

We shall now take up two cases of Baba's use of his mystic power to give bliss or productive power to his devotees namely, Narayan Ashram and Kusa Bhav. The life of this devotee Narayan Ashram from Satara district is interesting from the view point of Baba's method for spiritual improvement. In 1910, he was Mr. Toser in the Customs Department, and he continued to be in that department till 1926, when he retired on pension. In 1910, however, he had the advantage of listening to Das Ganu Maharaj's *kirtan*. As usual, whatever was his subject, the *Kirtankar* dilated upon Sai Baba's glories and qualities, and Sai Baba's picture was always at the meeting. Having derived a very good impression of Baba's saintliness, Mr. Toser, at the close of the *kirtan*, went and asked Das Ganu whether Sai Baba was living, and was told that he was at Shirdi. Within five days of this information, Mr. Toser hurried up to Shirdi and fell at the feet of Sai Baba. His attachment was so powerful that in six months he paid nine visits to Shirdi. He went in later years also, but the first visits were the most memorable. The impression derived from Das Ganu's *kirtan* was greatly strengthened and vivified by his frequent visits. Until 1918, Mr. Toser was entirely under Baba's influence. Afterwards, he passed into the charge of Vasudevananda Saraswathi of Gurudeswara on the banks of the Narmada near Nanded in Gujarat. Vasudevananda Saraswathi had in fact attained *Mahasamadhi* even in 1915. But he was in spiritual contact with Baba and Sri Narayan Ashram believed that Baba had left him in the charge of Vasudevananda Saraswathi from 1918. In 1931, Narayan Ashram went to Veda Rama Swamy of Kasi, Tarakamath, Durgaghat, and obtained *Sannyasa Diksha* from

him. Internal changes are hardly matters for publication, but Swami was kind enough just to offer a few hints so that readers may know more about Sai Baba. He begins by saying:

Sai Baba had different ways of dealing with different people. He was the centre and to each man he darted a separate radius. Most people who approached Baba cared for material things only and hardly any came to him for the highest spiritual benefit of *Atma Nishta*.

Hari Sitaram Dixit, Chandorkar and Dabolkar, were probably those who came close enough to him to receive high teaching. Yet it is a question if any of them got into *Atma Nishta* or anywhere near that. Baba had made Dixit read two of Eknath's works, as he was but a beginner in the religious field and had to chiefly develop his *bhakti*. Of course, immediate proximity was not needed for development under Baba. When I was at Shirdi, I would mostly go and sit away by myself in the Sathe *wada* and not be at Mosque. As even at the *wada*, one is under Baba's direct influence.

Baba's methods of teaching varied. He would simply touch with his palm the head of a devotee and that would have one kind of influence. Sometimes He pressed his hand heavily on the head of a devotee as though he was crushing out some of the lower impulses. On occasions, he would pat on the devotee's back or would pass his palm over his head. Each had its own effect affecting the sensation and feeling of the subject. Apart from touch, he effected an invisible operation on the devotee, whereby he could bring about a great change in him, and of that Mr. Toser had an experience. Baba conveyed to him graciously, without using any words or even touching him, the feeling that differences between various souls, or for that matter, all differences were unreal, and the one real thing was the Divinity which underlies all. This was in 1913 or 1918 perhaps. This truth was not uttered in words by Baba before Narayan Ashram. It seems to have been uttered in presence of R. B. Purandhare to somebody. Sri Narayan did not mention these experiences of his either to Mr. Dixit or to Dabolkar, though Mr. Dixit was writing experiences of devotees in his Sai Lila Masik, and Dabolkar was adding to his Sai Sat Charitra out of such material. Neither of them asked him for his experience. Baba spoke to Narayan Ashram only a few words, and they were direct and plain words. He did not talk to him in parables. When numerous people flocked to Baba, he would employ parables. So far as Mr. Toser could find out, Baba was trying to push people who came to him just a few steps above their level. As for further steps, further guides and further influences would come in later as matter of course. There was nothing

wrong in going from one saint to another saint, especially if the first Guru had attained Mahasamadhi.

Mr. Toser himself notices that other saints were talked of by Baba or they talked of him as brothers, and that they belonged to the same group so to speak. Thus, one Daji Maharaj, a saintly *Grihasta Brahmin*, who lived at Dangar Takidi, near Nanded in the Nizam's State, was referred to by Baba as his brother. That Maharaj passed away only in 1934. he was practising *Gayatri Puruscharanam*. in 1914, that Maharaj once said at Dangar Takidi, "Yesterday Sai Baba Came here in the form of Maruti and there was a great rumbling noise at his arrival". Mr. Toser and his father being Maruti worshippers, had got a temple built for Maruti in 1918 at Ville Parle, in Hanuman street and named the God, 'Sai Hanuman' remembering the fact that Sai was Hanuman. The very day this temple was consecrated at Ville Parle. Baba gave, it seems, Rs. 25 to a *Brahmin* called Vaze and made him perform Satyanarayana puja at Shirdi. People connect these two events as cause and effect. Sri Narayan Ashram says, "Sai Baba never spoke to me or so far as I remember to anyone else about the desirability of *Sannyasa*." But I myself had that feeling and became a *sannyasi*. The *Guru*, Sri Narayan Ashram says, "is a medium, a means to realize your ownself. He gives you the initial push and then you have to exert yourself, and go higher and higher to your height. Sai Baba thus was a medium responsible for a considerable and momentous advance in my spiritual history." Before we went to Baba, one Vinayak Bhat Shandale, whom he met in 1900, and who made him read *Yoga Vasishta* with zest, as a Guru or medium for him. So, Mr. Toser had a number of stepping stones, but the most interesting fact about him is that Sai Baba gave him the impression that he recognised no differences and that in fact no differences did exist and he filled him with prolonged bliss alike when Mr. Toser was with Baba at the Mosque and also when Mr. Toser went to his quarters, in, Sathe *wada*. "Even at the *wada*," he says, "one is under Baba's direct influence."

This grant of internal bliss and that for long stretches and for numerous days gives an indication of Baba's own internal bliss. It is for this purpose that Narayan Ashram's experience is valuable to us, that is, he shows us Baba is *Satchitananda*.

Sri Narayan Ashram's wife and mother are living in the same house with himself, but he is observing the rules of *Sannyas*, and devoting his attention to *Paramarth* and when Sai *Bahajan* groups gather, he comes and with his melodious voice sings Sai *Kirtans*, as he did at the All India Sai Devotees' Convention at Poona in 1952.

LIFE OF SAI BABA