

SHRI SAIBABA SANSTHAN, SHIRDI

(Shri Saileela July-Aug'2004)

Homepage

July-August 2004 Rs. 1/-

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Official Periodical of Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, Shirdi

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D. M. Sukthankar

Chairman, Board of Management, Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, Shirdi

Editor, 'Shri Sai Leela'

From Editor's desk

I was appointed by the Charity Commissioner, Maharashtra as the Chairman of the Board of Management of Shri Saibaba Sansthan, Shirdi in 1994. This appointment at that time was never expected by me. I had never sought nor tried for this exalted office, nor used any influence to secure it, as is, I am told, the usual practice. The authorities concerned having bestowed this responsibility on me, I deemed it to be my bounden duty to accept and discharge it to the best of my ability and with utmost integrity.

My father was a great devotee of Lord Dattatreya and my mother is a devout Sai-bhakta. I have inherited my faith and commitment from them. I have always regarded the Chairmanship of the Board of Management of the Sansthan to be essentially an instrument for rendering my humble service for the betterment and rapid progress of the Sansthan.

Providing maximum services and amenities to Baba's devotees and improvement of local basic infrastructure in Shirdi town have been the main focal points of my work. Based on my long experience as a public administrator, I also throughout strived to bring about simplicity, utmost transparency and speed in the administration of the Sansthan. The recent efforts to introduce computerisation and apply information technology and other modern methods of working in the conduct of multifarious affairs of the Sansthan are intended to achieve the same objective. It has also always been my endeavour to accept the accountability and full responsibility of all the decisions taken by me and by the Board of Management, by keeping their full background and rationale on record for any person to consider it impartially and dispassionately at any time.

My reappointment as the Chairman for the second term in 1999 by the Charity Commissioner was, for me, equally unexpected. May be, it was in recognition of the constructive work put in by me during my first term. I do, however, sincerely believe that the unique opportunity of serving for a full decade (1994-2004) as the Chairman of the Sansthan's Board of Management, which I was fortunate enough to get, is but a manifestation of Baba's munificent blessings, for which I shall remain eternally grateful to Him.

During this period of ten years, a massive, complex and equally memorable project of full-scale Redevelopment of Samadhi Mandir Complex was completed in record time. Had Baba not willed it, this could never have been accomplished. A sense of regret and disappointment does graw me off and on that I could not achieve as much during my second term (1999-2004) as I could in my first term (1994-1999). This occasion of penning my valedictory note is, however, not the right one to expatiate the reasons which contributed to this deficiency. I would say that, nevertheless, I am, on the whole, satisfied with what I have been able to achieve during my entire tenure as Chairman.

I have always enjoyed having a dialogue occasionally with the readers of 'Saileela', in my capacity as its Editor during the last ten years. I shall certainly cherish these happy memories.

JAYA SAI.

(D. M. SUKTHANKAR)

GURU MARGA OF SHIRDI SAI BABA

Baba's way of getting salvation is through *Guru marga*. Baba repeatedly stresses the greatness and powers of a *Sadguru*. Self-realization is impossible without *Guru's anugraha*. As Baba Himself quotes the example of three spiritual aspirants (*sadhakas*) who full of ego thought that they could cross the thick forest of worldly life using their intellect and physical power. They, overpowered by self-conceit did not pay heed to the advice and the voluntary help offered by the *vanazary* (merchant selling oil and grain, in this context it refers to a *Sadguru*). The three were wandering around and around the thorny thicket without finding a way to come out. But the fourth *sadhaka* was a wiser one. He gratefully accepted the voluntary help of the *vanazari* and got rid of his anxieties, worries and fear. He enjoyed walking through the forest holding the hand of the *vanazari* and came out of it quietly and safely. The *vanazari* referred to here by Baba is the *Sadguru* and his commitment to help the *sadhakas*. The relationship between the *Guru* and the disciple is subtle. As Baba says in His 'Charters and Sayings'.

"I wanted nothing but the *Guru* and He wanted nothing but the intense love from Me. I meditated on nothing but the *Guru* and had no goal or object other than the *Guru*. Unceasingly fixed upon Him was My mind. He always protected Me by His glance. That *Guru* never blew any *mantra* into My ear. By His glance I attained to My present State."

Baba's *Guru marga* is crystal clear and gives all importance to *Guru*. Kabir's *doha* substantiates this view.

If both Lord Govinda and our spiritual *Guru* stand before us, whom should we worship first? Kabir says, "We are highly indebted to our *Guru*; because it is only our *Guru* who tells us about God and takes us to God. But, for our *Guru*, we know nothing about *Paramatma*. In this respect the *Guru* is considered greater than Govinda.

In all religions, the *Sadguru*, who is the messenger of God has a unique position. In Christianity, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, also referred to as the messenger of God is a *Samartha Sadguru* and at times Christ Himself says, "There is no difference between Me and My Father." Jesus came and spoke unto them saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.

The glorious Quran though utters the word prophet to refer to Mohammad Nabi, his place is also that of a messenger of God, a *Samartha Sadguru*. All incarnations, prophets, sages, saints have their *Gurus* however great they might be. *Guru marga* and *Guru Avatars* are to help the suffering souls. Sai Baba descended into this world as *Avatara Purusha* with such powers to save people from the perils of *bhava sagar* or the cycles of births and deaths. Sai Baba Himself revealed the aim of His *Avatar* as to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity, to establish a society above the petty feelings of religion, cast and social difference. The core of Baba's *Guru marga* is very clear and simple. Faith in the *Guru*, and what cannot be absorbed by knowledge, study of scriptures, pilgrimage, or by observing fasting and rituals is easily got by the grace of *Guru*. A mere touch, or look from the *Guru* redeems all our sins.

Quotations from Kabirdas, Vedanta Deshika, Shankara and Poojya Sri Narasimha Swamiji will give us a glimpse of the kind of devotion, a *sadhaka* should have towards his *Guru*. H. H. Narasimha Swamiji gives us the following advice,

We should meditate *Guru's* form every day and always utter His name. Whatever is the instruction of our *Guru*, we should follow it strictly. We should not think of anything else, except *Guru*. Thus the mind is to be surrendered to the *Guru*.

I bow to the lotus feet of Sai and consider His *Padaseva* as the goal of life. It is an inexpressible bliss to utter *Guru Sai's* name. I always wish to meditate only on Sai's boundless virtues.

It is the *Guru* who is the creator Brahma, the protector Vishnu and the preceptor of the world Lord Shiva. But, *Guru* is all, Trinity incarnate, *Guru Datta*.

Guru's form is endless and pervading the whole universe. By worshipping his feet, a devotee gets into contact with the supreme *Parabrahma*.

A *Guru* is an embodiment of *gnana* and *shakti* (spiritual power and self-realizations). He wears the garland of supreme wisdom. He is the bestower of *bhakti* and *mukti* that is worldly happiness and comforts, and spiritual happiness, eternal bliss and *sakshatkara* of God. Let us see how the utter faith in the *Guru* is expounded in these *shlokas*.

One cannot obtain self-realization without *Guru's* grace. Only by the grace of *Guru*, who is the ocean of mercy, a devotee realizes the goal of life.

The above illustrations from H. H. Narasimha Swamiji's *Sainatha Mananam* clearly focusses our attention on the straight road (that is the *Guru marga*) on which we have to tread upon to reach eternity or God. We have to be careful as unknown and ambiguous paths will lead to unknown places.

Kabir Das too views the same and repeatedly sings on the glory of God.

Let us, surrender ourselves completely to our *Guru* who is above material pleasures, who has stripped himself off or self-conceit and who is always immersed in God.

Kabir considers *Guru*, the immediate rescuer, greater than Govinda. He says that he has come to this conclusion as a result of deep thinking. If one remembers Hari at the time of his passing away from this world or similar critical situations in this worldly life, there may be delay in getting the relief we receive. But, if we seek the help of *Guru* and remember him, in no time our *Guru* will help us cross the ocean of *samsara* that is *bhava sagar*.

This *doha* of Kabir explains the real situation. *Guru's* power is immense and in these three worlds and nine *khandas*, no body is greater than *Guru*. Even God does not go against the wish of *Guru*. The *Sadguru's* decision prevails over God's wish.

Thus there are volumes of literature which speak the merit and selfless services of a *Guru*. An incident often quoted in this connection is, Baba's advice to a rich lady who carried a plate full of rupees and begged Baba to make Himself her *Guru* and give *upadesha*. But, Baba revealed to her the *Guru marga* trod upon by so many. It is not the *Guru* that makes himself one's *Guru*. It is we who must identify a *Sadguru* and regard him as our *Guru* and pour our utter faith and love on him. Like Ekalavya, one must completely surrender oneself to the *Guru*.

It is rare to get a *Sadguru* like Shirdi Sai Baba. A *Sadguru* is a highly qualified preceptor and who is God incarnate and is the *Guru* of *Guru's*. A *Samartha Sadguru's Avatar* is not the usual incarnation. (As stated in the Bhagvad Gita, whenever there is a trial for righteousness, and thriving for wrong doings, God descends into this world to protect the virtuous and to punish the wicked.) But, *Guru Avatars* are remarkable as it is only to protect people in this world and help them enjoy supreme bliss in the world of eternity.

To sum, all these illustrations prove the fact that *Guru's* grace is our only *sadhana*. *Jnana* comes as experience. So, on this auspicious *Guru Poornima*, let us worship our *Samartha Sadguru* Sai Baba by constantly remembering that Sayeesha is the Same as Lord Venkatesha.

Let us try to establish contact with Sai Baba by constantly doing *Nama Japa*, "**Om Sai Sri Sai Jaya Jaya Sai**" in mind and worship Him with devotion. Sai is always there showering His benign blessings upon ardent devotee who approaches Him in the right manner. Sai Baba is ever present and near us and will assuredly respond to our call.

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Navavidha Bhakti in Shri Sai Satcharita

Different ways of devotion have been described by various people. I (Hemadpant) will speak briefly of its nature and characteristics during the course of the narration according to my aptitude. ||86|| - C. 1

When the horse passed the nine balls of stool, the merchant eagerly went forward to collect them. Similarly the nine-fold devotion, when adopted, gives complete peace of mind. ||100|| 1) Listening 2) Singing the Lord's praises aloud 3) Remembering Lord Vishnu 4) Serving at His Feet 5) Offering prayers 6) Bowing down before Him 7) Being humble 8) Developing affection and 9) Surrendering the *atma* - these are the nine ways of devotion. ||95||

21

This was the necklace of nine coins, which had been touched by Baba's hands - indicating the nine types of devotion. This was the way Baba reminded him of it. ||213||

33

Baba said, in reply : "Once a merchant came along and at that time a horse passed nine balls of stool in front of him. ||87|| The merchant was very efficient. He immediately took off his wrap, and spread it out, collected all the balls and tied a knot and was able to achieve concentration of mind." ||88|| The horse is God's grace. This is how the puzzle of the nine-fold devotion could be explained. Without devotion one cannot have a union with God and knowledge will not be acquired. ||94|| - C. 21

When you listen to the story of Baba leaving His mortal coil, you will realise the novel way of doing charity, as He had given nine rupees at that time (to Lakshmibai). ||214||

- C. 33

Taking out from the pocket once five and then four rupees, He placed them on her hands. This was the last act of Baba. ||119|| Was it indicative of the nine types of devotion, or was it because of the worship of Ambika at *Navaratra* had been completed and it was the *Seemolanghan* ? Was it the *dakshina* of *Seemolanghan* ? ||120|| Or was Baba giving a reminder of the nine good qualities required of a disciple as told by Sree Krishna to Uddhava of the *Shrimad Bhagvat* ? ||121|| - C. 42

Yet, if one has an acute desire for liberation, then perform only virtuous deeds always. Practise the nine forms of devotion, including listening to His stories etc. and one will be purified from within. ||57||

- C. 52

First Step – *Sravan Bhakti*

1 There is no greater devotion than listening to His stories. An attachment to the feet of the *Guru* is easily created by listening. A pure and clean mind is developed by it from which spirituality arises. ||21|| - C. 39

2 By listening to His life story, sins will be destroyed. By listening to His life story, destiny will be fought. By listening to His life story, supreme happiness will be achieved effortlessly by the listeners. ||108|| By listening, the heart will become pure; by listening the cycle of birth and death will be avoided; by listening the listeners will achieve *Brahman*, which can be achieved by performing actions and offering the fruits to *Brahman*. ||109||

- C. 17

3 You do not need ceremonies to complete the rituals, you do not need fasting to torture the body; you do not need to visit the *tirthas*. It is sufficient to listen to the story. ||182|| Genuine love and awareness of the core of devotion will easily lead to the attainment of the highest good; and incorrect knowledge and the knowledge of the two-fold nature will be destroyed. ||183|| You need not make efforts for other means. Let us listen to the Saicharita. It will exhaust all *karma*, of the past and the present life, which results in rebirth. Not the least effect will remain of them. ||184|| - C. 3

4 One may listen for a long time but if it just accumulates one layer over another of false knowledge, can it be called the right outcome of listening ? Such listening would be futile. ||43|| How can we call a thing soap if it does not cleanse ? How can it be called listening if it does not remove false knowledge ? ||44|| Such listeners are many. But by listening they develop faith and devotion. But a state of mind whereby a listener has absolute love of God and devotion at the feet of Sai, is rare. ||42|| - C. 15

5 Listening to the stories with love will dispel all worldly afflictions. Sai, the cloud of mercy, will shower grace; and, complete and pure knowledge will appear. ||180|| Sloth, a wandering mind, attachment to sense-objects and indulgence of the palate - these are the obstacles which come in the way of listening. Steer clear of these and the listening will become a happy experience. ||181|| - C. 3

6 Listening to the Saicharita purifies the listeners and the narrator always. The merits and the sins are obliterated and both attain salvation. ||32|| If the listeners hear it with complete and concentrated attention, the crossing of the ocean of existence becomes easy, after the bondages of *karma* are broken. ||38|| - C. 48

7 "It will cause waves of love and devotion to rise on the ocean of the mind; and, diving into them now and then, will bring up gems of knowledge." ||4|| To describe Baba's pure fame and to listen to it with all your heart, will burn away the sins of the devotees. This makes for easy attainment of salvation. ||49|| - C. 3

8 While listening, do it with humility. The listeners should only deem that Sai is in their mind. Only then the correct listening is accomplished. Let the oneness be continuous. ||33|| - C. 50

9 By listening (to the stories) one's own peace will be attained, the deluding fears of the world will be removed, and supreme bliss will be a certainty. Listeners will attain *Sadgati* truly. ||6|| - C. 24

Second Step – *Kirtan Bhakti*

1 "Whoever sings My praises, I will bestow upon him complete happiness, permanent pleasure and contentment. Believe this as the Truth." ||14|| - C. 3

2 The Lord Himself would be pleased as He prefers the stories sung of His own devotees or the description of their virtues. ||9|| - C. 40

3 In *Kritayuga*, it was controlling the senses and subduing of passions; in *Tretayuga*, sacrifices; in *Dwapara*, rituals; and in *Kaliyuga*, reciting the name and singing the praises - a simple means of salvation. ||53|| - C. 3

4 Now there are other modes of devotion. In the opinion of Gargacharya (author of science and astrology), when the mind is completely absorbed singing the praises of God, it becomes one with Him (a mode of worship). ||94|| Continuously being aware of one's Real Self, relating religious tales and songs, having disciplined behaviour, is another form of *Bhakti* as described by Shandilya (author of law book). ||95|| - C. 1

Third Step – *Smaran Bhakti*

- 5 *Ramnavami* was a Hindu festival. He would celebrate this as His own, by having the cradle tied up in the *sabha-mandap* and have *kathas* and *kirtans* said. ||6|| - C. 7
- 6 Bhisma was a versatile man, well-versed in narrating *kathas*. The *kirtan* was very enjoyable and all the listeners were very pleased. ||82|| Baba too was very pleased. According to His consent, the festival had taken place, along with *bhajan*, *kirtan* etc. ||83||
- C. 6
- 7 Once, the people of Thane requested that peerless *kirtankar*, Ganu Das, to perform *kirtan* at Koupineshwar (temple). ||18|| With the grace of Sai Samartha, Das Ganu composed stories describing the saints and performed *kirtans* free. Thus, he became famous. ||31|| - C. 15
- 8 Next year, Bhisma was not available. Balabuva Satarkar was to be brought for the *kirtan*. But, he had to go to Kavathe (in Satara district). ||94|| Even if he (i.e. Bhajani) had not been available, Kaka would have performed the *kirtan*, because he knew by heart the composition about *Ramnavami* composed by Das Ganu. ||96||
- C. 6
- 9 Not a single pie was paid for the *kirtan*. He did not wear garments on his upper body and was bare-headed, wearing only a *pancha* (poor man's *dhoti* which was short and also used as a towel). Still, listeners flocked to the *kirtan*. ||20|| Only the lower half of the body is covered. *Chiplis* are used and the *veena* (Indian lute) is played. Hari's name is loudly chanted. Such is the well-known and pure image of Narada. ||30||
- C. 15
- 1 In the *Kaliyuga*, there is only one means of liberation, which is the remembrance of God and *Guru's* feet. Thereby the fear of worldly existence is destroyed. This is the only protection for those who have surrendered. ||57|| "Watch the chanting of the Lord's name in My heart by placing the hand on it. Wake Me up if he finds Me sleepy." These are the orders given to him. ||139|| - C. 45
- 2 Krishna Himself was the Supreme *Brahman*. Yet He bowed at Sandipani's feet, and said : "Remembrance of the *Sadguru* is the surest way to please Me, Who is Narayana." ||167|| "Repetition of the name 'Sai' will burn away all the sins of *Kaliyuga*....." ||20||
- C. 3
- 3 Baba loved the *Nama-smarana*. He Himself constantly repeated the words '*Allah-Malik*'. He would arrange for a seven day ceaseless chanting of the *Nama* in His presence, day and night. ||82|| - C. 4
- 4 "Always remember Me only. Believe in Me heart and soul. Pray without selfish motives and you will attain your welfare. ||108|| Make Me ever remember your name and forget all other things. Remove the restlessness of the mind and make it steady and calm. ||119||
- C. 25
- 5 Abandoning all the million clever and cunning ways, recall always "Sai, Sai". You will be able to cross the worldly ocean. Have no doubts. ||135|| By merely remembering Him, the riddle of life and death is resolved. This is the best *Sadhana* for which one does not have to spend a single *pie* (coin of small demonitional value of British India). ||2|| - C. 10

6 Baba listened with full attention to this pure-hearted invitation and said : "He who remembers Me is always in My mind." II31II
- C 40

7 "If you recite 'Sai, Sai' always, I will take you beyond the seven seas. If you believe in these words, you will be certainly benefitted." II12II - C. 13

8 Considering her service, Baba was pleased with her and softly told her to keep on repeating "Rajaram, Rajaram". II166II "Keep chanting this always. Oh, mother, your life's objective will be achieved, your mind will be at peace, and you will be immensely benefitted." II167II
- C. 27

9 "Sai, Sai" is the name that we remember and it is the '*mantra*' to propitiate all Gods. This is our meditation and this is our repetition. Whole heartedly surrender to Him. II107II
- C. 37

Fourth Step -

Charansevan Bhakti

1 Pressing His feet is like bathing at the confluence of the three rivers (Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati). And, partaking of the water washings of His feet uproots all desires. II63II - C. 4

2 The devotees of the *Guru* experience, on resorting to his feet with full faith, that not only *Guru* but *Parabrahma* is moved. Such is the marvel of *Guru puja* ! II9II
- C. 11

3 The one who surrenders body-speech-mind-wealth at Sai's feet, such a devotee is deeply loved by Sai. II41II
- C. 9

4 Hemad surrenders willfully at the feet of Sai, and has spoken incoherently whatever has come to his mind. Let the devoted and innocent ones listen to that prattling which comes to life because of Sai's grace. II175II For any slackness in the service or any attempt to be smart will certainly lead the disciple into trouble. One should have full faith at the *Guru's* feet. II15II
- C. 16

5 When a person takes refuge at the feet of the *Sadguru*, he gets the merit of bowing to the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh - as if in reality, he has bowed to *Parabrahma* and supreme heavenly bliss manifests. II1II
- C. 27

6 Taking clean water in his hands, he washed Baba's lotus feet and did *puja* in the traditional way. Then he offered bananas and coconut. II60II - C. 28

7 While Baba was thus talking. I was massaging Baba's feet. I was surprised inwardly and was provoked to think. II58II
- C. 18

8 He said : "These feet are ancient. Your worries are over now. Have full faith in Me. You will be fulfilled soon." II147II Sapatnekar was pressing Baba's feet when he heard these sweet words. He was choked with emotion and his eyes filled with tears. He prostrated at Baba's feet. II148II
- C.

48

9 'I am your humblest servant. I have always regarded Your feet as my only solace.' Utter these words. Gather courage and have faith in Him. II142II Then you should see His miracle. The ocean of mercy, in the form of the *Guru*, will be moved and will take you in His bed, swaying you lightly on the waves of kindness. II143II He will keep His hand of re-assurance on your head; will ward off bad omens; burn up heaps of all sins and anoint the forehead with *udi*. II144II
- C. 17

Fifth Step – Archan Bhakti

1 *Puja* and *Archana* for the love of God are the ways to express devotion, as preached by Parashar (father of Vyasa) and Vyasa (compiler and arranger of Vedas). That is also another form of worship. ||88|| For the sake of the *Guru*, collect flowers such as the Parijat and others, from the garden, sweep the courtyard of the *Guru's* abode and sprinkle water and smear it with the wash of cowdung. ||89|| At the outset, bathe and chant the morning *mantras*; make fragrant paste and annoint the *Gurudev* with sandalwood, bathe him with the fine nectarial substances (milk, honey, ghee, curd and sugar), burn incense and light the lamp. ||90|| Afterwards offer *naivedya* (offering of food, such as milk, fruits, honey etc.), then do *arati* with the lamp and the incense. In this way, doing all the services with love, is called '*archana*' (worship). ||91|| Begin the worship by making your heart and intelligence pure and sinless, having an unsullied disposition and invoke the power of the deity within yourself. ||92|| Then recall that divine feeling after the '*archana*' is concluded, and in your heart restore the former state (state of purity and sinlessness) and establish it firmly within you. ||93||

C. 1

2 Though immutable, He accepted the worship and honours (rituals), according to the faith of the devotees. He accepted (the devotion) in all the different ways. ||45|| Some waved the whisks - some fanned - some played *shehnai* or drums and auspicious musical instruments and some offered *puja*. ||46|| Some would lave His hands and feet (to drink the water as *tirth*) - some annointed Him with *attar* and sandalwood paste - some offered Him betelnuts made out of thirteen ingredients (*supari*, white *kat*, cloves, nutmeg, saffron, dry coconut, camphor, *kankol*, *Jaipatri*, cardamom, almond, *kasturi*, lime) - some offered *mahanaivedya* (wide variety of delicious foods, which could be as many as sixty items). ||47|| Some applied *gandh* paste, with two fingers, horizontally across the forehead, as it is done for Shiva *linga*, without a break - some applied *kasturi* mixed with perfume - and also, applied sandalwood. ||48||

11

3 Taking clean water in his hands, he washed Baba's lotus feet and did *puja* in the traditional way. Then he offered bananas and coconut. ||60|| He offered incense, light, betel leaf and made a monetary offering; mentally circumambulated, offered a garland of flowers and then, sat near His feet. ||61|| Jog came to the *Masjid* with sandalwood paste, consecrated rice, flowers, bell, *niranjana* and the five-wick lamp etc. and asked Baba : ||75|| "What should I bring for *naivedya* today?" Maharaj instructed : "Bring Me a platterful of *sanza*. You can do the *arati* and *puja* later." ||76|| Since then he was devoted to Baba. He regularly offered *agarbattis*, coconut and garland. Lakhmichand also prospered. The *puja* was regular and ritualistic. ||85||

- C. 28

4 Seeing the beautiful image in the picture, everyone was supremely delighted. Everyone was surprised by the unimaginable way in which all this had happened. ||157|| After placing the picture on the central seat, and doing full ritualistic *puja*, *naivedya* was offered with loving devotion. Then everyone started their meal. ||158|| From then onwards, till this day, on every *Holi* day, the tradition is carried on with all rituals and *pujas*. ||159||

- C. 40