

Unit 26

Sai baba of shirdi

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Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- relate the life of Sai baba;
- outline early teachings of Sai baba;
- describe the assurances of Sai baba; and
- know about the miracles and parables of Sai baba.

26.1 Introduction

Every major saint or religious teacher eventually gives rise to an organization after his death. These organizations/ charitable trusts then become responsible for disseminating the life and teachings of the saint, observe various festivals and rituals and pray or meditate on the message/ teachings of the saint. In some cases the teachings and rituals are explicit and in others it is implicit. In the case of Sai Baba of Shirdi the trust formed was called Sai Baba Sansthan. In our introduction it would be better to delineate first the various aspects of this organisation, the important spiritual landmarks in Shirdi itself. We will then go on to relating Sai Babas life and teachings as also the teachings in parable form. Suffice it to say at this point that Sai Baba of Shirdi is among the foremost holymen of India.

The Sansthan was created in 1922 in the memory and for spreading the teachings of Sai Baba. From 1922 onwards the Sansthan has worked in various ways to help the devotees of Sai Baba. Thus in 1990 a large building was made which could house 3500 at a time apart from having 560 rooms with the various facilities. In memory of Sai Babas miraculous healing powers the Sansthan has inangurated a hospital in Shirdi with modern equipment to help diagnosis of disease. The equipment is often donated by the devotees of Sai Baba. The Sansthan also provides through a 'Prasadlay' food for the devotees which is cooked in modern equipment and in free of smoke pollution. A canteen is open all hours of the day or night. The Sansthan has also published various photos and books on Sai Baba in various languages. Thus the Sai Baba Sansthan has been looking after and disseminating the teachings very actively and efficiently.

26.2 Landmarks in Shirdi

We would man like to mention some landmarks in Shirdi so that we can contextualize the life and teachings of Sai Baba. The first of these is the Samadhi Mandir where the mortal remains are enshrined. The mandir is built with stores and Babas Samadhi is built with marble slabs, which are surrounded by ornamentation. Just behind the Samadhi with two pillars of silver with elaborate designs. At the back of the samadhi there in an idol of Sai Baba sculpted with Italian marble, and installed in 1954. In nearby hall some of the items handled by Sai Baba are kept on display for the devotes. Pictures of Sai Baba are kept on the first floor of the mandir. These pictures illustrate the various aspects of the life of Sai Baba.

Temple worship begins early in the morning at 5 and goes on for 5 hours. Various rituals are also observed by the temple devotees and an important aspect is that on each Thursday and various festivals Babas photo is taken out from the palanquin and taken in procession.

Another important landmark in Shirdi is that of Dwarkamai. This is at the left side of the Samadhi Mandir and this is the space that Sai Baba lived in during his life. This was often the scene of healing with the saintly powers that Sai Baba had. When Sai Baba had arrived at Dwarkamai it was a dilapidated mosque but is now in good repair. Dwarkamai has a large stone on which Sai Baba sat and also a portrait of Sai Baba. There are two rooms one of which has a chariot and the second a palanquin (palkhi). In the room where the chariot is housed is also a small temple.

At the second level we find that there is a stone stool on which Baba took his bath. Here there is an oil painting of Sai Baba and a wooden Kolamba (wooden vessel) in which Sai Baba kept the donations (Bhiksha) brought from the village.

Another important place in Sai Baba Shirdi is what is called "Gurusthan". This relates to the fact that Sai Baba came in his teenage years as a young ascetics and sat below a 'neem tree' where he was first seen. This area is now known as 'Gurusthan' and the last renovation was made in 1941. Gurusthan has a small shrine on which is placed a photo of Sai Baba in front of this is shivling and the Bull Nandi. Closeby is Babas sleeping place called Chavadi and the wooden bed and chair belonging to Sai Baba are still there. There are several other features of interest in here and the neem tree how has branches going through the roof of the temple.

The next important landmark in Shirdi is the Lendi Gardens which were laid out by Sai Baba himself in his early years in Shirdi when he spent a lot of time laying out the garden. This is at a distance from Gurusthan. Sai Baba used to water the plants everyday as part of his Bhakti. The name of the garden comes from the drain that used to flow past. Sai Baba used to go to garden in the morning and the evening to ponder and to relax under a neem tree. There Sai Baba dug a pit into which he put a flame which he kept burning day and night. After his death a small memorial has been built in marble and the flame now burns inside a glass box. These are some of the very many memorable places in Shirdi which are in the memory of Sai Baba and his holy life.

26.3 Life of Sai Baba of Shiridi

We now turn to an outline of the life of Sai Baba which indicates quite clearly that he was an extraordinary saint. If this were not so he would not have inspired people all over the world to lead a spiritual life. In fact he is regarded by his devotees as a perfect saint who lived for his devotees curing hundreds of the ill with his spiritual healing powers. Sai Baba first

came to Shirdi at a tender age in 1854. He then left Shirdi and returned to Shirdi with a marriage procession in 1858 and then lived in Shirdi the rest of his life. No proper account is available as to what he did, before he came to Shirdi, where he was born, who were his parents and family of orientation. What was quite clear to all those he came in contact with was his extraordinary spiritual powers and compassion, which was the basis of healing powers. It is well known that the saints take on the Karma of those they heal upon themselves. This is because of their spiritual powers being used to create happiness in the world.

Sai Baba entered into Shirdi as an ordinary person in a marriage procession. He was not known to anyone. Yet in Shirdi people began to address him as 'Sai' that is saint and Saviour. 'Baba' is an expression that is used for a spiritually evolved person. Soon, after his advent to Shirdi all referred to him by the name of Sai Baba.

Box 26.1 Advent in Shirdi

Sai Baba was first noticed near the village boundary while he was sitting under a margosa (neem) tree about 1854 deep in meditation. In his younger days Sai Baba stayed under this tree for a while and then left Shirdi and his readvent to Shirdi was in 1858 and there he stayed until his mahasamadhi in 1918. The second occasion in which Sai Baba entered into Shirdi was in fact a triumphant and all the people found him to be extraordinary spiritually evolved. Spontaneously the people of Shirdi began to refer to him as a saint and saviour.

At the beginning of his stay in Shirdi Sai Baba was detached and self absorbed walking on the boundaries of the village or meditating under the margosa tree. Gradually certain of the Shirdi villagers began to give him saintly recognition and regarded him very highly. One of the extraordinary devotees was a lady called Bayyaji Bai who used to trace down Sai Baba in the jungle near the village and the urge and force him to eat from what she had brought him. She would with motherly affection offer the food to Sai Baba and then return to her house. This went on for a while until the compassion of Sai Baba made him shift from the jungle to an ancient and broken down mosque on the boundary of the village in which he lived to the end of his days. In doing this Sai Baba sanctified the mosque and today it is one of the most popular worshipping sites in Shirdi. This mosque is called "Dwarkamai" or the abode of Lord Krishna.

Contrary to expectation Sai Baba was not simply an ascetic saint but was in fact fond of wrestling in his younger days. At other times he used to dance in ecstasy with anklets on his feet. In the company of devotees Sai Baba used to go into ecstasy and dance and sing in the midst of his deep state of divine joy. He used to sing in Persian and Arabic and often the songs of Kabir, another well known saint.

The dress of Sai Baba was very distinct in that he wore a long Kurta called 'Kafni' and had a length of cloth which was wrapped on his head so that it flowed behind his left ear. Sai Baba's habits were very simple and he used ordinary sack cloth to sit or sleep and went to sleep with a brick under his head. Hence Sai Baba had completely transcended the ordinary comforts which most human beings are obsessed with.

He was an ascetic and a 'fakir' so far as his personal habits was concerned. When questioned why he led this ascetic existence he replied that simple habits were better than opulent luxury. Outwardly Sai Baba's visage was handsome and he had a mesmeric personality. Anyone who saw him once (darshan) never forgot him and immediately became his devotee. As regards his behaviour this was usually compassionate but sometimes his

compassion manifested in rage which was divinely inspired and subsided like a wave soon after it manifested. Thus, this anger or rage was a divine manifestation which was not the 'anger' of the common man, who simply loses control over himself. Perhaps his mood was already preoccupied with saving his devotees and a show of rage or temper is also known as a method saints have used to test loyalty of devotees. Nothing negative can be imputed to this type of behaviour in the life of such an extraordinary saint such as Sai Baba.

Sai Baba used to go to various houses in Shirdi to beg for alms and it was his generous and saintly nature to share what he got with his devotees. Another feature was that he never stored food due to his unshakeable faith in the Almighty.

Sai Baba also kept a fire burning. This in fact was a sacred fire or Dhuni of which the Udi or ashes were of medicinal value when used by the devotees and its application on the forehead kept the mind calm and equipoised. He would also get Dakshina in terms of money on property from which in fact he was completely detached. Sai Baba never kept money or dakshina for his purposes but used to distribute the sum he would get daily to other needy persons, as the sick, disabled, elderly and impoverished. In his early days in Shirdi, Sai Baba laid out a garden after ploughing it. He himself watered the plants and looked after the garden, which was called the Lendi garden.

Sai Baba is also known as the "common man's god" since he himself was completely ascetic and lived, spent his time, and shared his food from alms with them. Further Sai Baba did not have any discrimination against any caste or class and freely shared his clay pipe (chillum) without orthodox caste rules being permitted to come in the way of this gregarious activity. This shows how humble and non discriminatory his attitude was towards people in general and devotees in particular. He often went to the extent of cooking food for his fakir visitors.

Sai Babas completely saintly attitudes and behaviour endeared him to the villagers of Shirdi who gradually began to worship him. Initially Sai Baba was not very enthusiastic about it but gradually he allowed this worship since it gave great peace of mind to the devotees, and onetime gave his blessings to the multitudes. The residence of Sai Baba Dwarkamai mosque was open to all devotees at all times to express their love and affection for Baba. His devotees cut across lines of class, caste, affluent, and poor. All were welcome as creatures of a common God.

Once the word about Sai Babas enlightened nature got around Dwarkamai and Shirdi in general had a large number of people and devotees visiting Shirdi for Sai Baba's darshan or spiritual seeing and contemplation. Shirdi itself once a sleepy village now became the hub of a great deal of spiritual activity. In fact some began to worship Sai Baba in Shirdi with a lot of expensive rites and rituals. However, Baba was detached from all these manifestations of worship and remained calm and collected. The devotees grew very many and by the time Baba left his body there were already very many believers and devotees of Sai Baba.

Today when Sai Baba is no longer in the flesh and blood with us many devotees consider looking at his picture intensely as the equivalent of viewing him in person. That is to say darshan now is seeing the picture of Sai Baba and offering genuflection and arti to it.

Baba performed many miracles and cures in his lifetime and always blessed his devotees with some ash from the Dhuni he kept lighted. This ash was known as Udi or sacred ash and had healing capacity and was used by devotees for all sorts of maladies to good effect.

So far we have been talking about the outward life of Sai Baba. However it was in his day to day teaching that Baba can really be discovered for the saint he was. As such we can commence with some of his sayings, incidents, cures and so on. The teachings which are like parables explain to us who Sai Baba was spiritually and how he taught in daily life. In fact nothing was too small for him to give blessings and faith to his devotees and they flocked to him for all their problems and he blessed them and spoke words of compassion. He did not want to be glorified in person.

26.4 Early Teachings of Sai Baba

Sai Baba gave his devotees pure and simple assurances in his lifetime which were of great benefit to their peace of mind and gave them great tranquility. Thus Baba assured his devotees that there would be no calamity in their houses in domestic life if their faith in him was strong and unshakeable. He pointed out that this assurance is given by Sri Krishna in the Gita. Baba further stressed that he was in touch with the devotees inner thoughts since he was established their hearts and was in fact in the heart of everything including the beasts and insects. Sai Baba in fact stated that he was the very embodiment of the divine- the mother of all possible creation, preservation and destruction of the universe.

Continuing in this vein Baba declared that the search for him should be not just outward worship but the enquiry and search within oneself. He made this clear when he pointed out that his consciousness, which is the All-Pervading consciousness, was within all creatures and thus attaining oneness with that consciousness meant that the seeker has gained oneness with all creatures and hence with Sai Baba who was All-Pervasive. Such an inner enquiry would remove all doubts of devotees since they would in their worship ritual and religion attain oneness with him. He advocated the mantra of "Sai Sai" or "Om Sai Sai" as words which had the power to lift ordinary consciousness to a transcendental level. However he did not posit any specific meditation posture for this simple mantra and therefore it can be repeated anytime, anywhere and as many times as the devotee wants to share the divine consciousness of whom Sai Baba was a representative. He himself claimed to be cosmic consciousness within everything.

Sai Baba left his body in 1918 but his spiritual self continues to help and guide the devotees. There is a story which gives an idea regarding this belief held by his devotees. The story is that a devotee called Navayanrao had Baba's darshan two times during the time when he was alive. Three years had lapsed after Baba left the body in 1918 when this devotee fell ill and almost died. No medicine or treatment gave him any relief. As a last resort Narayanrao prayed to Sai Baba and began to meditate on him continuously. Then one night Narayanrao had a dream in which Baba gave him darshan and the assurance that he would be well again and would no longer be bedridden and would be able to walk again within a week.

Narayanrao thereafter started getting well and could soon walk again. This goes to show that the work and influence of extraordinary saints goes on even after they leave the body. This is certainly true for Sai Baba whose mission continues and to his devotees he is spiritually still alive. Baba's statements form the main corpus of his teachings and the ingress into them indicates that Sai Baba could do wonders for those who were in any kind of suffering. Yet in each of the miraculous cures there is more than a story- there is a teaching hidden in them. Moreover, the statements Baba made in connection with his Divine status are such that they arouse a deep curiosity and reverence for Baba. Thus Baba has made it clear as regards behaviour that for anything to take place or any relationship to

exist there must be interaction. He advised that if anyone came to his devotees in search of help he should be treated kindly and politely no matter what or who the person was. All seekers should be treated with the greatest of respect. He advocated giving the needy people whatever they needed be it advice, clothes, food and water. He even went to the extent of saying that even if someone asks for money and you don't have it, even then he should be politely refused and not treated harshly.

In a similar vein Baba revealed his divine nature by pointing out that if all his divine activity was written and talked about all ignorance would go away from the minds of the hearers or listeners. The consciousness of material things, and material possessions would reduce greatly and finally fade away. In their place the spiritual consciousness would arise and devotion would become intense.

Apart from their personal prayers and meditations on Baba his devotees are busy in disseminating knowledge about Babas Leelas and miracles so as to remove the ignorance and bring in enlightenment. For Baba the devotee should not immerse himself or herself into worldly activity but observe the flow of the world as this would create detachment from the world and bring the devotees close to Sai Baba and create waves of devotion. Sai Baba urged his devotees to break down all barriers to devotion.

26.5 The Assurances of Sai Baba

We now turn to the assurances that Sai Baba gave to his devotees. These were originally written in Marathi by Shri Mohaniraj Pandit and translated into English. Our attempt here is to try and explain or comment upon these assurances by way of explaining them further. We will go one by one in this procedure and then try and give an overall statement. The first assurance is:

- a) No harm shall befall him who sets his foot on the soil of Shirdi.

This assurance has several levels or dimensions to it. In this the first level is that all those who come to Shirdi are assured of good health and happy mood during their stay in Shirdi. It is an assurance that any devotee or would be safe and sound on the sacred soil of Shirdi. We must keep in mind that while Sai Baba was alive Shirdi was a different place than it is now in the sense that so much of development and construction had not taken place and the facilities in area 1818 were not so good as they are now. There is however, another level to this assurance which relates to anyone who treads on the sacred vibrations left by Sai Baba in Shirdi. That is to say Sai Shirdi and its territory bestows protection to the devotees and that this protection would last beyond the stay of the devotees and visitors and give them a permanent benediction in life itself. This is the first assurance and it is an important one because it shows that Shirdi was and spiritually still is the home of Sai Baba. He spent sixty years in Shirdi and knew every corner of Shirdi. He had begged his food from all four corners of Shirdi and the dust and soil of Shirdi had rubbed on him and off him. Further Babas daily routine and ablutions also gave his spiritual powers to the soil of Shirdi. In fact Sai Baba made Shirdi a holy village and now it is a holy town. As such the assurance is that all those who set a foot on Shirdi will benefit spiritually. Let alone no harm befalling those who go to Shirdi there will be great good and happy fortune for those who visit and stay in Shirdi in order to visit the town of Sai Baba.

Let us turn now to the related assurance of Sai Baba to his devotees. This assurance is:

- b) He who cometh to my Samadhi, his sorrow and suffering shall cease.

Again, this assurance is of several levels and dimensions. The first obvious level is that when a devotee visits the Samadhi of a renowned saint there is an automatic connection with the vibrations of the Samadhi and that of the devotees. This is because Samadhi is a spot full of spiritual power and the mortal remains of the Baba lie there. As such rituals around the Samadhi such as the kneeling or the folding of hands in reverence, the Udi or sacred ash all create an ambience in which the devotees are entranced and feel a great flow and release of love and other emotions when they are near the Samadhi. Samadhi is sometimes the scene of great emotional crying, singing, fainting or jumping in ecstasy in the presence of the Samadhi. Their sorrow and suffering cease for they have found their guru and their Saviour in Sai Baba. Thus the assurance regarding the positive beneficial effects of the Samadhi of Sai Baba cannot be undermined. It is in fact the central feature of Shirdi so far as the holy spots are concerned. At another level the Samadhi and its darshan is good for anyone and everyone and it makes every one happy.

Let us now turn to the next assurance of Sai Baba keeping in mind that these assurances are all related to each other and shed light on each other. The next assurance is

- c) Through I be no more in flesh and blood, I shall ever protect my devotees.

This assurance from Sai Baba is a spiritual statement in which he promises his devotees that though one day he has to leave the earth and his body put into Samadhi he is spiritually still proactive so far as his devotees are concerned and will protect them. Here we point out that there is nothing in this assurance that is questionable because it is a known fact that great saints and realized souls continue to live in a spiritual body and very many devotees have had darshan of Sai Baba even after he departed in 1818 because he lives on in the spiritual body which is every bit able to help, energize, advise and bless the devotees who would pray to him. He would protect them from all harm befalling them. Thus, the fact that Sai Baba not being in a physical body does not prevent him from being in a spiritual body which will protect and help the devotees.

The next assurance or tenet that we turn to is that

- d) Trust in me and your prayer shall be answered.

In this Sai Baba is being very straight forward and there is no prevarication in this assurance at all. The simple method for prayers to be answered is to trust the guru. The guru in this case is Sai Baba and it is trust in him which will create the compassion of the Baba to fulfill the prayer. It is well known that devotees go to the saints and to their Samadhi when they have something praying on their mind. The numbers of problems in fact are so many and so diverse that it is really a simple way that Sai Baba has assured his devotees of their fulfillment. Part of the cure is the use of Udi the sacred ash and many who have used Udi with faith and trust have found that their problems are solved. Yet trust has to be in the guru and this creates a link between the vibrations of the guru and the devotee and then, through spiritual transfusion of energy the cure or the problems gets

solved. At another level simply trust can also help the beginner start on the journey. At some specific point he will be able to know that his trust has flowered.

We now turn to the assurance that

- e) Know that my spirit is immortal. Know this for yourself. We have been saying in the in the comments on the last assurance that the guru does not die when the body is buried or is cast to the flames. Thus the devotee has to realize that the spirit of the guru is immortal—that it does not perish with the body. However, this faith is very difficult to have and only the devotees who are realized souls themselves can have full faith in this tenet and that is why Sai Baba asks the devotee to know this immortality of spirit himself—that is by his personal experience. How can this faith in the immortality of the spirit be realized by any devotee? It is naturally through meditation on “Om Sai Sai” and the darshan of the picture and visit to Shirdi if possible. Though there are many temples now to Sai Baba we find that ultimately a visit to Shirdi is always at the back of the mind of the devotee of Sai Baba. This is linked up with faith and loyal devotion. It is by seeing for oneself the Samadhi and the dhuni and taking of the Udi from Shirdi itself that ordinarily the faith in the immortality of the spirit arises within the devotee himself and he no longer has to be told that the spirit of Sai Baba is immortal.

We now turn to the next assurance and see what it means and what we can comment upon it to make its meaning clearer. It says,

- f) Shows unto me he who sought refuge and been turned away.

Sai Baba points out that he is a compassionate and affectionate guru and that he turns no one away. This is an open invitation for all people and would be devotees to approach Sai Baba with faith, trust, humility, affection, love and devotion. For while Sai Baba says he turns no one away who has sought for refuge it is also clear that Sai Baba as the mentor and guru has to be approached in the proper manner that is prescribed to approach him. For those who approach Sai Baba in the right spirit of humility prayer and hope the doors of love and affection open up and he or she is gradually helped over his or her problems or difficulties. We will in a later section show with the help of stories and parables how so many have sought the refuge of Sai Baba and here overcome their problems and difficulties. Some people again wonder that they have not seen Sai Baba how will he them help them? To these people it must be made clear that even the darshan of a picture of Sai Baba is like having darshan of a living soul.

We have turn to the seventh assurance of Sai Baba which we point out is related to the other ones. This is,

- g) In whatever faith men worship Me, even so do I render to them.

This is in fact a difficult assurance to comment upon except of course that it also exists at different levels. Thus it is clear at the first level that what matters is the purity of intention of devotee. Those devotees who are interested only in their material welfare will benefit materially. However, the real benefit for mankind so far as Sai Baba in concerned has to do with spiritual benefit. The devotees whose faith in Sai Baba has to do with spiritual enlightenment and with aspects of prayer, worship, and meditation, then Sai Baba will fill their lives with happiness and joy. Thus with what intention the devotee approaches the guru is of paramount importance as pointed out by Sai Baba himself. At another level we find that all devotees have their own attitudes and

intentions and some are more advanced than the others. Therefore, no one is turned away, no one is looked down upon, as has been made clear each one is dealt with on merit alone. However, it is clear those who come with purity will receive purity. Those with material hope will get succor. Those with spiritual intentions will get them fulfilled.

Action and Reflection 26.1

Read the assurances of Sai Baba. In which way are they important as part of his teachings? Write down in your notebook.

The eighth assurance is

- h) Not in vain is My Promise that I shall ever lighten your burden.

This assurance is a very subtle but firm promise that as the devotee progresses on the path his burden becomes lighter and lighter. The clouds of sorrow and misery go away. This is in fact the basic promise of the Sat Guru to his followers that as the days go by in Kirtan, Bhajan, meditation and prayer the guru is able to make the mind cleansed from all negative thinking and evil tendencies. As many marvelous things keep happening to the devotee he is assured that the Sai Baba is looking after him and has his blessing hand on his head. This is not a matter of speculation but happens to be based in fact and all the old devotees of Sai Baba are themselves witness to the fact that their problems have receded and indeed many have experienced miracles with the Udi from the dhuni from the temples or the joss sticks in the domestic puja place. Thus the journey for the devotee of Sai Baba is one in which his burden of suffering and sorrow becomes reduced daily and the burden becomes lighter and lighter until the devotee fuses with Baba.

We now turn to Sai Baba assurance that

- i) Knock, and the door shall open, Ask and ye shall be granted.

Sai Baba is telling the devotees that they must make an effort and knock, and the door shall open. They must ask and what they ask will be granted. In spiritual parlance 'Knocking' means chanting the mantra and meditating. Thus the way to open the door is to meditate on Om Sai Baba and to offer their time and effort in prayer and socially uplifting activities. They must lead a pure life and give what they can to the poor and the destitute. Indeed there is a story in which devotee fed a dog and Sai Baba later told the devotee that he had had a sumptuous meal. Thus to knock on the door means to lead a spiritual life in which there was the worship of Baba at the centre. Again the question of asking is one of asking in all humility and not in pride or anger. Sai Baba is a loving and affectionate saint and the way to ask him for anything must be in humility and prayer. As Sai Baba has said those who knock with meditation and affection and those who ask with humility, will have the door open, and get what they want.

Let us now turn to the assurance of Sai Baba which reads as below:

- j) To him who surrenders to Me totally I shall ever be indebted.

What can this assurance mean? At first glance it may seem paradoxical. Why should Baba be indebted to anyone who surrenders to Him totally? On deeper reflection we are able to understand this assurance. When a devotee surrenders to Baba totally he becomes an instrument of his knowledge and His mission in life. Such a devotee makes Babas work much easier and he is able to direct such a devotee to do good acts

and help achieve miracles. However the catch in the assurance is total surrender. There is no specific outward sign of total surrender to Sai Baba except the prayers and the meditation. However the devotee feels oneness with Sai Baba and his burdens are reduced bit by bit and then lightened completely. He becomes an instrument in the hands of Baba and this is why Baba expresses himself saying that to such a devotee, who has surrendered completely he himself is indebted. Thus, this is a two way relationship between devotee and guru. In fact with total surrender of the devotee it is the guru who himself feels indebted!

Baba points out here very simply that the goal of all devotion is to gain total oneness with the guru. Anything short of this is not good enough. In a way this assurance which is the eleventh assurance is a summary of what would happen if the other ten assurances were followed by the devotee and understood by him. Blessedness is a condition in which there is no division between disciple and guru and in which the spirit of the devotee has fused with the guru. There are stories of such blessed souls and we will turn to them soon. However, this point needs to be made clear. Oneness with Sai Baba— that has to be the goal of the meditations and actions of all of Sai Baba devotees. Nothing short of such oneness will do and the entire teachings and stories which relay these teachings are geared to rise up the spirit of the devotee and take him to the heights of spiritual bliss and realization. Indeed the devotee one with the spirit of Sai is ultimately a blessed person. We have given some observations and comments on the eleven assurances of Sai Baba to his devotees. However, this procedure may tend to see these assurances as separate and apart in themselves which they are not. This fallacy can be removed if we integrate the message of the eleven assurance in a running manner so that the assurances emerge as a message which is what they truly are. This method removes the idea that each assurance is distinct and stand apart which it is not so when the message is regarded as a whole. Let us then try to integrate the message of the eleven assurances of Sai Baba.

The assurances begin with the promise that no harm will befall anyone who set his fort on the soil of Shirdi. Thus, the essential backdrop is Shirdi itself but it may not be taken literally as Shirdi town but also all the Sai Baba temples may be regarded as Shirdi itself for that is where the spirit of Sai Baba lives. However, the importance of the Samadhi is available in Shirdi town itself for the remains of Sai Baba are covered in it and it is important to commune with that vibration so as the sorrow and suffering will abate and cease. Yet there is another fact and that is all Sai Baba temples do have some thought given to the Samadhi and many have a genuine article or two of Sai Baba which he used during his life and an area to bow down to His feet. The feet are the real Samadhi and bowing down is an act of offering prayer to Sai Baba. Thus when the devotee bows down the spirit of Sai Baba blesses and protects devotee who has come for his worship. It does not matter whether Sai Baba is in flesh and blood for he will protect the devotees who believe in him it is in this context that trust and Udi are every important for this is what leads to a protection and blessings of the supreme. However, the fact is that to engender trust we need to have some basic degree of realization of who Baba was and what was His mission in life. Only when this realization dawns that self-understanding dawns on a devotee. Further, Sai Babas message assures that no one is too low for him to accept, and that there is no one who seeks refuge in Sai Baba no matter what his caste, class, religion, creed or background who would not be granted refuge in his spirituality and spiritual effulgence. However, it is pointed out as a corollary

it is clear that the intention with which one approaches Sai Baba which is all important.

If the intention is bad and harmful that naturally no good is going to come out of it. Thus if a person tries to get some bad deeds done by approaching with such an idea then no good will happen to him or her. Thus Sai Baba is a saint but he cannot be prayed for anything except good purposes and good intentions for oneself or one friends and relations.

However, when it is a devotee with good intentions a pious person then Sai Baba promises to lighten his burden of sorrows, sadness and loss that all human beings in this world experience. In such genuine cases when they pray sincerely and mediate on Om Sai Sai their life becomes happy and fulfilling that is their burden is lightened. However, in the end Sai Baba promises that those who knock on the door of his temple will not go away in vain and all reasonable requests will be fulfilled whether it is recovery from illness or the request doing well in exams they will all be entertained. Thus, Sai Baba exhausts total surrender and says that the greatest blessing is to become one with him. This is the gist of the eleven assurances of Sai Baba.

26.6 Sai Baba: Miracles and Parables

We now turn to the teachings told in the stories related to Sai Baba and his devotees. These form an important and growing corpus of stories which is still growing. These teaching stories are drawn from Shri Sai charita a memoir which was approved of by Sai Baba himself and written down by one Hemadpant a close disciple of Sai Baba. Baba while sanctioning this work said he would help Hemadpant who would be an instrument for writing these stories. Which would teach generations of disciples about the virtues of humility and service, and on how to be happy in a simple life. These stories would also tell of how the early disciples gathered in Shirdi constructing "wadas" where the disciples could stay and have regular darshan of Baba. Further, we find there are accounts of how Baba with the force of his spirituality was able to cure all types of diseases with the help of his command and the Udi from the sacred dhuni which he kept lighted in the mosque where he stayed. There are also stories relating to the complex nature of Brahma-gyan which cannot be called by expenditures of money but has to be earned by the aspirant leading a spiritual life and adhering to spiritual disciplines as prescribed. We have taken these stories but are relating them in our own words and in brief for we would like to deal with the teachings of the stories also as this may not be very clear at the outset.

Hemadpant relates that around 1910 he went to the Masjid in Shirdi and saw that Sai Baba was diligently indeed vigorously grinding wheat in a pestle. Hemadpant was puzzled and wondered what Baba was doing grinding wheat. The news of this happening spread to the village and people gathered to see Baba pounding the wheat. In fact a few women forced their way into the front and pushing Baba away began to grind the wheat singing Babas Leelas. They felt that since Baba has no offspring or relatives they might be the beneficiary of the huge quantity of ground flour, and began dividing the flour into different portions. Baba who had been watching these proceeding now intervened and told the women that the flour was to be spread on the border limits of the village. It was later found on discussion this was done by Baba to contain the cholera epidemic that was raging through the area and this was Babas attempt to contain the epidemic.

Hemadpant is satisfied with relating the incident, which remarkable as it

is incomplete without some kind of documentary. When Baba started pounding the wheat and the crowd gathered there was a suffusion of cooperation and crowd purpose in trying to see what Baba was doing. In such, situations apart from the spiritual purposes, we find that sociologically the creation of a crowd lessens the feelings of anxiety and fear that exists wherever there is an epidemic, like cholera. As such the combining of the huge crowd in the village made them one in wondering what Baba was doing. The spreading of the flour all around the village outskirts has both metaphysical and medical value. Thus metaphysically the village was bound off by the magical spells and the magical effort that had gone into the grinding of the flour. On the other hand flour that is freshly ground has the capacity to be antiseptic to any new virus or bacteria. Thus in various different dimensions the story of the grinding of the wheat is remarkable since it shows us the faith and interest Baba's activities had started attracting about 1910 that is eight years before his death.

The other aspect is that Sai Baba did the grinding of something or the other everyday in the sense of turning the problems of the devotees into nothing for all of the sixty years that he lived in Shirdi.

Box 26.2 Telepathy and Clairvoyance

Now let us see another metaphysical side of Baba. When Hemadpant arrived in Shirdi, he got into a discussion with one Balasahib Bhate regarding whether a guru was at all required or not. This discussion went on far as hour when all the pros and cons were discussed. Hemadpant made the point of what is the necessity of a guru and that one must make the effort himself or herself. The discussion went on. After this discussion the group went to Masjid where Sai Baba stayed and Baba asked point blank what were the group discussing in the Wada and asked what Hemadpant had been saying. Hemadpant was much surprised at this observation as the Wada was a considerable distance from the Masjid. Thus Baba displayed powers of telepathy and clairvoyance in his observations and statements and was able to make out the inner state of the mind of the people who came for his help.

Another disciple Kaka Sahib Dixit after Hemadpant had left, picked up the discussion with the Baba and was told the story of a man wandering alone in a strange land full of danger (lions and wolves). When Dixit asked if a man takes a guide in this journey then Baba replied there was no danger. But on the other hand if there was no guide there would only be trouble of all sorts and the journey would hardly be completed.

There is a story of the young Sai Baba when he first appeared in Shirdi as very handsome, and seen sitting under a margosa tree practicing penance. This area with the neem tree was purchased by one Vinayak Sathe and he built Sathe's Wada on it and for long this was the sole resting place for pilgrims and disciples. Another wada was built Kakasaheb Dixit and finally another wada (a big one) was put up by Mr. Booty. These wadas were inspired by Sai Baba and were the areas where many disciples came to stay and the builders of the wadas were firm devotees of Sai Baba.

There is a story of how Sai Baba changed his appearance due to the loss in a wrestling bout. A wrestler named Tamboli lived in Shirdi and Baba and he did not agree on several accounts over which there was a fight, which Baba lost. Baba hence forth changed his way of living and his dress mode. He began wearing a Kafin, and wore a langot and covered his head with a cloth. He further began to use sack cloth for his asan and his bed and

began to wear torn clothes and rags. Wearing these rags he would give answers only when questioned. He was surrounded by devotees during the day and his possessions included a chillum, tobacco, a tin pot, flowing kafni, head cloth, and a short stick. The cloth on his hair was not washed for days. Here wore a waist cloth and sat in front of the Dhuni facing south, with his left hand resting on the railing.

We turn now to a miracle of Sai Baba very remarkable for its content.

The first is how Sai Baba used to light the lamps in his masjid with oil he got from shopkeepers. At one point the shopkeepers got together and made a decision not to give Sai Baba the oil for his lamps. When Baba begged for the oil they all answered him with a refusal to supply him the oil. Baba returned to the masjid and put in the dry wicks in the lamp. The shopkeepers watched in disdain and interest at what the Baba was doing. Sai Baba took a tin pot which has a few drops of oil, put water into it, gargled and put it back in the tin pot. Thereafter, he took water in the tin pot and filled all the lamps. He then lit them. To the surprise of all the lamps burned throughout the night. The shopkeepers relented and Baba told them to trust him in the future. This is a miracle which speaks of the power of a saint in using miracles to teach a lesson to the people who did not have belief in him. When the shopkeepers felt that Baba was wasting oil on the lighting of the lamps Baba showed them that this was a most important ritual and made oil out of water. Thus the guru should always be believed in and he should be trusted from the depths of one's heart.

There is a most interesting story about Sai Baba and the fakir called Javhar Ali. This incident happened five years after the wrestling bout with Tamboli. Javhar Ali had many disciples and came from Ahmednagar and stayed in Virabhadra temple. He was a learned fakir and could speak the whole Quran. He began to construct a Idgah near Virabhadra temple. A quarrel over this meant he left Rahata and then lived in the Mosque with Baba in Shirdi soon captivating the people with his learned talk he began to call Baba his disciple. Surprisingly, Babas humility was such that he did not object to this. He went with him to Rahata to live there. Though Javhar Ali did not realize the worth of Sai Baba, Sai Baba could see that the fakir had faults but still respected him. They stayed in Rahata but visited Shirdi. The devotees of Sai Baba went to bring Sai Baba back to Shirdi. When they reached the idgah Sai Baba told them that the fakir was ill tempered and unreliable and that they should leave without him before he returned. Meanwhile the fakir came and was very angry with the followers of Sai Baba for trying to take him back. After some discussions it was decided both Javhar Ali and Sai Baba should return to Shirdi. They returned and began living in Shirdi. However, one of the disciples Devidas tested the fakir and found that he did not come up to the mark. Devidas had come to Shirdi with the marriage party along with Sai Baba and he had been little more than 10 years at that time. He had grown into a fine dispassionate man of knowledge. Javhar Ali was brought into his presence and lost the discussion which followed and Javhar Ali left Shirdi in disgrace. He prostrated himself to Shirdi Baba after some years when the idea that he was Sai Baba's guru was gone. The question arises that why did Sai Baba go through all this confusing gesture with Javhar Ali when he knew from the beginning that he was inferior to him? These can be many reasons but some of them are to display the lack of egoism and also to test his devotees regarding their faith in him. It was also a massive exercise in humility by his own actions and that of Sai Baba's devotees that he was the real Satguru. Thus it was that Devdas the devotee who ultimately took it upon himself to denude Javhar Ali. This story shows the gentleness of Sai Baba as also his discrimination.

There are several stories about Sai Baba and his devotees. One important story is how an old woman Bayajabai used to track down Sai Baba in the jungles in his early days and give him food to eat. She used to take food in a basket on her head and walk about 3 miles, going into thick jungle in search of the fakir, and after hunting him out worship him. The Baba would sit quietly and silently in his asan. She would feed him on a leaf and at times feed him forcefully. She searched for Baba everyday and give him his noon day meal. Baba was so touched that he never forgot her seva service, till the end of his days. After a few years Baba left going to the jungle and lived in the village and took his food in the Masjid. Only then did Bayajabai stop going to the forest. Such examples of selfless service to the guru are most inspiring to the devotees and such devotion facing the danger of the jungle at that age was really an exemplary devotion by an extraordinary devotee to an extraordinary guru. We must realize that it was Sai Baba who inspired this devotion. Selfless service is the highest service and that was Bayajabai !

Among the accounts given of Sai Baba there is a humorous story about how Baba was once given a plank of wood by a devotee which he used to sleep on— but not on the ground. Instead he took the plank and hung it with rags and made a swing out of it on which he used to lie sown and sleep. It was a mystery how he used to climb upon it and then sleep. As the news of this airborne plank became known people started to crowd around trying to see how Baba climbed up and down from the plank. Later, Baba disposed of the plank and went back to sleeping on the ground itself. This shows that Baba was a most interesting person who had a childish sense of fun as is clear from the above story. Thus the picture sometimes portrayed of Baba losing his temper or being abrupt and rude to some people need to be balanced keeping this in account. It also shows that Baba had an inner life of his own. This is true also in the case of the Lendi garden which he built near a drain and watered it himself and would visit it two or three times a day to contemplate and be by himself. Thus the stereotype of Baba which is that of a somber sage sitting with one leg over the other is only one side of the story. The other side is that of a lot of amusing and happy incidents. Now let us turn to some stories of how Baba in his capacity as a leader and a medicine man who could perform miraculous cures simply by the rise of his spiritual powers and heal people with various diseases. Indeed Baba's fame as a spiritual guru had something to do with his capacity and powers of healing. It has been noticed that those who are highly evolved spiritually develop healing powers which they use to good effect on the needy persons and devotees. Let us see some of these cures which go to indicate that Baba did indeed have miraculous powers of healing.

26.7 Further Miracles and Parables

Let us relate the story of Bhimaji Patil who had in 1909 AD a chronic problem in the chest. Thus chronic problem developed into tuberculosis. At that point in time there was no remedy for tuberculosis and all the remedies that he tried failed. Having given up all hopes of getting well Bhimaji began to turn to God and prayed to him to help him get well. This was a case of remembering God in adversity. In prayer he remembered one Nanansaheb Chandorkar, a prominent devotee of Baba. Bhimaji wrote him a letter explaining the details of his problem and how long he had the malady, asking him what he was supposed to do. Nanasaheb said that now the only course left was to go to Shirdi and prostrate at Baba's feet. Bhimaji was taken to Shirdi and to Baba's masjid in the company of Nanasaheb and Madahavrao. Baba said this disease was due to previous evil karma and did not want to interfere. However, in his compassion

Baba changed his mind and told Bhimaji to stop worrying and being anxious and that his sufferings would soon come to an end. He pointed out that anyone coming to the fakir would not go back disappointed. Now while Bhimaji the patient used to vomit blood at intervals of five minutes it was noticed that this did not happen in the presence of Baba. Once Baba had uttered words of hope the situation with Bhimaji started to improve and the problem took a better turn. Baba instructed Bhimaji to stay in the house of Bhimabhai which was not very convenient but Baba had told him to stay there.

Box 26.3 Two Miraculous Dreams

While Bhimaji was staying at Bhimabhais house Baba induced in him two dreams which were the vehicle to cure him. In one dream Bhimaji witnessed himself as a boy who was being flogged for not writing a poetry lesson before his master in class. The second dream caused Bhimaji intense pain, indeed torture with the feeling of a heavy stone being rolled up and down over his chest. With this pain in dreams Bhimaji's cure was complete and he went home completely cured. He became a staunch devotee of Baba and often went to Shiridi to prostrate before the Baba.

It is clear from this cure that Baba had the power of projection and altering the flow of currents in the body that was ill and used many different methods including that of dreams to induce a cure. Indeed the cure through a dream or dreams is not as farfetched as it sounds and there are other anthropological accounts in which the dreams were used as curative after they had been projected into the deceased person. It also shows that Baba had powers to control and project dreams as spirituality while he was in the body itself.

Again in those days malaria was also rampant and a very dangerous disease. A devotee by the name Ganapat Shimpi suffered from this deadly malaria. It was a dangerous type of malaria and was resistant to medicines and decoctions. The fever would not go down so Ganapat Shimpi went to Shiridi and prostrated at Sai Babas feet. Baba blessed him and gave him a strange sounding task to do. He told him to give a black dog curds and rice in front of the Laxmi temple. Ganapati did precisely that and he found the rice and curd and the black dog in front of Laxmi temple. The dog ate the rice and curds and Ganapat got rid of his fever. Now in this case the cure seems to be farfetched and very strange but it may be pointed out that holy men very often use strategies and techniques which keep them out of the limelight. While it is obvious that Sai Baba was the person who cured the disease he made Ganapat do a certain ritual so that he felt that he had taken part in the cure. The cure comes from the spirituality of the master and the rest of the proceedings are in fact profs for the cure that takes place.

Action and Reflection 26.1

Go through this unit carefully and point out the salient features of Saibaba's teachings.

Similarly, Baba cured many cases of chronic disease that are well chronicled and the cures that he did were always well disguised by infusions, decoctions, udi, and even smoke from his chillum. Had Baba wanted publicity for himself, he would have just had to touch the person or speak to him and he would have been alright. Thus he cured with the most unorthodox of procedures cases of cholera, dysentery, ear ache, tooth ache and even chronic asthma. However, there were cases in which his words themselves caused a cure. This was in the case of Alandi Swami

who suffered from a severe pain in his ear which disturbed him day and night and did not allow him to sleep. He was even operated for this but it did not become alright. He found his way to Shiridi to meet Baba and there Maldhavrao requested Baba to help out the swami regarding the pain in his ear. Baba simply said that god would clear the pain and after a week from departure the Swami wrote a letter to Shiridi that the pain and swelling had subsided and the surgeon did not think anything needed to be done. Thus Baba's words and his support moral and spiritual were so powerful that chronic disease like an earache and swelling would subside. As to how Baba did this it is clear that it was his spiritual currents that caused the pain or the disease to disappear. But many a time Baba used to provide a procedure so that people did not mob him and make him a medicine man.

Two final teachings now round up or account of Sai Baba. There is much more to the stories about Baba but in our account we must be content with these two further teachings which in many ways shed light on all that we have been pointing out.

The first is a story about how happiness and satisfaction is a inner condition and that inner satisfaction should be cultivated. A devotee of Sai Baba Das Ganu wanted to write a commentary on Ishavasya upanished which talks among other facts of knowledge about the relation between knowledge and practice. Das Ganu was quite perplexed at trying to explain or comment upon the upanishad so finally he went to Sai Baba and asked him to shed light on the subject. Baba did not give a direct answer but told Das Ganu that Kakasaheb Dixits illiterate maid servant at Ville Parle would solve his problems of philosophy on his homeward journey. Das Ganu left Shiridi for Ville Parle a Bombay suburb where Kakasaheb Dixit stayed. In that house the next morning he heard a girl singing a song about a crimson sari. Entranced by the song Das Ganu saw it was being sung by a young maidservant. Her job was to clean vessels and had rags on her person. On seeing her in this condition. Das Ganu asked a friend to give her a small sari which he did. The girl was very happy with this small sari. She soon wore the sari and danced and sang with happiness! However, the next day she put her sari into her box and wore her old and torn rags again; but her merry and happy spirit persisted. She showed no spirit of unhappiness or dejection. Das Ganu then realized that all our attitudes of happiness or unhappiness depend on the state of the mind that one is in. Das Ganu understood that man should gratefully enjoy whatever, God has bestowed upon him or her. In our present story the servant girl had nothing material so to speak but her mind was content with what she had Das Ganu got one of the main lessons of the Upanishad that it is the best attitude to be happy under any and all circumstances for the Ultimate Power of Reality that is God always does what is good for us. This story also shows us the most unorthodox way in which Sai Baba solved Das Ganu philosophical problem by directing him to the venue where this became clear.

The last story that we are going to relate and then close our brief account about Sai Baba is perhaps the most eloquent in terms of Sai Baba knowledge about the ancient scriptures. This story talks about a rich man who had no need of anything and idly thought that getting Brahma-jnana (God knowledge) would be a good and profitable enterprise. As such he decided to go to Shiridi and ask Baba to give him Brahma-jnana. This is exactly what he did. When he had prostrated before Baba he put forward his request. Baba was amused and told him not to be anxious as very few people came to him for Brahma-jnana while many came for requests of pelf and power. He promised to show him the intricacies of Brahma-jnana. The Baba began a divine leela and made the rich aspirant sit down

and sent a boy for a 5 rupee loan in the neighborhood at which he was unsuccessful. Baba deliberately created this situation knowing fully that the rich man had money but was unwilling to part with even five rupees. Yet he wanted Brahma-jnana and was even beginning to be impatient. Baba told him to surrender the five pranas, five senses, mind, intellect and ego if he were to realize Brahma-jnana. This took aback the rich man who was aghast at this turn of events. Then, Sai Baba explained further to the gathering.

Baba pointed out that Brahman is not realized by all in a single life or at a single time. Then, Sai Baba pointed out the qualifications for realizing Brahma-jnana. The first of these is an intense desire for spiritual freedom; the next is a feeling of detachment from worldly affairs. The third is to turn the gaze of the senses inward rather than outward. The fourth is purging of sins. Then, there is right conduct and adherence to dharma. Further, lies the territory of mind and sense control. Similarly, mind purification and a Sadguru are also essential. Finally, it is the lord's Grace that creates the right circumstances for a successful realization of Brahman.

The Baba turned to the rich man and told him that there were currency notes in his tunic and to take them out. He told him that unless he got rid of greed and desire for money God-realization was not possible. He told him to ponder what he had said and also that one can get only what one is qualified for. Although this discourse was directed at the rich gentleman all those who were present were also benefited and left after getting Baba's blessings. Thus Sai Baba was a saint who mingled with the people and did not avoid helping people in difficulty.

26.8 Conclusion

As can be seen from our brief report that Sai Baba was an extraordinary saint believed till today to be a sadguru, a guru who is literally perfect. However, although we have tried to give a portrait of his life and teachings it must be realized that it is important to live the life according to the teachings in the stories and the statements in the assurances. Sai Baba is still a mystery and as more accounts come to light and more documentary evidence is revealed Baba will come to be better understood and appreciated. As for now suffice it to say that Shirdi and Sai Baba are indelibly connected and the ultimate pilgrimage for the devotees of Sai Baba is the pilgrimage to his Samadhi in Shirdi. It is in Shirdi that the life and teachings are highlighted and many famous spots connected with Sai Baba come alive. The mosque of Baba, his samadhi, the Lendi Garden are there as are also many new sites and structures that have come up. Thus every Sai devotee would be keen to visit Shirdi in his or her lifetime, so that the blessing of Sai Baba comes with full force upon him or her.

26.9 Further Reading

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