



## NEW YEAR MESSAGE 2007

Most of the devotees of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba are reported to have spiritual experiences, many of which are in the form of miracles, which not only enhances their faith in Baba but also spiritually uplifts them. If one goes through such experiences of devotees as depicted in Shri Sai Satcharitra and other literature on Sai Baba and compares them with the experiences of the present day devotees one would find a close similarity pertaining to many of them. Shri Khaparde, a prominent advocate of Amravati near Nagpur, who used to visit Shirdi frequently, and Kakasaheb Dixit who devoted the later part of his life in the services of Baba at Shirdi have recorded details of such experiences in their diaries.

When one hears about some of the common experiences reported by devotees, one's mind is transported to Baba's time at Shirdi. Imaginations become vivid, all worries cease to exist and time seems to stand still. Most devotees have reported that they used to get spiritually charged at the very sight of Baba; disturbing and uncontrollable thoughts of their mind used to vanish, a feeling of purity and love would engulf them.

Baba had a unique way of communicating with his devotees through language, look and touch besides the extremely strong and vibrant spiritual thought waves. He used to relate his thought waves even from afar. These powerful thought waves used to appear in the form of vivid dreams and ideas in the minds of his devotees to convey certain impulses, directions, forewarnings, future happenings and Baba's love. Those who followed these directions with an open mind benefited amply. While such directions were related by Baba in dreams, the results were seen taking shape suddenly or in due course of time in the actual realities of their worldly life. For example, one devotee saw Baba giving him yellow rice in his dream. When he got up he found yellow rice sprinkled all over his bed. Similarly another devotee found a coconut in his bed when awakened from sleep. Another direct experience as depicted in the Shri Sai Satcharitra was in 1917, when Hemadpant had a dream wherein he saw Baba in the form of a Sanyasi promising to come to Hemadpant's house for meals that day. At lunchtime, just as the family was about to begin eating,

two men, Ali Mahomed and Moulana Ismu Mujavar, appeared at the door and handed over a picture of Sai Baba to Hemadpant. Hemadpant was much moved at the thought that Baba had indeed blessed him by gracing his house for lunch.

There are numerous experiences about Baba appearing physically in different and distant places, while he was in his human embodiment at Shirdi. Devotees have reported that Baba, while sitting in front of the Dhuni in the morning at the mosque, would often refer to distant places and other worlds he had visited overnight despite being physically present at Shirdi. A famous incident is narrated in Shri Sai Satcharitra in 1910, when Baba, sitting near the Dhuni, pushing firewood into it, suddenly pushed his arm into the Dhuni thereby burning his hand. On enquiry by the devotees, he replied that at some distant place, the wife of a blacksmith was working at the furnace with her child tied to her waist. When her husband called her, she suddenly got up and the child slipped into the furnace. Baba thrust his hand into the Dhuni to save the child from the furnace. Another devotee, B.V Deo had sent a letter to Bapu Saheb Jog in Shirdi requesting Baba's presence in a group lunch he had arranged. Baba promised to attend the lunch with two other persons and did so by appearing in the form of a Sanyasi with two followers.

The greater miracles of Baba are instances of control of natural forces like fire, air and water (rain). The Satcharitra narrates of an evening when torrential rain accompanied by lightning and thunderstorm hit Shirdi flooding it entirely. This terrified all the disciples, animals and birds who took refuge at Dwarakamai Masjid and prayed for help. At their request Baba commanded the cloud in a thunderous voice to stop its fury and to allow his children to go their houses. Within minutes the rain stopped and the storm settled down. Another instance documented was on an afternoon when flames from Baba's dhuni rose up to the roof of Dwarakamai Masjid threatening to burn it. Baba took his satka (stick) and hit a pillar commanding the fire to calm down. At each stroke of the satka the flames gradually settled to normalcy. Baba gave numerous other types of experiences to his devotees but it would not be possible to codify or cite such examples due to lack of space. The more surprising and interesting fact to note is that even after departure from his bodily abode in 1918 and till the present day, devotees continue to report similar experiences. Truly speaking, even on the day Baba left his body and thereafter, devotees have been experiencing such unexplainable events. Such experiences of Baba are not limited to the gullible and uneducated rural youth as is commonly believed to be, but cuts across the "intelligentsia" of the society including lawyers, professors, officials, doctors, scientists and others. It is interesting to observe that even in this era of esoteric, atomic individualism, with population (the number of devotees) having increased manifold, where rationality and objectivity rules the minds of the people, such spiritual experiences continue to affect millions. Cutting across the man made differentiations of caste, races, religions, socio-economic diversities, all are making a beeline to Baba's Samadhi at Shirdi as Baba had once uttered in a state of spiritual ecstasy. Despite the modern day youth's affinity to western culture, Baba's message remains ever relevant and appealing. That is why

so many temples have come up across the globe. Sai Baba not only crossed the boundaries of humanism but gave shelter to all living creatures. The Sai Satcharitra narrates numerous instances of his compassion towards dogs, snakes, horses, tigers and even birds.

Today on an average 35,000 people visit Shirdi every day and on weekends the numbers go upto a lakh or more. There has been a phenomenal growth in the Sai faith as can be seen in the astronomical growth in the number of temples, literary publications, devotional music etc. The number of devotees dedicated to spread the name and message of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba is mind-boggling. Today the Sai movement is not limited only to Maharashtra as was during the time of Baba, but within decades of his departure has crossed the national boundaries to become a global movement. This new era of "Saiism" does not touch the religious aspect of the devotee's life only but affects and permeates all aspects of an individual's life (family, culture, social behavior etc). For the devotees Shri Sai Baba is not a part of their life but their life itself in all its aspects.

The spirit of Sai is more active and alive today than perhaps it ever was. This raises in our mind a fundamental question - "Who is Sai Baba?" Some address him as a Sadguru, some as a fakir, some as a Yogiraj, some as a saint and to most of the devotees he is "God the Almighty" Himself. He has been accepted as an incarnation (Saguna Sakara avatara), which means, God who in human form walked on earth. History has shown that the expansion of religions and/or faiths started by the incarnations expanded phenomenally after they left their human embodiment. This was the case with Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mohammed and Shri Krishna. The Sai movement is ever on the increase in a similar manner, which goes to reinforce the faith that Sai Baba was an incarnation of God (Paramatma). This goes to prove Baba's promise that after leaving his body he will be ever active from his tomb to protect and guide his devotees. As Baba had once promised, He continues to exist in a subtle form (Mahakarana sheath) as a unifying force, to spread and re-establish compassion, love, truth and tolerance amongst human beings and among all living entities on earth.

Let us welcome and embrace this age of Sai, who is the panacea for all the evils of the present world, torn asunder by forces of regionalism, racialism, economic and social differences, religious bigotry, fanaticism and lack of faith in "God". Let us look forward to a happier tomorrow; let the name of Shri Sai resonate in all corners of the globe.