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Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

Reading The Lives Of Saints

DEVOTEE: Guruji, do you recommend reading any particular books or scriptures?

GURUJI: As long as you feel the need to do something, then I would say there are two categories. The first is for those who haven't yet found an object which triggers their spontaneous flow of love. Until that happens, they should read the lives of the saints. In that way they may get an abstract idea of a saint's qualities, or find a concrete form which triggers their love. Once love is triggered, the second category would be reading more about whatever is connected to their object of love. This becomes an expression and nurturing of their love.

Just as you ask me, "We want to know more about you, where you were born, where you met your Master, etc.," these kinds of things. What are these questions? Do you really need to know all these things? Are they important knowledge? No, it is an expression of your love. So, at the first stage, one sort of reading; at the second stage, another. But in general, if one feels a need for reading, then my first recommendation is to read the lives of the saints, because they are real. Whatever my understanding is of Ramana, it should be based on his life, on how he lived; that is reality. So, the first category comes before love is triggered; it is the exploration for an object of love. Once we have found it, then our reading becomes an expression of our love.

Actually, even Ramana recommended reading the lives of the saints. One day a Western gentleman was sitting in Bhagavan's presence, reading a Vedantic commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*. There was no one else in the hall at that moment, and it was one of the very rare occasions where Bhagavan spoke directly in English. He asked, "What are you reading?" The devotee replied, "I'm reading this commentary...." Then Bhagavan said, "Why don't you go to the library and read about Milarepa?" Just one year before, Evan-Wentz had visited the ashram and presented Ramana with a copy of his biography on Milarepa, and now Bhagavan was saying, "Go and read that book!" To close Indian devotees he would also recommend reading the lives of the saints. And it was the lives of saints which also influenced Bhagavan – more than the *Brahma Sutra*, *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Upanishads* – especially the *Peria Puranam* ['Great History'], the classical Tamil work on the lives of the 63 Shaivite saints [Nayanmars], which contains no philosophy at all.

Another time, a close devotee of Bhagavan's called Krishna Bikshu, the author of the most authentic biography of Ramana in Telugu, *Sri Ramana Leela*, told me that one day he had asked Ramana, "Bhagavan, we are enjoying your presence now, but when you pass away, what will be our fate?" Then Bhagavan immediately said, "Why? The biography is there." He was almost suggesting



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it as a subtle substitute for his presence. So, again, he was referring to the importance of reading the lives of the saints.



DEVOTEE: It seems impossible to really know Baba through books.

GURUJI: It depends on what way you want to know him. Do you want to know the life of Sai Baba? If that's the case, then yes, only through books, otherwise how can you know about him?

DEVOTEE: Yesterday, I was doing *pradakshina* at Gurusthan¹ and I was really wondering how can I know him? There was something there I knew I couldn't read in a book, something more, but I don't know what it is.

GURUJI: The question of 'more' comes when you're getting what is 'less'. First, let's know what is there already in the books. Then, if you still want to know more, we'll see. From the start, already thinking that books are not needed – do you think that's a wise attitude? Anything connected to Baba is important, whether it is in books or somebody speaks of it, whatever it may be. Why is it important? Why do you want to know? Because you love him. And all these things are actually fostering your love for him, making your abstract sense of fulfilment more and more concrete. This is the process of concretization.

So I don't undermine the value of knowing the life of a saint; it is important too. Where Baba lived, when he first arrived, where and how he sat, what he ate and did, where he went, what he said. Not only giving importance to his words, but wanting to know even where he answered the call of nature. Even that place is sacred now; it's called Lendi². Everything connected to him is sacred and dear to us, that is our expression of love. Why do you go to see Khandoba temple? Did Baba stay there? What is the connection? Just because he set foot there once or twice it is significant. So when we have an object of love, everything connected to it becomes important – we become almost greedy to know more. It becomes almost an obsession. That is a characteristic, a quality of love, and a powerful means by which our love expresses itself and grows.

When love is there, you read books with interest and a curious mind, wanting to know everything about your object of love. When you read a book with love, you remember everything; otherwise you can read and read without remembering anything. So learning is fostered by love, and if you really love Sai Baba, you'll come to know everything about him.



DEVOTEE: The steps to get things in the material world seem clear, but the steps towards our spiritual goal seem not so clear.

GURUJI: They are also very clear. I am telling you, think of nothing else except Baba, always focus on him. If you talk, talk about Baba. If you think, think about Baba. If you read, read about Baba. Read about his life, you'll understand. It's so clear – talk, think, read – only three words I've said. It's even easier than getting money in the material world. No problem! I have told you how to achieve your goal. It's so simple! [Guruji laughs]

¹ Gurusthan (Skt. 'Guru's place') is the area around a neem tree within the temple compound under which Baba lived when he first arrived in Shirdi, considered a sacred place for *pradakshina* and meditation.

² Lendi is a small garden area with a waterfall situated within the temple grounds in Shirdi. There, suspended between two trees, is a perpetually-burning lamp, called Nanda Deep, originally lit by Baba.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, to be able to think and speak of Baba, don't we need a clear conception or experience of him to do that?

GURUJI: That is why I advise you to read the story of his life, to have satsang and to be in contact with him in all these ways. Like that, you'll gain a clear picture, a clear conception, a clear understanding of him.

DEVOTEE: If one's mind and heart are going to be focussed on Baba like that all the time, then there has to be a sense of how he permeates all aspects of our life. You yourself have spoken of Baba as being much vaster than the form who lived and died on this planet.

GURUJI: It's okay. But how he permeates, whether he permeates or not, don't worry about that for now. The point is, I'm asking you to focus on Baba. Somebody once came to me and asked, "I'm in trouble, I need money." I said, "Okay, I'll give you this job."

"But I asked you for money, not a job!" he said. [laughter]

"Yes, why do you think I'm giving you a job – precisely to get money!" It is just like that. Whatever state you want, I am telling you to focus on Baba. Whether you like it or not, that's the job I'm giving you – just do it!



DEVOTEE: When I read about the great saints like Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramana, they seem to go through so much in their lives. I remember once you asked, if we were given the choice, would we really want to live like Ramana? Even though I have an aspiration to get the fruit he got, I'm not sure I want to go through the difficulties of the ripening process.

GURUJI: What state did he reach? You speak as if you already know it.

DEVOTEE: I don't know, but we must aspire to something.

GURUJI: Then aspire for your own fulfilment; they aspired for their fulfilment. That is why I never ask anyone to become a Ramana or a Ramakrishna. You have your own abstract sense of fulfilment, try to concretize it in your own way. Otherwise, it becomes imitation.

DEVOTEE: Yes, but is there not a value in reading the lives of the saints?

GURUJI: Yes, but what we have to see is the intensity of their application, their dedication and their commitment. If somebody comes and gives you a lecture, "Don't be so intense, be sober, otherwise people will call you mad. Everything should have its limits", let the lives of these great saints be a guiding light. If at all you want that state, the process should be so intense that people may call you mad! So what? Or, if you don't want that, simply give it up. There is no question of halfway. And don't try to deceive yourselves by thinking that you are seekers like those great saints. "Ramana did Self-enquiry, I am also doing Self-enquiry. Ramakrishna cried for Kali, I am also crying for God. Buddha was seeking for the Truth, I am also seeking for it." You are not! It's their dedication, their commitment and their application that we have to learn from their lives. Not that we have to imitate them.

DEVOTEE: But it seems in their cases they couldn't help being like that.

GURUJI: If they could help it, they definitely wouldn't have been like that! [laughter] We are the

persons who can help ourselves, that is why we find ourselves like this. So sane, controlled and sober! Hmm? Their intensity was so much that they couldn't help themselves, that's why some people called them mad.



DEVOTEE: Does a saint have preferences?

GURUJI: They say they don't have preferences. Ramana Maharshi said he didn't even have a mind to wish something, so how could he have preferences? There were no references to have the preferences! [Guruji laughs] And even if they had preferences, so what? They definitely had the preference that we should all become like them. Their first preference is that all people should be happy and free – that is their preference. Good! Nothing wrong in it. Anyhow, why do you always think about what a saint's state is like? Is it possible for you to really know? There are no means by which you can know how a saint is and how he works. Ramana Maharshi himself, when asked about the state of a *jnani*, said, "Until you gain *jnana*, you cannot understand the state of a *jnani*. There is no use asking about the work of *Iswara* [God] and the rest. Even if I tell you, can you understand it?" Again and again I tell you – mind your own business! Find out what *your* problem is and try to solve it. Let us confine ourselves to that, let us focus on that.

DEVOTEE: But asking questions about a saint's state is somehow an expression of our urge to understand our own longing.

GURUJI: To satisfy that urge is the meaning of reading the lives of the saints. Have that urge, go on exploring it, but always remember that you are only exploring. Don't jump to conclusions. Don't think that you know. If you ask me about that state and I answer, you take it for granted as a conclusion and assume you know. Your exploration stops there. If you want to know whether Baba had preferences or not, explore! Go and read Baba's life. Once, twice, thrice, a hundred, a thousand times. Read it, try to find out! When you find the answer, tell me, then I'll know too. And, whether it is true or not, I will also explore again. But your minds have become such that you only want the answers, which kills the spirit of enquiry, the thrill, the excitement. It's good to have the questions, but exploring them itself is so beautiful! Explore!

