



MAHA SAMADHI MESSAGE 2017

Shri Shirdi Sai Baba entered Maha Samadhi on 15th October 1918 (Tuesday) according to the English calendar. It was the day of Dussehra or Vijaydashami as per the Hindu calendar. Dussehra falls on the 30th September (Saturday) in 2017 and on 19th October (Friday) in the year 2018. It is observed that most of the temples and organizations, dedicated to Shri Sai Baba and Sai Movement are planning to celebrate the centenary year between the 30th of Sept 2017 (the day of Dussehra) and the 19th Oct 2018 (the day of Dussehra). Reportedly, they are planning to undertake a number of activities during the centenary year.

The exponential growth in the number of devotees, trusts/associations/societies, groups and temples of Shri Sai Baba, in India and abroad, need to be understood in the correct perspective. Today's Global Sai movement is a spontaneous growth without the management or effective support of a single global institution as is the case with many other religious sects. Most of the devotees who have created the temples and trusts in the name of Sai Baba, have done so sheerly out of their love for and faith in the holiness, kindness and magnificence of Shirdi Sai Baba. Most of these devotees are householders without any formal spiritual training. There exists no such dedicated cadre for the propagation of the Sai faith or Sai movement, to the best of my knowledge. A large number of individually inspired activities are being performed for the cause of Baba. As records indicate, before accepting Baba as their Guru, they have been worshipping their family traditional deities. Even after accepting Sai Baba as their Guru, they continued to worship the tutelary deities. These devotees don't aspire to achieve any spiritual status or recognition. They are happy to work for the cause of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba whom most of them, had never met. When asked, they reply that they are

internally and emotively connected with Baba and, therefore, love to perform activities in His cause. It has been observed that most of the Sai devotees have high emotive relationship with Shri Sai. Once into the fold of Baba, they undertake many types of inspirational activities like feeding the poor, distributing clothes, medicines and money to the needy and many more. The list is too long to be incorporated in this article. In the process of rendering philanthropic service, the character and personality of many of them evolves gradually.

Hence, the word 'Sai' can be defined as **“Spiritual And Inspirational”** in its quintessence. This used to be felt by the followers who were with Him at Shirdi as much as it is being felt by the present day devotees as well. Today also, a large number of devotees report such emotive connect, at times, bordering on miracles. That is so because, the illuminated horizons of spiritual possibilities that Shirdi Sai Baba showed His devotees filled them with a sense of hopefulness of converting a stressful life to a hopeful existence. Most of these worldly people were afflicted with the mundane problems of the sordid realities of life. Baba performed the unique task of uplifting these devotees to various planes of spiritual experience and awakening. Through varied methods, He tried to inculcate in them the equipoise of mind and ethical behaviour. He performed the act of balancing the counter elements in the devotees and yet evolving them. The indelible message scribed by Him for the posterity, inspires millions towards a pious and happy living. They are gearing up and getting ready to celebrate the centenary year.

The components of the centenary celebration year will, undoubtedly, be numerous events spread over the year. A festive and mirthful ambiance is likely to pervade the temples during these days. On special days, devotees from near and far, shall conglomerate and rejoice in each other's company, remembering fondly the greatness and kindness of their Guru. Philanthropic acts will make the atmosphere in the temples, pious and joyous. However, amidst such fanfare, we have to think of a more serious agenda on the celebration of the centenary year and the futuristic Global Movement of Shri Sai.

This issue has been deliberated with a cross-section of devotees of Shirdi Sai Baba across the Globe. A few ideas about what the future program should be, are listed below:

- Establish an online global communication network among the Shirdi Sai Baba temples and trusts for quick and effective communication. First, it will establish a healthy camaraderie among the devotees and trusts. Secondly, various religious and philanthropic practices/activities adopted in one temple/trust can be imbibed by others. Exchanging of news and views will strengthen their knowledge base.

Further, prior knowledge of the events/programmes of one temple will help the devotees of the other temples/trusts to programme their participation conveniently.

- Besides conducting the ritualistic activities on a daily basis and on special occasions, the temples/trusts should devote a major portion of their time, energy and resources to undertake humanitarian activities. The philanthropic work should be done in a structured manner by the creation of new institutions or updation of the existing institutions in collaboration with the other organisations, wherever possible. Some temples/trusts can also form a consortium and pool their resources to achieve greater targets rather than aiming for smaller targets in a stand-alone manner. These could include the creation of Schools/ Colleges/ Universities, Medical Colleges/ Hospitals/ Dispensaries, institutions for the differently-abled, homes for people rejected by their own in old age and homes for orphans and destitutes, with a special focus on women and children.
- Setting up a research centre based on the literature on Shirdi Baba in their possession in different languages in a library form, online. To the best of my knowledge no such activity has been started by any organization. These centres should create excellent literature on Baba.
- In flood-prone areas, for example, in the Eastern Coast of India, like Odisha and Andhra, that are afflicted by floods and cyclones, the temples should be prepared to function as flood relief centres. Details can be worked in collaboration with the local authorities. Libraries containing the print/audio and video material on Baba can also be created. Devotees should have easy access to reading material. They should also be encouraged to undertake research and write books and articles on Shirdi Sai Baba.
- Shirdi Sai Baba undertook plantation of flowering plants in Shirdi. He used to get seeds from Neemgaon, a neighbouring village, and water the plants personally. Further, He got the dirty well of Shirdi cleaned. During epidemics like cholera and plague, He used to take a lot of care of the villagers of Shirdi and encouraged cleaning activities. In short, Baba used to give importance to tree plantation (environmental protection) and cleanliness (Swachchata) in the village. Following these precepts, the Sai Baba trusts would do well to undertake massive tree plantation programmes both in urban and rural areas.

- They should also undertake large cleanliness drives not only in and around the temple premises, but also of the urban and rural areas where they dwell, on a regular basis. The nation is undergoing a massive drive to protect the environment and maintain cleanliness. The temples should help and join the governmental and non-governmental bodies in these activities for the maintenance of social health.

Physical, mental, spiritual and holistic growth of His devotees was the aim of Baba. His followers should do what they possibly can to help in the holistic growth of their fellow beings. We can celebrate the centenary year of Baba keeping in mind this pious resolve.

Jai Shri Sai

30th September 2017

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