

A short review of:

BABA **My I Answer**

by

C.B. Satpathy

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“We should always strive to elevate our consciousness to a purer state. If we really want to have a direct vision or experience of the universal form of God, then we have to clean the old memories, experiences, thoughts and convictions from our mental storehouse. Otherwise, in place of universality, limited and distorted pictures will be painted by negative and non creative thoughts in our mind.”

The Guru is always hidden in the disciple. When the worldly covers are taken out and the mind is purified then the real image of the Guru is reflected in the disciple. There is no difference between the disciple and theGuru as they live in each other in a subtle form.

C.B. Satpathy

1. From cover page:

The spread of the name and fame of Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi within the last two decades is a phenomenon by itself. From 1999 onwards a number of websites were created in the name of Baba, the world over.

In the year 2000, I visited Chicago to inaugurate the Sai Utsav in the month of November. This event attracted a lot of devotees from all over the world including hundreds of families from the US, Latin America, Canada and UK, and by His grace acted as the seed of the creation of an effective world forum of Sai devotees. It was followed by similar events and conferences in Sydney, Australia in 2001, Johannesburg and Nairobi in Africa in 2003 where an increasing number of devotees asked me questions regarding Sai Baba and his message. This trend continued over the years through the internet, till I decided to come up with a publication that would lend greater clarity about His message to His devotees as well as to those with a religious bent of mind.

This book is a compilation of the questions he has received over the years, and answers to them in a structured manner in a style and language which is easy to understand. His messages circulated on various festivals between 2004 and 2009 through different magazines and websites are also included.



Shri C. B. Satpathy was drawn to Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi in the year 1989. Ever since then, he has been working untiringly to propagate the values which Shirdi Sai Baba the Faquir stood for. Having inspired the construction of about 200 temples in India and abroad and nurtured them, he also has authored and encouraged others to publish a number of books and magazines/journals on Baba in English, Hindi, Oriya, and other Indian languages.

Shri Satpathy retired as Director General of Police from U.P. and is fully devoted to the cause of Sai Baba.

Foreword

By the grace of Sai Baba, I had the privilege of going through the manuscript of the new book *MAY I ANSWER*. The questions asked under 22 broad themes centre around the Sadguru Shri Sai Baba. The enquiries appear to be very spontaneous and natural coming from people who are a part of the ever increasing Sai following. The answers given by Shri C.B. Satpathy have been equally spontaneous and natural. A very ardent devotee of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba, Shri Satpathy has been working unceasingly for last 18 years, trying to bring Sai teachings to the people with utmost clarity and simplicity. The answers on various topics have been given with as much scientific and rational explanation as possible keeping in view the thought processes of the new generation of young people in different parts of the world. In this process, however, emotive contents have not been neglected. I think that such a natural style of answering is possible only from an Ankit Santan (chosen child) of Sai Baba. It is as if the Sadguru (Perfect Master), Shri Shirdi Sai Baba is responding to questions from devotees and persons with a spiritual quest.

I have thoroughly enjoyed going through the manuscript and felt spiritual exhilaration. I hope the readers of the publication will be blessed by Shri Sai Baba to follow the spiritual path shown by Him.

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Preface

The spread of the name and fame of Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi within the last two decades is a phenomenon by itself. From 1999 onwards a number of websites were created in the name of Baba, the world over. One of the main sites was created by Shri Mukund Raj, a prominent Sai devotee from Chicago, U.S. I visited Chicago to inaugurate the Sai Utsav-2000 in the month of November. There was a large conglomeration of Sai devotees and others, more than two thousand in number, including hundreds of families from U.S., Canada, UK and some other Latin American countries. By the grace of Baba, I addressed the huge gathering of Sai devotees from various countries and followers of other paths and religions on the life and preachings of Baba for three days. This event created an effective world forum of Sai devotees to share their thoughts on Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi and other related matters. It was later followed by similar Sai Utsav events at Sydney, Australia during winter in 2001 and at Johannesburg and Nairobi in Africa during winter of 2003.

Following these world Sai conferences I started receiving a large number of questions regarding Sai Baba of Shirdi through the websites, not only from His devotees but also from people with a religious bent of mind. They were too numerous to answer but nevertheless I tried to satisfy the devotees considering it to be a job done in the service of Baba. Some of the questions were limited to the specific thoughts of a devotee but a majority of them were generic in nature. Given this situation, it was felt necessary to bring out a publication in the form of a compendium of these questions and answers.

Messages circulated on various occasions between 2004 and 2009 through different magazines and websites are also compiled herewith.

This book has been substantially amended and updated with lots of new questions that the devotees have asked and my answers thereof. The name and fame of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba has expanded immensely during the last decade. More than a thousand temples have come up in His name in India and abroad. Shri Shirdi Sai Baba has become a household name in India. The devotees' urge to know more and more about the Master is clearly discernable from the never-ending series of questions they put through different mediums. I hope that my answers to their queries will benefit them.

By this time, an ardent Sai devotee named Shri Ravi Mehra had shifted to U.S.A. from Noida on a job. Ravi used to visit me frequently when he was in India and suggested that we should bring this out as an in-house publication. An in house publication captioned "May I answer" was published in the year 2001 A.D.

I thank Mukund Raj and Ravi Mehra for the immense help they have rendered to me in publication of this book. I thank Ms Shipra Shukla for assisting me painstakingly in the compilation and correction of the manuscript. My special thanks to Shri A. R. Nanda, IAS (Retd), an ardent Sai devotee, for manuscript corrections and writing a foreword to this book. At the end I thank Shri S. K. Ghai of Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. for the publication of this book.

May Shri Sai Baba bless us all to follow the path shown by Him.

Delhi **C. B. Satpathy** Ram Navami 3rd April, 2009
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First Chapter: Shirdi Sai Baba and Sadgurus (Perfect Masters)

Who is Shirdi Sai Baba? Why is He named like this?

The childhood or the parent given name of the Saint you are referring to is unknown. He is called by different names such as Shirdi Sai Baba or Sai Baba of Shirdi or Sainath Maharaj or Sairam etc. He was a Sadguru of a very high spiritual stage who finally settled at Shirdi for about sixty years before entering into His Maha Samadhi on, 15th October 1918. Presently Shirdi is a village in the district Ahmadnagar in the state of Maharashtra, India. Most of His spiritual, religious, social and philanthropic activities that made Him known all over the country were during the period of His stay at Shirdi for about sixty years. Therefore He is popularly known as Shirdi Sai Baba.

What does this word *Sai* mean? I have heard of it in different contexts and am confused?

This word is used in most of the Indian languages like Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Oriya, Marathi etc. The word Sai means a protector, God, a Spiritual Master, a religious teacher, a ruler, a king, a powerful man or a father, husband and even lover.

Was Shirdi Sai Baba a *Sadguru* or an *Avatar*? Can you please explain?

Before one should ask whether Shirdi Sai Baba is an *Avatar* or a *Sadguru* one must know the difference between the two. A Sadguru is one who dispels ignorance and lights wisdom and guides the devotees towards the Path of God. An *Avatar* is one (none else but God Himself) who descends in a human body to uplift mankind. He can incarnate as a full *Avatar* that is, with all the 16 *kalas* (sixteen types of powers) or as a partial *Avatar* to establish Dharma (with a few *kalas* out of this 16). I firmly believe that Shri Shirdi Sai Baba is an *Avatar* of God. The Lord in His form has descended in order to uplift mankind and re-establish *dharmā*. He always used to act as if He was just a fakir and a servant of God but many a times in front of devotees when He was in a spiritually ecstatic mood, He declared that He was the Lord Himself. The qualities required to call Him an *Avatar* are Omnipotence, Omnipresence and Omniscience. He had full control over all the five elements (Panchatattwa). We all know that He controlled the fire and rain as narrated in chapter 11 of “Shri Sai Satcharitra”, the life story of Shri Sainath. It is seen that usually a religion or path that is established by an Avatar goes on expanding for hundreds of years ever after His Samadhi. The phenomenal expansion of the Sai movement in India and abroad is a clear indication about the spiritual status of Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi.

Many devotees address Baba by different names like Baba, Sai Baba, Sai Ram, Sai Nath. By which name should I call Him?

You can call Him by any of the names. We have Vishnu Sahasra Naam depicting various attributes of Lord Vishnu. Similarly devotees have a tendency of creating newer and newer names for the Master out of sheer love. Lord Shri Krishna had so many names. However, it is the last name which appeals to our heart the most. Any name of Baba which spontaneously appeals to your mind and soul should be used.

Why did Sai refer to the Masjid, sometimes as Masjid Mayee and sometimes as Dwarka Mayee? What does Dwarkamayee signify?

Dwaraka was the capital of Lord Krishna. It was also called ‘Dwarawati’. Lord Krishna created Dwaraka (presently in Gujarat) for the final habitation of the Yadava family (His clan) and security from attackers like Jarasandha and others. Like a mother protecting a child, Dwaraka, protected the Yadavas. Baba has given the same concept to the dilapidated mosque where He stayed for over 60 years. He gave love, protection and solution to the problems of His devotees. Baba has been quoted saying in “Shri Sai Satcharitra” that Dwarakamayee protects its children i.e. His devotees. The word ‘Mayee’ in Hindi means mother.

I am always imagining about Sai Baba, but I do not know how He looked like. Please can you tell me how he looked like?

A few photographs of Baba and the paintings (particularly those by Jayakar who had painted Baba in real

life) and others give some idea of how He looked like. During His first visit to Shirdi in the in the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, He had curly hair, golden hue in His well formed and sportsman like body. His height was about 5 feet 8 inches or above. His feet and hands were longer than His body. His eyes had bluish tinge. Later He became bald. He always sported a thick mustache and got His beard trimmed. He had a powerful but kind look. His gazes were piercing as if He could read the mind. **(For more details please read the article “What Baba Looked Like” in the book “Shirdi Sai Baba and other Perfect Masters”).**

What is the relevance of Sai’s teachings in today’s world?

Although volumes can be written on His magnanimous personality yet the most important preachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi that are relevant in today’s world are:

Love towards all including animals, birds and insects: Baba used to feed dogs even before He partook of His meals. He had equal sympathy for His horse Shyamkarna and other animals around Him at Shirdi. He extended His love even to a useless rock which He used for washing clothes or at times used to sit on it. Today that rock can be seen in Dwarkamai and is worshipped by devotees who come there. To a great extent devotees are following such preachings of Baba. People are seen distributing clothes, food, etc. to the poor. *Narayana seva* is going on all over the world in various Sai centers.

Religious tolerance: Shirdi Sai Baba looked after the Hindus, Muslims, Parsees equally. We can find people of all religions visiting His Samadhi temple even now. He always believed in the peaceful co-existence of all species. In today’s world there is a lot of intolerance among the people of various religions and sects. People must believe that all human faiths may be different but the goal is one. Shirdi Sai devotees are equal before God. At Baba’s time Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees and Christians, etc. used to share their views and talk with each other like real brothers in Shirdi. They firmly believe that flowers may be many but the God to whom the flowers are offered is one. Stars may be many but light is one. Similarly paths may be different but the goal is the same.

Social Harmony: Shirdi Sai never allowed people to have ill feelings towards each other on the basis of social differentiations as caste, creed etc. People of all religions and castes used to have food together, sleep together, hug each other and share Hukka. When they felt loathsome to do the same He castigated them and told them everything is *Atma*. If they hated them then they are in fact hating Him who is residing in them. People who believe in Baba should follow the same thing. Treat all mankind as brothers and live happily. Believe in brotherhood of mankind under the fatherhood of God.

My mummy and papa are very fond of Baba. Through them I have developed some love for Baba. But does He love children as parents do?

At Shirdi, Baba was very fond of children. Most of the children at Shirdi used to go to Baba and get sweetmeats. Some children used to get money from Him. Baba always forbade the elder persons or the parents to ill treat or beat the children. Once when Shyama, chased his son Uddhav, the child ran to Baba and took shelter behind Him. Baba told Shyama that his son will henceforth, not go to the school but will serve Him (Baba) throughout his life. This is exactly what happened in the life of Uddhav. Baba’s promise to protect and guide His devotees even after leaving His mortal body includes children.

I am coming from Toronto and want to visit Shirdi. Can you tell me when and how to go to Shirdi?

One can go to Shirdi whenever one wishes to. Since you would be reaching India on an overseas travel, it is better that you take atleast a day’s rest at Mumbai or Delhi or wherever your aircraft lands before proceeding to Shirdi. If you proceed straight to Shirdi which is about 6 ½ hrs journey from Mumbai, 4 hrs from Pune, 2 ½ hrs from Aurangabad or 2 hrs from Nasik by road; or by train you will suffer from jet lag and will not be able to easily partake of the numerous devotional activities including the four Aartis that take place on a daily basis at Shirdi. When approaching the shrine or the Samadhi, one should be in a peaceful and happy state of mind.

What are the activities that I should do in a limited time of one or two days of stay in Shirdi?

Usually whenever devotees used to visit Shirdi at the time of Baba or even today they get into a series of activities and get less time to sleep. The pleasant atmosphere of festivity at Shirdi from early morning, about 4 am to midnight about 12 pm keeps them fully occupied. Some people visiting Shirdi, even spend

the whole night meditating on Baba. You should definitely attend the four aratis (Kakad arati 4:30 am, Madhyan Arati 12:00, Dhoop Arati at sunset, Sheja Arati at 10:30 pm). Visit the Samadhi Mandir, Dwarkamayi Masjid, Chavadi, Gurusthan, Khandoba mandir, Hanuman mandir, Lendi Bagh, Nandadeep, Shani mandir, Ganpati mandir and meditation hall of the Sansthan. One should offer Chaddar, Coconut, Prashad etc. at the Samadhi Mandir, Dwarkamayi and at other places. One can also purchase books, magazines, photographs and audio-video materials on Baba as they are available in plenty for future use and distribution. They can even read 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' in the parayan kakshya.

Recently I received 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' book from a devotee of Sai Baba. Although I have visited Shirdi but, I have not read this book. Can you tell me the significance of Shri Sai Satcharitra?

The significance of 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' is:

- This is the first and foremost book based on the life-story of Shri Sai Baba, which was originally composed in Marathi verse form. The writing of the book started in the lifetime of Baba with His blessings. It is like a standard text for all Sai devotees.
- The Hindi translation of this book is in simple Hindi language, which can be understood even by a common man.
- The divine truth imparted by this book is even greater than the knowledge contained in the Vedas and Geeta, because all the characters and events in it are real and authentic as also recorded in details by many devotees.
- Because of the expression in simple Hindi it is easy for everyone to comprehend it. Had it been written in Sanskrit it would have been difficult for most of the people to understand it. Today there are very few people who can understand Sanskrit language properly and absorb the meaning and substance easily.
- The spiritual essence contained in all the religious scriptures like Vedas, Geeta, Yoga Vashisht is found in the life-story of Shri Sainath.
- The concepts on God and spirituality are explained in such a simple yet comprehensive manner in 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' that no additional book or commentary etc. is required to understand it. It has a natural flow so the readers start feeling as if they had been closely associated with the events described in it, in their past life.
- I may mention here that the glory of Shri Sai is spreading in the world, far and wide, in such an amazing way that detailed information about Shri Sai and 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' is available in various websites on the Internet for interested readers.
- The foremost duty of a Sai devotee is therefore to read 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' and absorb it by heart if possible. The more they read this book, the more it will bring them closer to Baba and all their doubts and apprehensions will be cleared.
- It also has been experienced that during a crisis, if any devotee is searching for an answer and randomly opens 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' praying Baba sincerely and with faith, his answer can be found in that open page.
- Many people have got their desired benefits after reading 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' for a week or so in a parayana form.

Can I tell my friends, who are also Sai devotees to go through 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' book? In what manner can this book be best utilized by the Sai devotees and others?

'Shri Sai Satcharitra' can be utilized by all Sai devotees in the following manner:

1. Get the book, 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' in whatever language one chooses to read as translated versions are available in the market in most of the Indian languages. Neatly wrap it up in a piece of new cloth, and place it near Baba's statue or Pooja place with due sanctity.
2. Whether at home or elsewhere, one should always try to read a few pages of the book every night before going to sleep. Every devotee should try to keep Baba as the last thought in mind before entering into sleep.
3. During crisis or in order to get rid of any serious problem(s) one should read devotionally for a week in the form of 'Parayana', as is mentioned in 'Shri Sai Satcharitra'. If possible, such Parayana should begin on a Thursday or on some other special day, such as Ramnavami, Dussehra, Gurupurnima, Janmashtmi, Mahashivratri, Navratri, etc. After its completion on the seventh day one should feed the

- poor and destitute either in the temple/ home or wherever possible.
4. One should read it sitting in some isolated corner in the temple or in front of Baba's statue or Photograph/painting. If other people are present, then it can be read out to them or with them as well. Group reading should always be encouraged.
 5. Wherever and whenever possible, it should be read continuously from sunrise to sunset in the temples on auspicious days. Devotees may be asked to read it by turn as is done in the case of chanting of the holy name i.e. Naamjap. Encourage children to read this book. Question answer competition from the "Shri Sai Satcharitra" can be organized in temples and other suitable places.
 6. 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' should be read to the devotees - sick, old aged and those nearing death as much as possible. They will surely get peace and blessings of Baba.
 7. 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' is a reasonably priced book and is easily available at Shirdi. Therefore, any devotee visiting Shirdi must bring a few copies with him to distribute among the deserving people free of cost.
 8. At times, of distress and agony if one will sincerely search for answers from 'Shri Sai Satcharitra' he will not only find the answers but also solace. Consequently his faith will grow in Baba. I pray Shri Sainath to reveal the divine knowledge and mysteries contained in this book to the devotees in the same manner in which he had inspired Hemandpant to write this book sitting in his heart. Shri Sai Satcharitra should be taken by all Sai devotees with as much seriousness as one takes Geeta or Bible.

Like my neighbor, who is a genuine devotee of Baba; I want to do one *week parayana* of Shri Sai Satcharitra. Kindly tell me how to go about it?

Before doing 'parayana' you must understand what the word parayana means. In short, parayana means promising to oneself to complete reading of a religious book or a part thereof or Pooja or recitation of a mantra within a certain period of time. In your case you want to do parayana of Shri Sai Satcharitra that means going through the entire book word by word and page by page and complete the reading by the seventh day from the day of beginning to read it. A parayana is not a quick reading for the sake of reading only or an overview while turning over the pages or reading a few portions as per one's taste and leaving the other portions. Parayana is not starting of reading anywhere in the middle of the book and ending anywhere. During the time of Baba, He prescribed completion of the reading of religious scriptures written by Sant Gyaneshwar, Tukaram etc. to devotees. Most of these pothis were read by the devotees on the orders of Baba at a place known as "Dixit Wada" named so, as it was built by Kaka Saheb Dixit.

If possible, reading of the 'Pothis' as parayana should begin on a Thursday or on any other special day, such as Ramnavami, Dussehra, Gurupurnima, Janmashtmi, Mahashivratri, Navratri, etc. The Shri Sai Satcharitra book is apportioned in seven parts for the purpose of parayana in seven days time. You will do well to follow the instructions regarding the parayana given in the Shri Sai Satcharitra. On completion of parayana you may like to feed the poor people or make a donation to an institution working for the poor people.

I find nowadays gold being donated liberally for Baba's Mukhut, or for his seat, with crores of rupees being spent for the same. During his lifetime, Baba never wanted any of these, and even when he was being led to the Chavadi during the evenings every alternate day, He would protest, saying, "Bhau. Why all this. I have nothing except a tin pot and a chillum, and am a poor fakir. Don't get these attachments to me." In such a condition, is it right for us to do what we are doing, even if the donor wants it done. Cannot this be used for helping needy students in their education, or making available better hospital facilities? Or even undertaking poor feeding? I am aware these activities are there, but what there is can be improved upon rather than do what we are doing, which Gurudev never liked.

When Baba was in Shirdi, all types of people the rich and the poor used to visit Him. They used to offer Him whatever they could offer like coconut, sweets, garland, flower, coins, silver and gold etc. Baba is 'Nirguna' which means He is beyond the attraction of any of these materials. He used to accept whatever the devotees gave. The rich ones used to give gold and silver and the poor used to give coconut or sweets and coins. His love was there for all and equally. Therefore, it does not matter what metal is used in relation to Baba.

Baba is said to be a Sadguru. What does it mean?

Sadgurus are spiritual personalities holding human form who are in pure divine state of self realisation. They possess all the attributes and powers of God in themselves. Vasudev Shri Krishna was God Incarnate, who had assumed a human body. What is Sai Baba in reality? Without the direct experience of Baba no one can infer anything merely through the aid of his imagination and emotions. When you will

have the direct experience of the true form of Baba you will know. But it is for sure that Baba was in a *paramukta* state (fully liberated soul) and was beyond the cycle of birth and death through which all mortals travel. He had divine powers to control elements of nature and lives of millions of people at His will. There is plenty of literature available on Him which establishes His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.

What is the role of a *Sadguru* like Baba in our life?

The *Sadguru* gives the ability of God realization to the deserving human beings. His first function is to evolve them, stage by stage and give the experience of attaining the state of '*Paramhansa*' to the very, very few deserving human beings. Without the grace of a *Sadguru* it is impossible to achieve this state. One in billions can achieve this '*Paramhansa*' or '*Sadguru*' state. '*Paramukti*' and '*turiyavastha*' can be attained with great difficulty.

The *Sadguru* removes all the impediments in the path of spiritual evolution of any human being who comes in contact with Him in any way. *Sadguru* breaks the wrong and illusory concepts (*maya*) of a devotee collected through a few lives of his existence. All human concepts are relative and illusory in nature. When ignorance is dispelled by the Guru the disciple's inner knowledge gets illuminated itself. The true knowledge is veiled by various concepts taught to us from childhood and experience acquired by us. Therefore, it is necessary to shed them before the mind is free to accept new and truthful concepts. For a man who thinks that he is the most intelligent person, the *Sadguru* wipes out his ego of intellect till he realises that his intellect was full of follies. The *Sadguru* works upon the human society intensely in a way so as to ensure that human beings transcend their human limitations and attain a limitless state of God, which is their original state.

Is it true that our *Sadguru* Shri Sai Baba used to take the sufferings of others?

The *Sadgurus* are without the bindings of any past Karma. In them, the seeds of all past *Karmas* both good and evil are burnt. They are in a state of *Karmik* 'vacuum'. As per the law of nature nothing can remain in a state of vacuum with any pressure from outside to fill up that vacuum. Therefore, the effects of *Karmas* of all living beings coming into their contact enter into that vacuum. This is the truth whether one knows it or not. This work is carried out by the *Sadgurus*, for all the souls coming into their contact in any manner what so ever. Whether the recipient of the *Sadguru* kindness wants it or not, is also not material because the 'law of compassion' of nature working through the *Sadguru* works spontaneously. For example, when a horse was beaten up at Shirdi, Baba's back bore the whip marks. This was a spontaneous reaction. Even the diseases and pains of the devotees are automatically transferred to the Guru. Whenever any devotee of Baba was in pain, Baba naturally used to experience it in His subtle body and some times in His physical body. The moment a devotee had a thought or *bhava* in his heart for Baba or called Him mentally, a vibration or a ray of subtle thought form instantly reaches the *Sadguru*. These secrets of nature are known by the Saints, yogis and evolved spiritual personalities. As Baba used to say "Be wherever you are and do whatever you like, I will know it even if I am thousands of miles away from you".

Because the past was imperfect and the future uncertain should we spoil the perfect present? While thinking of the imperfect past and uncertain future, we must not spoil the perfect present. In this world there has been on one whose past did not have imperfections or whose future is not uncertain.

Last Chapter: New Year Message 2004

Devotees speak volumes about their Masters. They speak on the Master's glory, personality, activities, miracles, their personal experiences, and of other devotees with the Masters and their group activities etc. Particularly, when it comes to Shri Sainath Maharaj, devotees speak more about dreams with relation to Him, their own experience which they call miracles and on their inner and emotive communications with Baba. In short, they experience Him as a Personal God, who can be a Sadguru or a deity. Some of them worship a number of Personal Gods at the same time and therefore, find it difficult to focus on one. In any case the One and the Ultimate God the Almighty has to be beyond all the Personal Gods. A Personal God, by whatever name, is called Saguna (with certain qualities and powers) Sakara (with a form which a human mind can ordinarily comprehend). A finer understanding of God is Nirguna (beyond such limited qualities and powers), Nirakara (beyond all form). Nirguna Nirakara - this means seeing or experiencing the essence of God or that Ultimate reality or Brahma in all its creations, i.e., in the devotee himself and in the entire manifested and non-manifested creation around him.

By this logic all statues or paintings, structures (like Samadhis), names, Aartis, Mantras, Charan Padukas, etc. are symbols of God and certainly not God, the Ultimate. Such symbols are generally worshipped and contemplated on as it is easy for the limited human mind to comprehend them. The question is whether the human mind should necessarily be limited, or a path should be chosen to keep it limited. If any path or any religion prescribes such an approach, it itself is limited. Hinduism prescribes certain methods by which a devotee can graduate from a Sakara (limited form) of worship to a Nirakara (form-less) worship. Religion means both ritualism and spiritualism. Unless one transcends ritualism, it is difficult to enter into the arena of spiritualism in the true sense of the term. Spiritualism means to follow the true diktats of the spirit within. Generally speaking, 'the spirit within' means the soul, which is a part of that God, the Ultimate who encompasses both the seen and unseen, the living and non-living aspects of nature and from the smallest particles to biggest stars. Spiritualism, therefore, has necessarily to expand the spirit of the soul from its limited body-bound awareness to a vast cosmic awareness. If sheer ritualisms like Puja, Archana, Yagyans do not uplift the spirit of the individual or expand his mental horizon, it certainly is not spiritualism.

Generally, it is due to the lack of understanding of what real spiritualism means that most of the devotees spend their whole life doing certain rituals without progressing. From multiple forms of God to a single form God to a formless state of God is the real prescription for spiritualism. Multiple form worships (i.e. of deities etc.) do not give focus on a particular form. Since these various symbolic representations of different aspects of nature go with various functions and powers, a person worshipping these forms gets scared to stop such worship even when he understands that he has to graduate to a formless state of worship. For example, Shri Ganapati is for the removal of obstructions, Shri Durga is for protection against enemies or Shri Laxmi is for prosperity or Shri Hanumana for courage, etc. No doubt that all the four deities are manifestations of the Ultimate One but then on whom does the devotee concentrate? Where then is the question of what is called "Ekagra Chitta" as a sine-qua-non for subtle experience of God. In such a situation one has to choose one of the two ways. Either to worship the Ultimate One (Nirguna Nirakara) going beyond the worship of these deities or to evolve through these limited forms to the Ultimate reality through Gyana Marga (Path of Knowledge). All spiritual practitioners in all ages, of whichever religion, have gone through this process of leaving the forms and contemplating on the formless state of God or in experiencing the formless state of God through the forms. The Perfect Masters or Sadgurus always taught the same method to their disciples at a certain stage of evolution. Those who followed them and tried to experience the impersonal aspects of God evolved faster than those that stuck on to the Personal aspect of God only. Thus Baba has clearly

stated in Shri Sai Satcharitra that the best way of worship is to experience Him as a Formless, Universal existence. If not, to worship Him with a form. Therefore, the devotee of Baba while worshipping Him with a form, should always try to experience Him as the formless. But then, the big question is how to be focused and be in a state of “Ekagra Chitta” when too many forms are contemplated on at the same time. Is not the form of the Sadguru enough!

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