

CHAPTER VII

The Goal of Life, the Goal of Knowledge : What is it ?

This is one of the problems discussed by intellectual workers on purely rationalistic lines. The author of Thirukkural says that it is only true knowledge which enables you to see the Reality behind the final outward forms of things, which means the truth which remains after the analysis of the entire Triad, namely, Self, World, and God; that is Brahman. We need not enter into questions of Dvaita or Advaita though there are people who say that to deny the separate existence of a human soul is to commit suicide, that on ultimate analysis two things remain, namely, the self undestroyed and the God whom the self reaches. There are also many other divergent views. The ultimate truth is complex and not capable of a simple statement, and thus the intellectuals go on contradicting and fighting. How does Baba deal with his devotees when they are faced with this problem?

Chandorkar and other graduates who had studied philosophy, Sankara's commentary on the Gita and other works, were confronted with these problems, and sometimes they discussed these at the wada at Shirdi. Baba did not profess to be a University professor offering solutions for problems to be published to the world, but dealt with each man individually as he approached him as Guru. Baba's solution was always on the lines of getting over theoretical difficulties by adherence to practical methods. By sticking to Baba with full faith, these problems could be solved.

Unless there was the proper approach, there was no solution. Baba indicated this view in the way in which he dealt with a sceptic like the Station Master of the Valambi railway station. That man had no belief in Baba. But having been persuaded by Das Ganu that Baba was a great soul with wonderful powers, he just prepared to accept Das Ganu's invitation so that he might go and see Baba for himself before he judged about him. When the Valambi Station Master and Das Ganu came to Shirdi, the all-knowing Baba was behaving peculiarly. He took up a number of pots, washed them one after another and placed them mouth downwards, which seemed to be quite the reverse of what

one should do, and what one does usually. The Valambi Station Master was impatient and asked Das Ganu, 'What is the meaning of all this procedure of Baba?' Das Ganu asked Baba, and Baba's reply was. 'This is the way in which people approach me. Only when the vessel is placed with mouth upwards, it can receive anything. But this is the way in which people approach me, with mouth downwards'. The hit was not quite intelligible to the Valambi Station Master. Receptivity meant some degree of faith and respect for the person approached, so that the person approached could pour into the approaching person some seeds of instruction, edification or other useful teaching. But the Valambi Station Master was quite innocent of any faith or regard for Baba, and could not derive any benefit from Baba. But Baba's point was quite clear.

To solve any problems connected with one's spiritual progress, one must be in dead earnest and approach some person whom he has got regard for or faith in and then patiently wait for the solution of his intellectual or other problems. Baba occasionally used even accidental chances to furnish further illumination on this matter. After 1910, Dixit and some other friends wanted to leave Shirdi, and asked permission of Baba to go. Baba said, 'you may go'. Then a devotee asked, 'Baba, where is one to go?' Baba at once gave a new turn to the talk, and made it educative. Baba's answer was, 'Up', that is 'Above this,' which obviously meant, 'Above the present wordly level in which one is grovelling with so many attachments and repulsions, sorrows and joys, and so much of confusion, without any calm perception of the underlying reality.' Then the question was asked, 'What is the way (to go up)?' Baba's answer was, 'There are plenty of ways proceeding from each place. For you here, there is a way leading from here. But the way is rugged, there are tigers and bears on the route.' Baba was talking in symbolic language. There were no bears at Shirdi nor tigers. But what he meant was, 'There were obstructions on the way to one's spiritual progress, which are as fierce and terrible as tigers and bears.'

It was just then that H.S. Dixit intervened, and said, "But, Baba, if one has a guide with him?" Baba answered. 'If one has a guide with him, then there is no difficulty. Then the tigers and bears move aside. If there is no guide, there is also

a deep yawning pit on the way, and there is the danger of falling into it'. During the discourse Anna Saheb Dabolkar was present, and he had been debating once, whether a Guru was necessary at all for one's spirirutal progress. Dabolkar felt that this was the instruction given to him, that a Guru was essential and useful to overcome obstacles that would otherwise hamper one's spiritual progress. The word 'Guide' here meant 'Guru'. Baba's reference to the deep yawning pit meant 'hell'. So Baba drove once again the much needed lesson that unless one got a Guru, one would make no progress at all, or in the language of Kabir, '*Guru Vina Kona Bhatave Vat*' That is, 'unless there is a Guru who is to show the way?'

Baba again and again pointed out that the solution to one's intelletual riddles, conundrums and mazes, lies in the practical step of summoning up faith and reverence and love to a Guru, who will himself thereafter solve all problems, remove all difficulties, and drive off all tigers and bears from the route, and save one from falling in the yawning pit. Baba's metaphors must have been reported or in any case had far reaching results. Upasani Baba who came to Shirdi in 1911, took Baba for his guide and got his help, especially, by silent instruction through visions. In one of the visions, Upasani found that as he was passing on, there was a deep pit, which afterwards he learnt was hell, and that when he approached it, hands came out of that hell and clutched at his feet, and tried to pull him down. He had sufficient grace to remember his Guru, and said, 'Let go, let go. If you don't let go, I will tell Sai Baba'. The remembrance of the Guru knocks off all vasanas and tendencies which lead to hell. Thus Upasani's feet were released from the clutch of the hands from hell. Upasani was then told that it was a mistake to go very near the brink of that pit. It was the Guru's grace that saved him from that pit.

This is allegorical or symbolical, but, in point of fact it was this same Guru Sai Baba's grace that saved Rao Bahadur H.V. Sathe from the brink of hell, the sin of immorality with a lady of doubtful reputation at the shala at Shirdi. On that occasion Sathe felt like a thief caught red-handed. He repented immediately his stupidity and he resolved never again to call at that woman's place or to commit

such a sin. So, Baba did really save this devotee of his from falling into the yawning pit, and thus showed that he was the Guru who would take a man on to the goal of his life. If a man commits such mortal sins as adultery or debauchery, he can never be fit to receive the higher truths which alone can take him on to the purity, detachment, and love of God that ensure salvation and liberation. Thus, what Baba spoke to Dabolkar was illustrated in the case of Sathe. But this was not the only instance in which Baba helped either Sathe or others. It is not merely *kama* that degrades the soul and takes it to hell. *Kroda*, anger, or hatred does the same. Baba in the case of Sathe did another piece of signal service. Sathe had purchased a plot of land at or near Shirdi, and wanted to go and see the place. He brought a cart and wanted his wife to get into it so that they might go and see the place. But Dada Kelkar, his father-in-law, who arranged the sale, was anxious that claims to that land should not be put forward by Sathe's Jnatis or next of kin, as they would claim it if they came to know that the land was purchased by him. So, he had told his daughter not to go with her husband to see the land. So, when Sathe wanted his wife to get into the cart, she would not come. Then at once Sathe got angry, and took the horse whip in his hand, and wanted to whip his wife, for her impertinent refusal. He had lifted his hand, when Sri Sai Baba, who was watching the whole scene, unseen, from his own Mosque, sent up Megha to hurry up and bring Sathe to Baba. So, as the whip was lifted, Megha said; 'Baba wants you', and down fell the whip. Sathe went to Baba. Baba there softened Sathe, and told him that there was no necessity for him to see the land, for the land was there all the time. Sathe found how Baba had saved him once again from an act of gross cruelty to his wife, which would also be one of the sins leading to hell. Conquest of temper is essential for one's religious progress.