



Rose Petals

Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

Guruji's Early Years of Seeking

Guruji rarely spoke of his internal experiences. Fortunately, occasionally in satsangs opportunities arose to ask Guruji personal questions to which he replied. This month's issue of *Rose Petals* is a bouquet of his answers that gives us fascinating insights into his inner life during his early years of seeking and how he came to Baba.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, in your early years when you were seeking, were you clear about what it was you sought?

GURUJI: Yes. I used to feel I lacked something, that something was missing. I had a sense of dissatisfaction, of frustration. I saw people trying to get happiness in different ways and they appeared to be fulfilled. So, I too explored: is it this pleasure, is it that pleasure? But it definitely was none of those ways for me.

There were different signposts. Sometimes it became clear what I was seeking and then suddenly I realized it was not clear and I was confused again. Then the search would start again and it seemed, "Oh, now I know it, it's very clear!" And then, after some time, again there was no clarity. So you fail and then try again, fail and try again ...



Vidyanagar, 1972, Sri Babuji with Sri E. Bharadwaja



DEVOTEE: Guruji, what accounted for the intensity of your search?

GURUJI: There were so many unanswered questions in me. Everything used to be a question, a puzzle, a mystery to me.

DEVOTEE: Like what, Guruji?

GURUJI: Everything! Why am I breathing? Why am I able to see this black colour or that white colour? How am I able to talk and to hear? Everything used to present itself as a mystery, it was almost unbearable. Even sleep was a mystery. Why am I sleeping and getting up in the morning? What is happening? It's hard to explain how everything was a problem to me [Guruji laughs]. I almost went crazy trying to understand these things.

In those days I read the *sastras* and I used to question people who claimed they had solved the

mysteries of life. But when I met them, my experience was that they had never even thought about these things or experienced them as mysteries. There was nobody who was actually able to answer my questions. They just lectured, using Vedantic jargon.

DEVOTEE: Weren't those Vedantic concepts satisfying?

GURUJI: If anybody could have actually answered my questions, then it would have been okay, but they just repeated things without any practical application. They read the scriptures and just repeated what they had read, taking it for granted. But I wanted an answer to my problem, I didn't want to escape from anything.

DEVOTEE: What did you want to find out?

GURUJI: What is this frustration? What is missing? What is the problem of life? Why am I so dissatisfied with it? I wanted to face it, not escape from it. In my effort to have my questions answered I also studied Vedanta because that was the only thing available to me then. Even afterwards, my enquiry was Vedantic in a sense, but not in a formal way. There is no strict definition of Vedanta. Our discussion right now is also Vedanta in a way; any quest for knowledge is Vedanta.

DEVOTEE: But was your realization an answer to your question, or did it blow the question completely away?

GURUJI: Actually, I realized that by studying Vedanta I had just been beating about the bush and their answers to those questions were not relevant to my main problem.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, when did your connection to Baba become undoubtedly clear to you?

GURUJI: When I met my Master.

DEVOTEE: Did it happen immediately?

GURUJI: It wasn't so immediate, because by that time I had done so much reading, so much thinking and I had collected so many concepts, that these became an obstacle to readily accepting something new. I was not fresh when I met him.

DEVOTEE: When you felt the connection more strongly, did these concepts just go out the window?

GURUJI: Actually, my experience of Baba had nothing to do with concepts, it didn't happen at an intellectual level. It also became clear that it wasn't actually the answers to my questions that mattered. It was something else: the spirit behind it. I was so used to listening and reading these dry Vedantic concepts, but they just didn't speak to me. They said that Brahman is beyond intellect, beyond mind, it cannot be burnt by fire, it cannot be blown by the wind, it cannot become wet, you can't think of it, it's beyond your thought. It sounds wonderful. I used to ask, "If it's beyond our mind and thought, why do we talk about it? If it's so beyond everything, why think of it at all? Why do we need to bother about Brahman, and why does He need to bother about us? Why do we have to bother Him unnecessarily? [Guruji laughs] Let God rest happily in his so-called heaven. What about me? My problem! When I ask about my problem, you talk about God. I'm not concerned about Him! What about me, first tell me that!" [Laughter]

They answered, "Because you don't realize who you are, you have a problem."

"Ok, I don't realize who I am, but my problem is not that I don't know who I am. I know who I am now, I don't have a doubt about it. It is my experience that I'm having this misery, this frustration. What about the solution to this problem?"

"No, no. You should think that you are Brahman, you are atman. He is not affected."

"How can I think that? Do you want me to hypnotize myself into thinking that I am so-and-so? No, I'm not coming to you for hypnotic effects. Talk about reality! This is self-hypnotism you are talking about. When one has a problem and thinks, 'I don't have a problem, I don't have a problem, I'm always blissful, I'm very happy,' this is self-hypnotism."

With Master¹ it was different. He approached the whole process of questioning differently, and, as far as I know, nobody else had approached it like that. He never dealt with me on a dry conceptual level. He brushed the concepts aside and made the whole enquiry fresh, going to the spirit of it and paring it down to brass tacks. It was a different approach, which I liked. My search became enlivened because all the dead wood that had accumulated was removed and then seeking started afresh again.

DEVOTEE: Was your Master a devotee of Sai Baba?

GURUJI: Yes, he was a Sai devotee.

DEVOTEE: For someone to have you as a devotee, he must have been of an incredible calibre.

GURUJI: He is! He was of incredible calibre! He was a great man. He is my guru, and I am proud of it!

DEVOTEE: You used the present tense then, Guruji, you said, "He is my guru."

GURUJI: Yes, he is my guru. He was my guru, he is my guru, he will be my guru!

DEVOTEE: Your Sadguru?

GURUJI: I don't feel like there's a difference. It was Sai Baba who came in his form and then taught me what was needed.



GURUJI: I came to Master in a state of intense questioning. What I experienced was not the result of having my questions answered, but something else happened. One day when I was sitting and talking with him, I kept looking at Baba's photo which was there beside him. I was talking to Master but I kept looking at the photo. Then something happened! A kind of restlessness was relieved. For instance, how would you feel if a strong migraine you've had continuously for three or four months, suddenly left you? It felt like that. I can't explain it better than that. I don't know what happened, but I thought my relief must be because of Baba's picture so I wanted to gaze at him more and more. I didn't know anything about Baba at that time, but something was so attractive about him, that even while talking and arguing with Master, my mind was on Baba. My mind was becoming more and more empty. It was as if someone else was arguing, while my mind, my complete attention, was on Baba and I was observing the whole dialogue.

DEVOTEE: But you still had the capacity to carry on the argument!

GURUJI: Yes, the argument was going on and I was wondering how I was arguing. [Laughter] The argument was good and my Master was enthusiastic because he had never faced such an opponent [Guruji laughs]. He would encourage me, saying, "Come on! Come on! Come on!"

DEVOTEE: How old were you then, Guruji?

GURUJI: Nearly eighteen years old. And after that something changed in me, something was re-

¹ Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja (1938-1989), Sri Babuji's English lecturer in college and his spiritual guru.

lieved, the 'migraine' was gone. Whenever I felt a slight disturbance, I felt like going back to Master's room again. Whether I was going for Master or for Baba's photo I do not know.



GURUJI: I think of Baba as my guru, but back then I needed a concrete expression of it and I saw it in Master. He was the one who inspired me, who triggered the love of Baba in me. I felt moved to follow him, like a blind man. I didn't know the path, I was like a blind man. I wasn't questioning his instructions, asking, "Why? How?" None of these things. I found a guru and I followed him, that's all. Who cares about the path? He held out a stick, I grasped the other end of the stick and followed him. That is how I served my guru. On my path with my guru, anything he asked I did without questioning. Even when he asked me to marry, I did it without a word. That is my path, that is the path I tread. Without choices and without excuses. He said, "Hey, Sarath, you are in charge of the satsang, and on every Thursday you have to come and arrange the photos and do the satsang." I was living in Kota and had to go to Vidyanagar daily, even in the rain, when the only way to cross the canal was by small boat. Even if I had a fever above 103, I would still go. For six years, I didn't miss once. My parents used to shout at me. "What are you doing? Are you mad? With this fever, how can you travel in the rain all the way to Vidyanagar and back and do the satsang?" I would answer, "Master asked me to do the satsang and I want to go." So I went! Many times I was alone. I used to arrange everything as if a hundred people were there, sit and do the whole ritual alone – bhajan, *parayana*, everything. After I met my Master and said, "I want to tread the path, show me the path," then any word, any instruction of his, whether spiritual or material, was law to me.

DEVOTEE: Did you enjoy going?

GURUJI: I enjoyed it because the very fact of my following his instruction was the joy. What more joy is needed? He graced me with instruction, that is enough. I am fortunate, I am privileged. Ah!

DEVOTEE: That shows incredible maturity.

GURUJI: I don't know whether it shows maturity or stupidity! [Guruji laughs] I followed the principle. It's not the person there, it is the principle.



DEVOTEE: Early in your connection with Master he gave you the biography of Ramana Maharshi by Narasimha Swami. In what way did it speak to you? What lessons did you draw from his life?

GURUJI: Love! Commitment! Making it tangible that one can actually achieve that state, that unconditional state I had been longing for. "Oh, it is possible!" What Ramana gave me was that encouragement, that tangibility. He showed me that it was humanly possible. It was Ramana's life, not his teachings, that attracted me to him. His life, that is what is real. People can talk Vedanta, high Vedanta, but to live like that! Ramana was an embodiment of the teaching.

DEVOTEE: And what kind of influence did Poondi Swami have in your search?

GURUJI: I went to Poondi Swami because Master asked me to go. He asked me and I went, that's all, there was no other reason. I attributed it all to Baba. It was Baba who sent me there, and it was his duty to give me whatever it was. And it so happened that it [Guruji's realization] came through Poondi Swami's form and in that place, so I have an attachment there. But I think it was all due to Baba's grace. There is a subtle difference which is very difficult for you to understand. When I say I blindly followed my guru, that blindness has a different quality. It was not a blindness without intellect, rather it was with *all* my intellect that I followed him. It wasn't my personality to kill the

intellect. I asked a thousand questions and we had a thousand discussions. We almost used to fight, but in the end I did what he asked me to do.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, you said your Master understood you, and that he was the only one you met in those days who understood your problem. In what way did he understand you? What was your problem?

GURUJI: Why should we keep thinking about that problem, brooding on that old problem? [Guruji laughs] It's not my problem now! It would be a mistake to tell you, because you might try to make it your problem and I don't want to impose my reality on you. I had a problem, I solved my problem, and my Master helped me. My problem was not so common, that was the problem! [Laughter] That's why it was so difficult to find anyone even to understand my problem, let alone give a solution! I didn't say my Master gave me a solution, but he understood my problem sympathetically. That attracted me to him. In those days I used to think that most people were blessed and I was the only one damned. Everyone else seemed to be so happy as if they had solved their problems. "Why am I like a fool, always thinking about these things?" [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE: Did you not have the pulls that other young men usually have, like movies, sports, girls and those kinds of things?

GURUJI: They were there earlier when I was exploring the meaning of those attractions, wondering why people are actually so pulled by them. Then I used to have those pulls. Later, when I became connected to Baba, I started doing all sorts of sadhanas, very strenuous sadhanas. To me, doing sadhana, for instance, calling Baba's name, meant doing it for 24 hours, even while sleeping it had to continue. Because I was attending college, I couldn't completely devote my time to it, but if there was a holiday, then I would spend the whole day sitting in meditation, not even moving, trying to find out about a particular practice. I did it completely to see whether it solved my problem. I might have had different kinds of experiences, but they were not satisfying to me. During that period I never went to see a movie, I didn't even look at a movie poster! [Guruji laughs] I was that strict! I didn't wear any chappals [sandals] and even in winter I used to get up at three o'clock and take a cold bath. To make the water still colder, I would fill an earthen pot before going to bed and keep it outside.

DEVOTEE: Why did you do that, Guruji?

GURUJI: Simply, I felt it like that. The scriptures say that *vairagya* is needed in spiritual life. They say you have to conquer attachment to physical comfort. So I thought, "Let me do this completely, go to the extreme and see what will happen." I was purposefully seeking and courting trouble, almost torturing the body.

DEVOTEE: And what happened?

GURUJI: Nothing happened! [Guruji laughs] The only thing that happened was that since then, whether I have comfort or not, it's okay for me.

Before that I was a wrestling champion in my school. [Laughter] Wrestling was my favourite sport. In those days, it was the only martial art, there was no boxing, karate, nothing else was there. But after about six years of those kinds of practices, my health was gone.

I was so strict, I never looked at the cover page of a weekly magazine, even if it was lying right in front of me, I would intentionally avoid looking at it. My father used to visit his friend who was

the owner of a local cinema theatre and they would sit there and spend time together. If I needed to tell my father something, I had to go to the theatre – but I shouldn't enter the theatre! So I used to stand outside and ask the watchman to send for him. And all the people used to joke and say to my father, "Look, the *bhakta* has come! Go, go out! If he comes inside, he'll become impure and be spoiled!" [Laughter]

DEVOTEE: Who put those ideas in your head, Guruji?

GURUJI: All the scriptures speak about the importance of *vairagya* and my Master also encouraged it. It's not just reading about it in books, but implementing it! That is *vairagya*. See the end of it. The scriptures put these ideas into my head and some may call it nonsense, but it actually had its own good effect on me.

DEVOTEE: During what period of time was this?

GURUJI: It was around 1972 to almost '78 or '79. People thought I had gone crazy. Earlier, I had been active in college politics, drama and literature. People said, "Such a nice boy, and see now what has become of him!" [Laughter]

DEVOTEE: Was this after you were in Poondi?

GURUJI: Before going to Poondi, and after going to Poondi this state continued for some time. I could live with a bare minimum and didn't worry about anything. I lived like that in Tiruvannamalai, without having a rupee in my pocket, not carrying even a bag or a backpack. Living like that gave me such confidence, that even without all these things I could live happily. And maybe those practices also gave me something else.

DEVOTEE: Something else? For instance, did they make you more receptive?

GURUJI: Yes.

DEVOTEE: Was it easier to enter meditation, and to be in meditation?

GURUJI: Yes, definitely. But I'm not saying the practices were necessary. As I've said before, they might have been one of the stones that helped me hit the mango on the tenth try, by helping me learn the art of throwing. I did all these things, mantra, tantra, *japa*, and all kinds of meditative techniques, but I found something else. That is why I don't prescribe these practices to you, in the same manner, because I found another way to easily achieve the same goal. But, if you want to do all that, good, do it! No problem. [Guruji laughs]



DEVOTEE: Guruji, when you found the solution, so to speak, what changed?

GURUJI: Nothing. What happened can't be expressed verbally. In Poondi, the thing that was missing I got, and my seeking ended. Not that *something* happened. What happened was this and it was enough. My problem was solved and since then there has been no more seeking. The struggle was over, that sense of lack and frustration was no longer there. I think that is enough description. [Laughter]



DEVOTEE: Can you say what makes you a devotee of Sai Baba? What drew you to Sai Baba?

GURUJI: He is the concretization of my abstract sense of fulfilment. If I love Baba and Baba is my Sadguru, then he's my saviour – in fact, I never thought of him like this. I'm only using these words in order to make you understand. All these concepts were not there for me. Simply, I liked to see his form, his form of bliss, that's all. It gave me happiness. Why, I do not know. I was so happy.

DEVOTEE: Was it the image of the person, the way he looked, or the story of his life?

GURUJI: The peculiarity about Sai Baba is that the more deeply you dive into his life, the more the person vanishes. Something else emerges – it's not even his teaching – but something that was before so abstract in you, now starts taking a shape, a concrete shape. Because every aspect of Baba's life was an expression of his state. People can say, "All is Brahman! Everyone is Brahman!" but these are only words. Baba actually demonstrated that, immediately you can see that state in him. But it started with the person, with the form, with his life. Yes, and even now I am interested in his form and his life.

DEVOTEE: So it started with his form?

GURUJI: And it ends with his form, too. In fact, there is no end or beginning to it. It's not that I have crossed a point and now have eschewed the form. There is no difference between the form and the state, because it is the form which expresses the state. To me, there is no difference: form and state are so perfectly fused in Baba! He had no teaching we can point to and say, "This is his teaching." But he taught! There is so much we can learn, so much we can enjoy, we can experience, and we can love, in Baba!

