I only want to make you aware of what you already have. I'm only showing you your passbook, how much is in your account. [Guruji laughs] You think you are poor and starving, not knowing you have so much on deposit. Just look at your passbook, and you'll see how much is deposited on your account.





Shirdi, 1997



chapter five

Work – A Concrete Sense of Connection

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, as far as we know, did Baba ever recommend meditation to anyone?

GURUJI:

He only said meditate, read good books, and work. He actually said to work, remember God and read good books – that's the proper order. These three things he recommended.

DEVOTEE:

Did you say they were in a specific order?

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GURUJI:

Yes. Work is number one, that's why I was insisting upon the order.

DEVOTEE:

Why is work number one?

GURUJI:

Because it's not possible for people to constantly remember Baba and meditate on him and, for that matter, read good books! [Guruji laughs] Somehow, people have come to think of work as a curse. The Bible states that God inflicted the punishment of work on Adam and Eve, so they had to 'earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow'. But to me, actually, work is a boon. The satisfaction of eating a piece of bread, even a dry piece of bread, got by our own earning, has its own sweetness. So I give first preference to working. You have to work. Or at least, if you have your own savings or pension, you can live from them, no problem. I'm living on my pension, on my own earnings. But the first principle is: work. Don't be lazy and while away your time.



DEVOTEE:

They say one of the Gita's great contributions is the idea of *nishkama karma* [desireless action]. What does that mean? Is it the same as karma yoga?

GURUJI:

What I'm trying to make people around me experience is karma yoga. Some people, for instance, want to write something but I never give an assurance it will be published. [Guruji laughs] They simply write as an expression of their love. I say do whatever you like, but always as an expression of your love. People come and do many things here, the so-called contributions, but they are never acknowledged. They naturally get into that groove of doing something without any desire, not even the desire to be acknowledged. It's just an expression of their love, that's all. Even the desire to be praised by me is not there. If it's there, it is *kama*. That is why I immediately discourage it when someone tries to draw attention to what they have done. It's not because I want to put them down, but that desire is the seed, it feeds the ego. One has to do things around me with no motivation other than an expression of love. Then love expresses itself purely.

If you really want to do something, use your talents as an offering to Baba. It will give such a satisfaction to your mind. As long as you do it like this, you will remember Baba with love. Not a trace of commercialism in it, not a trace of business, not a trace of selfishness. What is more *nishkama karma* yoga than that? Some people write, that is their talent. Others cook, that is their talent. Some clean, that is their talent. Your talent is a gift from Baba and your offering is a means

of remembering him. It is both an expression and an experience of Baba. Even an iota of this kind of activity will be useful for you. And I don't want to tarnish or spoil it by making it a profession or business in the guise of spirituality. No, it won't give you any peace of mind.

When your whole life becomes a part of that expression of love, then everything becomes *nishkama*. People usually interpret the concept of *nishkama karma* in the Bhagavad Gita as activity done without any desire, but what it actually means is activity done without desire for the result, without thinking or worrying about the outcome. And how is it possible to do anything without a desire? Or desire for a result? Normally, that's not possible, it's out of the question. Only when it's an expression of your love, does it become possible. That is *nishkama karma*.

Whatever we do here, we do because it's a way to connect ourselves to Baba. We love to do it. It is both the means *and* the end. It is not a path in order to get a result: the path itself is giving you the result. That is *nishkama karma yoga*. Then any activity becomes yoga, whatever you do, whether it's writing a book, washing the dishes or sweeping the floor. And I am, in my own limited way, making you do all this *nishkama karma* without telling you it is karma yoga. Because, if I tell you, it loses its thrill. I always want people to do things without their knowledge, I want to strike them unawares. [Guruji laughs]

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DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, when I want to do *seva*, how do I know what activity to choose?

GURUJī:

As I've said, it should be an expression of your love. And, when we are choosing our expression, we should choose according to our capacities and abilities, not according to our likes and dislikes. We shouldn't avoid expressions where our ego might get hurt, then justify our choice, saying it's also an expression. So, there is a difference between expressions, and if any care has to be taken, it's care about why we choose one particular form of expression over another. There, we have to be cautious. For example, we might not choose a certain activity, thinking, "Oh, there's a very domineering personality I have to deal with there," or "I'm an intellectual, I don't want to do kitchen work!" [Gurujī laughs] If that kind of choice comes, you have to be careful.

One should not forget the basic principle behind these expressions, otherwise they won't be useful. One has to be careful whether an expression lifts the ego or destroys it. It is very subtle and very tricky. Whatever your expression is, it should soften you. The very purpose of love is to erase the ego – you have to lose yourself there.

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So, here you have only to remember this principle: The purpose of any work, whether manual or intellectual, is to lose some part of your ego. When you've finished your work, you should feel lighter. Again you do it, another few grams you lose, again you work, another few grams. The more you lose, the more you gain.



DEVOTEE:

How can we overcome our likes and dislikes?

GURUJI:

If you start liking Baba more than all the things you like, then with that liking, the other likings will go. Not that you don't have any likes and dislikes, you have. The moment you try to erase them, it's like trying to erase yourself, and you don't like it and resist. In fact, you can't erase your likes and dislikes, because it's like cutting off the branch you are sitting on. Or, in computer language, it's just like trying to erase the operating system, starting from the same partition. You can't. Because what erases the system is also a part of it and it can't erase itself. [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

And so, when likes and dislikes arise, then we should remember Baba? Is this what you're saying?

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GURUJI:

I don't mean just to remember Baba, but try to imagine what he would like or what would make you feel closer to him. Whether you like something or not, because it is connected to him, you'll start liking it. Try to like it and that trying will help you remember that it is connected to Baba. And remembering that connection will give you the liking.



DEVOTEE:

You said that the value of being engaged in work is in becoming less obsessed with ourselves, forgetting ourselves. Is that true for only that period of time or is there some accumulative effect?

GURUJI:

Definitely, as long as you are doing that work, your patterns are getting broken. It's not only during the period of work, it also continues afterwards. The pattern of self-obsession, self-centredness and always discussing and thinking about our own stories gets weakened. It is this story that breaks the other stories.



GURUJI:

As long as we are not ready for total renunciation, we need some work. And let this work be chan-

nelled to our object of love. The material and the spiritual, both have to be met.

I'm not stressing karma yoga, selfless activity, or work over meditation. If one can sit, absorbed, without any effort, for 24 hours – yes, that's my first preference. But, if you are not able to go into deep meditation, keep the mind engaged in some other activity, don't spoil it by simply sitting and brooding in the name of meditation, otherwise it becomes the devil's workshop. They say, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." And why isn't the mind going deeper? Because some needs or motivations, or some energy has to be worked out through interaction and work. So, come on, let it be worked out and then again begin meditation. It need not be *seva* or service, just do whatever you can.

DEVOTEE:

But if it's work in ordinary life, and not in relationship to a guru or holy objective, isn't it possible that our tendencies don't get released by it and we get even more entangled? What makes the difference?

GURUJI:

The grace of the guru.

DEVOTEE:

Will our tendencies get more easily released when our activities are chosen by the guru?

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GURUJI:

No, no, it's not about the guru choosing. It's about you doing what the guru likes, even when it's not to your liking. If we only do what *we* like, there's the danger of our complexes growing stronger. But if we start doing what *he* likes and have no personal liking, where is the question of our *vasanas* getting strengthened?



DEVOTEE:

The whole attitude towards work seems to be so different here at Saipatham. Rather than just helping to get the work done, people look for opportunities. I remember when I experienced this for the first time, it happened when a *gurubandhu* came up to me as I was sweeping and said, "Please give me a chance to sweep, you have so many chances."

GURUJI:

Yes, it's a different attitude. People who engage in some work here seek opportunities to help themselves, rather than thinking they are helping someone. As long as you think you are helping somebody, you don't get anything.

DEVOTEE:

It seems that the ones who work around you are more in contact with you and receive more grace.

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GURUJI:

It is not the work which gives them the grace, it is their desire to be connected to me. Actually, to have the desire for connection is the grace. It's not that I give more grace, it's that they are able to receive it more. If you're really anxious to get more, you'll get it.

So, I'm not saying that people will get more grace if they stay with me. For them, the staying itself is the grace. That is their idea, their experience, that is why they are here. Not with any faith or hope, or because of any theory or doctrine, simply because it is their experience.



GURUJI:

Activity influences us. It's our nature to be influenced by whatever work we do. So try to participate in work that is connected to satsang, or to Baba, or to whatever your object of love is. It's not actually the work but the working itself that has the value. That, for us, is karma yoga. People have different talents. Express them in your own way, whatever your limited time and capacity allows, making them part of your life, and see how fulfilled you feel.

You might feel, "Oh, I'm always thinking of Guruji. I'm always thinking of Baba," but if you are really thinking of Baba, it should express itself in your nature and in your actions. People say

that when they're away from here, it's different. I simply don't believe that. If you have the need, sincerity and honesty, you can connect, and if you don't have the need, you won't connect even here.

When you come home from work, you can take up some activity connected to your object of love, whatever your skill and aptitude is. For example, some people set up an email server [Saimail] so that devotees could communicate with one another. They had that skill and knew the technology. Like this, try to choose an activity that not only connects you to Baba, but will be useful to others as well.

So don't simply talk about your abstract sense of connection. "My mind is always on Baba, not even a minute passes without my thinking of Him." [Guruji laughs] People say that, but I think that for ninety-nine per cent of them, it's not possible. For those without any thoughts or pulls, like Ramana Maharshi, yes, for them, it is possible. Whether they do anything or not, they are always tuned to their object of love. For Ramana, not even a single minute passed without thinking of Arunachala.

For us, who see and hear many things, think about them and draw different impressions from them, we need to use some activity to protect the mind from other influences and keep us connected. It only has that value. I don't call it *nishkama karma*, it's just our need to connect, that's all. It is the expression of our love, our need, our yearning.



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GURUJI:

Everything on your path, even going to the office, should be part of your yoga. Without thoughts of getting merit, or a certificate, or whatever it is, just do your job perfectly, do your best.

DEVOTEE:

But most often, what I think to be my best is not necessarily *the* best.

GURUJI:

It need not be. It is not about efficiency or inefficiency, it's about how you do it.

If a sense of achievement comes in, it kills your efficiency and you stop enjoying what you're doing. You lose the art of it by thinking, "Is what I'm doing perfect? Maybe I'll make some mistakes. What will people think about it?" The more you think about it, the more mistakes you make.

I'll give you an example. When you're with your friends in the West you easily give lectures. One friend asks you what Guruji said in satsang and you beautifully expound. Your friend gets so enchanted by your discourse, he says, "Oh, I'll arrange a meeting tomorrow, a big gathering, and you can give a speech about it." Here comes the problem: Once you stand on the dais, nothing comes from the pulpit. "Guruji, last time in the States ..." you say, "Sorry, in India, when he gave a satsang in Shirdi ... no, no, not in Shirdi. What is that place's name? Tirupati, no, I mean Tiruvan-

namalai.” [Laughter] Everything goes, the mind becomes blank. You forget everything – names of places, even my name! [Guruji laughs] Your natural capacity to speak is hindered, is gone, the moment it becomes a feat, an achievement, an act of doing.

This is what happens when there is a sense of achievement and insecurity about the result. It kills our efficiency, our capacities, our faculties, and stops us from enjoying life. So I don’t give any room for the sense of achievement. I don’t even praise people. [Guruji laughs] I don’t want to spoil them. To me, what you do is not important, it’s how you do it.

First, try to practise with things that are connected to Baba. Because the world is so deluding, it’s difficult to keep the focus there, very difficult. It is easy here, because here we have love, we have a goal, we have contact. So, get the practice here. Once the mind knows the taste of it, then you can apply it to other walks of life. Then, as I said, everything – your being in the States, having a family, having a flat, having a car, going to the office, working – everything becomes an expression of your love. What we have to concern ourselves with is only the love. So, take care of that love, and Baba will take care of how it is expressed. And be ready to express it, be eager to express it, grab every opportunity to express it! The more you express it, the stronger it becomes and the more it grows.





Hyderabad, 1998



chapter six

The Question of Choice

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, the way you speak about getting a glimpse of the Sadguru's state, you make it sound as though we had a choice whether to hold on to that blissful experience or be distracted from it. Is it really a choice?

GURUJI:

It is a choice, but in fact it's a choiceless choice. It feels like a choice, but actually we don't have a choice, not only in this respect, but in almost all aspects of our life. The concept of choice is very tricky. This so-called choice is governed by our

past habits. We get distracted by the habit of always looking for something new.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, it seems that the glimpses we had were given, and we didn't do anything to get them. Is there at least something we can do not to stop them?

GURUJI:

Everything is given, how can you 'stop' anything?! Not only that experience, all our experiences have been given. But it's how we take them, how we receive them and how we relate to them, that makes us feel that we are choosing. Just think about any experience in your life, is it really your choice? For instance, it feels like you have chosen this path, but was it really a choice? Are we really capable of choosing?

People think that their life is the result of their choices and that they have the freedom to choose. They have a concept of spiritual life where they think that by treading the path one loses the choice – as if you had it before and were going to lose it now. What I say is, you never had it to lose! [Guruji laughs] Just think of anything – how you dress, what you eat, where you live, when you get up, anything, take any small, insignificant, trivial thing and try to explore it. You will see that you don't have much choice!

DEVOTEE:

I understand intellectually that we don't really have a choice but it often *feels* as if we had a choice.

GURUJI:

Yes, it feels like it.

DEVOTEE:

For example, in satsang, whether I go and sit here, or there, in front of you.

GURUJI:

No, if it was your choice you would be sitting right here. [Guruji points at his feet] [Laughter] So within what is left you try to make another choice, which is the next best, and then the next best, and then the next best. And finally, you'll be satisfied with what you get and think, "Oh, it's my choice." [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

But the experience feels like there's a choice: choosing to sit here or there.

GURUJI:

Yes, that's what I'm saying, everyone feels like that. Everybody says it is my choice, my choice, my choice! That feeling in Vedantic jargon is called *ajnana* or ignorance. That *ajnana* is not somewhere inside, at the back of your head. No, it's there in

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every action, in every thought, in every breath.
That's how it tricks you.

DEVOTEE:

But what is it exactly, Guruji, that makes it not my choice?

GURUJI:

Explore, explore! It's not so easy to experience it. It's not enough just to think, "Oh, I thought I had choices and now I'm told there are no choices, so I'll stop thinking like that!" No, it's not so easy. But if one can really see and experience it, it is what some traditions call 'choiceless awareness'. We are all choiceless, but we are not aware of the existence of our own choicelessness. If we are aware of how choiceless our whole being is, how it is simply flowing, and if we can learn to observe the flow – not as a glimpse, but as a continuous experience – then we will be in that choiceless awareness. Choiceless, right, we are all like that. Awareness, that's the problem – we don't have it! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

If we should ever be aware of our choicelessness, is that a good place to be?

GURUJI:

Yes, a very good place.

DEVOTEE:

Because it is the truth?

GURUJI:

It is the truth. What better place is there than truth?



DEVOTEE:

Would it be correct to say the reason our choosing is choiceless is because we are so conditioned by our past, our emotions, our environment, by so many things? When we reach a point of being unconditioned, will there then be complete freedom to choose?

GURUJI:

That's correct. You express it in terms of conditioning and freedom, I express it in terms of helplessness and ability. The immediate effect of that inevitable choice, we experience as helplessness, not as conditioning. We try to choose but are unable to choose. Finally, when the choice becomes inevitable, we 'choose' something but the moment we choose, we experience a kind of lack of fulfilment because we have done it helplessly. So, in fact, what we want is the ability to make the right choice. It's said that, in the state of choiceless awareness, the right choice will come. Why do we have to achieve that choiceless awareness? In

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order to choose properly. [Guruji laughs] That is the whole paradox. So, in contrast to helplessness, we gain the power to choose.



DEVOTEE:

So what seem like choices are dictated by our patterns and habits?

GURUJI:

Yes, past habits. We are all driven by our own habit energies. They are called in different traditions, patterns, *vasanas*, *samskaras*, karmas, so many things. But whatever you call it, this is the essence of it.

DEVOTEE:

Doesn't the spiritual path endeavour to remove these patterns, *vasanas* and past habits and erase the ego?

GURUJI:

What is ego? It is the net result of all your past actions. That is what is called ego. So, some say, "Erase your ego," others say, "Destroy your *vasanas*" or, "Destroy your patterns." This is all jargon, but whatever it is, this is the thing that should happen.



DEVOTEE:

Do saints like Sai Baba and Sri Ramana actually have any choice?

GURUJI:

No, they don't have any choice. They have no choices at all. Because whatever is happening, they simply flow spontaneously with it. They don't *choose* like we do, especially about their own life.

DEVOTEE:

Because they don't have preferences?

GURUJI:

They don't have preferences, they don't have choices. There is nothing to choose.

DEVOTEE:

What do you mean by 'they flow spontaneously with it'? In a situation there's usually more than one possibility, so what does it mean to flow with it?

GURUJI:

To choose is to have resistance to something that is happening. A person who doesn't have any resistance and accepts all things equally, flows spontaneously with whatever comes.

DEVOTEE:

When there is spontaneity, there is no choice?

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GURUJI:

Yes, when there's no choice, there'll be spontaneity! [Laughter] But check, is this so-called choicelessness really spontaneous? Question again! We call certain things spontaneous, but are they really spontaneous? Explore! I'm not giving any answers, I'm only trying to make you think. Trying!



DEVOTEE:

And what is will?

GURUJI:

I think the effect which gives us the illusion that we are making a choice is called will. And if we go on willing and willing and willing like that, willing to be a part of that delusion, that would be our last will! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

What about the concept of God's will?

GURUJI:

The ability to choose perfectly, to will perfectly, is godhead – that's what is meant by 'God's will'. "Thy will be done"¹ is about trying to be one with

¹ A half verse from *The Lord's Prayer*, taught by Jesus to his disciples. It is the most common Christian prayer.

God who wills, to be one with that will. So it is about trying to get the capacity to be one with God's will. Instead of the word 'choice' they use the word 'will'. In fact, in English they mean almost the same. So they are saying that only God has the capacity to choose; you don't have it! So, try to gain that perfect will. As the Bible says, "Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." That is the message.

It may appear as if you are becoming subservient to God's will, but you're not. It's more like becoming one with it – your will and that will are not two, they become one. Then you become as perfect as your Father in heaven. They express it in terms of imperfection and perfection; I express it in terms of helplessness and capacity or power; someone else may express it in terms of conditioning and freedom. Fundamentally, they are all referring to the same thing.



DEVOTEE:

If we have no choice, does it mean that we actually have no control over our lives and actions?

GURUJI:

It's a mystery that once you come to know you have no choice it makes you feel very sad, because you love to have choices, you want to choose. If I say, "No, there are no choices for you," it feels like

a punishment, as if you've lost your freedom and have become helpless. "Oh, choicelessness, what a sad situation!" It feels like that. But if you can see it from another angle, you will enjoy it. And, the moment you enjoy the choicelessness, that glimpse of fulfilment becomes a view.

DEVOTEE:

When you use the word 'choicelessness', do you mean that everything is predestined?

GURUJI:

Some people say, "It's all *prarabdha karma*, there's nothing you can do. Everything, every moment when you're moving, when you're sitting, whether you're breathing or not, everything is predestined!" But it is not predestined or choiceless in the way you think. It is not that kind of choicelessness, that you can't change at all. Yes, to some extent you can change it, it is not completely predestined. For instance [Guruji drops a pen and catches it in mid-air], the pen is destined to fall to the floor. Its velocity is dependent on its weight, the height it's falling from and the density of the air – all these things determine its speed. But if I catch it in the middle of its fall, where is predestination now? If this possibility was not there, there would be no question of spirituality, a Sadguru, mukti or liberation. What is this liberation you're all trying for? Liberation from the condition of predetermination. If you

don't accept this, and think that even liberation is part of your destiny, is it real liberation?

Fate or grace, free will or destiny – these are big questions, books are written on them, hmm? [Guruji laughs] It won't lead us anywhere. Just think about these things: do you really have a choice? And what makes you think, what makes you experience, that having a choice gives you joy? And what is actually choicelessness, and why does it make you so sad? Think about these things! It's a different kind of choicelessness than what you think it is. There are no words for it, that's the problem.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, if one could accept real choicelessness, then there would come with it a tremendous sense of security because, if it's no longer my choice that things happen, then it must be someone else's choice. And that 'someone' or 'something' has, as it were, taken care of me my whole life, so why worry? I mean, one's sense of security must increase immensely if one can really rest in that choicelessness.

GURUJI:

Yes, that is exactly where Baba comes in. He gives you that sense of security so that you can explore, and enjoy the choicelessness. You give the choice

to him and you feel, “Yes, I have given the choice to him, he will steer my life. He will take all decisions for me.” In fact, you are not giving the choice to him, but it feels like it and that gives you a sense of security so that you can go further; otherwise you can’t, because it’s just like trying to cut the branch you are sitting on. You take the knife but you don’t strike at the branch, because if you strike, the strike will be on you. It is perilous to you, so you don’t do it. This is exactly where the Sadguru comes in, so it becomes easier for you. But to some, instead of thinking of this in a positive way, they feel like they have given up their liberty, and all their choices are gone. To them it almost feels as if they are bound, like slaves, but it’s not true. It means they are not capable of seeing the beauty in it. You have brought up a very good point – in giving the choice to a Sadguru who loves us, who can take better decisions for us, we feel secure, we feel happy.

So, when you feel that it is really choiceless – whether you like what’s happening or not, whether you understand it or not, whether you have any idea of what’s going to happen or where all of this is going to end [laughter] – you don’t mind, because you have that sense of security. Then the real path starts, and you begin to experience real love. That’s what the experience of love is like!



DEVOTEE:

You use the analogy of cutting the branch on which we sit. Okay, let's say we accept our helplessness and feel we are being helped, but still the branch needs to be cut – where is the role of our action in this? Because a kind of apathy could set in or lack of striving, a sense of, "Okay, anyway, it's not my choice."

GURUJI:

In most cases, what happens is, we are not sure about our choice and we find ourselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: is it good or is it bad? Is it right or is it wrong? We don't know whether it is really beneficial to us or not. But once we hold on to the Sadguru, we happily choose without fear. So we don't stop making our so-called choices, but now we enjoy them. Before, we couldn't, we always bore the whole burden of our choice. Now, it is a totally different thing.

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean we choose with light-heartedness and a sense of security?

GURUJI:

More security, yes. If you want to call it light-hearted, okay, but it is not simply light-hearted. It is with a lighter heart, a heart which is bereft of its burden, lightened, as the burden of the whole responsibility is taken away.

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DEVOTEE:

Guruji, within this, where is the place for aspiration?

GURUJI:

To go on seeking and trying to keep up that sense of security, trying to experience and lead a care-free life – carefree, not careless – that becomes the endeavour, totally.



DEVOTEE:

So, it finally comes down to *saranagati* – going to the guru for refuge?

GURUJI:

It's not that you go to the guru *to* surrender; what happens *is* surrender. Even to surrender is not in your hands. The state itself, what you experience, is called surrender. What happens is, people see surrender as a practice, as one of the means to get Self-realization, but it is not a means you can choose. A Sadguru has to trigger that love and once you start tasting and experiencing that love, then surrender becomes so choiceless that there is no choice for you: there is no other way.

That love will slowly make us lose our choices. Not that losing choice is the objective in itself, it is a result, an effect of something else. Because we love so much, our choices become unimportant. What

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our object of love loves, we love. We merge into His choice. We lose ourselves, our individuality, and merge into a greater love.

When you realize there is no other way, no other choice to your destination, you take refuge. That is called *saranagati*.





Chennai, 2000



chapter seven

Sadguru, Window to the Sky

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, should we focus more on the guru's form or his state?

GURUJI:

Here again is the old, classic dilemma: form or formless, *saguna* or *nirguna*, this or that. Is it Bhagavan's or Sai Baba's form we are devoted to? Is the form even necessary? Bhagavan himself said that he was the Formless One. When someone asked him, "Bhagavan, what is your true nature?" he said he was not the form there on the sofa. "Why limit Ramana to these six feet?" he said,

“Ramana is universal.” So it is quite clear his real form is formless. Hmm?

In a similar way, Baba said, “Whoever thinks this five-and-a-half-foot body is Sai Baba, hasn’t seen Sai Baba at all.” So his form is not Sai Baba. Then, should we look upon him with form or as formless? Is it possible to think about Ramana Maharshi or Sai Baba without their form?

Recently, in a satsang, I used the analogy of a window to explain the function of the Sadguru’s form. Your conditioned state is like living in a room without a window or a door: you feel suffocated. This is our fundamental problem. We feel limited and want to look out and be free from this condition. A window is needed, and that is the form of the Sadguru. And when you look at the window, you are actually looking *through* the window, and what you see is the formless, unbounded sky outside. Sai Baba is such a window. When you look at him, it’s not just his form, it’s what you can see beyond it. So a Sadguru – the form of the Sadguru – is a window through which you can see your true Self, the realization of your abstract ideal of fulfilment.

So try to know the significance of form, the significance of the window. Don’t cherish any aversion towards form. The Sadguru’s form is a window through which you can see the Unbounded – it is needed, it is indispensable, you can’t do away with it. If you try to see the sky in a closed, windowless room, all you’ll see is your own imagination, your own concept, of what is

outside. You may imagine, "Oh, it must be like this or it must be like that!" But it can never be the reality. Reality is non-conceptual, it is not experienced by thinking, so in the process of concretizing it you need a concrete means.

DEVOTEE:

So is it necessary to have a living guru?

GURUJI:

Yes, as long as you are also living! If you think you are alive and other people are also living, you need a guru. And if you ask, "What about Ramana Maharshi? He didn't have a living guru." My reply is, he had a living guru: Arunachala. Arunachala was so alive for him that it changed his whole life. Bhagavan's is an exceptional case. He had come to such a level of maturity that he could experience even a mountain as his living guru. Most of us are not at that level. If by some stroke of grace you experience the mountain as a living guru, then it is okay to connect yourself in that way. It all depends again upon your need.

DEVOTEE:

And what about the Buddha? Did he have a Sadguru?

GURUJI:

He did not have one, he was one of those rare souls. But he never advocated not having a

Sadguru. Even though he didn't have a living guru and didn't reach realization with the help of one, he advocated taking refuge at the feet of a Buddha – that is the meaning of the first of the triple refuges that you recite to become a follower of the Buddha. The first advice is to seek the feet of the Buddha, to love and take refuge – *Buddham saranam gacchami*. The second is, *Dharmam saranam gacchami*, to take refuge in Truth, the Dharma. Here, you try to understand that the Buddha is only a window and what is expressed through the window is the Dharma. You try to absorb the Dharma and understand the true nature of things – *Dharmam saranam gacchami*. Then, because you are so easily influenced by your environment, you need something which protects your love of the Buddha and what was expressed through him. That is, you need the protection and support of the Sangha, the community of devotees. So, thirdly, you take refuge in the Sangha – *Sangham saranam gacchami*. By reciting the three refuges [*Trisarana*], you become a true follower of the Buddha, that is, if you follow them perfectly.

So, the Buddha advocated a path of refuge. *Saranam, saranam, saranam* – you have to take refuge, take refuge, take refuge. And now people say taking refuge is not connected with the Buddha at all! At the same time they are saying *Buddham saranam gacchami*! Is it not a path of refuge, of surrender, of bhakti? In the beginning, middle and at the end, it is a vast ocean of love!

So it should be clear that it was not just what

the Buddha said that made people follow him. What people got and what he gave was something beyond verbal teachings. That is why, after coming to him and seeing him, even great pundits, Vedic scholars and *Sramanas*¹, gave up all their learning, their religion, everything, and became followers of the Buddha. All because of their love for him – for Gautama the Buddha. If we consider only the sutras we miss the life in it. And, if we have a little common sense and think about it, we'll immediately know it could hardly be only the teachings that transformed so many hundreds and thousands of people. It was something else. It was the Buddha's compassion for humanity, the love he shared all those years! Those who met the Buddha experienced what he shared, and out of their love for him, they renounced everything and became monks. They had so much love they couldn't think of anything but the Buddha.



GURUJI:

One day somebody went to the Buddha and asked him, "How can you tell whether someone is a Buddha, a realized person? How can I know if someone is my Sadguru? What is the criterion?" The Buddha started giving various points but

¹ A class of ascetics contemporary with the Buddha who were seeking higher knowledge through yogic and ascetic practices.

then negated each one. Is it because of performing miracles? One need not be a Buddha to perform miracles. Is it because of explaining Vedanta philosophy in a glowing manner? Anybody who's got the gift of the gab can explain it well, even an actor if you give him a script. Someone can be very bright, a good speaker, a good teacher, but not necessarily a Buddha. Finally, the Buddha said that the one in whose presence you experience a sense of security and fulfilment, without any basis, without any reason – he is a Buddha. You simply can't judge by outward signs or actions.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, where is Baba's presence most strongly felt?

GURUJI:

Actually, Baba's presence is everywhere but you experience it differently depending on place and time. For instance, during one visit to Shirdi you feel it more powerfully in Dwarkamai. During the next visit you feel it's very good in Lendi, then at another time in the Chavadi. Then, next time you feel "Ah, there's nothing like the Samadhi Mandir!" Then again it can change. It depends on how we're feeling in the moment, on our patterns, our needs. So wherever you feel drawn, you can stay there. It's not that Baba's presence is only in

one place or that one place is better than another. Baba's presence is like fire: its heat is always burning, but you don't always feel it so easily, it's not always palpable. For instance, the light bulb at the back of this room is actually burning hot. Go and touch it and you'll experience this. Its heat is also here, at the front of the room where we are sitting, but you can only feel it if you are sensitive enough. In the same way, if you are sensitive enough, you can experience Baba's presence wherever you are, there's no need to go to Shirdi.

DEVOTEE:

So proximity does make a difference?

GURUJI:

Yes, proximity makes a difference. If you think that it doesn't, why did you come all the way from Tiruvannamalai to see me in Tirumala? What difference does it make? You tell me.

DEVOTEE:

It makes a huge difference! Being near a living Sadguru makes his presence much more palpable.

GURUJI:

Yes, it could be.

DEVOTEE:

And yet his presence surely does not diminish

when we are at a distance or even when the Sadguru leaves his body?

GURUJI:

That's true. Even when they are in the body, the saints are not confined to the body; it is because they are not limited to the body that they are saints. Those who are confined to the body have to go to them to realize they are not bound by the body. As long as we are not free of this body, the presence and proximity of the Sadguru is needed.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, it is recorded that Sri Ramana said before he died, "They say that I am going, but where can I go? I am here!" Is it true that 'here' means 'wherever we are'?

GURUJI:

When Bhagavan said that, it wasn't his intention to speak about his state, but rather to console the devotees who were in anguish because they saw he was about to leave his body. To them, it meant he was going away and wouldn't be there anymore. So in order to comfort them he said, "I am here!" But when saints speak like this it can always be understood on more than one level. If you go into it more deeply and understand Bhagavan's statement in a more profound way, 'here' means 'everywhere'.

He responded similarly in other contexts. Just read his answers to devotees when they invited him to America. They showed that he was everywhere.

So, on the human level, when he was dying and the devotees were very sad, Bhagavan consoled them with love and affection, assuring them that he would be 'here' always. At a deeper level, he was pronouncing what his real state was, and what it is and will always be. With the words of the saints there's always more going on than the current context. One meaning is appropriate to a particular context, but when you go deeper you find more and more meanings, infinite levels of meaning!



DEVOTEE:

What is the connection between the historical Sai Baba and our experience of him now? If Baba is really everywhere, why do we still relate to Baba's historical form and go to Shirdi?

GURUJI:

Because we still see him as Sai Baba with that form and those features, with that headdress and wearing that *kafni* – that is Baba for us. All the other things related to that form are also part of our experience of him.

DEVOTEE:

Even the sense of presence?

GURUJI:

Yes, even the sense of presence. And the other thing is, anything connected to him we call holy. Even though Baba said, “Those who think I’m only in Shirdi haven’t realized me at all,” – but still, he was in Shirdi. And when Baba was so attached to his guru’s form, wouldn’t he know his guru was everywhere? Why did he have to stick to Gurusthan? Didn’t Sri Ramana know that Arunachala was pervading everywhere and was actually his own Self? Was his Self not there when he was in Madurai? Why did he have to come to Tiruvannamalai? And, after coming, why was he so attached that he never left? Even a great saint like Ramana, who had realized his own Self everywhere, still showed such attachment to his Sadguru’s physical form! What did he say? “Arunachala is my Sadguru.” And then, if we speak dry Vedanta – saying, “What is there in Shirdi? Baba is everywhere, so why go to Shirdi?” – it’s meaningless!

No doubt, Baba is not the form, he himself said it. Baba is the spirit that pervades everything, that is in all creatures. That is his real nature. The same nature that manifests in the form of Baba is trying to make us aware of Itself. To do this, it takes different forms and Baba is one of them.



GURUJI:

Don’t have a phobia towards form. Truth may be

formless, but why should we have a phobia towards form when we have a form, and are living amongst forms, and those who taught about formlessness came with a form? Buddha Sakyamuni had a form.

DEVOTEE:

It seems human form is always limited by its attributes.

GURUJI:

You have conflict about this because you have been brainwashed by these different philosophies that stress formlessness, attributelessness, the ultimate state, the impersonal Absolute. There you see only one side, not the other, so it is difficult. I can make Sai Baba formless and more abstract by calling him the Guru Principle. Even though I call him Sai Baba, it really means his formless state. As Baba himself said, "Whoever thinks I'm only this five-and-a-half-foot body, they haven't seen Sai Baba." But because of your particular conditioning, I don't say this to you, since it's not what you require. So when I say Sai Baba to you, Sai Baba means Sai Baba. That is the remedy you need now. First, accept this, find the window. I know it is only a window, but when you look at a window, you are actually looking *through* the window and what you see is the so-called formless.



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DEVOTEE:

I'm not clear about what the 'sky' is in your analogy about the window. It seems that the ultimate thing is to see the sky and this is what the guru reveals. But how am I to look for the sky? Am I to look within, and try to feel or sense it somehow? And, if so, where should my attention be focused? How to make my sense of the sky concrete?

GURUJI:

If you feel the suffocation of being imprisoned in a windowless room you know where to look when the window is open. Nobody needs to tell you where to look because you'll be anxiously searching in all directions, pressed and suffocated by the limitations of your own being. First, you don't feel the expansion, you just want to be relieved of the limitations, that suffocation, so your immediate relief comes from the window itself. You start loving the window and want to be near it. You put a chair there and then sit and start looking at it, experiencing the cool breeze coming through. And then, slowly you look out and see the sky. You start to wonder, "What is the sky?" Later, you realize that even though the sky looks as if it's in the shape of the window, what you're actually seeing is the unbounded infinite. This can be a gradual process because even after experiencing the breeze, your past habits of groping around the wall make you go back again and sit in the corner. [Laughter] Again, you'll feel suffocated and want

to go back to the window and feel the breeze. Within half an hour, you'll get used to it, and then again you'll go back in the corner!

We need to get away from the window and feel our suffocation, so on our return we can experience the thrill of the limitless more and more. And, in fact, we'll not only want to stay by the window, we'll want to go outside the room. Why do we have to stay inside? Let's go out! Then there's no need for suffocation and no more need even for the window. Because the window isn't there for itself, it is just there as an opening for us to see the Reality beyond.





Sbirdi, 2008



chapter eight

The Mind

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what is peace of mind?

GURUJI:

Not splitting the mind into pieces. [Guruji laughs]
Peace of mind is keeping it in one piece.

DEVOTEE:

Does that mean there are no pulls in different directions?

GURUJI:

Pulls split the mind into pieces. They don't allow it

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to stay in one piece. We always experience pieces of mind, and if the pieces aren't there, we have peace of mind.



DEVOTEE:

What is the difference between our mind and the 'no-mind' state of a saint?

GURUJI:

The mind which we have, they don't have! [Laughter] What we call mind – our deepest impressions, our understanding or misunderstanding, our appreciation or lack of appreciation, our sorrow or happiness and all our reactions to these things – these they don't have. It is very difficult to explain. Even Ramana Maharshi said, "I can't describe it to you." If great sages like Ramana can't describe it, I would be a fool to attempt it!



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, I wonder what is the best way to use the mind?

GURUJI:

Can you use your mind? In order to use it, it should be in your control. So what is the point of my telling you how to make the best use of your

mind if you haven't got control over it? If I tell you, can you do it?

DEVOTEE:

At times when emotions are very strong it would help to have some reasoning.

GURUJI:

The fact that you have such strong emotions shows that your mind is not under your control. The problem is not with the mind, but with the emotions that trigger the thoughts. As your emotions, so your thoughts. So, when you get an emotional harmony, a stability, then your mind will be calm and under your control. Then, automatically, you'll know how to use it and how to make best use of it. When you want to use it, you'll use it, and when you don't want to use it, you'll keep it aside, and just store it somewhere. [Guruji laughs]

There are also certain thoughts that don't have a particular emotion attached to them. They are stray thoughts and they can be controlled by different practices.

DEVOTEE:

Is there a need to control even stray thoughts?

GURUJI:

Yes, because they weaken our attention and focus. Our energy is being used and misused by stray

thoughts that are useless! They're like those stray dogs always barking outside in the street, disturbing us. When we have some control over stray thoughts they become like pet dogs, only barking when there's a need. The main problem is we don't have a strong enough desire to get rid of even these. Why do stray thoughts come? They come to fill the gap of not having a strong, positive emotion that can give rise to a meaningful thought. When there is such a vacuum or void, then stray thoughts come and fill in the gap. They are the stuffing that fills the hollowness. So, a positive emotion is needed to strengthen our focus.

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean by focusing on love for the Sadguru, we can bring the other emotions under control?

GURUJI:

Yes, controlling the emotions through love – experiencing and expressing love, triggering love, inculcating love, and so on. When I talk about controlling stray thoughts, that is what you do when you sit quietly in meditation, or repeat Baba's name, or focus on Baba's picture, or read about him. There are so many techniques, 'stray techniques', which you can adopt and practise anytime.

DEVOTEE:

But when the emotions are disturbed, techniques don't seem to work.

GURUJI:

The only technique for that is love. It is not in your hands. That's why I don't ask you to do anything. You can only take care of your stray thoughts. When you take care of them you will become a pet, Baba's pet. Otherwise your mind is like a stray dog. Whatever we see attracts us and we run after it. Whenever something is offered, we greedily grab for it. It's free, let's take it! [Guruji laughs] That's the sign of a stray dog.



GURUJI:

Your identity is based on your emotions, not on your thinking mind. What you are, the basic personality, is the emotions, they are deeper than thoughts. Based on your emotions the thoughts arise. That is why in Vedanta they say, the heart is like the sun and the mind is like the moon: the moon gets its luminosity from the sun. The mind is like the screen and the heart is like the projector – that is the analogy Bhagavan gave. Just think of it and you'll come to know. If you want to effect any change, you have to work at the level of the heart – on the projector, not the screen. The problem is, your mind is often opposed to your heart. When they become friends, you see they are only parts of a larger whole that complement one another, and then mind and heart start to evolve.



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DEVOTEE:

How can we know the mind?

GURUJI:

How do we come to know anything? By observing it. In order to know me better, you have to observe me: What is he doing? How is he sitting? How does he do things? Like that, to know your mind, you have to observe it. When you go on observing and noticing, then you'll get to know all the mechanisms of the mind.

If you have a discerning eye for what is going on in your mind, you'll notice that during a particular time only particular thoughts appear. They come in a cycle. For example, while brushing your teeth, some thoughts arise, notice them and mark them down. The next day, when you are brushing your teeth, you'll notice the same kind of thoughts are there. Or, when you're walking down the stairs, a particular thought will arise and not occur again for the next twenty-four hours until you walk down the stairs again. Suddenly the thought appears again on its own.

The mind works in different cycles. And, based on the workings of the mind, its habits and cycles, so many spiritual practices have been designed: mantra, *japa*, dhyana, pranayama, all these things. They are all centred on getting rid of these cyclical patterns. That's why a fixed hour of meditation is good. Not that one has to meditate only then, you can meditate longer or leave early if you have urgent work.

You won't necessarily notice the difference immediately, but by going on practising, you'll start to feel the difference. For instance, if you meditate between nine and ten in the morning, and seven and eight at night every day, after a month or so, wherever you are, whatever you're doing – even in an office or in a meeting – the mind starts to get calm. Automatically, the state of meditation is induced without any effort. This is due to the nature of the mind. You need not understand all the intricacies of it. You will come to know by continuing to observe it. Then it won't trick you – you can trick it! [Laughter] Now that you have taken up the job of detection, keep your mind under constant surveillance! [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

What is the connection between stopping thoughts and experiencing bliss? And how are concentration techniques helpful for that purpose?

GURUJI:

In the *Yogasutras*, Patanjali says that the object of yoga is not concentration. He says, "*Yogas'chitta vritti nirodhah*" – "to stop the flow of thoughts is yoga." That is his definition. We are all trying to concentrate on one thing or another, to make our minds one-pointed so that the mind deeply expands. Sticking to the sense of expansion is in one way also concentration. There, instead of

focusing on a limited object, you are concentrating on an expanded object. Usually, what we mean by concentration is being one-pointed, continuously sticking to a particular object or function of the mind. Some people say to just watch the watcher and keep awareness of your own 'I'. Others say to watch the flowing thoughts. Still others say, "Why watch thoughts that are not so glorious when we can watch a glorious form like Sai Baba?" There are many different methods, but they all give you the post of a watchman – to constantly watch something or other, to achieve a continuous watchfulness or mindfulness. It is not a matter of trying to *get* awareness – awareness is already there. But instead of being aware of so many objects, we want to make it aware of just one object, whether it is Sai Baba, our thoughts, our mind, or the so-called Self, whatever suits our temperament. The nature of the mind is that it is constantly moving from one thing to another. If we stop that movement, the mind will stop. In order to get to that state, these teachings want you to hold on to one object.

Now I have explained what concentration is. The question was, in what way is concentration related to bliss? Because a kind of bliss seems to be the objective of everyone who practises meditation. Whether you call it bliss, the unconditioned state, liberation or nirvana, they are all different words for a state of fulfilment. In what way is the watching of a particular object and the stoppage of thoughts congenial to the experience of bliss?

We have been given to understand that bliss is something already embedded within us, but thoughts act as obstructions that veil the bliss like a curtain. So, if you stop the flow of thoughts and remove the curtain, you will experience the bliss already inside. That is why it is called *insight* – by constantly watching inside, different curtains are removed, and then you'll take sight of what is behind the curtains. This is the concept that underlies those teachings.

There are thousands of techniques, but, as far as I know, most of them focus on removing obstructions to something that is already there, naturally, inside you. The fundamental problem is that you always relate to bliss as an object. It is already there and you only have to tap into it, or find the right key that opens the door to it – to that room of bliss! Even concentration on form leads to formlessness. By concentrating on one object, the mind's habit of constantly moving from one object to another is stopped, and the mind remains focused on that one object. Then, automatically, it becomes introverted, becoming one with full awareness. In Sanskrit they call this *Chaitanya Ghanata*. Whether the techniques are useful or not and whether they are really related to your fulfilment or not, is a different subject.

What I'm trying to tell you is, instead of thinking how to stop your thoughts, try to think of why the thoughts are coming. Trying to stop the thoughts is going against the current. Even trying to watch the mind is also, in one way, going

against the current. Why aren't you able to watch your mind when you are really interested in something, or when you are having negative thoughts or getting angry? Why do you become one with the thoughts? For example, you have been on a retreat meditating for three months, watching your mind, and the moment somebody insults you, the whole matter ends there and then! You become one with the thought and get angry. What is happening here? So long as you are not interested in the content of the thoughts, you can watch them, but the moment the content is something interesting, or something you need or feel strongly about, then you become one with them, you are no longer able to watch. This is the natural tendency of the mind.

Of a hundred thoughts, probably only five or six are really needed and relevant. But all thoughts express something within you, they are trying to catch hold of some sort of fulfilment in you. They're seeking something, but failing to get it. A thought is just like a wave – it comes and goes, then vanishes; it dashes against the shore, then recedes. Again, another thought will come, meet the shore, recede and produce another thought. Why are these thoughts coming? What is their aim and what are they about, what are they addressing? Are the thoughts really troubling you, or is it their content?

Even when you are happy and blissful, in an ecstatic mood, you have thoughts. And the more you think about what gives you happiness, the

happier you'll feel. Doesn't thinking about our object of love, our Beloved, give us happiness? So these thoughts can help increase the bliss. If the thoughts disturb your peace of mind, if they are negative, or come from a mood of unhappiness, you say, "Oh, I'm getting lots of thoughts, let me take a sleeping pill and go to bed!" Actually, the thoughts are not the problem, they are harmless, innocent. Why do you always treat them like an enemy, and try to fight them? What have they done to you?

Why don't you take the content of the thought as your subject of enquiry, because that is what really matters. It's not the thought, but how you actually respond to its content. When you are sitting in meditation, so many thoughts arise. Whether you observe them or become one with them, whatever it may be, what is the content of the thoughts? Just think about it. They reflect your emotions: your likes, your dislikes, your loves, your hates, your desires. And some simply come out of habit. Why do habits keep on repeating themselves? Because sometimes following a habit makes us happy. That's why it is so difficult for us to stop a habit. As long as the mind is not engaged in something immediate, it sticks to what is already past and ruminates on it until something new happens – whether it is happy or unhappy, praise or insult – then automatically the previous thought stops and a new one arises.

Our thoughts are another form of words, in fact. Words are not only the spoken sounds, there

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are also unspoken words, all our thoughts. In a drama there are two types of speaking: dialogue or soliloquy. Our thoughts are our soliloquies, we talk to ourselves in our thoughts. There is such a human need for expression that even when nobody is there, we express at least to ourselves. [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

Does fulfilment have no name or form?

GURUJI:

It has a form, and you've just named it 'fulfilment'. Depending upon the language, you can give it any name. All our emotions, all our feelings and thoughts have some kind of form. That is how we differentiate between one emotion and another. Just think about it – happiness, envy, anger, discontentment, peace, fulfilment – they each have their own form. If they had no form they would be merged with one another. How would you be able to distinguish between happiness and unhappiness? And what kind of form is it? If you have the patience, you can know. It will take you from the gross to the subtle. When you speak, every sound has a form of its own. Going deeper, you'll find every thought has a form of its own. Which feeling, which emotion does a thought spring from? It, too, has a form. This going subtler and subtler, reveals

more and more subtle insights and takes us to the base. That is what vipassana is about.



DEVOTEE:

How can we visit the place where thoughts come from?

GURUJI:

That's what all this is about, why you're sitting here – to buy a ticket to travel there! [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

Where is the ticket? Where do we travel to?

GURUJI:

You're all sitting here in a travel agency. Paying the price of your patience, your ego, your mind, your devotion, and paying the price of love, you buy the ticket to go to that place. First have the ticket, go to that place, get yourself familiarized, then I will give you my address. [Laughter]





Tirumala, 1995



chapter nine

A Sense of Mystery

DEVOTEE:

When you ask us to find or make our own path, is it something we're supposed to figure out mentally or is it how we approach life moment to moment?

GURUJI:

It's how you approach your life moment to moment. It's not simply an intellectual choice. It's more like an emotional response, a passion.

DEVOTEE:

So, it's happening all the time?

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GURUJI:

Yes, all the time.



DEVOTEE:

You said that even what we aspire for may come from our ego patterns and be a concept rather than a real need.

GURUJI:

Sometimes.

DEVOTEE:

Is it possible to know that ourselves?

GURUJI:

Yes, if you're honest enough with yourself, you can know. There is no need for any books or teaching to know that: It's what we *do* that tells us! "Oh, I want mukti, I want moksha, I want nirvana, I want that transcendental state." You have good names for all these things! But are you really in need of that? Are you really hankering and starving for nirvana? Or, have you simply picked up a beautiful concept? No doubt, concepts like liberation, Self-realization and mukti are beautiful, but do you really need mukti?

DEVOTEE:

But, even if I ask myself that question, it's from a

patterned mind, a patterned way of thinking.

GURUJI:

That's why I'm here, to break those patterns. These things should be practical, relevant to your life and meaningful to your being, to your problems and needs. Don't just adopt something because it's a beautiful concept.

Ramana Maharshi said he never sought for Self-realization – he didn't know anything about realization and all those things. He had a problem, a sense of mystery, a mystery he wanted to solve. And when he solved it, the answer he got we call Self-realization. It's not that Ramana Maharshi started out to get Self-realization. It was the same for the Buddha – did he leave his palace in order to get nirvana? No. He was seeking the solution to certain burning questions he had. His questions – about sickness, old age and death – were so burning for him, they drove him out. Do you have that burning? You needn't have the same burning need as the Buddha's; people have different kinds of burning needs. But what is *your* burning need? When you find that out, then your seeking becomes personal. Everyone has their own seeking, their own way, their own path. Unless we focus on that, we can't evolve. Let us all make our own paths. A person becomes a Buddha, a Ramana, or a Sai Baba by seeking his own path. The great ones may help us, they may push us or sometimes even take us, but it will always be along our own path. Let

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your seeking be so personal to you, based on your own needs, your own experience of frustration, and your own concepts of fulfilment.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, cannot concepts like liberation or nirvana help our aspiration come alive?

GURUJI:

Yes, they can. If they do, it's good, because the moment your aspiration comes alive, it becomes personal. And it becomes alive for people in different ways. So yes, these concepts can help. But the problem is, they can also make you dry, mechanical and patterned. People may feel they have understood, that they know their goal and want to achieve it, but really they are trying to achieve somebody else's personal goal. Buddha had a personal goal, but if it's not yours, why should you have his goal?

Ramana Maharshi, in his death experience, wanted to know who he was, his own personal identity. Are you so troubled by your own identity? Do you really want to know who you are? Has it become such a burning question that you can't stay in your home, that you want to run away? No, it's not at all that much of a problem for you, but still you want to imitate Ramana Maharshi by taking his personal problem upon yourself and trying to solve it. You can't! I'm not saying that Self-enquiry is wrong – no! But let

that enquiry, let that endeavour, be based on your authentic personal needs, and your own sense of fulfilment. Face it, and relate to your abstract sense of fulfilment in your own way.



GURUJI:

When you have mystifying ideas which you can't fully understand or absorb and try to hold on to them – concepts that aren't meaningful to you in any way – then the whole life becomes trying to make a meaning out of them. And all your life will be wasted in that effort. There is always a sense of mystery, but it should be sensed directly in your own experience. To one person something may be meaningful, but what is it to you? That is what you have to think about.

DEVOTEE:

What do you mean by saying that the mystery should be 'sensed directly'?

GURUJI:

It should almost be your personal problem, not an intellectual effort or query, and not because you ought to do it, or are supposed to do it. For instance, you don't understand anything of the Upanishads. It's all Greek and Latin to you, but still you go on trying to find out the meaning and to make the meaning meaningful to you. And if

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you don't succeed, you make every effort to fit into the meaning. If it is really meaningful to you, it strikes you like lightning, you need not try. Look at how the mystery of his own life and of the whole universe struck the Buddha! It need not be that everybody has to face the same situation like that, it differs from person to person. The mystery of life, the mystery of sickness, of old age and death – these things the Buddha thought about were a personal problem for him. These kinds of questions may not be so urgent for us. We say, "What is all this? We already understand it, it's so obvious to us." It may not be something that really troubles you, but to him it was truly personal. It was his love, his love of solving the mystery, that brought out his search.



GURUJI:

When I was young, everything I saw puzzled me and I used to think, "What is actually happening here – when I breathe, when I think, when I look at something. Why am I able to see and what am I actually seeing? Is what I see the way it really is? If someone is talking, how am I able to hear?" All these things deeply troubled me, sometimes so much it even made me cry. It was a very personal problem for me. You may laugh and think, "Such a simple thing, isn't it obvious, why would anyone cry?" Yes, I used to cry! I

couldn't enjoy anything and everything was tasteless because I couldn't understand. Maybe I can't describe this state well now, but I know it was a problem for me. I had no other problems, and I had no fascination for *sastras*, scriptures, gods, goddesses, tradition, nothing! I was only preoccupied with this one personal problem. Then I used to think everybody must know these things because no one seemed to feel the same as me. I thought, "Maybe they all have solved the mystery and I am the only ignorant, stupid fool, surrounded by *jnanis*, because if they don't have the *jnana*, why isn't it a personal problem for them?" [Guruji laughs] What I'm speaking about happened when I was a boy.

DEVOTEE:

And how did that change?

GURUJI:

When I met my guru¹, I found a way to relate to my problem and tackle it. Then I followed that path. Actually, it's not that I followed a path – I came to know how to *make* a path. There was no path there in front of me, it was all bushes, thorns, grass and trees. So I had to make a path to go beyond that.



¹ Ekkirala Bharadwaja (1938-1989) – Eminent Sai devotee and spiritual teacher.

DEVOTEE:

It seems the mystery can't be solved by asking questions.

GURUJI:

No, ask questions, no problem. But don't be deluded that by asking questions and by receiving answers you'll get the solution. Because the mystery is an experience. It's not some mathematical equation written on a blackboard. The sense of mystery is an experience, so its solution also should be an experience.

People talk about enquiry, *vichara*. Some may say, "Try to enquire who you are," and in the next sentence they say, "You are Brahman, you are the 'I' that is Atman, the Atman that is Brahman." Ultimately, you're supposed to realize after doing all this enquiry that you're the big 'I' that is Brahman! So the answer is already given – what kind of enquiry is that?

Because some people are not able to understand the very spirit of enquiry they are not able to progress. They know the answer beforehand, conceptually, and because the question itself is also only conceptual, neither the question nor the answer is an experience. Actually, in reality nobody doubts who they are – do you really have a doubt about your own identity? We are damn sure about it and our whole life is about trying to establish that identity. [Guruji laughs] Those who have a doubt about their identity – as an experience, not just as a verbal question – for them the mystery and the

enquiry are both an experience. And then the solution will also come as an experience. The more words we hear about this enquiry, the more the spirit of enquiry is spoiled. They actually block us from getting an experience of the mystery or its solution. That's why I don't speak much about these things, because if I do, I'm not helping you.

After some time of verbalizing and conceptualizing, you'll say, "I am Brahman." What is your name? "Atman!" [Laughter] Yes! I'm not joking, you sometimes hear this from these kinds of people in holy places. [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, yesterday in satsang you spoke about discovering happiness. Do you mean uncovering something that is already there? If so, would it be right to say that our nature itself is happiness?

GURUJI:

Find out! You're asking me to give an answer, but I'm asking you to discover it for yourself. If I give you an answer, where is the discovery? Find out what is there, whether it's happiness or sadness or whatever. Maybe your nature is sadness, who knows! [Guruji laughs] Try to find out!

DEVOTEE:

But you said it was happiness!

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GURUJI:

I told you my experience. Maybe you'll have a different experience, who knows? I'm only trying to create a sense of mystery in you. I don't want to give you answers, because in giving you answers I'm shutting down your curiosity, your sense of mystery, your quest. So don't accept ready-made answers, try to find out for yourself!



GURUJI:

How are you able to think, to see, to talk, to sleep and to wake up? And how is it that you're brave enough to go to sleep, to lose your awareness, not having an assurance that you will get up again in the morning? [Guruji laughs] How can you see me, how can you interact with me, what are these emotions, what is all this? Are you not thrilled by these questions? Is it not a great drama? You need not assume, you need not superimpose a concept – just see the reality and you'll see the aesthetics of it, you'll experience the thrill. Your whole life is a thriller, the greatest of thrillers. People want to experience the thrill in life, and get so addicted to it that they need higher and higher doses. Some read thrillers and others try to mystify life more and more. Actually, the mystery is right here, in your hand. Have you solved it? In fact, it's not a question of whether you solve the mystery or not. The very fact that you recognize

the mystery, that you live in the mystery, that in itself is so thrilling and aesthetic. If you ask me to tell you the solution to the mystery, I won't tell you. Just as in a movie, I won't say what's going to happen at the end – who's the villain, what's the outcome. No, you have to see the movie, I won't tell you the story. Those who really love the mystery, they want to experience the mystery for themselves and be thrilled.





Vidyanagar, 1972



chapter ten

Guruji's Early Years of Seeking

Guruji rarely spoke of his internal experiences. Fortunately, in some satsangs opportunities arose to ask Guruji personal questions to which he replied. This chapter is a collection of such answers that gives us fascinating insights into his inner life during his early years of seeking and how he came to Baba.

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, in your early years when you were seeking, were you clear about what it was you sought?

GURUJI:

Yes. I used to feel I lacked something, that something was missing. I had a sense of dissatisfaction, of frustration. I saw people trying to get happi-

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ness in different ways and they appeared to be fulfilled. So, I too explored: is it this pleasure, is it that pleasure? But it definitely was none of those ways for me.

There were different signposts. Sometimes it became clear what I was seeking and then suddenly I realized it was not clear and I was confused again. Then the search would start again and it seemed, "Oh, now I know it, it's very clear!" And then, after some time, again there was no clarity. So you fail and then try again, fail and try again



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, what accounted for the intensity of your search?

GURUJI:

There were so many unanswered questions in me. Everything used to be a question, a puzzle, a mystery to me.

DEVOTEE:

Like what, Guruji?

GURUJI:

Everything! Why am I breathing? Why am I able to see this black colour or that white colour? How am I able to talk and to hear? Everything used to present itself as a mystery, it was almost

unbearable. Even sleep was a mystery. Why am I sleeping and getting up in the morning? What is happening? It's hard to explain how everything was a problem to me. [Guruji laughs] I almost went crazy trying to understand these things.

In those days I read the *sastras* and I used to question people who claimed they had solved the mysteries of life. But when I met them, my experience was that they had never even thought about these things or experienced them as mysteries. There was nobody who was actually able to answer my questions. They just lectured, using Vedantic jargon.

DEVOTEE:

Weren't those Vedantic concepts satisfying?

GURUJI:

If anybody could have actually answered my questions, then it would have been okay, but they just repeated things without any practical application. They read the scriptures and just repeated what they had read, taking it for granted. But I wanted an answer to my problem, I didn't want to escape from anything.

DEVOTEE:

What did you want to find out?

GURUJI:

What is this frustration? What is missing? What

is the problem of life? Why am I so dissatisfied with it? I wanted to face it, not escape from it. In my effort to have my questions answered I also studied Vedanta because that was the only thing available to me then. Even afterwards, my enquiry was Vedantic in a sense, but not in a formal way. There is no strict definition of Vedanta. Our discussion right now is also Vedanta in a way; any quest for knowledge is Vedanta.

DEVOTEE:

But was your realization an answer to your question, or did it blow the question completely away?

GURUJI:

Actually, I realized that by studying Vedanta I had just been beating about the bush and their answers to those questions were not relevant to my main problem.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, when did your connection to Baba become undoubtedly clear to you?

GURUJI:

When I met my Master.

DEVOTEE:

Did it happen immediately?

GURUJI:

It wasn't so immediate, because by that time I had done so much reading, so much thinking, and I had collected so many concepts, that these became an obstacle to readily accepting something new. I was not fresh when I met him.

DEVOTEE:

When you felt the connection to Baba more strongly, did those concepts just go out the window?

GURUJI:

Actually, my experience of Baba had nothing to do with concepts, it didn't happen on an intellectual level. It also became clear that it wasn't actually the answers to my questions that mattered. It was something else: the spirit behind it. I was so used to listening and reading these dry Vedantic concepts, but they just didn't speak to me. They said that Brahman is beyond intellect, beyond mind, it cannot be burnt by fire, it cannot be blown by the wind, it cannot become wet, you can't think of it, it's beyond your thought. It sounds wonderful. I used to ask, "If it's beyond our mind and thought, why do we talk about it? If it's so beyond everything, why think of it at all? Why do we need to bother about Brahman, and why does He need to bother about us? Why do we have to bother Him unnecessarily? [Guruji laughs] Let God rest happily in his so-called heaven. What

about me? My problem! When I ask about my problem, you talk about God. I'm not concerned about Him! What about me, first tell me that!" [Laughter]

They answered, "Because you don't realize who you are, you have a problem."

"Ok, I don't realize who I am, but my problem is not that I don't know who I am. I know who I am now, I don't have a doubt about it. It is my experience that I'm having this misery, this frustration. What about the solution to this problem?"

"No, no. You should think that you are Brahman, you are atman. He is not affected."

"How can I think that? Do you want me to hypnotize myself into thinking that I am so-and-so? No, I'm not coming to you for hypnosis. Talk about reality! This is self-hypnotism you are talking about. When one has a problem and thinks, 'I don't have a problem, I don't have a problem, I'm always blissful, I'm very happy,' this is self-hypnosis."

With Master¹ it was different. He approached the whole process of questioning differently, and, as far as I know, nobody else had approached it like that. He never dealt with me on a dry conceptual level. He brushed the concepts aside and made the whole enquiry fresh, going to the spirit of it and paring it down to brass tacks. It was a different approach, which I liked. My search became enlivened because all the dead wood that

¹ Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja (1938-1989), Sri Babuji's English lecturer in college and his spiritual guru.

Guruji's Early Years of Seeking

had accumulated was removed and then seeking started afresh again.

DEVOTEE:

Was your Master a devotee of Sai Baba?

GURUJI:

Yes, he was a Sai devotee.

DEVOTEE:

For someone to have you as a devotee, he must have been of an incredible calibre.

GURUJI:

He is! He was of incredible calibre! He was a great man. He is my guru, and I am proud of it!

DEVOTEE:

You used the present tense then, Guruji, you said, "He is my guru."

GURUJI:

Yes, he is my guru. He was my guru, he is my guru, he will be my guru!

DEVOTEE:

Your Sadguru?

GURUJI:

I don't feel there's a difference. It was Sai Baba who

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came in his form and then taught me what was needed.



GURUJI:

I came to Master in a state of intense questioning. What I experienced was not the result of having my questions answered, but because something else happened. One day when I was sitting and talking with him, I kept looking at Baba's photo which was there beside him. I was talking to Master but I kept looking at the photo. Then something happened! A kind of restlessness was relieved. For instance, how would you feel if a strong migraine you've had continuously for three or four months, suddenly left you? It felt like that. I can't explain it better than that. I don't know what happened, but I thought my relief must be because of Baba's picture so I wanted to gaze at him more and more. I didn't know anything about Baba at that time, but something was so attractive about him, that even while talking and arguing with Master, my mind was on Baba. My mind was becoming more and more empty. It was as if someone else was arguing, while my mind, my complete attention, was on Baba and I was observing the whole dialogue.

DEVOTEE:

But you still had the capacity to carry on the argument!

GURUJI:

Yes, the argument was going on and I was wondering how I was arguing. [Laughter] The argument was good and my Master was enthusiastic because he had never faced such an opponent. [Guruji laughs] He would encourage me, saying, "Come on! Come on! Come on!"

DEVOTEE:

How old were you then, Guruji?

GURUJI:

Nearly eighteen years old. And after that something changed in me, something was relieved, the 'migraine' was gone. Whenever I felt a slight disturbance, I felt like going back to Master's room again. Whether I was going for Master or for Baba's photo I do not know.



GURUJI:

I think of Baba as my guru, but back then I needed a concrete expression of it and I saw it in Master. He was the one who inspired me, who triggered the love of Baba in me. I felt moved to follow him, like a blind man. I didn't know the path, I was like a blind man. I wasn't questioning his instructions, asking, "Why? How?" None of these things. I found a guru and I followed him, that's all. Who cares about the path? He held out a stick,

I grasped the other end of the stick and followed him. That is how I served my guru. On my path with my guru, anything he asked I did without questioning. Even when he asked me to marry, I did it without a word. That is my path, that is the path I tread. Without choices and without excuses. He said, "Hey, Sarath, you are in charge of the satsang, and on every Thursday you have to come and arrange the photos and do the satsang." I was living in Kota and had to go to Vidyanagar, even in the rain, when the only way to cross the canal was by small boat. Even if I had a fever above 103, I would still go. For six years, I didn't miss once. My parents used to shout at me. "What are you doing? Are you mad? With this fever, how can you travel in the rain all the way to Vidyanagar and back and do the satsang?" I would answer, "Master asked me to do the satsang and I want to go." So I went! Many times I was alone. I used to arrange everything as if a hundred people were there, sit and do the whole ritual alone – bhajan, *parayana*, everything. When I met Master and said, "I want to tread the path, show me the path," then any word, any instruction of his, whether spiritual or material, was law to me.

DEVOTEE:

Did you enjoy going?

GURUJI:

I enjoyed it because the very following of his in-

struction was the joy. What more joy is needed? He graced me with instruction, that is enough. I am fortunate, I am privileged. Ah!

DEVOTEE:

That shows incredible maturity.

GURUJI:

I don't know whether it shows maturity or stupidity! [Guruji laughs] I followed the principle. It's not the person, it's the principle.



DEVOTEE:

Early in your connection with Master he gave you the biography of Ramana Maharshi by Narasimha Swami. In what way did it speak to you? What lessons did you draw from his life?

GURUJI:

Love! Commitment! Making it tangible that one can actually achieve that state, that unconditional state I had been longing for. "Oh, it is possible!" What Ramana gave me was that encouragement, that tangibility. He showed me that it was humanly possible. It was Ramana's life, not his teachings, that attracted me to him. His life, that is what is real. People can talk Vedanta, high Vedanta, but to live like that! Ramana was an embodiment of the teaching.

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DEVOTEE:

And what kind of influence did Poondi Swami have in your search?

GURUJI:

I went to Poondi Swami because Master asked me to go. He asked me and I went, that's all, there was no other reason. I attributed it all to Baba. It was Baba who sent me there, and it was his duty to give me whatever it was. And it so happened that it [realization] came through Poondi Swami's form and in that place, so I have an attachment there. But I think it was all due to Baba's grace. There is a subtle difference which is very difficult for you to understand. When I say I blindly followed my guru, that blindness has a different quality. It was not a blindness without intellect, rather it was with *all* my intellect that I followed him. It wasn't my personality to kill the intellect. I asked a thousand questions and we had a thousand discussions. We almost used to fight, but in the end, I did what he asked me to do.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, you said your Master understood you, and you felt that he was the only one you met in those days who understood your problem. In what way did he understand you? What was your problem?

GURUJI:

Why should we keep thinking about that problem, brooding on that old problem? [Guruji laughs] It's not my problem now! It would be a mistake to tell you, because you might try to make it your problem and I don't want to impose my reality on you. I had a problem, I solved my problem, and my Master helped me. My problem was not so common, that was the problem! [Laughter] That's why it was so difficult to find anyone even to understand my problem, let alone give a solution! I didn't say my Master gave me a solution, but he understood my problem sympathetically. That attracted me to him. In those days I used to think that most people were blessed and I was the only one damned. Everyone else seemed to be so happy as if they had solved their problems. "Why am I like a fool, always thinking about these things?" [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Did you not have the pulls that other young men usually have, like movies, sports, girls and those kinds of things?

GURUJI:

They were there earlier when I was exploring the meaning of those attractions, wondering why people are actually so pulled by them. Then I used to

have those pulls. Later, when I became connected to Baba, I started doing all sorts of sadhanas, very strenuous sadhanas. To me, doing sadhana, for instance, calling Baba's name, meant doing it for 24 hours, even while sleeping it had to continue. Because I was attending college, I couldn't completely devote my time to it, but if there was a holiday, then I would spend the whole day sitting in meditation, not even moving, trying to find out about a particular practice. I did it completely to see whether it solved my problem. I might have had different kinds of experiences, but they were not satisfying to me. During that period I never went to see a movie, I didn't even look at a movie poster! [Guruji laughs] I was that strict! I didn't wear any chappals [sandals] and even in winter I used to get up at three o'clock and take a cold bath. To make the water still colder, I would fill an earthen pot before going to bed and keep it outside.

DEVOTEE:

Why did you do that, Guruji?

GURUJI:

Simply because I felt doing it like that. The scriptures say that *vairagya* is needed in spiritual life. They say you have to conquer attachment to physical comfort. So I thought, "Let me do this completely, go to the extreme and see what will happen." I was purposefully seeking and courting trouble, almost torturing the body.

DEVOTEE:

And what happened?

GURUJI:

Nothing happened! [Guruji laughs] The only thing that happened was that since then, whether I have comfort or not, it's okay for me. Before that I was a wrestling champion in my school. Wrestling was my favourite sport. In those days, it was the only martial art, there was no boxing, karate, nothing else was there. But after about six years of those kinds of practices, my health was gone.

I was so strict, I never looked at the cover page of a weekly magazine, even if it was lying right in front of me, I would intentionally avoid looking at it. My father used to visit his friend who was the owner of a local cinema theatre and they would sit there and spend time together. If I needed to tell my father something, I had to go to the theatre – but I shouldn't enter the theatre! So I used to stand outside and ask the watchman to send for him. And all the people used to joke and say to my father, "Look, the *bhakta* has come, go outside! If he comes inside, he'll become impure and be spoiled!" [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

Who put those ideas in your head, Guruji?

GURUJI:

All the scriptures speak about the importance of

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vairagya and my Master also encouraged it. It's not just reading about it in books, but implementing it! That is *vairagya*. See the end of it. The scriptures put these ideas into my head and some may call it nonsense, but actually it had its own good effect on me.

DEVOTEE:

During what period of time was this?

GURUJI:

It was around 1972 to almost '78 or '79. People thought I had gone crazy. Earlier, I had been active in college politics, drama and literature. People said, "Such a nice boy, and now see what has become of him!" [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

Was this after you were in Poondi?

GURUJI:

Before going to Poondi, and after going to Poondi this state continued for some time. I could live with a bare minimum and didn't worry about anything. I lived like that in Tiruvannamalai, without having a rupee in my pocket, not carrying even a bag or a backpack. Living like that gave me such confidence, that even without all these things I could live happily. And maybe those practices also gave me something else.

DEVOTEE:

Something else? For instance, did they make you more receptive?

GURUJI:

Yes.

DEVOTEE:

Was it easier to enter meditation, and to be in meditation?

GURUJI:

Yes, definitely. But I'm not saying the practices were necessary. As I've said before, they might have been one of the stones that helped me hit the mango on the tenth try, by helping me learn the art of throwing. I did all these things, mantra, tantra, *japa*, and all kinds of meditative techniques, but I found something else. That is why I don't prescribe these practices to you, in the same manner, because I found another way to easily achieve the same goal. But, if you want to do all that, good, do it! No problem. [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, when you found the solution, so to speak, what changed?

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GURUJI:

Nothing. What happened can't be expressed verbally. In Poondi, the thing that was missing I got, and my seeking ended. Not that *something* happened. What happened was this and it was enough. My problem was solved and since then there has been no more seeking. The struggle was over, that sense of lack and frustration was no longer there. I think that is enough description.
[Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

Can you say what makes you a devotee of Sai Baba? What drew you to Sai Baba?

GURUJI:

He is the concretization of my abstract sense of fulfilment. If I love Baba and Baba is my Sadguru, then he's my saviour – in fact, I never thought of him like this. I'm only using these words in order to make you understand. All these concepts were not there for me. Simply, I liked to see his form, his form of bliss, that's all. It gave me happiness. Why, I do not know. I was so happy.

DEVOTEE:

Was it his image, the way he looked, or the story of his life?

GURUJI:

The peculiarity about Sai Baba is that the more deeply you dive into his life, the more the person vanishes. Something else emerges – it's not even his teaching – but something that was before so abstract in you, now starts taking a shape, a concrete shape. Because every aspect of Baba's life was an expression of his state. People can say, "All is Brahman, everyone is Brahman!" but these are only words. Baba actually demonstrated it, immediately you can see that state in him. But it started with the person, with the form, with his life. Yes, and even now I am interested in his form and his life.

DEVOTEE:

So it started with his form?

GURUJI:

And it ends with his form, too. In fact, there is no end or beginning to it. It's not that I have crossed a point and now have given up his form. There is no difference between the form and the state, because it is the form which expresses the state. To me, there is no difference: form and state are so perfectly fused in Baba! He had no teaching we can point to and say, "This is his teaching." Yet, he taught! There is so much we can learn, so much we can enjoy, so much we can experience and love, in Baba!





Sbirdi, 1996



chapter eleven

Fulfilled Seeking

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, regarding spiritual practices and the search for fulfilment, some say, "Seek out someone who knows the answer, submit to him, and he will do the rest." Others say, "Seek within, the answer lies there, the Kingdom of Heaven lies within." And yet others say, "Stop the search because it is that very seeking which blinds you to the Truth." Are all these true, or is there another way of viewing the search?

GURUJI:

You always have to look at the context in which something is said. It all depends on how you look

at it. So, each statement can be correct depending upon your point of view.



DEVOTEE:

Baba said that by remembering him always, we will gain the supreme goal. Is there any practice we can do to help us remember Baba more?

GURUJI:

The practice, if at all you do any practice, should answer some need in you. It should be the same as when you do things like sleeping, eating, having a bath or brushing your teeth. Daily, you do these things, but do you say, "I practise eating, I practise brushing my teeth." Do you say that? In fact, you practise them daily and you enjoy their benefits, but you don't consider them as practices. They are your needs. If you don't do them, you miss them, you feel uncomfortable. So, just like sleeping, eating, or having a bath, let remembering Baba be also like that, then it becomes a real practice. If at all anything has to be done, let it be done like that. Just like eating answers some need in you, remembering should also answer a need. Then that is real remembering. Otherwise all this remembering is of no use, even though you repeat it millions of times. That is what I usually tell people who want to do *japa* of Sai Baba's name. If you want to do it even a million times, good, do it!

But what is the use of simply repeating it, if it's not answering your need?

DEVOTEE:

Some spiritual teachers say we shouldn't give up our practice even if we're not getting results.

GURUJI:

If you want to follow their advice, then follow it, but I wouldn't say that. When you are doing a practice, you should be getting a result, whether big or small, that points towards your goal. It all depends on how we do the practice. What have we understood about the practice? Why are we doing it? How are we doing it? What is the goal? If we understand the dynamics of it, then it's good. Then it will give the right results.



DEVOTEE:

You mentioned that spiritual practices can have a negative effect. In what way did you mean that?

GURUJI:

Because they can give the practitioner a false sense of satisfaction. He thinks he's doing a practice, but if his heart is not touched, he won't try to go further. That's when it can be detrimental.

If somebody realizes he has a disease, he'll be anxious to see a doctor and get medicine. But if he

doesn't know he has a disease, how can he look for a cure? One who is doing all these practices and thinks, "Oh, I'm a great *sadhaka*, I'm a good yogi, I'm a Vedic practitioner, I know a hundred mudras and two hundred *bandhas*," he won't listen even if the Sadguru comes and tells him, "No, this is not the way." You can wake someone who's asleep, but you can't wake a person who's only pretending to sleep. Even after coming to a Sadguru like Sai Baba, one can waste a lot of time weaning oneself away from a fancy for all these sadhanas, still thinking about mudras, yogas, mantras and tantras.

So, I say, no practices, no techniques, no mantras, nothing is needed if your love has been triggered. Once you find a Sadguru everything becomes a mantra – his name becomes a mantra, what he does becomes a mantra, thinking about him becomes a mantra, everything becomes sadhana, an expression of your love. A mantra is a vehicle, a conveyer, a medium, but the vehicle is empty without that love. What does it convey? It conveys love – that is mantra.



GURUJI:

Once your abstract sense of fulfilment is triggered by a Sadguru, it becomes more and more clear and concrete, "Oh, this is what I want!" Then real seeking actually starts: the real investigation, the

real effort, the real quest, begins. Before, even though you were seeking, it was futile, you didn't know why you were seeking, you couldn't do otherwise; it was a kind of helpless seeking.

People think that seeking doesn't give fulfilment, but if it is the right seeking, then even in a state of effort it gives you fulfilment. We seek for fulfilment and what we get is fulfilment. Then the whole path is a path of fulfilment.



DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, if our hearts are open and we experience fulfilment, is this the end of our seeking?

GURUJī:

No. Actually, another kind of seeking starts, and we experience the fulfilment more and more, to the fullest. When we are hungry we seek a plate of food, but when we get the food, we seek how to relish it the most. Then, after eating, how do we enjoy the fulfilment a good meal has given us? By having a siesta. Has the seeking stopped?

DEVOTEE:

Could we say that the experience of fulfilment is the real beginning of seeking?

GURUJī:

Yes, from there the real seeking begins. But if you

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don't get that fulfilment – that 'taste' – then seeking a plate of food becomes the seeking. Or, seeking a restaurant becomes the seeking. Or, if you don't get hungry at all, then seeking a doctor who can rectify your digestive system becomes the seeking. [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE:

So, the seeking itself gives a sense of fulfilment?

GURUJI:

If it is real seeking. At one stage it may give us suffering, but, even though we suffer, we enjoy it. That is why the seeking moves forward. For instance, first you seek where to find a job. A person says, "Oh, go to Hyderabad, there you'll get a job." So you anxiously go to the bus station and enquire about buses. Then the seeking becomes seeking the right bus and once you're on the bus, you look for a seat. "Ah! Very good!" Then you fall happily asleep. But have you reached your destination? You're still on the bus in the Shirdi bus station, but it's as if you have already reached your destination because you are on the right bus. So, you happily sit, enjoy, and sleep. And when the bus arrives in Hyderabad, you are still only on the bus, but it has reached the destination. Here the seeking itself is happy and fulfilled; it is fulfilled seeking.

DEVOTEE:

Will the seeking ever stop?

GURUJI:

Seeking doesn't stop, it takes another dimension. Another kind of seeking happens: seeking the experience [of realization] to the full. Even though it comes in its fullness, we have to experience it to the full; this is the ongoing fulfilment of seeking. After Ramana Maharshi's realization in Madurai he said, "I am in search of my Father," and he came to Arunachala. He expressed it like that. Had his seeking stopped?



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, are there stages of realization?

GURUJI:

I have already spoken about this. For example, when you take an axe and try to chop a log of wood, you give it one stroke, two, three, four strokes, and at the tenth stroke the log is broken. It is broken by one stroke only, but it was the tenth stroke. Do you say it is broken by just one stroke, or by ten strokes? Which is the truth? Even at the ninth it was not broken – do you call it a stage of breaking? Still, it is not yet broken. At the tenth attempt you succeed, and the log breaks. But it could have happened even with the first stroke. All of these nine strokes have given you the art, the skill, of chopping the log. But it finally broke with only one stroke. If you had stopped at the

ninth stroke, it wouldn't have broken, and if you hadn't made an attempt at all, it also wouldn't be broken. What is the difference between the two? Whether the log breaks or not! It broke with one stroke. If you call that one stroke realization, there are no stages in realization. Either you realize or not! There are no flashes of realization. People say they had a wonderful experience, a glimpse of realization and then lost it. They spend their whole life trying to recapture or regain it. I'm not saying it is an unworthy experience – it may be a very good experience, but the very fact that you lost it shows that it wasn't strong enough to take hold in you. There are stronger interests, stronger wishes and emotions which make you come out of the experience. What is the fun of trying again to recapture an experience which is so temporary and weak? It is not for this we have started our journey. We have started it for complete fulfilment, which is truly permanent, which doesn't come and go. Why have you changed your objective? You started with wanting nothing short of realization, but after getting a thrilling experience, your objective has become to regain it. And you think of this as a stage in realization!

When we really realize – in fact, there is no such thing as 'really' realizing – there are no stages, we either realize or not. We don't realize twice. If we need a second time, we didn't realize completely the first time. We haven't seen it completely. We at least know that there is something, but we do

not really know what it is. So, in essence, what I'm saying is there are no stages in realization.



DEVOTEE:

Once you told us, when you first read about the life of Ramana Maharshi, it gave you the sense that realization was possible in this life. But, for me, the experience of a realized sage feels very divorced from what I could possibly achieve in this life. How different is a saint's experience from our own? Is it really so different?

GURUJI:

In which prospect are you more interested – more different or less different? [Laughter] Which is more attractive to you?

I'll give you an example, and you can tell me whether it is less different or more different. One evening, in the dark, you are coming for satsang. A stranger, who is coming for the first time to our satsang in Tiruvannamalai, stands at a distance from the gate, waiting for someone to help him. He's afraid to go inside because he saw two ferocious, Doberman-like dogs at the entrance. And then you say, "Why are you just standing here?"

"Ah, Sir, I can't go inside Guruji's house because of those two fierce dogs at the gate!"

"Where are the dogs?"

"There! See, those dogs there."

"No, no, no, they are only statues, they are not dogs!"

They seem so real to him, he thinks they are actually dogs. For you they are simply idols, mere statues.

Then he says, "Oh no, I don't believe it. They are really dogs."

"Come on, I'll take you!" And then you take him by the hand, and you lead him towards the gate. He follows with fear, two steps forward and one step back. And then, the moment he's at the gate and sees the dogs closely, he says with relief, "Oh-ho! They are statues!"

"That is what I told you before!" [Guruji laughs]

Is there a small difference, a big difference, or a vast difference between what he saw before and what he saw afterwards? Tell me!

It is like this: the whole world is like that dog statue. And because we do not know the reality of it, we see it and we react with different emotions: fear, love, jealousy, avarice, so many emotions. A Sadguru comes and tells you that it's not what you think it is, that it's something else, but we don't believe it. And then he takes you by the hand and leads you towards your destination. And the moment you reach it and actually look at it, you realize that what you're seeing now is what you've been seeing all along, but now you see it with a difference! So, a saint like Bhagavan, he also sees the same thing that we see, but with a difference.

And whether the difference is big, small, vast, infinite, how can we say? But the difference is such, that it makes all the difference. [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

How to find the path? The way to our goal?

GURUJI:

We are already on the path. We are already in a stage of evolution. When a seed falls and becomes a new plant which later blossoms, it may seem that it is a new plant, having no link with any other, but it is in fact a continuation of the seed from the previous plant. A flower may be beautiful, but, even if you try to preserve it and don't pluck it, the flower will wither of its own accord to make room for another flower, in a different way, having a different shape, a different hue, a fresh scent – all these are the paths.

DEVOTEE:

Should we watch this evolution and be conscious of it? Would this be beneficial?

GURUJI:

It is not our purpose to watch evolution. What is there to watch? You simply have to realize it is there. After having taken your food, do you need

to watch the digestive process? It is a natural, continuous process. It is enough to know you are at a certain stage in your evolution: don't try to go back or make a leap. Be part of evolution and evolve! Grow, keeping in view that it is an ongoing process.

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [IV.8], "*Dharma-samsthapan'arthaya sambhavami yuge yuge*," meaning, "According to the times, so does the form of God appear." Or, "According to the requirements and practice of a particular time, I come forth time and time again." The Sadguru will take new forms, to bring forth the same teaching, the same dharma.

When people try to retard the process of evolution, they get misery. When they become part of it, they get happiness. The process of evolution itself is Dharma, the way of Nature. It is the dharma of fire to burn, and of water to run downhill or to take the shape of the vessel which contains it. And so we must be conscious of the dharma within us, of the world, of our whole being. If we act according to that, there will be no misery. Bhagavan Ramana said, "Know your Self, know your real nature, your real Self." What is this 'real nature'? It is not a person; it is the Dharma. Those acts which correspond to our dharma are right. What is righteousness? That which is in accordance with Dharma, with natural law, with cosmic law. So what is the ultimate Dharma? To be in accordance with Nature. Therefore, in the

Bhagavad Gita [18.66] Sri Krishna says, “*Sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam sharanam vajra/ Aham tva sarva-papebhyo moksayisyami ma sucah.*” [“Abandoning all dharmas take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins, grieve not.”] That is, all other dharmas are secondary: the real dharma is to surrender to Me, which is the fundamental dharma, and you can leave all the other dharmas, all other acts of righteousness. If you can achieve this – the state of total surrender – all will follow naturally. Often, people give more importance to the secondary dharma and forget the primary spirit behind it, the fundamental purpose behind all their acts. Then, saints like Sai Baba come and direct our minds to our real nature: “Surrender to me, I will take care of you. Give me the reins of your life, and I will take you to your destination.” Always, with every word, Baba stresses the need for surrender.





Kanathur, 2010



chapter twelve

Guru and Disciple

DEVOTEE:

What is the difference between a devotee and a disciple?

GURUJI:

A devotee is one who loves, and is devoted to the worship or the adoration of a particular person or deity. A disciple is one who follows a particular kind of discipline enjoined by a guru. When you say disciple, the discipline is important: there is initiation, a path, certain rules and things you have to do. And when you say devotee, it's the worship, devotion and love for someone or something that

is the main thing. Because Baba did not enjoin any discipline in the normal sense of it, one can say he has no disciples. Of course when Baba said, "I have no disciples," it was because he knew we have no discipline! [Laughter]



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, why do you say that you have no disciples? To me, the word disciple means a person who is devoted to his teacher and feels that he is learning something from him. There is a teaching – whether expressed or not. I certainly consider myself a disciple, as well as a devotee, but is there some particular reason why you say you have no disciples? Wouldn't Baba say that he had disciples?

GURUJI:

No, he clearly said he had no disciples. Baba said it, Ramana Maharshi said it. There are hundreds of people who think they have disciples, I'm not talking about them. When such great people like Baba and Ramana said they had no disciples, who am I to say that I have disciples? To me Baba is my model, my God, my deity, my guru.

DEVOTEE:

What did Baba mean by that, Guruji?

GURUJI:

He didn't refer to an English dictionary and then give definitions. [Guruji laughs] He said he had no disciples, and what he meant was he never considered himself a guru. That is also what Ramana Maharshi meant when he said it, and, in fact, that's what I mean when I say it. I don't consider myself a guru. So, when I'm not a guru, how can I have disciples? Ramana Maharshi made it very, very clear. He said that it is not the guru who makes himself a guru to you, it is you who make him a guru.

I feel that I am a devotee of Sai Baba, but Baba may not think that I am his devotee, or disciple, whatever it is. And I don't complain about it. I speak from my side, from my experience, and I don't think about how he experiences it. So, if you look at Baba as your guru, yes, that is the principle, that is the path of the saints. The great saints never consider themselves as gurus. And we have to take this instruction, this message from them. If they didn't say it, who are we, mere specks, to say it?

DEVOTEE:

But, Guruji, can we consider ourselves disciples?

GURUJI:

You have every right to think whatever you like. [Guruji laughs] You can think of yourself as a devotee as well, whatever! That is from your side

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and that is what actually matters. What matters is what you think, how you relate to me, not how I relate to you. In fact, it also matters, but you can't understand that. Don't try to brand it with jargon, referring to the English dictionary. What I am, how I think, how I relate to you, you can't find in the dictionary. So don't think of it, don't bother yourself about it. It is enough that you relate to me in a particular way and get the response to that way.

DEVOTEE:

For me you are what I was looking for my whole life. You are sitting here, in front of me, alive! I want to learn from you, learn how to be with you, try to be like you.

GURUJI:

Good. That is what I'm also telling you. It is how you relate, not how I relate.



DEVOTEE:

We feel blessed that you are here in Tiruvannamalai and we are so grateful for your teaching.

GURUJI:

For a long time I've had a nostalgic feeling for Tiruvannamalai, so I decided to come here and spend some time. Then you people came, so there

was a sharing, that's all. I don't think I'm teaching you. I haven't advertised in any newspapers, or sent invitations for people to come and listen to me speak. It's a human instinct to share, and what I am doing is just in the way of that human instinct. People unnecessarily call me 'Guruji'. I am not a guru. Why I keep quiet is because they need a guru, and they see a guru in me, so they call me 'Guruji'. It is their need. I don't need disciples, so I don't see them as disciples. Without disciples can a guru exist? 'Guru' is a relative term.

DEVOTEE:

You say you don't have disciples, but they say they are disciples.

GURUJI:

They may say so, because they feel a need to express it like that. Who am I to say no to them? It is their right to say what they wish. Some people may say I'm a cheat, a fraud. They have the right to say that too, they can have their own opinions. If their need is to criticize me, let them do it. If others have the need to worship me, let them do it also. As long as I'm not exploiting their devotion, and their devotion is fulfilling some of their emotional needs, then what I am doing is a kind of sharing, just like giving medicine to a diseased person. If I was to start taking donations, building an ashram, or accepting gifts, then there would be a possibility of my exploiting their devotion.

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That is why I set strict rules to not have property, and not accept any donations or gifts. We should always be cautious when people want to worship someone, so I always exercise caution.



DEVOTEE:

Guruji, our love for the Sadguru can be experienced in different ways and intensities. What makes for these differences? Are there different kinds of love, or is it the intensity that makes the difference?

GURUJI:

The love takes different forms and expressions depending on the *samskaras* and past connections with the Sadguru. One can feel like a child, like a disciple, like a servant and so on.

DEVOTEE:

Does the guru know the past connections?

GURUJI:

Yes, he usually knows.

DEVOTEE:

Does the disciple need to know?

GURUJI:

No, there's no need for the disciple to know.

DEVOTEE:

When one meets one's Sadguru, are there always past connections, or can it also be the first time?

GURUJI:

When it comes to the stage of relating to someone as a Sadguru, then it is due to *rinanubandhu*, their past connections. Before, they might have related to one another in a different fashion, not as guru and devotee. But when one starts realizing, "This is my guru," it cannot be the first time they've met. It is due to their past connections.



DEVOTEE:

Is the Sadguru's love for disciples always an impersonal love?

GURUJI:

It is impersonal but expressed in a personal way, a very personal way. Look at how personal Sai Baba's love was for his devotees. People thought he even gave up his body to save the life of Tatyasaheb Kore Patil, one of his closest devotees. What better example is there than that?

DEVOTEE:

This is his personal love, but what is his impersonal love?

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GURUJI:

It is not the usual personal love which the Sadguru expresses, it doesn't end there. Something more is there, behind it, which takes you beyond your person. At the source, it is impersonal, but when it's expressed, it takes the form of personal love. Otherwise, it would just be one of the many personal loves you experience in your everyday life.

DEVOTEE:

And the way the Sadguru expresses love, is it according to the disciple's needs?

GURUJI:

Needs spring from the past connections, and so, too, the expressions. According to the *samskara*, formed by past thoughts, needs appear. So, as the disciple's *samskara*, so are his needs; and as his needs, so are the expressions from the Sadguru.



DEVOTEE:

What are the most important qualifications for a disciple on this path?

GURUJI:

Disciple is a concept. From your side, you think the beginning of becoming a disciple is the moment you see someone or something which symbolizes

and triggers your sense of fulfilment. But from the Sadguru's side, you are already his disciple, that is why he has chosen you. And the qualification is your urge, the need for concretization of your abstract sense of fulfilment. Of course, that was there even before. Even before, you were trying to concretize your fulfilment, you were seeking. Now it is just a more refined expression. That is why I always say, don't be misled by the idea that those who resort to a Sadguru and think about spirituality and all those things, are the only seekers. Everybody is a seeker, all living beings are seeking, they are all seeking to concretize their abstract sense of fulfilment in various ways. And, for some people, when all those ways are exhausted, or they have become sensitive to a more refined need, they try to experience and concretize it in this way and start labelling themselves a disciple.

DEVOTEE:

Do you mean they are disciples of their concrete symbol of fulfilment and serve that to experience their own fulfilment?

GURUJI:

Yes. Before they thought that their fulfilment was coming through various sources, but now they see it is coming from one source, a means through which all desires are fulfilled. It's not that you shouldn't have any desires, they can be there, but

the means change. The focus and the approach change. Now you realize, "Ah, He is the means which fulfils all my desires, and gives me ultimate fulfilment." And from the moment you shift your focus to a particular symbol which triggers your fulfilment and stick to it, then you start realizing that you are a disciple. And the stronger your focus, the more and more you become a worthy disciple. That is the real means for a disciple, and except for that, there are no other qualifications. If this is not realized, all your endeavours to be a qualified disciple become simple gymnastics, a practice, working only on the periphery. It's like holding a degree without having the real knowledge.

So this is the formula, this is the basis of the qualification. The qualifications which were enumerated in the *sastras* are all linked to this. Choose one point, one qualification, and see how it applies. Just take this formula and ponder over it. The various ways it is expressed may differ from individual to individual – how you act, how you focus and stick to your symbol of fulfilment, how you utilize it as a means to achieve all your ends – it all depends on that basic qualification.



DEVOTEE:

Gurujī, what are the signs of maturity in a disciple?

GURUJI:

Why do you want to know the signs of maturity? Do you want to give rankings? The real sign of a disciple's maturity is that he doesn't think of any other thing than his object of love; he doesn't seek signs of maturity. That is the sign of maturity! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE:

Should we at least be aware of our immaturity?

GURUJI:

If we accept that we are immature and want to become mature, the only thing to be aware of is that we are linked to the Sadguru. As long as the link is there, the maturing is a natural process. Take a fruit, for instance, in the early stages when it is immature, it's sour, there is no sweetness. As long as it is attached to the tree it gets the nourishment and it becomes sweet. It's not the concern of the fruit how to mature, or how far it has matured, what matters is the connection which makes it mature until the tree itself drops it. I'm talking about the process of maturing: the sense of fulfilment, the sense of security, the sense of attachment, the love that we experience. If at all they have to be called signs, they are the signs of maturity, they are the sweetness of the fruit! The real maturity of a disciple is that sweetness.

It is the law of nature that a fruit matures and sweetens when connected to the tree. As long as we

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are tuned to Baba, we'll mature. Baba is the tree and we're all hanging from one of his many branches.



DEVOTEE:

I'm afraid you might reject me if I'm not a worthy disciple.

GURUJI:

I have told you many times, it is not because I accept you or reject you that you are here or not here: it is Baba's will. I always look upon you as Baba's *prasad*. And if anybody – in spite of my telling them so many times – feels that they are rejected, they haven't understood even the fundamentals of what I've said. I want you to be fulfilled, happy, and to reach your goal. That is what I want. And I've told you in many, many satsangs that this is just simply sitting together. I don't see any value in this talk. What I really want to tell you, I will tell you in my own way. I always think that Baba is helping you, and because Baba thinks you can be helped by being here, he has sent you – I respect that. The one who has sent you, he knows how to help you. Why should I worry about it? I don't invite anybody, I never say, "Oh come here, I will help you!" I don't ask people to be with me, or if they want to go, I don't object to it. I never reject anyone. I accept everybody because they are Baba's *prasad* to me. With-

out Baba's will, without Baba's calling, nobody comes to me. If there's a connection between you and me, it is Baba! I don't see any other direct connection or disconnection. That is how I see it. If you feel you are connected – good. That is from your side, how you see it. But I'm telling you how I see it. For me it is so clear. You are all Baba's *prasad* to me. Sacred *prasad*. How can anyone reject *prasad*?

DEVOTEE:

Guruji, to you we may be Baba's *prasad*, but to me, I feel like a disciple.

GURUJI:

Good, stick to your concept! I'm neither rejecting it, nor denying it. It's good you have it. If you really feel that I am your Sadguru, the very concept of being rejected is ridiculous, because the moment you say, "I am being rejected" it means you're not looking at me as a Sadguru. A Sadguru will never reject anybody. That's how Baba himself phrases it: "I won't reject anybody. Will the ocean send back the rivers?" Will the ocean reject the rivers, which are coming and merging into it? No, it will never. The Sadguru is like the ocean, so there is no question of rejecting the rivers – they come and simply merge.



Appendix of Sources

Abbreviation:

s – *Satsang (English)*

Chapter 1 The Principle of Flow

1	s126	19 November	2007	Pipalkote
2	s126	19 November	2007	Pipalkote
	s56	29 January	2002	Chennai
3	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
4	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
5	s77	29 June	2003	Chennai
6	s130	28 November	2007	Rishikesh

Chapter 2 Purity of Means

1	s108	19 June	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s88	03 February	2004	Chennai
	s93	06 May	2004	Chennai
	s7	01 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
3	s68	01 February	2003	Chennai
4	s56	29 January	2002	Chennai
	s001	14 March	1993	Tiruvannamalai
5	s75	09 June	2003	Chennai
6	s75	09 June	2003	Chennai

Chapter 3 The Role of Ritual

1	s98	11 November	2004	Tiruvannamalai
2	s52	15 October	2001	Tiruvannamalai
3	s19	27 December	1997	Shirdi
	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh

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4	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
5	s92	02 April	2004	Chennai
6	s27	17 January	1998	Shirdi
7	s92	02 April	2004	Chennai
8	s60	21 April	2002	Chennai
9	s130	28 November	2007	Rishikesh
10	s44	12 July	1998	Shirdi
11	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh

Chapter 4 Desires: Obstacles or Stepping Stones to Fulfilment?

1	s28	18 January	1998	Shirdi
	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
2	s6	31 March	1997	Tiruvannamalai
3	s4	15 March	1997	Shirdi
4	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
5	s68	01 February	2003	Chennai
6	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi

Chapter 5 Work – A Concrete Sense of Connection

1	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
2	s113	26 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai
	s111	08 September	2005	Tiruvannamalai
3	s91	12 March	2004	Tiruvannamalai
4	s95	23 July	2004	Tiruvannamalai
5	s55	19 January	2002	Chennai
6	s66	29 December	2002	Chennai
	s3	12 March	1997	Shirdi
7	s3	12 March	1997	Shirdi
	s60	21 April	2002	Chennai
8	s128	26 November	2007	Rishikesh
9	s113	26 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 6 The Question of Choice

1	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
2	s34	25 February	1998	Chennai
3	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
4	s54	25 December	2001	Chennai
	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
5	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
	s34	25 February	1998	Chennai
6	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
	s10	04 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
7	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
	s44	12 July	1998	Shirdi
8	s133	23 November	2009	Rishikesh
9	s41	08 May	1998	Shirdi
	s60	21 April	2002	Chennai

Chapter 7 Sadguru, Window to the Sky

1	s9	03 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
2	s96	27 August	2004	Chennai
3	s70	03 March	2003	Tiruvannamalai
4	s108	19 June	2005	Tiruvannamalai
5	s108	19 June	2005	Tiruvannamalai
	s86	12 December	2003	Chennai
6	s3	12 March	1997	Shirdi
7	s54	25 December	2001	Chennai

Chapter 8 The Mind

1	s120	25 November	2006	Uttarkashi
2	s112	22 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai
3	s43	08 June	1998	Shirdi
	s85	08 December	2003	Chennai
4	s13	10 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai

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5	s135	25 December	2009	Rishikesh
6	s31	20 February	1998	Naimisharanya
7	s18	24 December	1997	Shirdi
8	s79	18 August	2003	Chennai

Chapter 9 A Sense of Mystery

1	s137	09 March	2010	Chennai
2	s92	02 April	2004	Chennai
3	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
	s13	10 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
4	s118	14 November	2006	Rishikesh
5	s127	23 November	2007	Rishikesh
6	s125	18 November	2007	Pipalkote
7	s21	05 January	1998	Shirdi

Chapter 10 Guruji's Early Years of Seeking

1	s61	25 April	2002	Chennai
2	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai
	s61	25 April	2002	Chennai
	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
3	s61	25 April	2002	Chennai
4	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai
5	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai
6	s12	09 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai
7	s121	27 November	2006	Uttarkashi
8	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
9	s122	30 November	2006	Rishikesh
10	s12	09 April	1997	Tiruvannamalai
	s123	17 August	2007	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 11 Fulfilled Seeking

1	s111	08 September	2005	Tiruvannamalai
2	s70	03 March	2003	Tiruvannamalai
	s68	01 February	2003	Chennai
3	s41	08 May	1998	Shirdi
	s115	30 January	2006	Tiruvannamalai
4	s46	22 July	1998	Shirdi
5	s2	09 March	1997	Shirdi
6	s4	15 March	1997	Shirdi
7	s112	22 October	2005	Tiruvannamalai
8	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai

Chapter 12 Guru and Disciple

1	s54	25 December	2001	Chennai
2	s134	14 December	2009	Rishikesh
3	s004	Compilation	1993	Tiruvannamalai
4	s41	08 May	1998	Shirdi
5	s86	12 December	2003	Chennai
6	s39	24 April	1998	Tiruvannamalai
7	s86	12 December	2003	Chennai
8	s109	15 July	2005	Tiruvannamalai

Glossary

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

Agama(s) – ‘the flow, that which has come down’; a major division of Indian scriptural literature embodying revelatory and preceptorial traditions outside the Vedas but equally ancient. It includes the Saiva tantras and Sakta tantras inculcating esoteric Mother worship. Vaishnava tantras are usually termed ‘*samhitas*’. The *Vaikhāṇasa Agamas* cover temple construction, rituals and worship.

ajnana – ‘without knowledge’; in Vedānta, the egoic limitation that hides man from the true nature of his own Self (atman) as Brahman, and gives rise to the illusory world of multiplicity.

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

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

Arya Ashtanga Marga – The Noble Eightfold Path; the last of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths leading from samsara to nirvana. It comprises Right View, Right

Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

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

avakaya – a mango pickle relished in Andhra Pradesh.

bandha – lock, bondage, control; tie or knot; a class of exercises in Hatha Yoga.

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

Bhagavan – Lord; Supreme Reality endowed with infinite power, compassion and knowledge; term of address for Godhead personified, accorded to Sri Ramana Maharshi as a mark of great respect and devotion.

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

bhakta – devotee, votary; lover of god.

bhakti – devotion (fr. root *bhaj* – ‘to share or partake of’);

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the practice of devotional theism or loving devotion to a personal form of God, often the teacher (guru) or a chosen form of the deity (*ishtadevata*), as the instrumental means to release.

bhiksha – alms, food obtained by mendicant begging.

Brahman – Vedic term for the infinite nondual Absolute, both formless (*nirguna*) and with form (*saguna*); source of universal existence and consciousness.

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

Buddha Sakyamuni – The Buddha, ‘Sage of the Sakyas’, so-called because they were his tribal clan.

Buddham saranam gacchami – “I take refuge in the Buddha”; the first of the ‘three jewels’ (*Triratna*) comprising the Buddhist profession of faith in the triple foundation of Buddhism, the others being the Dharma (teachings) and the Sangha (community of monks and nuns).

Chaitanya ghanata – (also *chidghana*) i.e. ‘massed blissful awareness’. A Vedantic technical term for the nature of absolute Consciousness as the self-existent source of manifest creation, having absolute freedom to manifest creation or not.

Chavadi – the building in Shirdi near Dwarkamai where Sai Baba spent alternate nights from an early period until the end of his life (1918 CE).

dharma, Dharma – ‘what bears up, supports’; truth, law, order; teaching; religion; the eternal ‘Way’ of truth, non-

violence and virtuous conduct exemplified by saints since time immemorial (*sanatana dharma*).

Dharmam saranam gacchami – “I take refuge in the Dharma”, second of the ‘triple jewels’ in the Buddhist profession of faith.

dhyana – meditation.

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

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

Gangagir Maharaj – a Vaishnava ascetic fond of wrestling whose conversion to religious life is noted in *Shri Sai Satcharita* (ed. Gunaji, pp. 26–27).

Gita – ‘song’; standard abbreviation for the ‘Bhagavad Gita’, glossed above.

gongora – a chutney made of sorrel leaves typical of Telugu cuisine.

Goraknath tradition – The Nath Yogis were a sect of anti-Brahmanical, nonconformist Saiva ascetics who rejected caste, rituals, scriptures and outward observances and were widespread in medieval India and Nepal from 9th to 15th centuries CE. Their cult combined elements from the Buddhist Vajrayana-Sahajiya tantras with Hatha Yoga practices based on austere self-abnegation

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and mastery over the vital, mental and emotional functions, that resulted in miraculous powers (*siddhis*). These practices were amalgamated with the Southern Tamil Siddha alchemical tradition (*rasayana*) that united yoga with tantra and herbal chemistry to achieve bodily perfection (*kaya siddhi*) and immortality. The Naths were known as 'Goraknathis' after their foremost Guru, Goraknath (Nath means 'Master' or 'Lord' [of yoga]), who is credited with inventing Hatha Yoga and systematizing it within the Saiva Nath Siddha tradition sometime in the 10th to 11th centuries CE. The Naths were renowned for their occult powers and prowess as wonder-workers, and enjoyed wide respect and prestige among the masses of Medieval India.

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

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

jnani – a person endowed with experiential knowledge of absolute truth; a realized, enlightened human being.

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

kama – desire, love; force of attraction.

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

karma yoga – the yoga of disinterested action leading to *sama* or *samatva*, the state of dispassion and equanimity arising from undivided heart and will, praised in the

Gita as the optimal antecedent to realization.

Krishna/Sri Krishna – eighth avatar of Vishnu (as *Saguna Brahman*), chief deity of the Vaishnavas. He is the protagonist of the Bhagavad Gita (c. 500 BCE) whose life is retold in *Srimad Bhagavatam Mahapurana* (800 CE), two of Hinduism's most sacred canonical texts.

Lendi – the garden in Shirdi where Baba performed his daily ablutions.

Madurai – second largest city in Tamil Nadu, the capital of the Pandyan empire till the 14th century, famous for its grand Sakta temple to Meenakshi Devi, a popular form of the goddess worshipped throughout the south. It was the childhood home of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Mahavira – 'great hero'; the name by which Varadhama, the 24th Jaina teacher or Jina, is best known (5th cent. BCE).

mantra – sacred Vedic formula; a mystical word or sentence sacred to a deity; mystical phonemes or syllables of divine power giving rise to non-conceptual experience.

masjid – Arabic; mosque.

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

mudra – gesture, hand pose; seal; a certain class of hand exercises in Hatha Yoga, classical dance (Bharata Natyam) and some forms of ritual worship.

mukti – 'freed'; liberation from embodied existence.

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nama-japa – ‘devotional chanting’; repeating the name(s) of God or Guru.

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

Narasimha Swami – gifted writer, scholar, lawyer and indefatigable lover of Sai Baba who did more than any other to make Baba a household name in modern India. After attaining realization by Sai Baba’s grace at his Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi on 29 August 1936, he began his mission of spreading Baba’s teaching throughout India and published three works – *Life of Sai Baba*, *Devotees’ Experiences*, and *Sai Baba’s Charters and Sayings* – which became famous and achieved canonical status in the Sai Tradition of worship (*Sai Sampradaya*).

nirguna – *nir* ‘without’ + *guna* ‘quality’; without form or quality, formless. Nirguna Brahman is pure, formless Being; Nirguna Bhakti is devotion to the pure, formless Self within.

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

nishkama karma – ‘desireless action’; actionlessness; acting without attachment to result, good or bad. According to Lord Krishna (Gita III.4 & 19) such action, by dissolving ego and inducing equilibrium (*samatva*), conduces to freedom.

niyama – ‘observance, discipline’; unbroken observation of a rule or vow, second limb of Patanjali’s eight-limbed yoga described in his *Yogasutras*.

parayana – devotional reading or study of a scripture or holy text.

Patanjali – great rishi, author-compiler of the *Yogasutras* (c. 4th cent. CE).

Poondi Swami – great *avadhūt* and adept renowned for his rare state of absolute absorption called *ajagarabhava* (python-state), in which he remained stationary for the last 18 years of his life (d.1978). Sri Babuji experienced *sakshatkar* (Self-realization) while visiting him in 1974.

pranayama – yogic practice of controlling the breath, fourth limb of Patanjali’s eight-limbed yoga (*Astanga-yoga*) set out in his *Yogasutras*.

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

prasād – food offered to god or a holy person and then distributed to devotees; also, figuratively, divine grace or favour.

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

Rama – a king of the Solar dynasty at Ayodhya (trad.

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3800-3700 BCE) and 7th avatar of Vishnu, husband of Sita, whose life and deeds are told outwardly in Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Tulsidas' *Ramcharitamanasa*, and inwardly in the *Yogavasistha*. Lord Rama is considered the personification of Dharma and the ideal husband and king.

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

Ramanuja – South Indian theologian of Sri Vaishnavism (1017-1137), who established loving devotion (bhakti) to God (Brahman as *Isvara*) on the same footing with Vedic sacrificial action (karma) and Upanishadic revelation (*jnana*) as a means to release. In his great commentary on the *Brahmasutras* known as *Sri Bhashya*, he argued that souls (*jivas*) and the world exist as modes (*prakaras*) of Brahman, upon whom their reality depends, so that Brahman's nondual nature (advaita) is qualified (*visista*), not compromised (*bheda*); he is therefore considered the founder of *Visistadvaita*, the doctrinal basis of Bhakti Vedanta.

rasa – taste, juice, relish, essence, nectar, joy; the 'taste' of inner being. In Indian Aesthetics, it is the subtle joy arising from an appreciative, generalized delight in a drama, poem, or work of art, considered as a precursor to the joy of realization; in Bhakti Vedanta, it is the joy arising from experiencing life as the divine love-play (*lila-vilasa*) of the Lord's (or Sadguru's) redemptive grace

leading the devotee to Self-realization, which continues to unfold afterward in fulfilment of the mutual love between deity (or guru) and devotee.

rinanubandha – karmic bond or connection, prenatal relationship.

Sadguru – ‘true guru’; a fully enlightened spiritual master capable of guiding others towards enlightenment; also, the guru within, one’s own Self (atman).

sadhaka – one who practises sadhana.

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

saguna – with form and qualities.

Saint Ramdas (Samartha Ramdas) – revered Maharashtra saint and poet (1608-1681) and Vaishnava religious leader, guru of Shivaji, whose *Dasabodha* is a popular Vedanta classic of knowledge and devotion.

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

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

samskara – ‘groove’; prenatal tendency, latent impression; psychic traces left in the mind after any experience or brought over from previous births which predispose one to their repetition.

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sangha – group, collection, society; community of Buddhist monks or nuns; company or group of devotees around a master.

Sankara (Adi) – the great philosopher, saint, and poet (788-820 CE) who upheld primacy of the formless Nirguna Brahman as the nondual Absolute and systematized the teachings of the Upanishads into the school of Advaita Vedanta. His commentaries on the Upanishads, Brahma Sutra, and Bhagavad Gita are the doctrinal foundation of Advaita, the oldest school of Vedanta.

saranagati – ‘going for refuge’; the act of surrender.

saranam – refuge, shelter.

sastras – scriptures; teaching, doctrine, treatise.

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

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

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

sramanas – a class of ascetics contemporary with Buddha who, in contrast to orthodox Brahmanas, did not accept the final authority of the Veda and experimented with various forms of yoga and tapas as alternative means to release.

Sutra – ‘thread, string’; an aphorism condensed into an extremely laconic, cryptic style using minimum words, and requiring a commentary (*bhashya*) to make it intelligible. Its meaning is held to be transferred mnemonically to those qualified to understand it without a *bhashya*.

Tantra(s) – ‘warp, loom, threads’; text; a broad class of scriptures outside the Vedic canon but equally ancient, whose content and authority depends on extra-Vedic revelation and direct transmission from guru to disciple, not upon Vedic mantras and sacrifices, or Brahmanical rituals and observances. The Tantras include both the Southern *Saiva-Siddhanta* and Northern *Saiva-Kashmiri* traditions (*Trika Agamas*), as well as the *Vaishnava Samhitas*, but the term is usually applied to tantras teaching Mother Worship (*Sakta Agamas*). The Tantras use psychic centres of the human body (*chakras, padas*) as foci for esoteric worship, with ritual use of mantras and yantras in exoteric worship, usually to a form of Siva or the Divine Mother.

tirtha/teertham – ‘ford’ or ‘crossing place’; a holy place where there is a well, pond, lake, river or sea, the waters of which are considered holy; any place of pilgrimage, where one may ‘cross over’ to higher life (*moksha*).

Tirumala – a sacred Vaishnava temple complex in Andhra Pradesh, where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims take darshan daily of its deity, Lord Venkateshwara (Sri Balaji), a form of Vishnu. It is the wealthiest, most popular temple shrine in India, hallowed by its association with many saints, including Adi Sankara (788-820 CE), Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE) and Chaitanya (1486-1533 CE). It was one of Sri Babuji’s favourite places of residence.

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Tirupati – holy city in southern Andhra Pradesh at the foot of the Tirumala Hills on top of which is situated the great temple shrine to Lord Venkateshwara known as Tirumala.

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

trisarana/tri-saranam – the 'triple refuges' of Buddhism, namely the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, particularly as used in the Buddhist profession of faith; also known as the 'three jewels' (*ratna-traya*).

Upanishads – philosophical treatises attached to the Vedas containing the speculations and mystical insights of the Vedic Rishis into the nature of ultimate reality, collectively termed Vedanta because they occur at the end (*anta*) of the Vedas.

vairagya – renunciation, dispassion; indifference towards all worldly objects and enjoyments; one of four classical qualifications given by Sankara for study of Vedanta to bear fruit.

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 soterial philosophy of the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita, predicating the ultimate identity of the soul (atman) with Brahman, the infinite, nondual Absolute, and upholding worship of both the personal (*saguna*) and impersonal (*nirguna*) forms of Brahman.

vichara – enquiry into the nature of the Self (atman), Brahman or Truth.

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.

Yogasutras – foundational Sanskrit text of the Yoga Darshana (school) of classical Indian philosophy, composed by Patanjali (c. 4th century CE).

Yogi Vemana – 17th century Telugu saint, poet, and yogi, whose unconventional, caste-free approach to spiritual life and trenchant social comments were much appreciated by Guruji.

Saipatham Publications

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

Publications in English

1. *Arati Sai Baba: The Psalm Book of Shirdi Aratis*. English Transliteration of the original Marathi Arati Songs with English Translation, Introduction and Commentary. By Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1996); Pp.67. (Under reprint). A definitive edition of Sai Baba's *Aratis* showing their historical background and devotional significance.
2. *Bound to Love: Experiences with Sri Babuji*. Compiled and edited by SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011); Pp. 241. Fascinating accounts of devotees' life-changing experiences with Sri Babuji, with photographs and Glossary.
3. *Rose Petals: Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji – Vol. 1*. Edited by Ram Brown Crowell and Alison Williams (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012); Pp.124. The first published volume of Sri Babuji's original English satsangs, with colour photographs, Glossary, and biographical Introduction.
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7. *Experiencing Sai Baba's Shirdi: A Guide.* By Alison Williams (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2e rev., 2004); Pp.153; illustrated with maps, diagrams and photographs. The most comprehensive guidebook to Shirdi and the relics, sites and stories associated with Baba's long residence there during the last 50 years of his life.

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

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

Publications in Telugu

1. *Prarthana Patham* [booklet]. The daily prayer and hymn to Sri Sai Baba, adapted by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji into Telugu, from Sri Ramana Maharshi's hymn *Arunachala Padikum* in Bhagavan's *Marital Garland of Letters* (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, n.d.).
2. *Sai Bhakti Sadhana Rahasyam*. An in-depth introduction to the Sai Tradition (*Sai Sampradaya*) by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1996). In Telugu, Tamil and Kannada editions. A treasury of insights into Sai Worship and the path of devotion by Sri Sarath Babuji.
3. *Sri Sai Gurucharitra*. Selected works by Das Ganu Maharaj, with an explanatory foreword by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji. Translated from Marathi into Telugu by S.V.L. Narayana Rao (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1996).
4. *Sai Deevena*. Edited by SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2011). A moving anthology of devotees' experiences with Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji.
5. *Sarathchandrikalu – Vol. 1*. By SaiSeekers (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012). A translation into Telugu of *Rose Petals*, Vol. 1.
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9. *Sri Sai Bhakta Vijayam*. By Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012). Original articles on six early devotees of Sri Sai Baba.
10. *Saipatham – Vol. 1*. (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 1988; 2e rev., 2014). A collection of original articles by Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, reprinted from *Saipatham Magazine* (1988-1994).
11. *Saipatham – Sri Saileela Prabodha Darshini*. (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2013). A compilation of articles by various authors including articles by Sri Sarath Babuji from *Saipatham Magazine* (2001 – 2003).
12. *Sri Sai Bhakta Anubhava Samhita*. (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2008). A translation into Telugu by Sainathuni Surendra Babu of *Devotees Experiences of Sri Sai Baba* by Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami.
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15. *Purnavadhuta Sri Poondi Swami*. By Smt. Sainathuni Anasuya Ammagaru (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2014). A revised translation of Sainathuni Gunashekar's original anthology in Tamil of devotees' experiences with Poondi Swami (Chennai: A. Gunasekhar Rao, 2011). This revised edition is currently the most complete and authoritative account of Sri Poondi Swami in any language.

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