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Managing Editor : **Jayant Murlidhar Sasane**

Editor : **Kishore Ramrao More**

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● **Office** : 'Sai Niketan', 804-B, Dr. Ambedkar Road, Dadar, Mumbai - 400 014. Tel. : 2416 6556 Fax : (022) 2415 0798 E-mail : saidadar@sai.org.in ● **Shirdi Office** : At Post Shirdi - 423 109, Tal. Rahata, Dist. Ahmednagar. Tel. : (02423) 258500 Fax : (02423) 258770 E-mail : 1. saibaba@shrisaibabasansthan.org 2. saibaba@sai.org.in ● **Annual Subscription : Rs. 50/-** ● **Subscription for Life : Rs. 1000/-** ● **Annual Subscription for Foreign Subscribers : Rs. 1000/-** (All the Subscriptions are Inclusive of Postage)
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Main

REMINISCENCE

It was clear to people who pondered on the happenings in Shirdi that Shri Sai Baba had not opened a miracle shop. Yet, certain things occurred in ways that were amazing and against the laws of nature.

This enhanced people's beliefs regarding the Divine and when they took Sai's *Darshan* with renewed vigour they would be elated.

My friend used to cite an example. Bhima was a head jobber in my friend's factory. He was originally from Indapur, but had with his diligence and sincerity steadily worked himself up to the present post.

Most mill workers are pious and love to sing *bhajans*. Some are smart and do work-outs to maintain their good health. But, others are influenced by liquor and end up in a life-long debt. Bhima kept himself away from liquor. He spent his spare time singing *bhajans* and exercising to preserve his good health.

Later he became engrossed in the recitation of *Shri Dnyaneshwari* and soon became known as a knowledgeable man amongst his kin.

My friend worked as a manager in the factory and used to visit Shirdi quite often. One day he had the following conversation with Bhima :-

"Babasaheb, may I ask you a personal question?" Bhima asked.

"You may."

"You often go to Shirdi for Sai's *Darshan*. Can you please explain to me, what is meant by the 'seventeenth' from the *Dnyaneshwari*?"

"I do not know. I have not read the *Dnyaneshwari*."

"Then, why do you go to Baba?"

"Because I feel good and my mind and body feel refreshed!"

"Is Sai Baba a Divine *Sadhu*?"

"Yes."

"Do not get angry, but He looks like a Muslim!"

"Bhima, outwardly He may look like a Muslim, but the place where He sits, though an ordinary *Masjid* from outside, has a *Dhuni* burning in front of Him day and night! At certain times Baba sends everyone out and sits in front of the *Dhuni*, even talks to it. Besides, He also gives ashes - *Udi* - from the *Dhuni* to His devotees with His own hands. You must have heard of the effects of the *Udi*?"

"Yes Babasaheb, we have heard of the miraculous *Udi*."

"There is also a grinding stone in the *Masjid*. All such activities, as cleaning and grinding of wheat take place there. Sacks of wheat and tobacco are also stacked. Baba smokes His '*Chillum*' there and also gives it to others to smoke. Will you call such a place a *Masjid*?"

"No."

"All sorts of *Brahmins* and high caste Hindus worship Baba like a Deity. They put sandalwood paste and '*akshat*' on His forehead, place flowers on His head, perform '*abhishek*' and take the '*Charan Jal*' as *Tirtha* and also perform the '*Aarati*'. Each one imagines Baba as per his choice - Shiv Shankar, Ram or Krishna - and does the *Aarati* with a huge bell ringing. People also perform the *Kakad Aarati*, *Noon Aarati* and the *bed time Aarati*. Now would you call this place a *Masjid*?"

"No, certainly not. Slowly I am getting to know a bit of Sai Baba! Can I go for His *Darshan*?"

"Surely, you must go. Take your family with you. Shri Kakasaheb Dixit has built a *wada*, where you can stay. You can eat at Shri Balubhau's eating place, which is just opposite. Do not worry at all."

"Babasaheb, I have made some mistakes in my youth. I have heard that Baba hurls abuses and even hits such people. What if this humiliation happens in front of my family?"

"Take note, there are very few people in this world who are chaste. Yet, if you are mentally penitent for your misdeeds and bow to Baba, He will surely treat you with love. Do not be arrogant and think you are a know-all. If you have a false *ego* and are proud of your knowledge, you will definitely be brought down to earth."

"Babasaheb, to tell you the truth, I was testing you. I wanted to know, what you had gained by going to Sai Baba and so, asked you the question from the *Dnyaneshwari*. But, I am truly stunned with your oration. Please forgive me," so saying, he tearfully asked for forgiveness and tried to touch my friend's feet, but he forbade him and said,

"Go ! You must definitely go to take Sai Baba's *Darshan*. Do not worry about the work here."

Bhima was sanctioned leave and he went to Shirdi with his family in the summer of 1914. Before going to the station, he once again went to Babasaheb and asked, "Will I be able to see some miracle ?"

"If that is your ardent wish, Shri Sai will surely fulfil it."

The very next day, he took Baba's *Darshan*, whereupon Baba asked, "Did that old man send you here ?"

Bhima was confused, but when Kakasaheb Dixit told him, who the 'old man' was, he was thoroughly surprised. He clung to Baba's feet and started crying like a little child. His arrogance of being knowledgeable about the *Dnyaneshwari* was nullified.

After the Noon *Aarati*, Baba ordered everyone to leave and said, "Stay put in your places. Do not move out. Come when I send for you."

What happened next is best narrated in Bhima's words :-

"After the *Aarati* we ate at Balabhau's eating house and returned to the *wada*. At that time, Bhausahab Dixit returned from the *Masjid* in a hurry. When asked about Baba's order, he said, 'When Baba says, we must obey. Do not rack your brains !'

Near 2 p.m., there was a huge windstorm and the atmosphere became bleak. We got scared and went into the room and shut all the doors and windows. The roaring winds banged against the doors and hammered against the walls. The thought of the house collapsing truly frightened us. We were dumbstruck.

Some sheets of tin flew off the roof in the front of the house and landed with a loud thud in front of the Maruti temple. My family was utterly scared ! We are natives of the hinterland, where we have always faced such storms. But, in all my fifty-five years, I had never experienced such a tornado.

This continued for a good fifteen minutes. There was darkness in the middle of the day. People and cattle that ran helter-skelter were injured. There was complete pandemonium all around. We became extremely petrified and thought, this was the end of the world - '*pralay*' - as described in the '*puranas*'. I had never been so scared in my life.

The tornado was followed by a huge hailstorm and torrential rain. Soon it became pretty cool and the summer heat abated.

Baba sent a messenger to beckon us. Kakasaheb Dixit was with us. Baba asked him, 'Kaka, you were scared ?' Kakasaheb replied, 'Why should I fear when you are near ?'

Overwhelmed, I realised that this conversation was directed at us, and I humbly fell at Baba's feet with tears in my eyes. Baba said, 'Do not be afraid. This is God's sport. We will see many such games.' It was then that I realised that my wish to witness a miracle was thus fulfilled.

After four days in Shirdi, we took Baba's leave and have just returned. Baba not only guessed our thoughts, He even warned us against the tornado, leaving us truly flabbergasted."

"Babasaheb, did Sai Baba intentionally create this situation ?"

My friend replied, "Nothing is impossible for Baba. Before the tornado, the intense heat of the summer must have caused the atmosphere to become thinner. The cold air above must have caused a pressure and along with the hail and rain must have been the reason for this storm. Sai Baba must have realised that a storm was coming and ordered you to stay inside. Baba's deep knowledge of meteorology must have made Him aware of the onset of a tornado and thus warned you to stay indoors. I also feel that Baba controlled the tornado and stymied the disaster which it would otherwise have wreaked."

"Tornados are a natural phenomenon. But, to control and destroy one is only possible for a complete Divine Being like Baba. Baba must have had an intuition about the oncoming storm. Since you wanted to see a miracle, Baba inspired you to visit Shirdi at that time. This seems to be the only plausible reason, for many have heard Baba say, 'I beckon my devotees from far and near !' Hence, this natural calamity took place to pacify your mind only."

"Why did He not call me to witness it ? It is because, I have some knowledge of meteorology and may not have found it to be a miracle and be satisfied as you are. This shows the depth of Sai's

knowledge, experience and teaching. He gives lessons as per the devotees' capacity of understanding, so that they understand the Divine force within themselves and gain confidence. Now, it is best that you search for Sai in the verses of the Dnyaneshwari.”

This conversation is given as it took place. There is no doubt that Sai was a Divine Being in mortal coil.

The miracles that took place at Sai's feet are unfathomable to ordinary people if they apply science. Devotees of Shri Shankar saw Him in Sai, while those of Shri Vishnu saw Him in Sai too. Those who believed in the formless - 'Nirakar' - and were frustrated, because they could not meditate on any form, were given *Darshan* of *Jagan Mata* that strengthened their belief, that meditating with Sai in mind was the best and easiest way.

These miracles cannot be explained with western science. A study of spirituality - 'Adhyatma' - and true yearning will give experiences that can give some understanding of the mystery of the miracles of the saints. Till then it is just a blabbering of meaningless words.

R. A. Tarkhad

- Shri Saileela, Chaitra, Shaka 1894, Year 9, Issue 1

Translated from Marathi into English by

[Jyoti Ranjan Raut](#)

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... Tamasoma Jyotirgamay

The word 'Guru' consists of two letters - 'Gu' and 'Ru'. 'Gu' means darkness and 'Ru' means the one who dispels darkness. Little wonder then, that Sai Baba and His miracle of lighting the clay lamps filled with water are inseparable and unforgettable.

What exactly had happened that its sheer memory fills us with inexplicable joy even after more than a hundred years have passed ?

Baba was very fond of lights. In the early days He would Himself go to beg for oil from the local grocers and shopkeepers. He would then burn oil lamps in the village temples and in the *Masjid*. So deep was His love for the worship of light that He celebrated Deepavali with illuminations in the *Masjid*. He used to bring the oil free of charge. Hence, after sometime the shopkeepers decided to put an end to this practice. Later, when Baba went to them to ask for oil they lied to Him by saying that they had no oil. Baba came back without a drop of oil and without a word. From the parapet of the *Masjid* He picked up a tin pot containing few drops of oil which was barely sufficient to light the evening lamp. He poured some water into that tin pot. The shopkeepers were watching all this with amusement, to see what Baba would do without oil. Baba then drank it all up and offering it thus to God (*Brahmn*), He took pure water. Baba then poured that water into the earthen lamps to wet the dry wicks. 'What is Baba doing ? Whoever has heard of water-filled lamps being lit,' thought the shopkeepers. But, lit they were ! Without a trace of oil the lamps burned brightly all night ! The ways of a saint or a *Guru* (*Sadguru*) are more profound than meet the eyes. Where there is light, how can darkness prevail ? In front of Baba, who was light personified, such a miracle is just a rule.

What is darkness ? Darkness symbolizes ignorance (*agyan*). Ignorance does not mean absence of knowledge. It means false knowledge. Metaphorically speaking, when we (mistakenly) think a piece of rope to be a snake, it (illusion) is due to our ignorance or *agyan*. We did perceive something, but it was a wrong perception. Some kind of knowledge was there; but it was false knowledge.

How to get rid of this false knowledge ? How to dispel this darkness of ignorance or *agyan* ? Let us see what we do to remove darkness in general. Do we fill it in buckets and throw it out ? Do we kill it ? Of course, all these sound ridiculous. We simply bring in a lamp or a torch or switch on the light. But, this act of ours is so mechanical, done in such a 'taken - for - granted' manner, that we miss a vital clue - that darkness is nothing but absence of light (Chapter 39, Shri Sai Sat Charita) ! It has no existence of its own. Chapter 39 of Shri Sai Sat Charita relates, how Baba asked Nansaheb Chandorker, if in that particular *shloka* from the Gita, the word '*gyanam*' could be replaced by some other word.

Though Nanasaheb admitted that it could be replaced by the word '*agyanam*', he failed to understand, how the *Guru* teaches '*agyanam*' (ignorance). Baba then explains to him that destroying ignorance is *gyan*. (Is there anything different or independent in *gyan* besides the destruction of ignorance ? The Gita 5:16)

The disciple is really embodiment of *gyan* or the divine light. But, it is overlaid by the effect of impressions of innumerable births in the shape of layers of ignorance. The *Guru* brings to light the various illusions that have their root in ignorance. Ignorance has no existence of its own. It is absence of knowledge.

Once we realize that it was only a piece of rope, no separate knowledge (effort) is required to make the snake disappear. So, the simple inference is we need to light the lamp of knowledge. Normally, knowledge for us means information. But, knowledge has two branches - one is information and the other is wisdom. All that we acquire from books, scriptures, discourses, doctrines etc. is borrowed knowledge or information. But, wisdom is the essence derived from one's own experience. It is the fragrance of our unique experience (because every individual in this creation is unique). How much ever we may lecture or caution a child from going near the fire, nothing seems to work. But, the day he burns his finger no further cautioning is needed - he has learnt from his own experience. That is (the light of) wisdom. Baba used to always show the path of direct experience (a gold embroidered shawl) and discouraged the habit of taking shortcuts by collecting information (rag pieces) from others (Shri Sai Sat Charita). Needless to say, wisdom or *vivek* has a glow of its own, that can illumine the depths of our inner self. Information is shallow. Baba sent Shri Dasganu to Kakasaheb Dikshit's house, so that the light of wisdom drawn from the essence of his own experience could illumine the dark spots of his doubts regarding Isha Upanishad (Chapter 20, Shri Sai Sat Charita).

At this point, many of us may contend that every day we go through so many experiences, then why isn't the lamp of knowledge (wisdom) lit within ? Why are we still groping in the dark ? Why do the dark shadows of anger, avarice, greed, hatred, clinging still haunt us ? Most of the time the essence of our experience gets lost in the forest of our preoccupied mind, in our haste to move on to the next action or the rigidity of our preconditioned mind refuses to let it in. Many must have seen an apple falling from a tree, but either in a taken - for - granted manner or were so lost in their thoughts, that the phenomenon went unnoticed. Newton not only observed it but also contemplated on it. Hence a secret was revealed and the law of gravitation was born ! Baba used to say, "Whatever you read, you must contemplate on it ! If you contemplate on my *leelas*, you will come to acquire the invaluable gems hidden in them."

The light of awareness, contemplation and meditateness is the secret behind all revelations. The light of total awareness (*dhyan*) and contemplation (*manan*) is like the rays of the sun, that shall make the lotus of our wisdom (knowledge) bloom petal after petal. Awareness is being meditative with our eyes open. While meditating with our eyes shut, the light energy that gets consumed in seeing things outside us is turned inwards. Then the light is being thrown back to its source, the soul (*atman*). One day then, the seeker, the seeking and the sought become one, the light of pure consciousness. *Brahmagyan* can only happen in the light of *Atmagyan*. The miracle of lights was meant to unveil the significance of light in all its dimensions - as a presence and source of joy (bliss), as a manifestation of wisdom, as a path of spiritual practice, as a glimpse of our true self and as the Abode of Divinity.

Baba would often tell His devotees, "Bring down this wall of 'you' and 'me', so that we can see (meet) each other !" A layer of oil between two layers of water does not allow them to merge. What is this 'layer of oil', that prevents the disciple from meeting or merging with his *Guru* (the All-pervading Consciousness) ? It is that small 'i' called ego. Only on shedding this small 'i' can we merge with the omnipresent 'I'. "Tattvamasi, Shvetketu - you are That, Shvetketu !" This false 'i' of ego is the only obstacle for the real 'I' to manifest itself in its full glory. Ego is a shadow, it represents darkness. Once Baba lit those lamps, the shopkeepers took no time to shed their illusion of 'I, the giver' and 'you, the taker'. Their ego admitted

defeat. They realized their sin of falsehood. Baba indicated that if one wants to get rid of ego, then one must light the lamp of truthfulness and humility (*vinamrata*). Humility that springs from the core of our being and not worn as a mask from the outside. The light of Self-realization dispels the darkness of ego.

Contemplating further on this miracle or *leela*, one feels that the lamps filled with water symbolise the disciple's *samarpan* or surrender (surrender is closest in meaning to *samarpan*; but it can happen out of force or helplessness. But, *samarpan* is devoid of compulsion or helplessness) at the lotus feet of the *Sadguru*. The seeker-devotee (disciple) places himself in the hands of his *Guru*, giving up all senses of pride and ego and says, "I possess no worth or virtue. Enlightenment cannot happen in this vessel without your touch of grace. I surrender at your lotus feet. Even to say 'I surrender' is an utterance of the ego. Let there be only the act of surrendering. I, the doer is no more." And then, the miracle of miracles takes place - enlightenment happens !

In one of his discourses, Osho talks about the innate nature of water and fire. Water has the natural tendency to move downwards. Fire always moves upwards. Even if we take water to the highest peak of a mountain, it will still flow down to the lowest parts of a ditch or a pit. And even if we tilt the burning end of a log downwards, the flames would still rise upwards. Thus, when water in the lamps was kindled into a flame, it was as if Baba was drawing our attention towards the innate nature of our mind. Like water, the human mind refuses to go on a upward journey. Unless it is turned towards the *Guru* (the fire), it is destined to have a 'downfall'. It will be interesting to note that only on coming in contact with fire, water acquires the quality of rising up in the form of water-vapours. Hence, this miracle of lights signifies, how important it is to keep the mind in the company of the holy and the pious, so that it does not fall into the dark abyss of ignorance. When the mind meditates on the *Guru*, it gradually begins an upward journey, the journey towards Divinity.

Baba, Compassion Incarnate that He was, lit those lamps to 'enlighten' us, the mortal beings, and inspire us to embark on the journey from darkness to light, from despair to joy (bliss), from descent to ascent, from ignorance to wisdom, from transience to transcendence, from ephemeral to eternal, from Form to Formless.

This Diwali let there be Light within and light with out. Tathastu !

"Teen lok nau khand mein

Guru se bada n koy

Karta karei n kar sakei,

Guru kare so hoy" - Kabir

(In all the three worlds, no one is greater than a *Guru*. Even the Creator cannot, and does not. Only if the *Guru* does, it gets done.)

Such is the glory of a *Guru* - the one who dispels darkness. Hail Shri Sainath ! On this festival of lights, we bow in front of Your effulgent Self.

- Sumona Bagchi

Translator : **Shri Sai Sat Charita**

Shri Saisagunopasana

Shri Sainath Stavanmanjari

**Chaar Adhyay (on Sai Baba by
Dasganu Maharaj) in Bengali**

A-41, Vishrantika Apartment,

Sector 3, Plot No. 5A,

Dwarka, New Delhi.

Mobile : (0)9899774321

E-mail : vpriya1960@yahoo.com

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Shirdi Sai Baba and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

O Sai ! Stretch Your leg to my lips, and let me suck Your toe !

&

Bestow on me the Mercy that is desired by Brahma and other Demigods !

O my Omniscient Sai ! You know full well that Shivanand Sen was an eternal associate of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. His three sons, named Chaitanya *das*, Ram *das* and Paramanand *das*, were all heroic devotees of Lord Chaitanya. (Shri Chaitanya-charitamrit : Adi Lila, 10.62, written by Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami in the 16th century, now published with elaborate translations and commentaries in English by A. C. Bhaktivedant Swami. The multi-volume Chaitanya-charitamrit is divided into three sections, Adi Lila, Madhya Lila, and Antya Lila, representing the beginning, middle, and concluding pastimes of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.) [Hereinafter referred to as Cc.]

Once, when Shivanand Sen introduced his sons to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Lord showed the boys great mercy. Chaitanya asked the youngest son's name, and Shivanand Sen informed the Lord that his name was Paramanand *das*. Once, before when Shivanand Sen had visited Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at his residence, the Lord had told him, "When this son is born, give him the name Puri *das* (after Paramanand Puri)."

The son was in the womb of his wife, and when he returned home the son was born. The child was named Paramanand *das* in accordance with the Lord's order.

When Shivanand Sen made his son offer respectful obeisances at the lotus feet of the Lord, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu jokingly called the boy Puri *das*, and asked him again and again to chant the name of Lord Krishna; but the boy would not utter the Holy Name. Although Shivanand Sen repeatedly asked his boy to speak Krishna's Holy Name, the boy would not utter it.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said, "I have induced the whole world to take to the Holy Name of Krishna. I have induced even the trees and immovable plants to chant the Holy Name. But, I could not induce this boy to chant the Holy Name of Krishna." (Cc., Antya Lila, 12.45-50)

Now Chaitanya Mahaprabhu put his toe in the child's mouth.

Another day, when Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said to the boy, "Recite, My dear Puri *das*," the boy composed the following verse and expressed it before everyone.

sravasoh kuvalayam aksnor anjanam

uraso mahen dra-mani-dama

vrndavana-ramaninam mandanam

akhilam harir jayati

(Cc., Antya Lila, 16.66-73)

"Shri Krishna is the blue lotus flower on the ears of the *gopis*, the ointment for their eyes, the blue sapphire on their breasts, and all their other ornaments. May that Shri Hari be always glorified ?" (Cc., Antya Lila, 16.74)

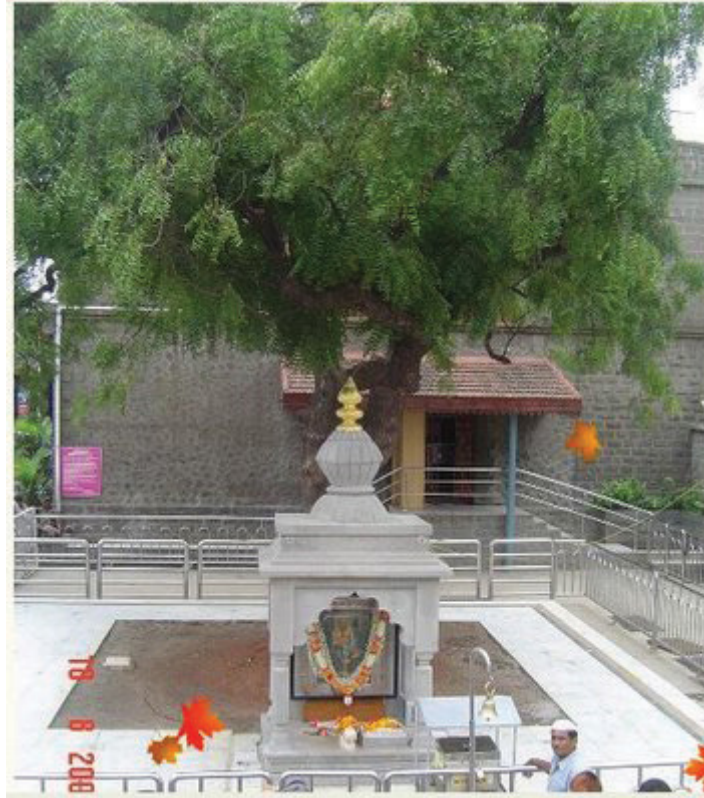
Although the boy was only seven years old and still had no education, he composed such a nice verse. Everyone was struck with wonder. (Cc., Antya Lila, 16.75)

The devotees became astonished upon hearing this beautiful Sanskrit verse glorifying Krishna from such a small boy. They concluded that by sucking Mahaprabhu's toe he had received some special potency; because miracles easily manifest by the mercy of the Lord. In response to the boy's recitation, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said, "My dear child ! Like a great *kavi* (poet) you have so nicely described the ornament on the *karna* (ear) of the *vraja gopis*. So, from today on you will be known as, Kavi-karnapur."

O Sai ! Stretch Your leg to my lips, and let me suck Your toe !

&

Bestow on me the Mercy that is desired by Brahma and other Demigods !



While Sai Baba at first manifested Himself as a young lad (*Bal Yogi* - a child ascetic) of sixteen years under a Neem tree in Shirdi in the second half of the 19th century, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born under a Neem tree in Mayapur in the late 15th Century.

Nobody knew the parents, birth or birthplace of Sai Baba. Many questions have been asked at several levels to seek the information; but to this date no entirely satisfactory answer has emerged. Practically one knows nothing on this subject. Namdev and Kabir were not born like ordinary mortals. Namdev was found on the bank of Bhimrathi river by Gonayee, and Kabir on the bank of Bhagirathi river by Tamal. Similar was the case with Sai Baba. He was first spotted seated in an *Aasan* under a Neem tree.

“Sada Nimbarvrikshasya mooladhiwasat,

Sudhasravinam tiktamapi-apriyam tam,

Tarum Kalpavrikshadhikam sadhayantam

Namameeshwaram Sadgurum Sai Natham”

(Shri Sai Sat Charita, Chapter 5, English Version by Shri Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji)

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a Vaishnav saint and social reformer in eastern India (specifically present-day Bangladesh and states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Manipur, Assam, and Orissa of India) in the 16th century, believed by followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism to be the full incarnation of Lord Krishna. Gaudiya Vaishnavism (also known as Chaitanya Vaishnavism and Hare Krishna) is a Vaishnava religious movement founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in India in the 16th century. ‘Gaudiya’ refers to the ‘Gau’ a region (present day Bengal/Bangladesh) with Vaishnavism meaning ‘the worship of Vishnu’. Its philosophical basis is primarily that of the Bhagvad Gita and the Bhagvat Puran, as well as other *Puranic* scriptures and *Upanishads* such as the Isha Upanishad, the Gopal Tapani Upanishad, and the Kali Santaran Upanishad.

Chaitanya was a notable proponent for the Vaishnav school of Bhakti Yoga (meaning loving devotion to Krishna/God) based on the philosophy of the Bhagvat Puran and the Bhagvad Gita. Specifically he worshipped the forms of Radha and Krishna and popularized the chanting of the **Hare Krishna ‘Mahamantra’** and has composed ‘*Shikshashtakam*’ in Sanskrit. His line of followers, known as Gaudiya Vaishnavas, revere him as an *Avatar* (incarnation) of Krishna in the mood of Radharani Chaitanya descended on this earth to a learned family of Shrihatta (now Shylhet, in Bangladesh). Prior to his birth, his grandmother had a vision that the Lord would be coming down to the earth as Sachi Devi’s son and that he would be born on the banks of river Ganges. To welcome the Lord as specified in the revelation, Jagannath Mishra and his family migrated to the town of Navadvipa in Nadia, West Bengal – a distance of some 600 kilometers crossing many mighty rivers - before the time of Chaitanya’s birth. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born in Mayapur, just after sunset on the evening of the 23rd *Phalgun* 1407 *Sakabda*, corresponding to February 18th, 1486 of the Christian Era.

Mayapur is 130 kms. north of Kolkata (Calcutta) across the Ganges River. Navadvipa was the capital of Bengal in the 11th and 12th century. Before Chaitanya’s birth this place was known as Nadia and after the Mahaprabhu’s birth, it became known as Navadvipa. Today it is known as Mayapur.

The moon was eclipsed at the time of his birth, and the people of Nadia were then engaged, as usual on such occasions, in bathing in the Bhagirathi (Ganges River) with loud cheers of ‘*haribol.*’ He was the tenth child of Jagannath Mishra and Sachi Devi. The first eight - all daughters - died soon after their birth. The ninth was Viswarup, a son. He abandoned the world at the age of sixteen when he was being forced to marry, and entered a monastery in South India.

The mother named her tenth child ‘Nimai’ after the Neem tree under which he was born. The neighbours called him ‘Gaur’ or ‘Gaur-Hari’ or ‘Gauranga’ (fair-complexioned) on account of his marvellous beauty. *Gaur* means fair and *Anga* means body; and they called him Gaur-Hari, because he was so fond of the name ‘Hari’ that nothing could soothe him, when he cried during childhood, save Hari’s name. The house of Jagannath Mishra, therefore, always echoed with blissful ‘Hari-nam’ *kirtan*.

The holy site of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s birth place known as *Yogapith* is marked by a temple of Gaudiya Mauth. It is said that the original Neem tree under which Chaitanya was born and the ancestral house are still present at the location.

Rarely is the name Nimai (Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) taken without that of Nitai (as Nityanand Prabhu is also called). Mahaprabhu cannot be approached or understood without the

mercy of Nityanand Prabhu, who is the cardinal *Guru* of all the universes and serves as an intermediary between Mahaprabhu and his devotees.

Nityanand Prabhu was born in Ekacakra, a small village in present West Bengal, around the year 1474. He was born on the auspicious thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Magha*. Nityanand Prabhu is considered an incarnation of Lord Balaram, Krishna's elder brother. He is statuesque, like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, with the whitish complexion of Lord Balaram. His garments resemble a cluster of blue lotus flowers and his effulgence is said to surpass the grandeur of a rising moon at sunset. He has a deep melodious voice, constantly singing the glories of Lord Krishna.

At the age of thirteen, Nityananda left home with a travelling mendicant (*sanyasi*) known as Lakshmipati Tirtha. Nityanand's father, Hadai Pandit, had offered the travelling *sanyasi* anything he wished as a gift. To this Lakshmipati Tirtha replied that he was in want of someone to join him in his travels to the holy places, and that Nityanand would be the most suitable pilgrim companion. As he had given his word, Hadai Pandit reluctantly agreed and Nityanand accompanied him on his pilgrimages. This marked Nityanand's long physical and spiritual journey through India, and brought him in contact with important *Gurus* of the Vaishnav tradition. Besides Lakshmipati Tirtha, who at some point of time initiated him, he was also associated with Tirtha's other disciples, such as Madhavendra Puri, Advaita Acharya and Ishvara Puri., the spiritual master of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Nitai travelled from holy place to holy place for the next twenty years, until he was thirty-two. He journeyed the length and breadth of India and sanctified the subcontinent by his presence, making holy places even holier. As Nitai continued to travel, feeling the ecstasy of these sacred areas, he more and more took on the character of a spiritually elevated person.

Soon Nityanand Prabhu reached Vrindavan. His ecstasy increased one million times. Visiting the many places associated with Krishna's pastimes, he shouted, danced, rolled around, laughed, and howled like a madman. With overflowing intensity, he cried out, "Where is Krishna ? Where is my very life and soul ?" As these words emanated from his anxious lips, he shivered uncontrollably and tears of love poured from his eyes like torrents of rain. At that moment, he was seized with a startling inner vision, which showed him that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had completed his childhood pastimes. Mahaprabhu was now overtly engaged in his mission. This realization made Nityanand chortle with unbridled affection for his spiritual brother, and so from Shringar-vata he proceeded to Navadvipa to join in Mahaprabhu's mission.

The year was 1506, and after arduous travel through dense forests in the trance-like state of frantic devotion, Nityanand Prabhu reached the land of Nadia, where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu resided. When the two Lords finally saw each other for the first time, they were immediately overtaken by waves of ecstasy. Their lives were now perfectly complete. Embracing, they cried rivers of ecstasy. Nitai was roughly thirty-two-years-old, and Mahaprabhu was twenty. A temple called Shri Gaura - Nityanand commemorates this meeting place in Nadia.

Chaitanya took Nityanand to his own house and introduced him to his mother : "Mother, here is another son of yours. He is my elder brother. The lost Vishwaroop has come back to you now. Take him as your Vishwaroop." Sachi said to Nitai : "Child, come. Take care of your younger brother. Protect him. He is careless and thoughtless. Now I need not be anxious about him. Sit down, my child. Take your food and be happy."

The confluence of Nimai and Nitai reminds of the euphoric or ecstatic meeting of the two lizard sisters at the Dwarkamai *Masjid* in Sai Baba's presence.

Once, while Baba was sitting in the *Masjid* with one of His devotees, a lizard began tick-ticking on one of the four walls of the Dwarkamai *Masjid*. The devotee asked Baba out of curiosity whether that tick-ticking of the lizard signified something. Baba said that the lizard was excited as her sister from Aurangabad was coming to see her. The devotee sat silent, not able to make anything out of Baba's words; but soon thereafter, a gentleman from Aurangabad came on a horse-back to have Baba's *Darshan*. As he was trying to open the bag of grams to feed the tired horse, a lizard jumped out of it; and in the presence of everyone there, climbed up the wall, rushed towards her sister. They kissed and embraced each other, whirled round and danced with love as both sisters met each other after a long time. (Shri Sai Sat Charita : Chapter 15, English Version by Shri Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji)

Soon after their initial meeting, Mahaprabhu took Nityanand to Shrivastav Thakur's home to offer *Vyas-pooja*, or *Guru-worship*, to Nitai, who is the original *Guru* for all mankind. However, Nityanand grabbed all of the worship articles from Mahaprabhu and worshiped him instead. Nitai kept repeating, "Nimai Pandit [Mahaprabhu] is my Lord and Master ! Nimai Pandit is my Lord and Master !" There was constant competition as to who would serve whom. Their love for each other is indescribable.

Mahaprabhu asked Nityanand Prabhu and Haridas Thakur to serve as His door-to-door preachers, spreading the message of love of God to every home in Navadvipa. Eternally known as bothers, Nimai and Nitai performed *sankirtan* in the streets of Nadia and thus uplifted the hearts of many of its residents and thus *Krishna-prem* or love of God was able to manifest in hearts that were once considered barren.

Chaitanya conducted his transcendental movement strictly according to the injunction of the *shastras* (scriptures) because that is the qualification of all bonafide *aacharyas* or authorities, and as such he has most reasonably and scientifically asked devotees to chant the Lord's Holy Names. In the scriptures the *Taraka Brahman* Names of the Lord in this age are composed of 32 letters and 16 words, symbolised as follows :

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna

Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Hare Ram Hare Ram

Ram Ram Hare Hare

The chanting of the above sixteen words composed of 32 Sanskrit letters combined together is called the '*Mahamantra*'. (*Maha* = great, *Man* = mind, *Tran* = deliverance) and, is the easiest and most sublime process for God realization.

If one, therefore, takes shelter of the '*Mahamantra*' with unconditional surrender, one can very easily attain to all successes both material and spiritual. This '*Mahamantra*' when murmured within the mouth it is called '*Japa*' and when chanted loudly so that others also may take advantage of hearing the same, it is called '*Shri Krishna Sankirtan*' or *sankirtan-yajna* (congregational chanting).

Within the Gaudiya tradition a *mantra* formed from the names of the five members of the **Pancha Tattva** is often spoken or sung as a means of devotional worship or *japa* (meditation). Often this *mantra* is sung or chanted prior to the **Hare Krishna mantra**. It is believed, by followers, to be the most merciful *mantra* available in this age of Kali :

jay shri-krishna-chaitanya, prabhu-nityanand,

Even those that evaded Mahaprabhu's grips were unable to escape the merciful grips of Lord Nityanand for he was relentless. Though the Supreme Lord of all, Lord Nityanand humbly begged each door he went to chant the name of Gauranga and thus fulfil life's goal.

Chaitanya went on a pilgrimage to Gaya with his companions. Here he met Ishvar Puri, a Sannyasin of the order of Madhvacharya, and took him as his *Guru*. A marvellous change of life now came over Chaitanya. He shouted, "Krishna, Krishna! Hari *Bol*, Hari *Bol* !" He laughed, wept, jumped, danced in ecstasy, fell on the ground and rolled in the dust. When he was in an ecstatic mood, he never ate or drank.

Chaitanya proceeded to witness the footprints of Lord Krishna in the Gadadhar temple at Gaya. He stood before the footprints motionless as a statue. He became absorbed in meditation. Tears gushed out of his eyes in continuous stream. His cloth was drenched with tears. He was about to fall down. Ishvar Puri rushed forward and supported him. Gradually Chaitanya came back to consciousness. He spoke to Ishvar Puri : "Oh venerable *Guru*, have mercy on me. Extricate me from the quagmire of *sansar*. Initiate me into the mysteries of Radha's love for Krishna. Let me develop pure *prem* (love) for Lord Krishna. Let me drink the nectar of Krishna-*prem-ras*."

After Chaitanya Mahaprabhu took on *sannyas* (the renounced order of life) to spread the *sankirtan* movement, he along with Nityanand Prabhu moved to Puri, the abode of Lord Jagannath on the east coast of India. Upon his arrival in Puri he went straight to the temple. Present in the temple was Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, the chief *pandit* in the court of the Maharaj of Orissa and the most revered scholar of *Vedant* in the school of Shankaracharya at that time. Sarvabhauma requested Chaitanya to hear his recitation of the *Vedant Sutras*. This Chaitanya listened to with great patience and silence for seven days. At the end of the recitation, Sarvabhauma said "Chaitanya ! I think you do not understand the *Vedant*, as you do not say anything after hearing my recitation and explanation." Chaitanya replied that he understood the *sutras* very well, but could not make out what Shankaracharya had meant. Sarvabhauma was astonished and asked Chaitanya to explain. Chaitanya in turn explained the *sutras* perfectly without regard to the pantheistic commentary of Shankaracharya. With keen understanding and a vision for the truth, harmony, and beauty of what Chaitanya had explained, Sarvabhauma was humbled. Sarvabhauma admitted that he had never heard such a clear manner of commentary on the *Vedant Sutras*. He made known that the commentaries of Shankaracharya were not the natural and profound commentaries that Chaitanya had given. Another thing that was clear to Sarvabhauma was that to not submit himself to be a follower and devotee of Chaitanya would be the greatest mistake. He did just that and became one of the greatest devotees of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's dance in front of Lord Jagannatha's chariot was so ecstatic that it astonished all who saw it. No one had ever enjoyed *Ratha-yatra* like Mahaprabhu did. His dancing before the chariot astonished not only the entire universe, but Lord Jagannatha Himself. Not only human-beings, but the moveable and immoveable living beings throughout the universe – the trees, plants, animals, birds and insects – were all astonished. Mahaprabhu blessed the entire world by bestowing *nam-sankirtan*, the greatest gift from Goloka. He demonstrated the highest service to Krishna imbued to the fullest extent with Radharani's absorption in deep feelings of separation from Him. Mahaprabhu's dance at *Ratha-yatra* was in this mood. Mahaprabhu was so absorbed that he could not utter Jagannatha's name. He could only chant, "Jaja gaga ! Jaja gaga !" Tears fell from his eyes, and his heart melted.

Whilst Nityanand Prabhu - Chaitanya's most reliable *sankirtan* commander- stayed at Jagannath Puri, Mahaprabhu proceeded on a tour of South India that was to last for two years.

During this period, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited the Tirupati hills, Kancheepuram and the famous Shrirangam on the banks of the Kaveri. From Shrirangam he proceeded to Madurai, Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari. He visited also Udipi, Pandharpur and Nasik.

When Mahaprabhu returned to Puri, he was pleased to see that Nitai had developed the movement in Puri with the help of the local devotees. However, the movement in Navadvipa had been sorely neglected, and so in 1511, Mahaprabhu requested Nityanand to return to Bengal; and true to the expectations of Chaitanya, Nityanand Prabhu was successful in spreading Krishna consciousness throughout Bengal.

Now Chaitanya Mahaprabhu decided to go to Vrindavan taking Balabhadra Bhattacharya with him. The year was 1515.

When Mahaprabhu passed through the solitary forest chanting the holy name of Krishna, the tigers and elephants, seeing him, gave way. When Chaitanya passed through the jungle in great ecstasy, packs of tigers, elephants, rhinoceros and boars came, and Mahaprabhu passed right through them. Balabhadra Bhattacharya was very much afraid to see them, but by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's influence, all the animals stood to one side.

One day, a tiger was lying on the path, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, walking along the path in ecstatic love, touched the tiger with his feet. Mahaprabhu said, "Chant the holy name of Krishna !" The tiger immediately got up and began to dance and chant 'Krishna', 'Krishna'. Another day, while Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was bathing in a river and murmuring the Gayatri *mantra*, a herd of maddened elephants came there to drink water and stood before him. Mahaprabhu immediately splashed some water on the elephants and asked them to chant the name of Lord Krishna. The elephants whose bodies were touched by the water splashed by Mahaprabhu began to dance and sing in ecstasy, 'Krishna', 'Krishna'. Some of the elephants fell to the ground, and others trumpeted in rapture. Seeing this, Balabhadra Bhattacharya was completely astonished. Sometimes Chaitanya Mahaprabhu chanted very loudly while passing through the jungle. Hearing his sweet voice, all the does came near him. Hearing the Mahaprabhu's great vibration, all the does followed him left and right. While reciting a verse with great curiosity, Mahaprabhu patted them :

dhanyah sma mudha-gatayo pi harinya eta

ya nanda-nandanam upatta-vicitra-vesam

akarnya venu-ranitam saha-krsna-sarah

pujam dadhur viracitam pranayavalokaih

(Shrimad-Bhagvatam, 10.21.11)

"Blessed are all these foolish deer because they have approached Maharaj Nanda's son, who is gorgeously dressed and is playing on his flute. Indeed, both the does and the bucks worship the Lord with looks of love and affection."

While Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was passing through the jungle, five or seven tigers came. Joining the deer, the tigers began to follow him. Seeing the tigers and deer following him, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu immediately remembered the land of Vrindavan. He then began to recite a verse describing the transcendental quality of Vrindavana.

yatra naisarga-durvairah

sahasana nr-mrgadayah

mitranivajitavasa-

druta-rut-tarsanadikam

(Cc., Madhya Lila, 17)

“Vrindavan is the transcendental abode of the Lord. There is no hunger, anger or thirst there. Though naturally inimical, human beings and fierce animals live together there in transcendental friendship.”

On Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s asking, “Chant ‘Krishna !’ Chant ‘Krishna !’”, the tigers and does began to chant ‘Krishna !’ and dance. When all the tigers and does danced and jumped, Balabhadra Bhattacharya saw them and was struck with wonder. Indeed, the tigers and does began to embrace one another, and touching mouths, they began to kiss. When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu saw all this fun, he began to smile. Finally, he left the animals and continued on his way. Various birds, including the peacock, saw Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and began to follow him, chanting and dancing. They were all maddened by the holy name of Krishna. When the Lord loudly chanted “Hari *bol* !” the trees and creepers became jubilant to hear him. Thus all living entities in the forest of Jharkhand - some moving and some standing still - became maddened by hearing the holy name of Lord Krishna vibrated by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Sai Baba too “did not grumble when dogs and cats touched the dishes with their mouths.” (Shri Sai Sat Charita, Chapter 7, English Version by Shri Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji)

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu requested a select few among his followers, who later came to be known as the six Gosvamis of Vrindavan, to systematically present his theology of *bhakti* (devotion) in their writings. This theology emphasized the devotees’ relationship to the Divine Couple, Radha and Krishna, and looked to Chaitanya as the embodiment of both Radha and Krishna. The six were Rupa Goswami, Sanatan Goswami, Gopal Bhatta Goswami, Raghunath Bhatta Goswami, Raghunath *das* Goswami and Jiva Goswami.

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this article, Shivanand Sen was a very intimate associate of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Just before the rainy season (*Chaturmasya*) he would lead the associates of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu from Bengal to Puri, where they would go each year, to see the Lord. All of the expenses of this journey were born by Shivanand Sen. (Cc., Adi Lila, 10.54)

The devotees would depart for Puri one month before the *Ratha-yatra* festival and travelling by foot, they would arrive one month later. Though Chaitanya had ordered Nityanand Prabhu to preach in Bengal, he would also accompany the devotees to see Mahaprabhu. Also present were Shri Acharyaratna, Pundarik Vidyanidhi, Shrivasa Pandit, along with his brothers and their wives, Vasudev, Govind, Madhav Ghosh, Murari Gupta Ohja, Shri Raghav Pandit, Shri Khandavasi Narahari, Shri Gunaraj Khan, etc. Shivanand Sen would bring his wife, his three sons, Chaitanya *das*, Ram *das* and Paramanand *das*, and his two nephews, Shri Vallabha Sen and Shri Kanta Sen too to Puri, with this team of pilgrims. The *thakuranis* (ladies) would prepare foodstuffs, which were the favourite preparations of Mahaprabhu. Shivanand would make the arrangements for everyone’s meal, as well as the paying of the tolls at the ferry gates. Wherever they would halt for the night, they would hold a festival of dancing and chanting of the holy names.

Shivanand Sen knew all the paths through Orissa. One day, he remained behind at the *ghat* to settle their account with the toll collector, while the rest of the party went ahead. After walking some distance they sat down to rest underneath a tree. Shivanand, however, was held up and not able to come right away and thus there was no arrangements for their meals. Having

walked quite some distance that day, everyone was very hungry. Nityanand Prabhu began to abuse his name and was ready to curse him.

“Where is that Shiva ? Everyone is dying of hunger, but still he hasn’t come. No one is arranging any *prasadam* (meal). Let his sons die as well !”

Just then Shivanand arrived. His wife went to him with tears in her eyes, “You didn’t manage any *prasadam* and now Gosai is very angry. He has cursed your sons to die.”

Shivanand replied, “Now don’t you become crazy. No need to cry needlessly. Just try to get a hold of yourself.”

Consoling his wife he came to where Nityanand Prabhu was and offered his *dandavats* (obeisance). Nityanand Prabhu, still in angry mood, gave him a good kick. Greatly mortified at this, Shri Kanta Sen, Shivanand’s nephew hastened to Puri in advance, where he met Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and bowed down before him with his overcoat on. When prostrated with the overcoat, he was objected to by Govind. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu told Govind to let Shri Kanta Sen have his own way, as he had come with a wounded heart.

But, Shivanand felt great pleasure to get this mercy from Nityanand and immediately went to the house of one Gaudiya Vaishnav to arrange *prasadam* and a place to stay for the devotees. Then he went to bring Nityanand Prabhu there.

Nityanand Prabhu accepted *prasadam* with the devotees after which Shivanand came, and offering his obeisance at Nityanand Prabhu’s lotus feet he prayed to him, “Today in accepting me as your servant, you punished me fittingly, according to my offense. But, such is your tenderness that under the pretense of punishment you actually awarded me such great mercy. Who within the three worlds can understand your character ? The dust of your lotus feet is very difficult to obtain even for Lord Brahma, but even such a low, vile wretch as me received the touch of these lotus feet on his body. Today my birth and the heritage of my forefathers have become successful, and today I have received devotion to Lord Krishna, as well as the ordinary objects of attainment for human beings - religion, economic development and sense gratification.”

Hearing these words of Shivanand Sen, Nityanand Prabhu became very happy and he rose up and very lovingly embraced him. (Cc., Antya Lila, 12.31)

I am glad it occurred to me that the interpolation of the story of a stray dog into the main narrative would turn the storyline to most delightful account.

During the course of this journey to Nilacala (Jagannath Puri), a dog joined their party and Shivanand took personal care of him. . On the way, while crossing a river, a sailor (resident of Orissa) refused to allow the dog on his boat. Shivanand Sen paid 800 *kaudi* (*kaudi* was local currency at that time) to the sailor and arranged for the dog to ride the boat across the river along with them. One night Shivanand was detained for sometime and arrived at the camp late in the evening, and inquired from his servant whether he had served food to the dog. The servant stated that he forgot to do so. Shivanand was sad to hear that. He sent 10 people in search of that dog; and, despite a thorough search, the dog was nowhere to be found. Shivanand did not take dinner that night and slept.

When their party arrived in Nilacala, they found the dog in the presence of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The dog was eating some coconut *prasadam* given by Mahaprabhu and was chanting, ‘*Krishna, Krishna.*’ When Shivanand saw that dog, he offered his obeisance to him and asked for forgiveness for his offence of neglecting him. Next day the dog attained *mukti*

(liberation) at the holy feet of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, chanting ‘*Krishna*’, ‘*Krishna*’ in the presence of all.

This reminds us of a similar incident which happened in the year 1918 at Shirdi :

A country-cart came rolling into the village of Shirdi and stopped in front of the Dwarkamai *Masjid* nearly a week before Sai Baba took *Mahasamadhi*. A tiger was on the cart, fastened with iron chains. Its keepers (the three *darveshis*) were taking that tiger from place to place to make money for their subsistence by exhibiting it. But, now the tiger appeared to be suffering from severe symptoms of some acute illness and incurable disease. They had already tried all sorts of medical treatments, but to no avail. The malady was growing worse with every passing day. Finally, the *darveshis* heard of Sai Baba’s fame and came to Him with the animal. After seeking Baba’s permission, they brought the tiger before Him. As the tiger approached the steps of the Dwarkamai *Masjid*, it was taken aback on account of the luster of Sai Baba and hung its head down. When the tiger got on the step and looked at Sai Baba with affection, it moved the tuft of its tail and dashed it thrice against the ground and, finally fell down dead. On seeing it lifeless the *darveshis* were first much dejected and full of sorrow, but on mature thought they came to their senses. They soon realized that as the animal was diseased and nearing its end, and - in the circumstances - it was very meritorious on its part that the tiger should meet *moksha* (liberation) at the Lotus Feet of Sai Baba. (Shri Sai Sat Charita, Chapter 31, English Version by Shri Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji)

Before Baba came to live in Dwarkamai *Masjid*, He “resided for a long time in *takia*; and here, with *ghungrus* (small bells) on His legs, Sai danced rhythmically” and sang with tender love, ‘***Sabka Malik Ek***’. (Shri Sai Sat Charita, Chapter 5, English Version by Shri Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji)

Sai Baba is the essence and embodiment of spiritual enlightenment and religious harmony. He awakened people to the eternal truth - ‘***Sabka Malik Ek***’ (One God governs all). ‘***Sabka Malik Ek***’ is the *ashtakshar mantra* or the 8 letter mantra. It is no ordinary *mantra*. It has divine capabilities. This *mantra* has eight letters. ‘*asht*’ means eight and ‘*akshar*’ means letter, thereby it is called *ashtakshar mantra*. These eight letters are not inanimate like ordinary letters, but, they are bestower of wondrous divine powers. Each letter has profound depths of significance. Once Lord Sai, accepts one as His *das* (devotee), one doesn’t have to fear anything or anybody :

“Why fear when I am there !”

In fact, the *ashtakshar mantra* or the 8 letter *mantra*, which is first given to the devotee who comes under Lord Krishna, is a celestial *mantra*. It has heavenly potential. The *mantra* says, ‘***Shri Krishnah Sharanam Mamah***’, literally meaning : “**Shri Krishna is my shelter.**”

On superficial view, these words may sound like ordinary ones, but they are definitely not so. They contain the meaning of the *vedas* in them. The one who is bestowed with this *mantra* by the grace of God and the *Guru* should be considered extremely fortunate. The *vedas* are treated as the highest authority among the ancient Indian scriptures. The four *Vedas* along with the Bhagvad Gita, the *Bhramasutras*, and the Shrimad Bhagwatam, collectively indicate that “Shri Krishna alone is the ultimate reality or the innermost soul of the whole universe”, he is ‘*Purna-Purshottam*’, ‘*Paramatma*’, and ‘*Para-Brahma*’. Through this *mantra*, one comes under the protection of Lord Krishna, the Ultimate Reality. Once Lord Krishna, accepts one as His *das*, one doesn’t have to fear anything or anybody.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu disappeared in his forty-eighth year at the time of *sankirtan* in the temple of Tota-gopinatha at Puri, while Sai Baba took *Mahasamadhi* in the year 1918 at Shirdi.

- Dr. Subodh Agarwal

'Shirdi Sai Dham',
29, Tilak Road, Dehra Dun - 248 001,
Uttarakhand.
Mobile : **(0)9897202810**
Tel. & Fax : **0135-2622810**
E-mail : **subodhagarwal27@gmail.com**

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