



# Rose Petals

Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

## Topsy-Turvy in a Well

"I was hungry and thirsty and I was moved by the Vanjari's extraordinary love; we thought ourselves very learned but were strangers to kindness. The Vanjari [tradesman] was a quite illiterate and unqualified fellow and belonged to a low caste. Still, he had love in his heart and asked us to eat his bread. In this way, he who loves others disinterestedly is really enlightened and I thought acceptance of his hospitality was the best beginning of getting knowledge. So very respectfully I accepted the loaf of bread offered, ate it and drank water.

Then he said, "Would you like to come with me? I will show you what you want, but he alone will be successful who believes in what I say." Then he [the Guru] took me to a well, tied my feet with a rope and hung me, head downwards and feet up, from a tree near the well. I was suspended three feet above the water, which I could not reach with my hands or with my mouth. After suspending me in this manner he went away, no one knew where. After 4 or 5 hours he returned and, after taking me out quickly, asked me how I fared. "In bliss supreme, I was. How can a fool like me describe the joy I experienced?" I replied. On hearing my answer the Guru was much pleased with me, drew me near him and stroking my head with his hand kept me with him! He took care of me as tenderly as a mother bird does of her young ones.

He put me into his school; how beautiful it was! There I forgot my parents, all my attachments were snapped and I was liberated easily. I thought that I should embrace him and keep staring at him always. My Guru became my all in all, my home, my mother and father, everything. All my senses left their places and concentrated themselves in my eyes, and my sight was centred on him. Thus, my Guru was the sole object of my meditation and I was conscious of none else. While meditating on him my mind and intellect were silent and I had thus to keep quiet and bow to him in silence."

—*Shri Sai Satcharita* by G. R. Dabholkar, adapted by N. V. Gunaji, Chapter 32 [edited].



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**GURUJI:** Baba said he was in search of his guru and when he met him, his guru gave him food. Food means life. His guru put him topsy-turvy, upside down, into a well and Baba experienced unbounded happiness! That's what he said. Sai Baba often used to speak in an allegorical or symbolic way. He said his guru was a *vanjari*, a tradesman, who has a low status in society, who works and earns his own bread. And he's the one who gave him mukti, who put him topsy-turvy in the well. Everything he thought was turned upside down, his whole being was turned topsy-turvy.

On many occasions in life we can feel turned upside down, but when it happened to Baba through such a competent Sadguru, he experienced unbounded happiness. After that, he loved his guru so much he would go on looking affectionately at his face day and night. The guru was his sole object of meditation and Baba had no other goal but him. Like this, he said he spent about twelve years with him, although that may also be symbolic, of course, the twelve years.



**GURUJI:** Baba said that when he was looking at his guru he forgot himself. All his vital forces became concentrated in his sight and he was in ecstasy. Even later, when he was apart from him, he was never deprived of his company; his guru was always with him. And that's what Baba also tells us, "Wherever you go in the wide world, I am with you, my abode is in your heart. Even if you are beyond the seven seas, my watchful glance will be upon you."

**DEVOTEE:** Is this similar to what happened between Rumi and his guru, Shams, when they stayed in a room together for many weeks? <sup>1</sup>

**GURUJI:** Rumi said that he was in a state of ecstasy in the presence of his Beloved. And even later, after Shams disappeared, Rumi's ecstasy continued. Shams gave him a taste of ecstasy and it continued his whole life. That kind of theme is there in the Sufi tradition – spending an intense, prolonged time with the Sadguru, the *murshid*, experiencing ecstasy and the ecstasy continuing even afterward when out in the world. But don't take the utterances of a Sufi saint literally; they may be symbolic or actual happenings, we can't really say. Take, for example, the story of Baba hanging topsy-turvy in the well. There were certain practices of the Sufi saints which coincide with the practice of hanging upside down.<sup>2</sup>



**GURUJI:** How are we to understand this story of Baba hanging upside down in the well? Not that he was simply hanging in the well for twelve years. After he had a glimpse of what he was seeking, he came out of the well and stuck to the source of his bliss, his Sadguru. The aim was to get the bliss, not to remain in the well! [Guruji laughs] If we look at it symbolically, the well is not the well and the water is not the water. The well signifies depth. If we are having an experience, we feel as if we are going deeper, actually diving. Even when we need to find a solution to a question we are told, "Dive deeply, think deeply!" Not that actually some depth is there, but when we go inside, it is experienced as depth. The goal is not the well, but the water, which signifies bliss. Baba stuck to the one who gave him that bliss, his Sadguru, and was totally focused on him with love. He didn't say that he had done a sadhana, tantra, Self-inquiry or anything.

If we were to recast Baba's account it could be read like this: "My Guru made me see the depths of my own being – there all my so-called knowledge, patterns and ways of knowing became top-sy-turvy, and I had a glimpse of bliss. Then I stayed with the one who made me experience that." Read it that way and you'll understand the whole mystery of Baba's well experience.



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<sup>1</sup> Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207-1273 CE), held to be one of the greatest Sufi poets and mystics, whose poetry in Persian was largely inspired by devotion to his teacher, the great Sufi mystic, Shams-i Tabrizi (d.1247 CE).

<sup>2</sup> It was called *Chilla-i-Ma'kusa* and occurs in the Chishti Khanqah; see *Shri Sai Satcharita* by G.R. Dabholkar (Hemadpant), Tr. Kher (New Delhi: Sterling, 1999), p. 531, n.5.

DEVOTEE: What is bliss?

GURUJI: Fulfilment, happiness, a state where nothing is missing, where there's a sense of having everything. That experience is possible for a person like Sai Baba who was capable of focusing all his senses and vital forces on his guru and staying twelve years with him. The glimpse of that experience can come in different ways. For some, the Sadguru triggers something in their heart, a sense that, "Here, we get something" – a sense of assurance, of happiness – something inexplicable, mysterious, an attraction which gives an unpromised promise of getting fulfilment. This is what I call the abstract sense of fulfilment and the Sadguru is a concrete symbol of that.

DEVOTEE: So if the focus is not there in the same way as Baba, will the experience be diluted?

GURUJI: It's not actually about the focus but the readiness for such a focus. Before Baba had the well experience he didn't have the focus but he had the potentiality. He was ready for such a focus and the experience gave it to him. Before, his sense of fulfilment was abstract and then, in the well, he experienced it in a concrete way through the grace of his guru, and afterward his focus remained on him.

DEVOTEE: So what does this readiness depend upon?

GURUJI: The harmony of our pulls, of our emotions – that is the readiness. It is the dish in which the experience is served. I'm not saying this is the qualification. Don't go to the extreme of thinking that you have to be qualified in this way, otherwise you'll always be seeking what you don't really want and you won't get it. And, even if you get it, you won't be happy. We get according to our nature, our being, our needs and our desires and then we evolve towards that harmony.



DEVOTEE: You have said that when difficulties arise we have to experience them. How can we be with unpleasant experiences while they are going on?

GURUJI: If you can withstand it, you have to explore in your own way when you are in the middle of the difficulty. That exploration, that effort itself will give you the strength not to run away but to face the situation in a new way, and to investigate what is actually lacking in yourself. We need the strength to get the fulfilment which is our very own, and which we have earned.

DEVOTEE : Do we have to earn it?

GURUJI: Even with the great saints, we see their need was so much and they had reached such maturity in their seeking for fulfilment that the Sadguru gave them the mystic experience. But it is after this that their so-called spiritual practice begins. Look at Baba's life. He met his guru. His guru hung him topsy-turvy in a well and he got that experience of bliss. But that was the beginning, not the end. He spent twelve years with his guru, totally focused on him. Is it because he was totally focused on his guru that he got it or did he get it simply by grace? And if he got it, why did he have to spend twelve years with his guru? Is that earning it or getting it by grace? He earned it, but he earned it in such a way that he earned it with grace. If you understand this dichotomy, then you'll understand whether one has to earn it or whether it happens by grace. The distinction is so subtle and so fine, it is something in-between. And for the one who experiences it, there are no words to express it.



GURUJI: One thing is very important: don't think in extremes of black and white. Don't judge anything unless you have the sufficient resources to do so. We only have a series of hypotheses. The truth cannot be judged or understood in black and white terms – "If it is not like this then it should be like that; if it is not like that then it should be like this" – the mind is trained to think in these patterns. In every satsang I show you a series of these kinds of paradoxes, these enigmas, and how the truth lies somewhere in-between. Trying to see that 'in-between', reading between the lines, is the art of life, the art of spirituality. And if you want someone to spell it out, to write lines about it, you'll miss the target because the truth lies beyond the lines. If you are happy with the meaning you get while reading the lines, no problem. But the problem is, you are not satisfied with it, so I'm trying to show you the meaning by redirecting your attention to the subtle beauty in-between the lines – it's poetry, it's not prose!

Actually, that is what Baba meant when his guru showed him bliss when he hung him topsy-turvy in the well. Does the quality of the bliss have anything to do with hanging upside down? Whether he was this way or that way, the bliss is the same. So what does topsy-turvy actually mean here? It means the patterns and process by which we acquire knowledge and understand things have become topsy-turvy. His patterns were broken and destroyed and that was his guru's way, his poetry.



DEVOTEE: So there must be another way of knowing that we're not familiar with because of our habitual way of thinking and understanding things.

GURUJI: You understand in patterns only. I'm asking you to break your patterns and the most difficult pattern is the pattern in which you understand things. You think your understanding or concepts are the patterns, but the way you understand is also a pattern. It's at a very subtle level in you. I'm asking you to look into that.

DEVOTEE: It sounds like you have to remake us, Guruji!

GURUJI: That's what I'm trying to do! [Laughter] That's why I'm trying to break your patterns and divert your attention to the subtle beauty in-between the lines. What I say – the lines – is not that important. I'm only concerned about the process.



GURUJI: One day you'll see the reality as it is. When you see the reality as it is, that's when you'll have the guts to see real love. Because then real communication begins and the old interpretations stop, when the mind doesn't work anymore. Then you see the reality. In the meantime it will go on. I think this is why all you people are here: to stop the interpretations of the mind. You have to realize that these interpretations are false, so some experience will happen that shatters your concepts and patterns. And after some time the mind becomes tired, exhausted, and then it says, "Ah, no more interpretations!" Then it starts seeing the reality. Then you have the first glimpses of bliss.



GURUJI: Baba's idea is that our concepts, our so-called knowledge, has to become topsy-turvy, and then we'll experience bliss. The Sadguru first blasts our concepts and makes them topsy-turvy, whatever the concepts are. There are no good or bad concepts, concepts are concepts.

DEVOTEE: Spiritual traditions use so many techniques to break our patterns and concepts. What is Baba's way then?

GURUJI: He simply breaks the pattern. Without need of a technique the pattern is gone! It can happen at any moment – in a satsang, or when we are just looking at a mountain or at the Ganges – things we have already done a thousand times. Something happens in us – and suddenly a pattern is broken. That's all! Then you find you are not the same person, your way of thinking changes. What happened we do not know, but we notice something has changed in us. Something has simply been taken away and something else has come in. We feel we are new, that the path is new, and the whole world takes on a new dimension. That Baba can do!

