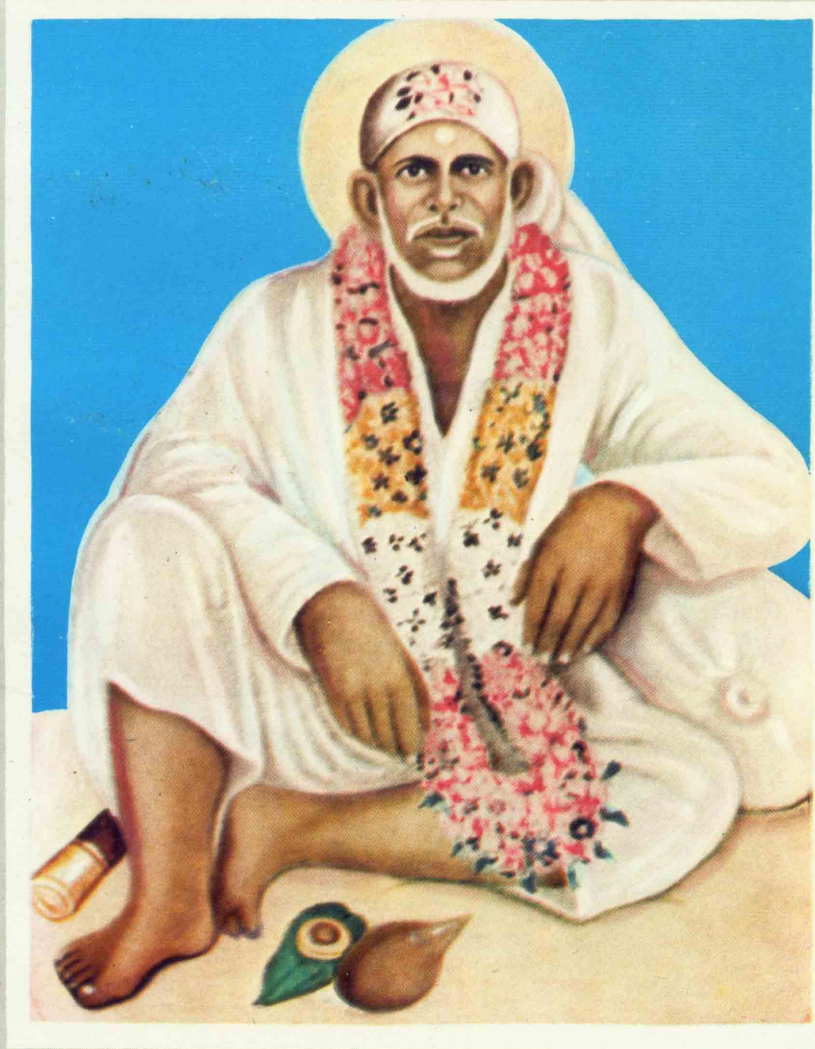


THE SAINT OF SHIRDI



THE SAINT OF SHIRDI

THE WONDERFUL STORY OF

SRI SAI BABA

TOLD TO CHILDREN

INSPIRED BY

HIS HOLINESS

SRI SWAMI KESAVAIAHJI

AUTHOR

N.MURUGESA MUDALIAR

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BENEDICTION

By

H.H. SWAMI KESAVAIHJI

This book gives you the story of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi, a fund and gentle saint who lived about 60 years ago in our country. He lived a humble life and taught us to love one another and have faith in God. He was merciful and suffered for the sufferings of others. Innumerable were the incidents in which he helped everyone who went to him for solace, young or old, rich or poor. These incidents are very interesting and at the same time they carry deep lessons for us to follow. The way to happiness and peace he has shown is not difficult. As a boy he was like any one of us, but he was blessed by a Guru to whose memory he was faithful to the end of his life. You must have confidence in yourself and have trust in anyone who cares for you and guides you. Read this story of Sai Baba. It will give you hope and joy and some guidance when you grow up.



This story is written in simple words. The learned author who has specially written this for you is a devotee and one who loves children, and is a good writer and author. The book is illustrated by an eminent artist. I am sure you will like this book and ask your friends to read it too.

Although it is written for children, anyone can read and benefit from it. Behind the interesting and subtle narration of facts one will find great spiritual truths to guide us in our lives.

Sai Baba wanted that we should read his life to understand his godly mission. He promised happiness even from his grave to all those who think of him. Remember that the lives of great men all remind us that we too can make our lives sublime and beautiful.

So, I consecrate this great small book and give my benedictions to all those who lovingly read it in the hallowed name of my Saviour, Babaji!

Om Tat Sat.

Sai Nilayam, Chennai. October 1975

With love.

(Sd) Swami Kesavaiahji

May 1981

PREFACE

A WORD TO THE READERS

Dear children, I have written this story of the life of Sri Sai baba of Shirdi, particularly for you. You will feel happy to know about this Saint who lived very recently. He was a great man, but very-simple and child-like. He loved everyone. He looked upon all alike. It did not matter to him whether one was rich or poor, young or old. He wanted every one to love God and love one another. His teachings were simple and in plain words. He helped people out of their difficulties. He could foretell things to happen. He saved people by his miraculous powers. He wanted them to understand that God is all powerful. He wanted them to have faith in God and be good to others. That is the way for one to be happy. He taught these things in a simple way by parables. Parables are stories with an inner meaning.

I have told all these in simple words so that you can understand easily. I have used words which will not require the use of a dictionary. I have explained some terms which will not be found in the dictionary, like mandir, udhi, etc.

I am sure you will love this story. Baba's teachings will help you to be good and cheerful, obedient and dutiful. You won't get cross because you will learn to love others. You will have love for parents and teachers. You will have trust in a loving God. If you have any difficulty, you can think of Baba. He will help you unseen.

There are many good men who follow Babaji. They work as Baba's messengers and serve their fellowmen, Sri Swami Kesavaiahji of Shenoy Nagar is foremost among them. He has had many wonderful experiences in his life. It is all due to the grace of Baba. For over 40 years he has been doing the work of Baba and serving his disciples. He is a very kind, gentle and God-loving person. He leads a spiritual life. He has built a magnificent Mandir for Sai Baba in Shenoy nagar. We look upon him as a noble servant of God.

It is at the kind inspiration of Swami Kesavaiahji and by his blessings that I have written this book. He has helped me to love Baba more and more and earn

his blessings. I am thankful to him for asking me to do this small duty for your sake.

Dear Children, may you be all blessed by the Grace of Sri Sai Baba!

Chennai 17

N.Murugesu Mudaliar

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author has based this book mainly on the authoritative publications like Shri Sai Satcharita, published by Shirdi Sansthan and the book Sai Mahimai published by Sri Sai Baba Bhaktha Samajam, Shenoyanagar, Madras and on the writings of Sri Swami Kesavaiahji. He lays no claim to originality except in the presentation on the story of Sri Sai Baba's life and in the explanation of his deeds and utterances in simple words. As the book is intended for children, the incidents are selected and narrated in a simple way. The author believes that the book will be useful not only to children but also to others who wish to know about the Saint of Shirdi.

We are fortunate in getting the book illustrated by Prof. R. Krishna Rao, Retd. Principal, Government College of Arts and Crafts. He is a good man and an artist of international repute. You will doubtless like the pictures.

A NOTE ON SHIRDI AND THE NEW MANDIR

Shirdi is a small village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. It is 10 Miles from Kopergaon railway station on Dhond-Manmad railway line. It could also be reached by bus from Manmad railway junction, a distance of about 40 miles. As one approaches Shirdi, the shining dome of Sai Baba's mandir would be visible.

The mandir newly built by Sri Swami Kesavaiahji's efforts is in Shenoyanagar in Madras. It is about 7 miles from Madras Central Railway Station and 5 miles from Egmore railway station. It is as lovely as it is holy.

See the beautiful portrait of Babaji and meet the good men, women and children who assemble there. You can sing and meditate and get the blessings of Swamiji.

THE SAINT OF SHIRDI

The Wonderful Story of Sri Sai Baba told to Children

1. The Advent of Sai¹

This is the story of Sai Baba, a kind and gentle Saint. A saint is one who lives for his fellowmen and lifts us up to God. He cures us of our ignorance. He helps us out of our misery. He teaches us to make our lives pure. He shows to us that God is loving and merciful. God does not want us to be bad and cruel and selfish. He wants us to do our duty and be loving to others. By this, we can all be happy.

The saint teaches all this not through books. He uses the magic of love. He loves us like a mother. He will not be harsh if we fail. He corrects us and makes us better. Sometimes, he will suffer for us if we go wrong. He will help us out of our difficulties like a father. He may be cross with us like a good friend if we don't heed advice. He sees God in every one of us. He thus serves God. He has no desire or attachment to the world. He has realised God in himself and all living creatures. So he does not go away and live in a forest or on a mountain. He lives and works with us.

So listen to this story of Sai Baba. It is a beautiful story of the simple life of a Godly man. He lived only recently. So he is not a mythical person. He lived about eighty years ago² He resided for the most part of his life in a small village called Shirdi near Ahmednagar. ³ It is in Maharashtra State. Shirdi is a nice name. The samadhi or the tomb of the saint is to be seen even to this day in Shirdi. The mandir and the neem tree under which Babaji used to sit are still there. One day when you are older, you too can visit it if you are fortunate.

WHO IS SAI ?

Very little is known about the early life of Baba till he chose Shirdi for his work. He is believed to have been born in Aurangabad a few miles away from Shirdi, and brought up in his uncle's house. As a boy, he appears to have worked

¹ Advent means coming

² Mahasamadhi (or passing away) (15th October 1918)

³ Baba first came to Shirdi in 1854. He was then a lad of about 16 years

as an embroiderer. No details are known about his family. Once Baba⁴ said that he belonged to God's kula (caste) and gothra (class); he had no religion, his guru was one Venkusah. He came to be called by people as Sai. The villagers pointing to him would call him 'Sai'⁵ which means 'God with us'. This was not a mere fanciful name, because he was blessed by his guru even as a boy. When he was a lad of sixteen, he roamed far and wide in quest of his guru's samadhi. He finally reached Shirdi and found peace there. He used to sit in silence under a neem tree in front of an old rest-house in the village. He was a tall, handsome boy and fair complexioned. He used to sit there without minding the sun or rain. He did not make friends with any. There was a sacredness about the spot. It was believed that it was the place of samadhi of Baba's Guru. The mother of one Nana Chopdar of Shirdi who first saw Sai, used to speak of him as a young saint.

Sai left the village after a short time. After three or four years, he was again seen in Shirdi with a marriage party. He had come there along with one Chand Shanthi Patel who had come to know Sai. From then, Sai made Shirdi his permanent place of work for nearly fifty years. To him his Guru was the unseen power to guide his mission in this world. Often he would speak with gratitude that he owed everything to his Guru.

2. Early days at Shirdi

MIRACLE ON THE ROAD TO SHIRDI

Chand Patel was a rich man of the village called Doop, near Aurangabad. One day, he lost his horse on the way to Aurangabad. He was very sad because he liked the horse so much. He searched for it roundabout, but in vain. So he decided to return to Doop. On the way, he came across a lad sitting under a tree. He appeared strangely attractive. He was dressed in a kurta (Shirt) and cap and had a short stick under his arm. On seeing Chand Patel dejected, the boy asked him to rest awhile and offered him hookah (smoking pipe). Chand told him about his missing horse. The lad told him that he would find the horse grazing nearby! Chand rose in search of the horse. Lo! He found it in a minute as the lad

⁴ 'Baba' is an endearing term meaning Father or any reverend person.

⁵ 'Avo Sai' Means 'Welcome to God amongst us'

prophesied. Chand was glad in his heart that he found his horse. He felt that the lad was no ordinary youngster but one with magic powers. This lad was no other than Sai. Chand went back to him to tell him the glad news of the discovery of the missing horse.

"Chandji, you can now smoke your hookah and be happy as you have regained your valuable horse!", said the bright young lad.

"Thank you, but there is no fire to light the tobacco and water to wet," said Chand. "Don't worry, you will have them", said the boy. And so saying, he hit the ground with his stick and scratched the earth with a sharp stone. Water gushed forth, and some sparks of fire flew out.

Chand was wonder-struck. He smoked his pipe in thankfulness. He thought that the lad must be a fakir with mysterious powers. A fakir is a holy mendicant, Chand beseeched him to go to his house. Sai stayed with him for a few days and went with him to Shirdi for the marriage of his nephew. Sai did not return to Aurangabad but stayed behind at Shirdi. The road to Shirdi was thus paved by a miracle. Sai means "Peace be with you". It is also the name of one of the five mystic saints of old, called Siddhas. No wonder that on arrival at Shirdi, the young saint was greeted as 'Sai' by the people. (When he grew old, he was addressed as 'Baba' which means 'father').

LIFE UNDER THE NEEM TREE

For many days, Sai lived under the neem tree. He had few friends. Most of the time he was in meditation. Perhaps he was praying to God. May be he was praying for the guidance of his Guru. At noon, he would take a morsel of food and sleep in the open air. Later he shifted his place to a nearby old and ruined mosque. As days passed, more and more people used to visit him.

Sai would go to a few houses to beg for food. If a housewife was grudging, he would say, "Mother you have so many chapatis (Wheat cakes) and so much rice and vegetables, why refuse a little to a poor fakir?" The woman would be surprised at the accuracy of Sai's words about the things they had prepared. They would rush in to give him more food than he needed. Sai would share the food with poor people and dogs and crows in the street. Some times, he would

spend days in a nearby forest. Baija Bai, an old lady, used to take some food and give him there. Sai's eyes would light up with gratitude. He would raise his hands in thanks and accept a morsel. Sai would not pretend that he needed no food.

DWARAKAMAYI⁶

At the mosque, called Dwarakamayi, his visitors would bring him a few vegetables or fruits. Some would leave a paisa or two. Sai would buy flour with the money. He would cook the vegetables in a pot. He would give the food to beggars that would pass that way. Radhakrishna Mai, a lady of good family, who came to live in Shirdi would sweep the place to keep it tidy. She served in this way devotedly for many years.

3. Miracles and Festivals

YOUNG MENDICANT MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY

You would like to know more as to what Sai looked like and how he dressed himself. He was, as we said earlier, fair and handsome. His face was bright with sharp and shining eyes. He never shaved his hair or beard. He wore a loose robe (called kafni) over his body. He tied a piece of white cloth on his head like a twisted turban. He carried a tin pot (tumrel⁷) and a short stick (called satka). He wore no sandals or shoes. He used to sit on a piece of sack cloth or a low stool. Often he would sit before a fire (called dhuni), occasionally muttering "Allah Mallick", i.e., "God is Lord"! Mostly he would be silent. He would not shun to speak if any came to him. At times he liked to water the trees and plants. He would fetch water from a well in an earthen pot. In this work, a devotee by name Vaman Tatya used to assist him. Sai liked flowers like Chrysanthemum (Zendu), Jasmine(Jai) and Vripakshi(Jui)⁸. In this way, he grew a nice flower garden. Occasionally he would walk to the nearby canal near the flower garden at eventide. He would never be idle. Often he would be found to be awake when others slept at night.

As a young man Sai liked to sing and dance and even do some wrestling. Once he had a wrestling bout with one Mohidin Tamboli. He was defeated. He

⁶ Dwarakamayi means abode of Mother.

⁷ Tumrel is a tumbler or lota

⁸ Zendu, Jai, Jui are Marathi names of the flowers

took it in a sportsman-like way. Gangadin, another friend, was also a wrestling master. But by Sai's influence, he gave up wrestling and became a pious man.

MIRACLE OF THE LAMP

When villagers gathered round him, Sai would ask them to sing the name of the lord and be happy. He was very fond of burning lamps in the old masjid, which he called Dwarkamayi. He would go out and collect oil from the shop-keepers. They supplied oil free for sometime, but later refused. Sai was not sorry at all. One day he went back and filled the lamps with water from his tin pot (tumrel) and lighted the wicks. Lo! They burned. The Banias (shop-keepers) who witnessed this were ashamed. They apologised to Sai. They learnt the lesson that they should not grudge giving what they truthfully can.

Many pious men roundabout Shirdi were attracted by the story of young Sai which began to spread. They came to see him. They said that Sai was no ordinary fakir. Holy men blessed him. There was a learned fellow called Jawhar Ali who came from Rahata to live in Shirdi. He called Sai his disciple. Sai did not demur and did service to him like a true chela(disciple). One day Jawhar was defeated in a learned argument by one Devidas, a young man who did service in the Maruti temple nearby. Jawhar was humbled. This showed that humility more than learning was necessary for godliness.

RAMNAVAMI AND URS

The neem tree in Shirdi became a holy place by Sai's presence. It became a sort of wish-fulfilling tree (kalpaka-vriksha). Its bitter leaves seemed to cure men of their illness. Sai's presence was like a soothing balm (amrita) to the people. Men, women, rich and poor, beggars and lepers were attracted to him. Some would be so happy that their eyes would be filled with tears in the presence of Sai. Some would seek his blessings.

One man who had no children was blessed with a child by Sai's grace. He wanted to celebrate a festival (called 'urs') at the mandir. It was fixed on Ramnavami day. People of all castes joined in the festival. From then Ramnavami became a day of festival. Bhajans with flags and festoons would be taken out by some. Others would take out sandal pots (chandan) to the masjid.

On one occasion there was not enough drinking water for all in the well. Sai threw some flowers in another well. Its brackish water became sweet and drinkable. Feeding the poor was very dear to the heart of Sai. Sweet things would be prepared by devotees. They would be distributed to the gathering. Kirtan singers would come from nearby places. On Gokulashtami day, too, there would be bhajans. On Id day people would offer prayer at the masjid. Sai would give away the dakshina⁹ offered to him as charity to the poor. These festivals drew large crowds as years passed.

4. Sufferings for Others

A STRANGE ACT SAI THRUSTS HIS HAND INTO FIRE

People became fond of Sai. His darshan made them happy. Sometimes Sai would get angry for no reason. It had some reason behind it. Wicked people were turned into good ones in his presence. Some would come to be cured of their illness, Sai would sit near the fire (dhuni) and put the udhi(ash) on the forehead and place his hand on the head of the person. Even lepers were thus cured. Baba had some yogic power. Yogic power means mysterious power. He did not make a show of it. Infact, he himself suffered by curing pains of others. That was the mystery. One day he suddenly thrust his hand into the dhuni instead of the logs of wood. Devotees nearby got alarmed at this.

"Babaji, why have you done this?", they asked anxiously.

"There is a carpenter at a place a small distance away. His wife was working the bellows.

Her husband suddenly called her. When she hurriedly rose, her child on the waist fell in to the fire. I wanted to save the child by pulling him out.

So, you see why I thrust my hand into the fire. I don't mind my hand being burned. I wanted to save the innocent child from harm!" said Baba.

It was later found that the accident did take place. Sai did not practise magic. His hand was in fact scalded. Devotees brought a doctor to apply ointment and bandage. Baba declined treatment. He allowed a leper devotee to dress the burn with ghee and cover it with a leaf and bandage it by a piece of

⁹ 'Dakshina means fee or offering.

cloth. This kind of service went on for a long time. Thus the leper whose name was Bhagoji had this good fortune to serve Baba.

I WILL SUFFER FOR YOU

Baba took on himself the sufferings of others. The son of a devotee was suddenly affected by plague. The lad's mother was worried and wished to go back home. Baba told her not to worry. He lifted up his robe and there were found boils on his thigh. The boy was cured. Baba shared even the bodily sufferings of others. This is what we call compassion. Lord Buddha practised it.

Baba wanted men to preserve the body. With this body, we can work and help others. So this body should be well looked after.

Baba also liked to satisfy the hunger of other people. He would daily go out and beg for alms. He would collect solid food like bread, rice and vegetables in a cloth. He would collect liquids like soup and butter milk in the tin tumbler he used to carry. He would put the collections in pots. Beggars and poor people could freely take and eat. Even dogs, cats and crows were not left out,

DON'T COVET MY WHEAT FLOUR

Baba would grind every morning the wheat and other grains collected by him. In this, the women in the village would also help. They would sing in joy. One day the women jokingly asked, "Why does the fakir want so much flour? We shall take home some of it as our share".

"No", said Baba, "Why are you avaricious. It is not your property! I want you to take this sack full of flour and throw it out on the outskirts of the village."

The women could not understand this. Afterwards they learnt why Baba asked them to do this. There was small-pox epidemic in the village. To drive out the evil Baba must have done this. Thus the people were saved. The people learnt that only by service to others, one can serve God. Love of God is called Bhakti. Selfishness must be destroyed by the grinding stone of karma¹⁰ or good acts. For this, the handle is Bhakthi¹¹.

¹⁰ Karma is doing one's duty

¹¹ Bhakthi is unselfish love

TO SEE GOD IN EVERYTHING

Baba wanted his devotees not to make any difference between him and other creatures around them. One Tarkhad Mayi was a poor lady but very pious. She would send to Baba even small things like a fried Brinjal or a pheda (milk-sweet meat). One noon while she was eating, a dog came nearby. She threw a piece of bread. The dog ate it with satisfaction. That afternoon the lady visited Baba.

"Mayi, you fed me sumptuously today," said Baba.

Tarkhad Mayi could not understand this as she did not send anything to Baba. Baba said, "Don't you remember the dog to which you threw a piece of bread? It is one with me. You can see me in all creatures. Don't make distinctions. I love such people."

To see God in everything is the highest truth. He who teaches this is the True Teacher (Sad Guru). Baba taught this to those who went to him.

5. Humility and Self-Control

STRANGE WAYS BUT DEEP MEANING

The true Guru is one whose mere contact is good for us. He does not teach or advise. His life itself is an example. Baba was a mendicant. But he cared for the welfare of all. He wanted to serve not the learned only. He wanted to help ordinary men who work in the fields and lead a simple life. He would be all the time active but his mind was calm. Sometimes he would scold people. Sometimes he would embrace them. He taught people not to quarrel and argue. He wanted people to do good to others, if possible. At least, they should not return evil for evil. We can call nothing our own. All of us are merely servants of God.

SLEEPING ON NARROW PLANK

Baba did not care for his food or dress. He did not seek other comforts. He would sleep sometimes in the masjid and sometimes with other disciples in the wada (choultry) nearby. Once, for days he slept every night on a narrow wooden plank. It was only 6 feet in length and 10 inches in width. It was tied like a swing by old clothes to the roof. It was odd to see Baba sleeping precariously on the

narrow plank. You children would find it funny how Baba got up and got down! At any moment the cloth rope might snap. And Baba would fall down, you might think. No such thing happened. People wondered. Baba did not want to show a feat. But what do we learn? If we keep our mind steady, we can do anything. It is called self-control.

GIVE UP YOUR GADI

Baba had great humility. Humility is the quality of not being proud. Many good men were meek and humble. Baba would tell people who came to see him, "Thank you, I am your slave. I am a small insect. How kind of you to come and show your kindness. I feel blessed". These are golden words we must remember. They will make us also humble.

One day a man by name Nanavathi came to Baba, Baba was seated on a low stool. People called it 'gadi' (throne). Nanavathi asked Baba to get out of the seat.

"Why do you want it?" asked Baba.

"I want to sit on it", answered Nanavathi.

Baba readily gave the gadi to Nanavathi. Nanavathi sat on it for a few minutes and ordered Baba to resume his seat. Baba did so. He was not in the least affected by these orders. It is like your teacher asking you to 'stand' on the bench and 'sit' in the class-room. Baba perhaps wanted to show that we are only puppets subject to God's will. Nanavathi became a disciple of Baba and loved him very much.

Baba did not ask people to recite mantras and do rituals.

He did not ask people to give up worldly duties. He wanted them to leave off thinking always about the ills of the world. He wanted them to remember the name of the Lord and listen to the stories of saints. It would be like taking a bath in Ganges. It makes one happy and pure.

CHILD LIKE NATURE

Baba was childlike in nature. He allowed people to show their affection to him in the way they liked. Some would bring sweets. Some would offer betel and pan. Some would wave a fan. Some would hold an umbrella over his head.

Some would sing songs. Some would apply sandal tilak to his forehead. Every one saw in him one's own Guru or favourite deity. Once an orthodox Agnihotra¹² Brahmin came to see Baba. He was haughty. He threw flowers at him from a distance. But he was wonder-struck to see his own guru in Baba! Many looked upon Baba as God in human form. Sometimes Baba would be displeased with the devotees' attention. But he would not show anger. The sea does not turn back the rivers that flow into it. Its muddiness clears in a moment. So also the love of the devotees and the master mingle.

Baba had no sympathy for haughty people. Once a man who had returned from a visit to Mecca came to visit Baba. But Baba would not see him. Someone intervened. Baba said he had no objection to see the visitor. But he asked whether he would be able to bring Rs.40,000? The visitor said he would be pleased to bring even Rs.4 lakhs! Baba was upset at this arrogance. He chided him for his boast and advised him not to be proud. Baba gave him a few rupees "whenever he came. The Haji learnt humility by this and loved Baba for teaching this.

6. Predictions and Healing

TEA WITH SUGAR

Babas fame spread to neighboring districts as days passed. Baba's close friend was one Nanasaheb Chandorkar who was a mamlatdar¹³. Another was Dasganu, who was a Kirtan¹⁴ singer. People use to hear about Baba from them. They were fascinated by the stories about Baba. They would long to visit Shirdi. Once a poor man who was working in a Civil court as a clerk vowed that if he passed his office examination, he would go to Shirdi. He said he would fall at the feet of Baba and distribute sugar candy. This man, his name was Cholkar, did pass the examination. But he was too poor to take a trip to Shirdi. He had not enough money for the journey to Shirdi from Thana. So he decided to take his tea without sugar for sometime and thus save some money. When he saved

¹² 'Agnihotra is a daily worship by lighting a holy fire with vedic mantras.

¹³ " Mamlatdar is a Revenue Official,

¹⁴ Kirtan is a song in praise of God set to music.

enough he went to Shirdi and fell at Baba's feet. He said, " Babaji, by your grace I have passed my examination." He offered coconut and sugar candy to Baba. Baba told those nearby, " Give our guest some tea with lots of sugar in it." Everybody wondered what it implied. But Cholkar was astonished that Babaji knew that he went without sugar in his tea for many days. Baba wanted to reveal to others Cholkar's devotion by these words.

THE TICKING LIZARD

Baba did not boast of his powers of omniscience. Omniscience is knowing everything of the past, present and the future. He had a sense of humour too. Once a lizard tick- ticked continuously on the wall in the masjid.

A devotee asked, "Babaji, is this tick-ticking by the lizard good or bad?"

Baba said, " I don't know. But the lizard is expressing her joy as her sister is coming from Aurangabad to see her." People thought Baba was joking.

The same day a devotee arrived from Aurangabad to have darshan of Baba. He wanted to feed his horse. He opened the gram pouch he brought. A lizard jumped out of the bag. It quickly climbed the wall, went near the lizard already there as if to kiss her. Both circled each other to express their joy.

They all had a good laugh and Baba joined in it. They wondered how Baba knew of some one coming unexpectedly from Aurangabad and the lizard coming with him in a pouch!

We are all mere lizards. We have our being in God. His unseen power directs us. We do what God bids us to do.

HE KNEW TONGA HORSE WOULD KICK

Baba had wonderful powers. He foresaw many things. If any mishap was likely to happen to a devotee he would know it beforehand. He would try to save him from it. Once one Tatya Kota wanted to go to another village. Baba did not want him to go. But Tatya did not mind his words. He hired a tonga (horse cart) and went a short distance. The horse was restless and ran rashly and fell down. Tatya was thrown down but was not much hurt. He then remembered Baba's advice to postpone the trip. On another occasion a European came to visit Shirdi.

Baba asked him to leave Shirdi the next day. But he ignored the suggestion. He met with a mishap on the road and got hurt.

THE FORGOTTEN SWEETMEAT

Baba could tell what was happening somewhere else. We call this omniscience. Once a lady sent a pheda (sweetmeat) to Baba through a son of her friend. The boy forgot to take the sweetmeat to Baba. He forgot all about it even when Baba asked him if he brought anything. Then the boy remembered and brought the sweetmeat. On another occasion a lady came to Shirdi and stayed a few days. Her husband who was in Bandra did not have sugarcandy to offer in the puja to Baba's picture. He was sorry for it as he promised his son to do the puja in his absence exactly as he used to do. Baba that afternoon told the lady, "Mai, I went to your house in Bandra and got nothing to eat." She could not understand this. Then after enquiry she learnt about the puja without candy offering.

Once a devotee from Bombay came to Shirdi for Gokulashtami¹⁵ festival. He wanted to spend a few days there. When he got darshan of Baba, Baba asked a strange question, "When are you returning to Bombay?" The devotee said he intended staying for a few days in Shirdi. Baba told him, "Better go tomorrow." It turned out that he was called back by his office urgently. Baba could know this. In another case, Baba would not permit another devotee to leave Shirdi although he had to attend a case in a law court. It turned out that the case was adjourned. Later the case ended successfully for the devotee.

A STRANGE DREAM

Baba had pity for those who did not understand him. He used to say that he himself was troubled sometimes by ignorance (called 'maya'). So he wanted others to have trust in him, a poor fakir. Baba used to cure persons suffering from sickness. These affections are the result of our past deeds called 'karma'. But with faith they can be lessened. One Bhimaji Patel came to Baba. He was suffering from tuberculosis (a wasting disease of the lungs). Baba asked him to stay in a poor person's house near the masjid with no comforts. One day Bhimaji

¹⁵ Birthday of Lord Krishna occurring in Sravana masya (i.e., August -September).

had a dream of a stone rolling over his chest. He was gradually cured of his dreadful disease. He was grateful to Baba. He observed a vrata (fasting and prayer) regularly in thankfulness. It came to be called

THE BLACK DOG

A man called Balaganpat Shimpi came to Baba with severe malaria (fever with shivering). Baba did not prescribe any remedy. He asked the man to give some rice mixed with curd to a black dog. When Ganpat returned home lo! A black dog was at his door. He offered curd rice to it and was cured of the fever. Sometimes Baba would make the disease worse, but later the patient would be cured. Baba would ask the sufferer to eat things which ordinarily would make the disease worse. Actually the patient would be cured by it. Baba would say, "Allah achcha karega" (God will do good) and ask the person not to be worried.

WHY DON'T YOU PAY

Baba would ask dakshina (coin offering) from those who came to him. Sometimes he would take only a few coins from a rich man. Sometimes he would ask too much from a poor man. All this was a test. He would get wild if some one made a show by offering costly things. Baba did not want money for himself. All that he spent was for buying fire wood for the dhuni and for the pipe..

7. Teachings and Examples

THE TWO PAISE - FAITH & PATIENCE

Baba was all love for his Guru. He used to speak lovingly of him. He used to call him a mother. A mother looks after the child in all ways. So also a Guru does. Once an old lady by name Radha Bai came to stay in Shirdi. She wanted to take mantra upadesa from Baba. Mantra upadesa is the giving of the sacred word by the guru to the disciple. The disciple cherishes and chants the mantra. This old lady was disappointed that Baba did not give her the upadesa. So, she went on a fast. She thought she would make herself worthy by this. She thought that Baba would take pity on her. People round about were alarmed at the old woman going without food. They thought she might die. So they went to Baba and requested him to take pity on her. Baba sent for her and told her that he himself did not get any upadesa from his guru. His guru was a great saint. Baba

served him for many years. The Guru wanted Baba to shave his head and to give him two paise. What is the need for money for the Guru? And then two paise were such a small sum! Baba explained that two paise were-(1) faith and (2) patience. Without patience we cannot attain anything. This will give us steadiness. This is called 'nishta'¹. Without faith we cannot progress. This is called 'bhakthi'.

THE STORY OF SAI'S GURU

Baba then told the lady the story of his own Guru. "My Guru was all love. He loved me so well. He fed me and clothed me. He was gentle and kind. He would often be in deep meditation. (This is called 'dhyana'). I would sit with him night and day without hunger or thirst. I would enjoy unspeakable peace. I had nothing else to meditate on. I would feel restless without his presence. He did not teach me any mantra, nor was I prompted to ask him for any. I had complete faith in him. I was not impatient. He protected me and blessed me by his mere glance. This is mental upadesa (manasa diksha, as it is called). The Guru is everything. I served my Guru for twelve years. Blessed is he who realises that the Guru is everything!"

The old lady gave up the fast on hearing this.

GRACE WITHOUT FEES

Hemadri Pant, another close devotee of Baba, was also blessed in a simple way. He was going to Baba for many years. He once thought that another new-comer was blessed in no time but not he. Baba read what was passing in Hemadri Pant's mind. Baba asked him to go and get a loan of Rs.15 from another very poor devotee, Madhavrao Deshpande, as dakshina. (A dakshina is an offering given to a Guru or priest), Deshpande told Hemadri that he had not with him Rs.15 but could give only 15 namaskars (A namaskar is bowing with hand closed and head bowed). But Deshpande told Hemadri the merits of hearing the glories of the Guru. ('Leela' as they are called). He then told the story of the old lady, Radha Bai Deshmukh mentioned earlier. Hemadri Pant went back to Baba. He told him that he could not bring Rs. 15- But he said his mind was now quite at peace. Baba had a laugh. Just then there was arati (Puja with waving of lights

and sounding of bells) at the Dwarakamayi. Sugar candy was offered. Baba gave to Hemadri all the sugar candy that was given to him. This was the grace (prasad) that Hemadri got from Baba. It needed no fees.

BOOKS NOT THE SECRET KEY

Baba loved holy books like Bhagavata¹⁶ and Gita¹⁷ being read. More than that he wanted his devotees to act kindly to others. This kindness is giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked and shelter to the weary and kindness to guests. Love is the key to all happiness. He wanted his disciples to ignore if anybody talked ill of them. Baba never used to like learned talk. He would speak only on ordinary matters. Many valuable truths could be got from them. One should hear them lovingly and humbly.

THE FOOLISH MAN WHO WANTED TO BUY DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

Once a rich man heard about Baba. He was proud that he had everything, yet he was avaricious. He wanted to obtain Brahma Jnana (i.e., knowledge of God) quickly. So he went to Shirdi engaging a horse carriage. He thought he could come back by the same carriage after finishing the business. He fell at Baba's feet and asked to be given Brahma Jnana. Baba said to him, "Dear friend, I am glad you want Brahma Jnana. Others come to me for wealth, power and position. Or, they want children to be born to them. You are indeed a rare person. So I shall show you the Brahman. But I deal in cash and not credit".

So saying Baba made him sit and engaged him in some other conversation. He wanted to show him how difficult it was to get even small things. He wanted to show him that sacrifice was needed for great things. So, he called a boy and asked him to go to a money -lender nearby and get him a loan of Rs.5. The boy went and returned and said that Nanda, the money—lender, was not in his house. Baba asked the boy again to go and ask Bala, the grocer, for the loan. The boy went and returned unsuccessfully.

¹⁶ Bhagavata - a Purana giving the life of Sri Krishna.

¹⁷ Gita or Bhagawad Gita is the Teaching of Sri Krishna to Arjuna.

The rich man who came for Brahma Jnana was seeing all this. He had plenty of money with him. Yet he kept quiet and did not offer to give Rs.5. But he wanted to go away quickly and ask Baba to show him Brahman soon.

Baba said, "Dear friend, you saw how difficult it was to get Rs.5. You have, I know, Rs.250 with you. Yet you could not give away Rs.5".

The man was astonished that Baba knew exactly how much money he carried with him. He felt ashamed and fell at Baba's feet and begged for his blessings.

Baba said smilingly, "Dear friend, you cannot roll up Brahman like your currency notes. Give up your avarice. How can one see Brahman if one is engrossed with money. Brahman has no name or form. One must give up all desires. Then he must go to a Guru and seek his help".

The man went away wiser. Every one who heard this conversation felt it was a great spiritual lesson for them also. Such was Baba's method of purifying men's mind. By this, he helped them to become good men.

HAPPY SERVANT GIRL TEACHES A LESSON

Baba would teach his disciples according to their fitness. He would ask some to read Gita or Bhagavata. Some he would ask to meditate. To some he would appear in a dream and say something. He would ask some to go on a pilgrimage. Once Das Ganu who was writing a book went to Baba to clear up a doubt. The book was a translation of an Upanishad. Upanishad is the most valuable part of the Vedas. Upanishad is difficult to understand. They call it philosophy. Baba told Das Ganu who waited to clear up his doubt, "Bhai, go to Kakasaheb Dish's servant maid. She will clear your doubt". Ganu wondered how a servant woman could clear a doubt which even learned men cannot. But he carried out Baba's orders. He went to Kakasaheb Dixit's house. Early morning the servant girl who was cleaning vessels was singing pleasantly. She was dressed in rags. But she was singing merrily about the beauties of a crimson sari! Ganu felt pity for the girl. He arranged to buy a nice sari, and gave it to her. Next day the girl wore it and danced with joy. She was equally happy whether she wore rags or a nice sari. It made no difference. Das Ganu realised that one must

be satisfied with whatever God gave. It is His pleasure. He is all - knowing. He knows our needs.

SPEAKING IN PARABLES

This was how Babaji taught to people the highest truths. Every day after the noon puja in the masjid, he would offer udhi (sacred ash) to those gathered and bless them to be happy. Sometimes he would say something difficult to understand. Sometimes he would be silent. Sometimes he would speak in parables. A parable is a short story which has an inner meaning easy to understand. Such was Baba's grace.

8. Saving Devotees from Dangers

BEWARE OF LAMBA BAVA (SNAKE)

We have said earlier that Baba was omniscient. That is, he could tell things which are to happen. He would help people to avert themselves from danger. It was his grace.

Once Balasaheb Minikar, a mamlatdar, visited Shirdi on his way to another place. Baba enquired about his health and said, "You are blessed. The place where you are now sitting is Dwarakamayi. She is the Mother of all. She will save her children from dangers and calamities". Then Baba gave him udhi (sacred ash) and said, "There is a long fellow, lamba bava, (meaning snake), who is terrible. But what can he do to the children of this Masjid mayi ?" He asked a friend to accompany Balasaheb to his destination. Balasaheb could not understand the reference to the lamba bava. When he reached the destination, he was sitting and reading a newspaper. Some one noticed a snake in the folds of his upper cloth and raised a cry. The snake slowly moved away without doing any harm to Balasaheb. Now he realised Baba's reference to lamba bava! How wonderful that Babaji could foresee danger to his devotees and avert them. Innumerable incidents like this could be told but one is enough.

Baba did not want to show off his powers. He wanted to teach people that they could not save themselves by their human powers only. This they could understand through a Guru. Then, they will understand that God is all mercy. Neither a snake will bite you, nor could it be killed by you without His will! That is

why Baba often used to exclaim, "Allah Mallick". This means, 'God is our Master and Protector'.

On another occasion, Shama who always lived with Baba was bitten by a snake. Some said that he should be taken at once to the Vitobha temple for being cured. When he was taken to Baba he appeared enraged and cried out, "Chalo, Chalo" (that is, "Get away, get away"). Shama thought that Baba was asking him to get out. Baba was ordering the poison to come down. He asked Shama to go back and not to sleep, but say the mantra "Go, get away, come down". Shama did as was told. Thus was Shama's life saved.

At one time a discussion ensued whether a snake should be killed or not. Baba said, "God lives in all things like snakes and scorpions, They bite you only if God wills it. So too no one can harm them unless God wills it. We should take pity on them and avoid killing. The protecting God will certainly protect us from them".

TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL A GOAT

Baba showed this in another way to test his disciples. Once a goat, weak and old, was brought to the masjid. Baba asked his friend, an old Fakir¹⁸ to kill it in one stroke as an offering to the gods as there was cholera in the place. The Fakir hesitated. Baba then asked Shama to do it. He brought a knife, but it slipped and fell down. Baba then asked Kakasaheb Dixit to do it. He obeyed the command of the Guru. When he raised his knife, Baba cried out, "Stop, stop, you are a Brahmin and you want to kill a goat. You are cruel!" So saying Babaji smiled. The goat was saved. By this he wanted to test his disciples. Doubting people have faith in nothing. They think that even the Guru could go wrong. Some others are lazy. Some carry out Guru's orders without understanding the spirit. It is not easy to be a perfect disciple.

YOU ARE A THIEF!

Baba would teach people great truths in a simple way.

One day, Baba was seated at the masjid and devotees were gathered around him. Some one noticed a few grains on the sleeve of Hemadri Pant and

¹⁸ Fakir is a mendicant

drew attention to it. Hemadri pant did not know how the grains got there. Baba remarked, "Today is shandy¹⁹ day in Shirdi. This fellow must have bought some peas and be eating them without giving to others".

Hemadri protested, "Babaji, I did not go to shandy and buy the peas. I never eat anything without sharing with others present".

Babaji laughed, "Well, what do you do if there is none present to share with when you eat?"

Hemadri kept silent.

Baba twitted, "Dear, dear, what could you do if no one is near! But do you forget that I am always with you? Do you offer to me before you eat?"

Every one was taught a great truth by this dialogue. We should not be guided only by our senses, i.e., sight, hearing, touch, etc. We should be guided by a higher sense. In this the Guru helps. Thus we can see the unseen God who does not eat or drink as we see it. We can see him in our inner mind or self.

DON'T EAT RAW ONIONS IF YOU CANT DIGEST

One morning Baba was eating and old piece of roti (bread) with a raw onion. Nanasahab Chandorkar was nearby. He was a learned man. He was a high official. He had read the Yoga sastra (the science of controlling the senses and the mind). He thought to himself, "Look at Baba eating stale bread with raw onion!" Baba was silent for a few minutes. Then he carelessly remarked, "Nanaji, those that can't digest raw onion should not eat it". Chandorkar was wonder struck how Baba knew what was passing in his mind. He fell at Baba's feet and felt humble.

BRING ME YOUR TROUBLES

Many people went to Baba with their troubles. Once a rich merchant went to him to consult on taking up a speculative²⁰ trade in grains. Baba did not seem to approve it. He remarked, "You are going to buy at 5 seers a rupee and sell at 7 seers a rupee!". This appeared improbable at that moment. Afterwards prices did

¹⁹ Shandy day is market day in rural areas.

²⁰ Speculation means taking chances to make profits unduly.

come down. It would have ruined the merchant. Thus the merchant was saved from loss by Baba's hint.

A Mango tree puts forth flowers in every branch. Not all flowers develop into fruits. Some fall down. So it is wrong to think that Baba fulfilled all the desires of the devotees. We cannot know what is good for us in God's plan.

YOU ATE THE COCONUT MEANT FOR ME DIDN'T YOU?

One Swami Vasudevanand was a great Yogi. He belonged to the Telugu country. A friend of his Pundalik Rao went to see him. The conversation turned on Shirdi. The Swami gave him a coconut. He asked him to give it to Baba with his namaskar. The friend took the coconut with him on his next visit to Baba. On the way he and his company felt hungry and thirsty after a bath in the river Godavari. It happened that this particular coconut was broken and scraped to be added to the parched rice and eaten. When he reached Shirdi, Pundalik discovered the mistake. He asked Baba for his pardon. Baba said, "Don't be worried. It was by my wish that the coconut was sent through you. It was my wish that you should eat it. Why do you think you are the doer, whether good or bad?" Baba was all knowing. He taught a great truth in a simple way.

9. Fame Spreads Far and Wide

DON'T ASK OTHERS, COME TO ME STRAIGHT

Baba's boundless love was like the full moon on a clear night. Many people far and wide had come to know about him. Das Ganu always used to carry a picture of Baba wherever he went. He went to many places to sing Kirtan (devotional songs). Many were attracted to go to Shirdi to have darshan of Baba. They wanted to get his blessings. Some saw Baba in their dreams. Baba knew all these. He would speak about them. He would tell what was passing in their minds. Once a man called Lakshnichand, who was a clerk in a company wanted to visit Shirdi. By coincidence, a friend of his asked him whether he would accompany him as he was going to Shirdi. Lakshnichand had been postponing his visit to see Baba. Now he was happy he had a guide. He borrowed some money from a friend for rail fare. He went to Shirdi. On the way he asked other people to tell him all about baba. When he came to Shirdi he prostrated before

Baba. He was very happy. Baba remarked, "Look at this fellow, why not he come straight to Shirdi? Why should he borrow money from a money lender?"

Lakshrnichand wondered how Baba knew what all happened!

I LIKE YOUR KITCHADI

Once a lady in a far off place had a dream. She saw Baba at her door asking for some kitchadi to eat. 'Kitchadi' is rice cooked with ghee, vegetables and spices. She went to Shirdi with kitchadi. She could not serve the kitchadi to Baba. She somehow missed as the door was closed before she arrived. Finally she pushed open the curtain and offered Baba the dish of kitchadi. Baba ate it with relish as if he was waiting for it for days. That is how he favoured his true devotees.

YOU CAN SEE SHIVA IN ME

A man called Megha was a devotee of Shiva. He was the servant of a rich man. The master asked him to visit Shirdi. Megha got the impression that he being a Brahmin should not prostrate before Baba whose caste or religion nobody knew. When he went before Baba, Baba cried out to other devotees, "Drive out this man". Megha returned home and came back later to Shirdi a wiser man. Now he looked upon

Baba as Lord Shiva himself. After his Shiva-puja he would sit at Baba's feet and massage it (that is pressing gently to give comfort). One night Baba came in his dream. Megha wanted him to show a trisul (a r.pear with three heads which Shiva carries) on the picture of Baba he worshipped. Megha used to do obeisance to this picture kept in the chavadi. That night he saw trisul in the picture! Baba never wanted any one to leave off worship of his favourite God or to leave off his old Guru. Because there is only one God, and all gurus teach only that.

THEY WILL COME TO ME LIKE SPARROWS

Baba used to say that those who loved him would fly to Shirdi like sparrows because he loved them too. Children, you have seen sparrows often in your garden. Sometimes you see them perched on the windows in your house.

They chirp musically. They make sharp sounds, rurit turit turee. They don't come on your asking. They are quite happy to find a few grains to peck at. So also devotees are attracted by godly-men. They get peace and happiness in their presence.

This was the experience of one Kakaji Vaidya.

He was a priest in a Saptasingi²¹ goddess temple in a place called Vani. He was poor and had many worries to bear. One day he intensely prayed to the Goddess to free him from his difficulties. In his dream the Saptasingi goddess appeared and bade him to go to Baba. He thought that the Goddess referred to Trumlok, the famous Shiva shrine in Nasik. He went there and performed worship. Still he was restless. He again prayed to the Goddess. She said in a dream that he should go to Sai Baba of Shirdi. Vaidya wanted some one to accompany him to Shirdi. By good fortune, Shama, the close devotee of Baba had come to Vani to fulfil a vow to the Goddess after a delay of 30 years! He met the priest and told his story. Vaidya was overjoyed that Baba had sent him a guide. He went to Baba accompanied by Shama. He found utter peace in the presence of Baba.

10. Guiding to Success and Happiness

GIVE ME YOUR BOOK

Baba did not want men to be merely learned. You cannot see Truth through learning alone. One should have love of God. It is called bhakti. One should also serve fellowmen. For this we should give up selfishness. For example, if you have a good book you should share it with your friends. Baba would like his devotees to read Bhagavata. It tells us the story of Sri Krishna. He wanted them also to read Vishnu Sahasranama. This contains the 1008 sacred names of Vishnu. He told Shama, his devotee, "Once I had severe suffering. I was panting. I hugged Vishnu Sahasranama to my heart. The pain disappeared." He gave to Shama a copy of the Sahasranama belonging to another visitor. The visitor was angry thinking that Shama had coveted his book. He thought Baba himself allowed Shama to take it. Baba consoled the visitor. He asked hyn not to

²¹ Saphthagtrf Literally means seven deers

have attachment even for books. Shama did not know much Sanskrit to read that book. But soon he became proficient in Vishnu Sahasranama and could explain the meanings of the names of the Lord. People would bring to Baba their favourite books like the Bhagavat Gita, Bhagavata, Ramayana²², etc. Baba would touch them and return them with his blessings. So it is good to study one or two sacred books. If they are given by good men they must be treated like treasure.

This book you are reading is also written for you to get Baba's grace. So treasure it up. Read as often as possible the wonderful stories of love and compassion of Baba.

YOU WILL PASS THE EXAMINATION, DON'T BE AFRAID

Here is story which will put strength in your minds. One Savitribai Tendulkar was a devotee of Baba. She had written many Bhajan songs (called abhangas). Her son was to appear for an examination. He was studying in the medical college. Some astrologers told Savitribai that her son would not pass the examination that year. Savitribai went to Baba and told him of this. Baba said, "Ask your son not to lose heart. Let him throw aside predictions. He must study with a clear mind and trust in me. He will pass."

So the boy made bold to appear for the examination. After writing the written paper he was not bold enough to face the oral test. He wanted to stop away. But his Professor sent word that he must appear. He had passed in written test and so should not lose a chance. The boy accordingly appeared for the oral test and he passed the examination. Baba does not work miracles but he puts strength in you. He wants you to work hard and with faith. We must leave the rest to God and to our teachers and well -wishers. In this way Baba gave enormous strength to any one who had faith in him.

It is said of God that he knows what we desire but only gives what is good for us. If we know this, there is no disappointment at all.

²² Bhagavata is the story of Krishna. Ramayana is the story of Rama. Bhagavat Gita is Krishna's teachings called Lord's song.

THAT MEDAL IS FOR ME

Baba would teach such lessons in a strange way. A gentleman called Narverkar loved Baba. He once brought a silver medal with Rama, Sita and Lakshmana engraved on one side and Hanuman on the other. He brought it to Baba and requested him to touch it and consecrate it. He wanted it to be given back by Baba with udhi. He wanted to treasure it up as a sacred coin. Baba took the medal and simply pocketed it. He asked Shama to tell Narverkar that it would not be returned. When Narverkar came, Baba said, "Why should it be returned to him? If he gives Rs. 25 we shall return it." Narverker collected Rs. 25 and placed it before Baba. Baba said "That coin is worth more than Rs. 25. Let us keep it." He asked Shama to keep it in the shrine and worship it. Narverker had attachment only to the medal and not to Sri Rama who should be worshipped in the heart. Baba thus helped to put Rama in Narverkar's heart.

I CAN'T KEEP QUIET IF YOU ARE UNHAPPY

Baba once told the story of his boyhood life. "When I was a boy I was in search of food. I went to a place to find work. I got work as an embroiderer (that is, decorating cloth with lace or silk designs). Three other boys worked with me. The employer was pleased with my work. He paid me a wage much higher than the other boys got. He also presented me with good clothes. I never wore them. These presents are nothing when compared with God's gifts." Baba paused for a while and continued, "People come to me and ask for this or that thing.

My treasury is full of many valuable things. Any one can dig into it and take away what he wants. But ignorance prevails in them. I feel much for such men. Faith in God alone will cure this ignorance. He who remembers this will be happy. This is the happiness that my Kingdom can give. If they can't become happy thus, I too am unhappy. Because, I lose the good opportunity of this life to make other people happy."

Baba did not want anyone to fast and take up difficult religious practices. How can one think of God with empty stomach? he asked. "So it is not necessary for you to observe fasts. But pray and eat moderately. That is good rule."

11. Lofty Truths Made Easy

LOOKING BEYOND NAMES AND FORMS

Baba wanted people to think about and know the real meaning of this life. He did not want people to be sorrowful but happy. Happiness can be got only by right knowledge. This is what the sastras call jnana. One cannot be happy without this. Another thing is we should not have too much desire for anything. These were taught by Bhagavan Krishna in the great book Bhagavat Gita. Baba taught these lofty truths in a simple way to the learned as well as illiterates. He would take a dakshina (offering in coin from the devotees. This is to teach one to give up possessions bit by bit. Baba would give udhi to them. Now, udhi is the ash from the dhuni (sacred fire). Udhi is the mark of truth about this world. This world is not what it looks. The logs that were burnt in the dhuni were many. They were appearances. They had different names and forms. We may burn the logs any number of times. Finally the ash alone remains. So truth is one. It has many forms. Udhi is the mark of this truth. So Baba would smear the udhi on the forehead of his devotees who came to him.

He would place his hand on their head with his blessings. Blessed are they who got this grace from Baba's own hands! But Baba lives unseen even today. He blesses us all from his samadhi!

CAN WE CROSS A FOREST WITHOUT A GUIDE?

Baba was a good guide for our spiritual²³ life. Baba used to describe the difficulty of this quest for right knowledge. One who finds himself in a forest needs a guide to take us through. The quest for a Guru is even more difficult. Merely learned people cannot be good guides. A guide should be a man who has knowledge of the strange country. Because the Guru has such knowledge to overcome the pitfalls, he alone is a safe guide.

Baba once narrated how he came upon his Guru. "Four of us discussed about how to attain God. One said one should try himself and no outside help was necessary. Another said we should control the mind. The third said, we

²³ Spiritual means holy, i.e., above mere worldly pleasures

should have right knowledge. I said we should do all our duties, but we should have faith in God in everything. This is called surrender.

If one is not steadfast in this, one cannot succeed."

"We four went in search of a guru to a forest. A simple forest dweller met us. He asked us what we are in search of in the forest. We said we wanted to search the woods."

"What are you going to find out?," asked the simple Vanajan (forest dweller) a little amused.

"We want to find out someone who will show God to us."

The Vanajan did not quite understand this. He said, "How can you find anything in the forest without a guide? If you don't want to tell me what do you want, atleast stop for a while and have something to eat and drink. Then you can go."

"We turned down this simple man's request. We wandered and wandered till we were tired and lost the way. Finally we were lucky to come back to the place from which we started."

The Vanajan was there. He asked us, "Good friends, did you succeed in your search? You even discarded food. You relied on your own cleverness. Pray sit down, eat something and go."

My friends ignored his request. They were obstinate. I was hungry and tired. The Vanajan was not a learned fellow but he had love in his heart. That was the best in a man. I accepted the food offered by him. We were tired and fell asleep. All this appeared as a dream.

THERE HE IS, ENTRUST YOURSELF TO HIM

"When I woke up, I had a strange experience. I saw a Guru standing before me. He asked me what the dispute was about. I told him what all happened."

"The Guru spoke, I shall show you what you want. Would you come with me? But you will succeed only if you fully believe in what I say."

"My friends demurred and went their way. I bowed to him and said I was his slave. The wise man took me to a well, a distance away. He tied my feet with

a rope and hung me up head downwards with a rope from a branch of a tree down into the well. I could not reach the water surface with my hands. Even if I was thirsty and wanted to drink, I could not do so. Because my Guru wanted complete faith in him, I did not ask him why he hung me up like this. I did not ask him how long I should be like that. My thoughts were fully concentrated on the Guru's promise. I did not even look up to see whether he was there or not. The Guru disappeared. He came back, I thought, after about five hours. He called me and asked, "How do you feel, good man!"

"I said, "I am quite happy. How can I describe the joy I got?"

SURRENDER AND BE HAPPY

"The Guru was quite pleased. I appeared to have proved worthy. He kindly took me and caressed me with his hand. Oh, it was bliss to be so sanctified!"

"The Guru was all kindness to me. He cared for me as a mother-bird cares for its young one. I forgot all my past life. I wanted to cling to him like a child clings to his mother. He was always in my eyes whether he was near or far. My inner eyes were centered on him. My mind was fixed on him. I had no other thoughts. I became absorbed in him, so to say. He did not ask me to read holy books. He did not ask me to do rituals. He did not ask me to practice severe austerities. He did not impart to any mantra²⁴. My mind became clear. I had no doubts and difficulties. I felt myself in a world of Light!" Without Guru's grace one cannot attain higher knowledge.

Baba used to speak lovingly of his Guru always. He regarded the ground near the neem tree as the seat of his Guru. Although he realised the highest jnana (divine knowledge), he lived an ordinary life for the sake of others. His actions were acts of blessings to others. The saint lived in and walked the humble streets of Shirdi for the good of others. Though unseen, he gives his grace even today.

²⁴ Mantra is a sacred word which has to be uttered in meditation.

12. God is Master - Surrender to Him

CARES OF MIND AND BODY

The dhuni (fire) which Baba lighted in front of the Dwarakamayi masjid when he settled down in Shirdi was kept on burning. Baba would buy fuel with the dakshina he got from devotees. The fire is kept burning even to this day. Baba would give the ashes (udhi) from this holy fire to his devotees with his blessings. He would also give it to sick people who came to him for cure. That was the medicine he used. Many were cured of their bodily ills. Many were also cured of their worries of the mind. Baba would say, "Whoever steps in here will go away happy. This Dwaraka mayi will not disappoint them. This udhi is sacred. They will be cured of their illness."

There were many cases for such cure. Baba did not work miracles. People went to him with faith. Perhaps he took upon himself their sufferings. Earlier you have read that he cured a person of his plague, and he got the boils on his thigh. He put up with them. This is like a mother herself suffering for her children's cure.

BOIL CURED WITH UDHI

Once a youngman had a bone abcess (swelling in the bone). His uncles were doctors. The boy was not cured. Some one told his parents to take him to Baba. The boy was taken to Baba, He was made to sit before him. Baba passed his hands on the trouble spot and looked lovingly on it. With the application of udhi the boy was cured. The doctor uncle who heard about it was surprised and could not believe it. Baba came to him in his dream on three nights. The doctor heard a voice crying, "Why do you disbelieve me still?" The doctor knew who was speaking. He was determined to go to Shirdi for Bab as darshan. But a patient he was treating was dangerously ill. He thought he could not go. By a miracle the patient immediately got well. So the doctor could go to Shirdi on the same day and became a devotee of Baba.

People reap the fruits of their past deeds. It is called Karma. We do bad acts sometimes. *We* suffer as a result. *We* cannot escape it. The sufferings will not affect us if we have faith in God. Saints teach us this. They feel for us if we suffer out of ignorance.

THE CROW PECKS AND PAIN DISAPPEARS

Another doctor, one Dr. Pillai, was himself suffering from worms on his feet. He could not bear the pain. He was a devotee of Baba. He sent word through a friend, that Baba should deliver him from this suffering. He was prepared to suffer bit by bit, if need be. He was willing to suffer in next birth also. He could not bear the present pain. Baba asked him to come to Shirdi. He asked him to take off the bandage. He said, " Surrender your feet, body and mind to God. God will take care of you. A crow will come and peck your leg. You will then get well." Nobody could understand this. Now, there was another devotee. He used to clean the in as] ids and trim the lamps. Just then he came along. Accidentally he put his foot on the doctor's leg. The doctor screamed in pain. The pain was terrible. But next moment the pain had left. He felt relieved. Baba laughed and said, " Did you see the crow that pecked your leg?" The doctor was completely cured by taking in a little udhi in water daily.

GOD IS LORD -I AM ONLY WITNESS

Baba used to say, " I am not responsible for these cures. God is the Lord. Allah Mallick. He does everything. I am only an onlooker or witness.

He who casts his cares on Him is happy."

The udhi that devotees got was the token of God's protection. There was no miracle. Those who came to Shirdi with doubts went away changed in mind. Those came to test Baba were afterwards sorry for their disbelief. Those who had faith had their wishes fulfilled.

GIVING YOUR BEST - A FINE EXAMPLE

Baba did not care whether anybody saluted him or not. He did not care whether anybody gave dakshina or not. He used to say that he did not need dakshina. He would say it is a sort of repaying a debt. If a man is wealthy he must use some of it for others. Those who gave like that are bom rich again. Others will be born poor. What one gives will come back to him. This is what we call dharma or duty. There was a man called Balaji Navaskar. He rendered service by sweeping the masjid. He used to bring the whole of the harvest from his bit of land to Baba. He would take home what Baba gave him back. Balaji

was not a rich man at all. Baba used him as a fine example for others to follow. He regarded money as danger. He did not allow the friends who did service in the Dwarakamayi to be given money.

15. Simple Joys of Shirdi

FOOD FOR ALL

Baba regarded giving food to others as a very good act. It is better than giving money. When a stranger comes to our house at meal time, we must feed him. As day passed, the number of visitors who came to Shirdi grew larger and larger. Baba arranged to cook enough food for all. He himself used to get his food by begging from a few houses. For the sake of guests, he would go to the bazaar and buy grains, flour, spices and vegetables. He would light up a fire in the courtyard in front of the masjid. He would place a big pot over it, for cooking food for 50 to 60 persons. Sometimes he would cook sweet rice. Sometimes he would cook 'pulav'. He would make them palatable. He would also prepare soup and sometimes porridge with jawar flour and serve it with butter milk. Before distribution he would ask the maulvis (priests) to consecrate the food. Then food would be sent first to the servitors (servants) of the masjid, Tatyā and Mahlaspati. Baba would himself then serve the food to the poor and helpless people. The fruits and sweets brought by devotees as offerings would also be distributed. The devotees would be seated in rows and all the offerings would be placed before Baba. Baba would bless, and then the fruits and sweets mixed with the prasadam²⁵ would be distributed to all. In a holy place, nobody should be left waiting for food. This was Baba's idea. This is the old custom of our country. In Shirdi it was done without distinction of caste and community, or of rich and poor.

THE EVENING PROCESSION - A THING OF JOY

Another great joy which the devotees in Shirdi enjoyed was the procession from the Masjid to the Chavadi. The neem tree shade was Baba's Durbar^{26*}. Everybody met him there. They made their salutations to him. They did their little services like massaging Baba's legs, Baba would give his blessings and udhi

²⁵ Prasadam is food made sacred by offering to God or God's servants.

²⁶ Durbar is royal court

from the dhuni. Thus his durbar was an open court. The low stool (asana) on which Baba sat was the throne of grace for the devotees. Behind it was the holy ground of his Guru whom Baba referred to as Fakir and revered deeply. The devotees would sing and pray at the noon arati (worship) at the Dwarakamayi. Then they would all be fed.

In later years devotees used to offer worship to Baba. Baba did not need any. He was quite disinterested. He used to be calm and undisturbed at all this. The masjid would glow with small lamps in the evening all round. Devotees would form into a procession to accompany Baba to the Chavadi. Men and women would sing. Conches would be sounded. A decorated horse would lead the procession, Baba would walk slowly with devotees on either side. His face would be serene and beautiful.

The gathering would utter God's names and say "Hail, Babaji". On reaching the Chavadi, Baba would be made to sit and his feet would be washed and sandal paste applied to his forehead. Flowers would be showered on him. Then arati would be done. Arati is waving of lights. After getting Baba's blessings, the devotees would retire to their places. Baba too would retire.

I AM AN UNSEEN GUEST IN EVERY HOUSE

We said that feeding the devotees was considered important by Baba. Baba himself would teach this in strange ways. He showed them that feeding the devotees was in fact feeding done to him. Once a Mamlatdar by name Deo invited Baba for food for a ceremony in his house. Baba promised to come and said he did not want any cart to take him. Baba did not however turn up at the appointed time. Instead, a Bengali Sanyasi appeared at the house. Deo thought that he had come to ask for money. The -sanyasi said he did not want any money. He came only for meals. He had with him two others also. Deo fed them. Deo was however disappointed as Baba did not come. He communicated this to Baba through a friend by name Jog. Baba asked, "Did not Deo see me in the Bengali Sanyasi who came in proper time for the meals? Ah, Ah, does he think, I break my promise?"

I BREAK NO PROMISE

One day Hemadri Pant had a dream of Baba coming to his house. Baba told him in the dream that he would go over to his house for meals the next day. Pant was much pleased. His wife doubted whether Baba would come all the way from Shirdi to Bandra. Babaji did not turn up till the appointed time. Pantji asked other guests to sit for food. At that time two Muslims knocked at the door and gave a beautiful picture of Baba. Pant placed the picture on the seat in the dining place reserved for Baba and worshipped him.

In the matter of feeding, Baba wanted his devotees to see him in everyone. This is one way of teaching that God dwells in every one. Feeding the hungry is most important. Once he threw away bread specially prepared for him to a hungry dog. He said that hunger was the same to man or dog. All are God's creatures.

BUILD ME A SHRINE WITHOUT MONEY, IN YOUR HEART

Baba Sahib Bhutey was a millionaire he wanted to build a house for himself to stay near the masjid. Baba told him in a dream to build a wadi (choultry) with a shrine with his money. Baba told poor Shama also in a dream to build a wadi. Shama was a very devoted man, but utterly poor. He had built a shrine for Baba in his heart. He was puzzled that Baba wanted him to build a wadi. He had not even a few rupees. The building would cost several hundreds. So he told Bhutey Sahib of his dream. Both their dreams coincided. Bhutey started building a wadi immediately. He got Babas permission to put up an image of Shri Krishna with flute (Muralidhar²⁷) on a platform in the centre, Baba consecrated the starting of the work by breaking a coconut. He said, "I will make it my place and stay there. We shall live and move and embrace each other here." Lord Krishna you know was surrounded by Gopis (cowherd girls). He made them happy. The place became later the final resting place of Babaji when he attained Mahasamadhi²⁸.

²⁷ " Murali = Flute ; dhar : bearing. Sri Krishna enthralled the world by his venu gana music

²⁸ Mahasamadhi is entering Eternal life by throwing off this mortal body.

Baba blessed the prayers of the rich and the poor without distinction. He wanted his devotees also to practise non-difference. He is present in everybody. This is the greatest truth.

14. Crossing the Border

COVER ME WITH FLOWERS

Baba's passing away was as sublime as his simple life. He could foresee many tilings. He once foretold that Vijayadasami day (the last day of Dasara) was the day of Crossing the Border²⁹. People did not understand what Baha meant. One of his close devotees Ramachandra Patel was very ill. He wanted Baba to see him. Baha told him that his time was not up. But he expressed his fear that Tatya Patil, who served Baba every moment of his life, might pass away on Vijayadasami day. Baba, however, wanted this to be kept secret. This was a veiled reference to his own mukti³⁰. On 28th September 1918, Baba took ill with slight fever. After three days he gave up taking any food. Baba attained Mahasamadhi on 15th October, 1918 which was Vijayadasami day. He was conscious up to the last moment. He bade the devotees to go to the wadi and take their food. He gave a small present to Lakshmi Bai who served in the Dwarakamayi with devotion. He gave her nine rupees which was all he had. Lakshmi Bai was well-to-do and she needed no money. Baba's action was significant. Through her Baba returned his love to all devotees. Nine rupees represented nine types of bhakti (love) of devotees spoken of in holy books. Baba passed away reclining in the act of putting those rupees in Lakshmi Bai's hand. This is symbolic of his Eternal act of Grace. Hail, immortal Babaji! Hail, His undying Grace!

On the next day, early morning Baba appeared in the dream of Das Ganu who was at Pandaripur. Das Ganu was the Kirtan singer who did bhajan of Baba's name wherever he went. Baba told him, "Go and cover me with Bhakkal³¹ flowers."

²⁹ " Passing away from this life to the Life everlasting.

³⁰ Mukti is attaining God's feet.

³¹ Bhakkal flower is Bhagula or Magilampoo in Tamil.

Baba's Samadhi is to be seen today in the Wadi at Shirdi. The flowers of devotion from devotees from far and wide adorn the Samadhi. Baba's Grace is everlasting. Baba is ever present in the hearts of the devotees.

15. The Great Promise

THERE WILL BE NO WANT IN MY DEVOTEE'S HOMES

Baba lives for ever as he promised to bless his devotees even from his Samadhi. He said he would answer their prayers from his grave. A beautiful life-like portrait of Baba drawn by a famous artist now adorns Shirdi. His Samadhi is visited by thousands of people. Baba lives in the hearts of all who think of him. Baba has left his mortal body. His kind and wonderful acts are not forgotten. They are called leelas (loving acts). Such leelas are experienced by devotees even today. Baba comes to their help whenever they think of him. Even the utterance of his name is good for them. For, the word 'Sai' means 'God with us'. If this is understood, Baba stands always by one's side. He is bound by the golden ties of love. Baba used to say that he would draw to himself a devotee even if he is beyond seven seas. He would draw him like a sparrow with a thread tied to its foot. The thread of love binds the devotees to him. He said he would answer their prayers from his grave. He said there would be no want in his devotees' homes.

MORE MEN HEAR THE VOICE FROM THE SAMADHI

Sai Baba's wonderful deeds became known more fully after his passing away. He answers the call of devotees from his samadhi. Many persons who had not heard of Baba before, now pray to him. Their prayers are answered. They get Baba's guidance. They are helped in difficulties. Their doubts get cleared. They are enabled to follow a noble path in their lives. They look up on all with love. Baba used to say that we should see him (Baba) in all creatures. If we keep this in mind, we will not hate anyone. Baba thus taught love to all. Baba helped people to lead a divine life. He also helped to repair many shrines in Shirdi and roundabout. In Shirdi any fakir or sanyasi can have food and shelter. He helped fakirs with money to go to holy places.

Baba did not want anyone to give up worship of their favourite deities. He did not ask people to waste time in arguments as to whom they should follow.

Baba is a living Guru. His ways were simple. He promoted brotherliness and love among all. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis continue to visit Shirdi and pay reverence to Babaji.

A DEVOTEE'S HOMAGE

Swami Kesavaiahji, a chosen devotee of Baba, sums up Babaji's teachings beautifully thus:

Baba said, "By the touch of your previous life, you have come to me. Understand this. Don't think low of anyone who comes to you. Don't think ill of him or despise him. Show kindness to him. Feed the hungry. Give water to the thirsty. Give clothes to the naked. God will like your charitable acts and kind nature. Don't drive away those who come and ask you for help. If others slander you, be patient. Don't try to avenge. Be persuasive. This is the way to live peacefully and happily. Even if the world turns upside down, control your mind. Don't give up dharma."

The Call of the Saint is heard today from his Samadhi. His unseen presence is always with us and ready to help. His leelas are a source of strength to us.

16. How Baba Came into Swami Kesavaiahji's Life

Sai Baba left his mortal body on 15th October, 1918. When he was present in this world he cared for his devotees like a mother. He was all-knowing. He saved his devotees from difficulties. Sometimes he would appear in their dreams. Even after his passing away he cares for his devotees. Many who had not known or heard of Babaji when he was in this world now pray to him. They go to Shirdi to worship his Samadhi. Many worship his picture. Many wear Baba pendants or rings on their bodies. Many love to read about his deeds of love (leelas) or his sayings. They benefit by such devotion. Baba blesses them in their dreams.

KESAVAIHJI'S VISION AT PALANI HILL

It is a wonderful story how Baba came into the life of Swami Kesavaiahji. Baba has made him his special servant. He continues his miracles through him. Swami Kesavaiahji was born in a pious middle class family in Pamidi on the bank of Pennar river in Anantapur district in South India. He was brought up in good discipline. He was very dutiful to his teachers. He had an enquiring mind. He was of charitable disposition even as a boy. He did not believe in rituals. After his Matriculation he got employment in Government service in the department which registers documents³². He proved to be a very strict and efficient official. He was married and had children. On one occasion he went on a pilgrimage to several shrines. He visited Palani, the Hill temple of Muruga in Madurai district. After worship he closed his eyes in meditation. When he opened his eyes he had a wonderful experience. He saw a jothi (wonderful light) in the place of the idol. He felt his body light. He had a spiritual experience. From that day he seemed to possess rare powers. He could tell the past events in the life of anyone who came to him. He could even know their future. He would advice them as to what they should do to free themselves from any calamities.

BABA APPEARS PHYSICALLY

Swami Kesavaiahji at that time had not heard about Sai Baba and not even seen his picture before. On one occasion he was relating to his friend Mr. Malli Reddi, an Advocate of Anantapur some of his personal difficulties. Mr. Reddi said, "Pray to Sai Baba. Your difficulties would be over." Swami Kesavaiahji mentioned this to his dear wife Govindammal. On that night Sai Baba came to Swami Kesavaiahji in his dream. He remained with him for four or five minutes. Swami Kesavaiahji felt blessed and overjoyed. He wanted to buy a picture of Babaji the next day and worship it. Strangely enough, on the same day a picture of Baba and packet of udhi arrived from Shirdi although the name of the sender was not known to the Shirdi people.

This revelation was on 1st July, 1939. It was then about 21 years since Baba had left this world. Yet this miracle in the life of Swami Kesavaiahji had

³² This is called the Registration Department.

happened. It had a special significance. Baba had chosen Swami Kesavaiahji as his servant. Swami Kesavaiahji used his spiritual powers to serve the bhaktas in the name of Baba. Many people sought Swamiji's help. When he was Sub-Registrar at Penukonda in 1948, he built a small shrine there for Sai Baba, which became famous. Swamiji did his spiritual healings to whoever sought his help. He did this good work wherever he was transferred in his official career.

SAVED FROM DEATH

Swami Kesavaiahji came to Madras in 1948 for medical treatment. As if ordained by Baba he was transferred to Madras in 1949. Even during his illness he would conduct Sai Puja in devotees' houses. He would give sacred udhi to whoever came to him. Swamiji's illness grew worse. On one night his condition grew worse. He prayed to Sai Baba intensely. Baba seemed to have driven away the messengers of death. Swamiji recovered by the grace of Sai. Through Swamiji's grace many persons had received a vision of Baba in their dreams. One such person was the doctor who treated Swami Kesavaiahji during his illness.

Once Swami Kesavaiahji visited Pandaripur. Baba seemed to accompany him in the guise of a fellow traveller. Swami Kesavaiahji dreamt that the garlands he placed on Vittoba at Pandaripur was on Baba's Samadhi itself. Swami Kesavaiahji had innumerable such experiences³³ to tell.

17. Swami Kesavaiahji's Mission

MANDIRS IN MANY PLACES

Swami Kesavaiahji's services in organising the Mandir at Penukonda were gratefully remembered by friends there. People from far and wide used to go to the mandir. They were relieved of their difficulties and illnesses. They were given tirtham (sacred water) and udhi (sacred ash). Swamiji would bless everyone. People saw Baba's grace shining through him. Swamiji's personal life was as pure as his devotion. He worshipped Baba in a puja room in his own house with great love. He thus infused strong faith in the people, rich and poor, high and low.

³³ Read these in the book "Sri Sai Mahima" available in Tamil & Telugu published by Sri Sai Baba Seva Samajam.

Sometimes he used to prophesy what is to happen. This strange power is due to his meditation and Sai's Grace. He did not claim any powers as his own. On one occasion by his prayer to Baba he made rains to fall in Gooty after a severe drought. Swami Kesavaiahji has visited Shirdi about 73 times after he was first blessed by Baba in 1939. He helped construct and open mandirs for Baba in many places.

After coming to Madras, Swami Kesavaiahji organised Baba's puja. It was done with great devotion. Hundreds of persons attended the puja in his house. Swamiji adopted the way of puja to spread the grace of Baba. Reused to comply with the wishes of friends if invited to do Sai puja in their places. He visited many places in Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka States to spread the love of Baba.

AT SHENOYNAGAR

Swami Kesavaiahji settled down in Madras and lived in Shenoyanagar. He conducted Sai Puja³⁴ in his small room. He gave tirtham and udhi to friends who visited him. The number of devotees increased. Many would also write to him from various places for advice. In 1956, a big portrait of Babaji was installed in the shrine. The puja on Thursdays drew a very large number of devotees. Special occasions like Guru Poornima³⁵, Rama Navami, Gokulashtami and Sai's Mahasamadhi Day, (Vijayadasami day) were celebrated, with great devotion and solemnity. There would be puja, music and bhajan. Special discourses and distribution of prasadam would follow. Men, women and children participated in these functions in large numbers. Swamiji's messages on these occasions are inspiring. The pujas were attended by thousands of devotees from far and near.

If you visit Shenoyanagar on a Thursday evening you will find a long queue of persons before a small house called Sai Nilayam. You will find them very orderly. You will find them not making any noise. After Swamiji had concluded his puja, one by one they would go in and have darshan. Swamiji would pat on the back, place his hand on your head and give you udhi. By this, Baba's grace

³⁴ From 1949.

³⁵ Poornima is full moon day

would pass on to you. Swamiji considered himself only as a servant of Baba. You will find in his face peace and radiance.

Before him was the portrait of Baba adorned with flowers. You will feel the holiness of the place. You will feel happy and peaceful.

A NEW MANDIR IN MADRAS - A DREAM COMES TRUE

Swami Kesavaiahji's wish had been to build a big mandir and meditation hall, to accommodate the increasing number of devotees. This was a mighty task. It was a difficult task to get a piece of land. He had to face many difficulties patiently. Swamiji, by Baba's grace, had secured the use of the land opposite to Sai Nilayam. Then the money had to be found, to construct the mandir. Devotees came forward with help. As work progressed, money was always found short. Swami used to pray night and day for Baba's blessing for the completion of this work. By Swamiji's penance, the building is now completed. Now you find a beautiful Mandir has been built. A beautiful portrait of Babaji is installed there. There is a mantap for puja. The big hall in front is artistic. It can hold a large number of persons who come for dharsan. Swamiji's dream has come true. Praise be to Swamiji for achieving his great mission!

This Sri Shirdi Sai Baba Mandir was inaugurated on the 14th March, 1975 amidst great enthusiasm and acclamation by the Hon'ble Sri K. Brahmananda Reddy, the Home Minister of the Government of India. The Mediation hall was opened by the Hon'ble Sri C.Subramaniam, Finance Minister, Government of India. He also released the Souvernir, on the 15th March, 1975. Blessed are those who contributed to the completion of this monument. Blessed are those who will go there and seek Baba's blessings through Swami Kesavaiahji. Blessed are those who laboured to serve Swamiji to complete this task.

Swamiji was a Godman with a difference. He never claimed himself to be a Baba. On the other hand, he firmly believed that no one, however great, could become Sri Sai Baba. There is no second Ramdas, there is no second Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he used to say. Swamiji was not a great scholar in the worldly sense, but his works were full of philosophical truth and spirituality. He was not a great orator, but his speeches were charged with devotion and

sincerity. He attracted huge audiences wherever he went. Although he is no longer seen in mortal form, his spirit remains to eternally serve mankind and guide the destinies of Sri Sai Baba's devotees. Swamiji had made such a promise. He was a saint of the highest order - an embodiment of love, service, compassion and simplicity. He was a star in India's spiritual firmament. Such pious souls make rare appearance in the world to remind people of higher values and to turn erring humanity to the right path.

Swamiji is survived by a son and two daughters. Before his Samadhi on August 9, 1981, Sravana Sudha, Dasami, Swamiji has asked for udhi. He applied it to his forehead and swallowed. This occurred at sunset. Still seated, he said "Allah Malik" and closed his eyes. After a while, he was made to rest on his bed. At about 6.30 p.m. the sage of Shenoy Nagar left his mortal frame.

Glory to Sri Sai Baba, and glory to the hallowed memory of His chosen devotee Sri Swami Kesavaiahji.

18. MAY YOU BE BLESSED!

You have read in this book the wonderful story of Sri Sai Baba. Baba will always be with you. The best way to get His grace is to remember his leelas recounted here. They will make you good. They will make you happy. They will make you strong in mind. They will make you loved by all. The love of Baba and his devotees will be in your heart!

Swami Kesavaiahji gives his Blessings to you. By his grace you have read this book!

May you be Blessed!

Om Tat Sat