



## MAHA SAMADHI DIWAS MESSAGE -2007

Often during my visit to the temples of Shirdi Sai Baba and also in the functions relating to Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi, I at times observe certain types of conduct of devotees of Baba as also the general visitors to the temples, which to my mind does not seem appropriate for the place or the occasion. Far to speak of higher spiritual senses and sensibilities, even the common sense of an ordinary man dictates that certain dress and behavioral codes are required to be adopted in a certain situation. Let us think of a few such situations i.e., a marriage party, an official conference, a funeral procession and a golf tournament. Can any one think of attending a marriage party in attire meant for playing golf or an official function in attire befitting a funeral procession? The dress codes prescribed for each of these occasions are different. Such dress specifications have evolved gradually over a long period of time in our civilization, because they are appropriate to the occasion. The idea is to keep the environment comfortable and non-intimidating for everyone and take into consideration the sensitivities of other human beings around. Since to be civilized means to make compromises to accommodate the human sensitivities and sentiments of others, it is essential that while in a place meant for group activities one must be dressed appropriately.

Now let us examine the way the devotees of some religions dress or conduct themselves while in a religious congregation. While in the church the Christians are fully and appropriately dressed. So also is the case of Sikhs, Muslims, and Buddhists etc. When inside the temple premises, devotees are supposed to concentrate all their faculties for a definite purpose and in a certain manner i.e., eyes (through which they concentrate and meditate on the image of the deity), mouth (through which they recite mantras or aartis and bhajans in praise of the deity), ears (through which they listen to mantras, aartis, discourses etc.), nose (through which they smell the sweet smell of flowers and incense offered to the deity) and skin (through which they touch the feet of the deity). One can imagine the serene atmosphere of a temple, which gives a feeling of expansion of the thought horizons and a sense of ecstatic upliftment of the soul. The most desirable situation in the temple is where one can listen to the prolonged euphoric notes of somber mantras, there is no hustle bustle, no high pitched and abusive ruckus mingled with diatribes with choicest invectives. It should also not give a picture of a depressed and melancholic place with tearful devotees with sulking faces. Such devotees sulking in the temple due to non-fulfillment of their purely material desires spoil the pleasant and peaceful

atmosphere of the temple. It needs to be a place of unison of minds and souls of devotees, while focusing on a deity, in chanting mantras and also singing the aarti together. When the purpose, the thoughts, the sentiments and the activities of the devotees are merged in a prayer in invoking the deity or the master, the love of the master or deity flows down to the devotees. This then is the method and the purpose of going to a temple or a religious congregation.

On the other hand, imagine for a moment, when such a pristine atmosphere is about to raise the souls of the devotees to a state of sublime ecstasy, impropriety in dressing and conduct such as talking or laughing loudly by a devotee may knowingly or unknowingly disturb the other devotees and vitiate the atmosphere. The focus is shifted from the deity, in our case, the holy image of Shri Sai Nath Maharaj of Shirdi towards such individuals. Then the whole purpose of visiting a temple is defeated.

Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi was never in favour of his devotees and workers wearing such clothes. Once poet Dasganu the famous ballad singer on Baba and other saints came to Baba on his way to a religious function, where he was supposed to give a rendition of songs on Baba. He was donned in dazzling and colourful attire, which Kirtankars and Kathavachaks usually wear in Maharashtra and elsewhere. Baba asked him not to decorate himself in such lavish style and attend the function in the simplest possible dress.

In the light of what has been explained above, it is desirable for the Shirdi Sai devotees to worship Baba in the temple or to participate in a congregation of Sai devotees in modest and simple attire. Baba's teachings show that lavish display of material aspects of life including dazzling dresses never impressed Baba. Shri Sai Baba the Fakir with the torn clothes perhaps finds it more comfortable to be with simply dressed but truthful people.

In this context I have also observed many devotees trying to wear clothes in the style and manner of the Master, wearing Kafnis (long flowing cloth covering the entire body) and patka (headgear). Some of them carry a satka additionally in their hand. The famous Gurugita asks the devotees not to copy the look or the behaviour of the Master. And this is the accepted rule of law, in the master-disciple relationship in the spiritual world. Even the famous Shri Vivekananda never imitated the attire of his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Although some Sai devotees tend to dress like Baba out of ignorance and simply as a feel good factor, there are other fraudulent ones who try to impress the gullible devotees in order to extract money and other advantages. It is therefore correct on the part of the temple trust to surely but politely impress upon the visitors to the temple to be properly attired and behave while in the temple premises.

On the day of Mahasamadhi of Baba, I invoke Shri Sai Baba's blessing for the devotees and readers in helping them to evolve in the spiritual path.