

**Excerpts from a letter written on 18/2/1920 by Shri. Nilkanth Ramchandra Sahasrabuddhe citing his experiences and published in the 1<sup>st</sup> year's 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of Shri Sai Leela.**

Late one night in the beginning of December 1910, while reading the 'Panchadashi' at a fellow devotee's place, Shri Bhausahab Dixit and Shri Nanasaheb Chandorkar arrived unexpectedly around 11 p.m. After some preliminary conversation, Nanasaheb asked me, "When are you going to Shirdi?" "Someday," I answered. They had asked me many times before, and I had been putting it off. This time they insisted that I leave the very next day, a Sunday. I told them that I would collect my pension and go on Monday; but they were so insistent that Nanasaheb gave me Rs. 10/- for expenses and said, "Annasaheb Dabholkar will arrange to collect your pension." I was hesitant; but reluctantly agreed, wondering if I had to stay for more days in Shirdi, would Rs. 10/- suffice. But, Bhausahab arranged for an unlimited amount to be paid to me by giving me a letter to a treasurer in Shirdi.

Reluctantly I left for Shirdi the very next morning. My co-passenger in the Manmad Mail was a young man, who was M.A. and studying for LL.B. Conversing with him I asked him if he knew anything about Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi. "I know that mad Fakir," was all he replied. My belief that Shirdi was a place of idiots was confirmed.

I reached Shirdi around 10 a.m. and went to Rao Bahadur Sathe's Wada, where I was supposed to look for Shri Madhavrao Deshpande, the treasurer mentioned by Bhausahab. Just then, I met an old friend, Laxman Krishnaji alias Tatyasaheb Noolkar, seated there. Initially when I greeted him with a namaste, he did not recognize me; but when he did, he gave me a bear's hug and said, all my work was now his responsibility. He apprised Madhavrao of my circumstances.

After bathing, Tatyasaheb took me for the Aarati in the Masjid. As Tatyasaheb paid his obeisance by touching his head on Shri Sai Baba's Feet, I too followed suit as a matter of routine. Immediately Baba said, "Do Namaskar to Tatyaba, do Namaskar to Bapusaheb, there is no lowliness in bowing to anyone."

Tatyasaheb had introduced me to Bapusaheb Jog earlier. Shri Sai told me to serve Tatyaba in the noon Aarati repeatedly for the next three days. Though I believed that some great souls graced this earth, I was doubtful of Shri Sai Baba's authority. Hence, I jested with Tatyaba to give me some opportunity to serve him from the very first day. I continued to jest till one day Tatyaba told me to stop, as it hurt him immensely.

One day, I told Baba that I could not fathom the meaning of His words and that He should tell me clearly, what He meant. Unlike His other devotees, I could not deduce some hidden meaning. "Okay," He said. A few days later, during one of His discourses, He said, "Our experiences are not indirect. Those who feel so can go and those who don't should experience and then go." I realized that these words were for me and so told him that I would not go, until I had proof. Once again, He just said, "Okay".

Madhavrao would keep asking Baba about the date of my return; but Baba kept saying, "We have to work on him. Let him lie around the Masjid like a dog." Another time He said, "He is mine; I have to do his work; whom does he have besides me?" I was thus assured by Baba.

Tatyaba, who had been in good health all these days, suddenly became extremely ill and I resolved not to go till he got well. But, he died in the month of March. Sai's words "Serve Tatyaba" thus came true and one day Tatyaba tearfully said, "Nilkanthrao, Baba brought you here, so that I may not suffer. Don't you think that is what He meant, when He first uttered those words to you?" Concentrating his sight and telling both his sons to recite the 'Abhang', which means - "Please remain within my sight always", he left his body in the wee hours of the morning.

The previous day, before his condition worsened, Baba had said to Madhavrao, "Tatyaba listened to me and stayed here to achieve salvation." Not even is highly educated doctor son could have foreseen that Tatyaba's condition would turn for the worse so suddenly. "Such a death is really the fruit of great good deeds (Maha Punya)" was everybody's unanimous opinion as they recalled the Sloka from the Bhagvad Gita, which says that those who remember God when the end is near, achieve salvation. This was Baba's Prasad.

In the last 35-36 years, I do not remember a single week, in which I did not have dreams. But, while in Shirdi many months passed with dream-free sleep. There could be no other reason except Baba's blessings. My health was good if not better in other places; but I had always had dreams.

Once, during noon Aarati, while Baba was distributing Mithai brought by a gentleman as Prasad, I wondered if my turn would come. Just then Baba smilingly gestured, "Nothing for you"; and then gave me the Prasad!

Once, referring to the fictitious name of Dadabhat Deshpande instead of mine, Baba described my proud nature, my family and circumstances. Bhausahab Dixit asked, "Who is this Dadabhat Deshpande?" as he and I were the only two people, who completely understood whom Baba had implied. The others did not.

One day, as soon as I entered the Masjid, Baba said, "Come Ramayya!" and asked me to come up. After some days, when Baba was distributing 'Udi' and it was my turn to do Namaskar, He blessed me by keeping His hand on my head and said, "Say Rama's name," as I had firm belief in thinking "Shri Ramam Sarvam Karmani", that is Shri Ram did everything.

Once, while I was musing for three days on the thought that saints made you like them immediately, Madhavrao as usual asked Baba as to when I would be allowed to return. Baba surprisingly replied, "He wants me to get up and make him sit in my place, a job which needs patience." Nobody, but I understood the meaning of His words!

I met the same young man I had met on the train to Shirdi, when he visited two months later. By now I had no doubts whatsoever regarding Baba's authority and so just repeated the same question to him. Amazingly, he had changed his previous opinion about Baba within half an hour. He could not explain, why.

The first time I met Baba, He asked me for Rs. 12/- as 'Dakshina'. After some days, He asked for Rs. 8/-. Some days later, a friend Shri Ramchandra Vaman alias Bhausahab Modak sent Rs. 5/- by money order to Tatyasaheb, which he asked me to deliver to Baba. When I presented the amount to Baba, He said, "Keep it, you will need it for your expenses." But, since I had enough money, I requested Baba to keep it, when again He said, "you will need this for your expenses, I am telling you; so keep it with you!" Reluctantly I kept the amount. Later, when I got His permission to leave, I intended to go to Pune or Mumbai; but due to unforeseen circumstances I had to leave for Jalgaon. There was a shortfall of Rs. 5/- for the amount required to go there. I kept the note given by Baba in a sealed packet with a friend and borrowed Rs. 5/- from him. Later, I collected my sealed packet by returning the amount.

In later years, whenever I went to Shirdi, Baba asked me for exactly Rs. 15/- as 'Dakshina'. Once, when I did not have the requisite amount, He said, "Get them from Kaka (Bhausahab Dixit)!" I could not meet Kaka then; but when I went once again, he said, "I do not know your money, I will take out the Holy Book (Pothi) and you can see for yourself." But, I just returned to Baba without bothering to look in the Holy Book and telling Him, what had happened and asked Him to reveal the meaning of Rs. 15/-. But, He said, "let it remain for the time being. We will see later; there is no hurry." So, I just kept quiet and mulled over the subject. Then I remembered some lines from Shri Nath Bhagvat, which I had noted in my notebook earlier. I

found great satisfaction in them. The meaning of the two lines was that the five ways of Yoga and control of ten sense organs were the ways to self-realization. It struck me that the fifteen rupees, that Baba asked for every time must be these. As it is said in the Bhagvad Gita, those who believe will find knowledge; and my belief was not blind.

On my last visit to Shirdi, as soon as He saw me, Baba said, "It is good you came; I was thinking about you." Words, I had never heard before. But, it never occurred to me that this would be His last Darshan until He left His mortal coil. This time, when I decided to return, I kept asking through Bhausahab for permission to leave in the late afternoon, since we all believed the train left Kopargaon in the evening. But, every time, Baba would say, 'Let him leave tomorrow morning.'" Finally, one day, I managed to get permission to leave in the late afternoon and reached Kopargaon station only to find that the timings of the train had changed to morning. I had to stay on the station overnight!

Once, my friend Rao Bahadur Ganpatrao Anjangaonkar had gone to Shirdi with some friends. Since he had to meet the public prosecutor in Thane regarding a District Court appeal on Sunday, he asked for permission to leave on Saturday; but Baba kept saying, "He does not need to go so early." But, how can ordinary people like us believe it? Ultimately, after many appeals by Ganpatrao, Baba said, "Go, its your wish." When Ganpatrao reached Thane Court at the appointed time, he was informed that the appeal was postponed for another eight days.