



Rose Petals

Extracts from
Sri Babuji's Satsangs

Arati

Arati is a mode of congregational worship in which the devotees stand facing the image of a deity or a deified saint, or the living person of an exalted saint, and join in singing hymns of adoration to him in unison (the *arati* service). Normally, this singing is accompanied by musical instruments such as bells, gongs and cymbals, and the object of worship is devoutly decorated with flowery garlands while aromatic incense and musk are kept burning. Then, while the devotees sing hymns, either an officiant or a devotee slowly rotates in a clockwise direction a tray containing five small oil-traylets lit with ghee wicks as lamps, or burning camphor (*karpura*), in front of the adored image or person selected for worship. Such a performance of waving light(s) is called *arati*....

For the majority, worship in a congregational setting is helpful in several ways. In a communal setting devotees can pray in a space charged with the devotional fervor of a group. While singing devotional songs in unison, beating time to a rhythm, a devotee can break through the insulation of the ego and merge easily into the group's rhythm. Singing in a group induces a sense of expanded consciousness in which one tends to lose one's individual voice. The sense of being apart from the world is subtly replaced by an awareness of being part of a whole. And, enrapt in the warm emotional fervor of the group, one's isolated sense of separate identity melts away into the mainstream of collective consciousness. Besides, the intense involvement of the senses in the *arati* offering – visually, in the aesthetically-decorated idol, aurally, in the group singing accompanied by drums, cymbals, and bells, and the olfactory sense in its being delighted by the fragrant incense and garlands, results in the stimulation of these senses, thereby inducing a kind of ethereal, rhapsodic ecstasy in the hearts of the devotees.

-from *Arati Sai Baba* by Sri Sarath Babuji (Saipatham Publications, 1996)



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GURUJI: In Baba's *arati* we sing, "*thaka gayi meri rasanaa*," that is, "I am dumbfounded" (lit. "my tongue is exhausted"). Actually, Dasganu was expressing that stupefied feeling where one forgets oneself. Because he was singing and using poetry, he used the word "dumbfounded". But why did his tongue become dumb? Because his mind had become numb, and he couldn't speak. Again, it's the same: what we read, we also feel as we sing the *arati*. And when we sing the *arati*, at least to some extent, our minds should get stupefied. That is the real *arati*.



DEVOTEE: Did you used to go to the *aratis* in Shirdi, Guruji?

GURUJI: Yes, in the beginning I used to go to the *aratis*, yes. I enjoy them and I like them but I don't have any attachment to *aratis*, in fact. I like to do *arati* also; I have no objection to whatever is connected with Baba. Among the *aratis*, I like Dasganu's *aratis* more. Somehow to me the most beautiful *arati* is the one that begins, "*Sai rahama nazara karanaa*" ("Lord Sai, look on us mercifully"). [Kakad Arati, Padh X]. So when people asked me what to do in *satsangs*, I said that all the *aratis* are not needed. If you want, you can just sing *Sai rahama nazara karanaa*. Then it started like that. Not that I prescribed it.



DEVOTEE: What is it about these two *aratis* that you like so much, Guruji? [Kakad Arati, *Padhs X–XI*].

GURUJI: I like everything about them, their whole attitude, the diction, the way he expressed it, who expressed it.

DEVOTEE: You mean Dasganu Maharaj?

GURUJI: Yes, Dasganu Maharaj. He was an orthodox Brahmin who had some hesitation to take *prasad* from Baba's hands. Yet he was ready to say he was a broom in the *masjid* [mosque]. Usually for a Brahmin the Muslims themselves are outcast, low caste people, untouchables. They won't touch them. And in the *masjid* the broom itself is again untouchable, because it touches dirt, and sweeps up dust. So, in a symbolic way, Dasganu is saying, "I am not here to collect your dust or your grace. My focus is not on that. It is enough for me that I collect the dust of your devotees' feet. This is my *puja* and I'm happy with that." There are so many expressions like this, for example, *sathi akharaaka* [companion to the end] and *rahama nazara karanaa*. Actually, the words he used are Islamic. If at all he wanted to write in a Hindu way there are other words he could have used in Hindi. The word "*nazar*", and other words he's chosen, also show his erudition. It is beautifully expressed and beautifully felt. Unless he felt it he could not have written like that.

DEVOTEE: So the choice of *nazar* was to honour Baba as a Muslim?

GURUJI: He was so confident that Baba was a Muslim that he wanted to express it in a Muslim way. So he used Islamic wording.

DEVOTEE: Out of his reverence for Islam?

GURUJI: Out of his devotion! Baba was his Sadguru. You can't say 'reverence'; it is devotion. So much devotion that he wants to be a broom in his *masjid*! Do you call that 'reverence'? That's a light word for it! He doesn't revere Sai Baba, he's not only reverent! It's much more than that. Didn't you read [Arati Sai Baba]? I think some of the things which I felt I tried to

explain there. In my own limited way I tried to share my appreciation of these two songs in my comments on them in the Arati book. But that is only a part of why I actually like them, amongst many other things.



DEVOTEE: Narasimha Swami gives the translation of *sathi akharakaa* as “last moment helper”.

GURUJI: Actually, *sathi* means ‘companion’; the exact translation is ‘companion’. Maybe he doesn’t want to use the word ‘companion’ with reference to Baba because for him it is disrespectful to call Baba a *sathi* – a friend, or companion. Maybe that is why he changes it to ‘helper’. Of course I don’t know if he would have done it because of that. But factually, *sathi* means ‘companion’. ‘To the end’, *akharakaa* means ‘to the end’. Actually, not only at the end or at the climax, but ‘from beginning to the end’, he [the helper] will be there. Not like the police in a Telugu movie, who’ll come in the last scene – but won’t be of any help, of course! Not like that! From the beginning to the end, Baba will be there.



DEVOTEE: Is there some inherent value in doing *arati* with others?

GURUJI: It is just an expression, there is no inherent value in it. The only inherent value is the way you express it, and how it makes you feel. If you don’t have your own expression, and you find that is an appropriate expression for you, then use it, no problem in it. Not that you should or should not. Some people feel, “Oh, when we sing the *arati* it is beautiful and I like to do it. I feel something, I feel happy.” Do it then. Not that one has to do the *arati* to Baba like that, otherwise he won’t shower his grace: that is wrong. It is only an expression. Let it be spontaneous. If you don’t have a spontaneous expression of your own, try to find a ready-made expression from ones available in your surroundings. Find one which suits you. For example, when you want to give your best wishes to a friend and you can’t think of a poetic thought or sentence, what do you do? You go to a shop and search through all the cards, the different cards there, until you find one you like, that you actually connect to. Then you buy that card and send it to your friend, on his birthday, or on Christmas, or on New Year’s Day, whatever it is.

It’s not that everyone has to express their love as they do in the *Aratis*. There are so many other ways available in the world, with beautiful poetry, pictures, and designs. Pick one which suits you best and use it. Send your best wishes to Baba!



GURUJI: Not everyone may know Baba’s *Arati*, I know. But just sitting there and happily enjoying it, listening to it and looking at Baba with respect, that is participating. Someone who knows the language, who knows how to speak it, they may sing. But it’s not that everyone has to sing to participate: standing there and just happily enjoying the whole thing in a group, that is participating in *arati*. That’s what I am thinking. I don’t think that everybody has to sing the *arati*. But I prefer you being there and expressing your love in your own way, because being there has the advantage of being together with others who love Baba. If a person really loves someone, then they like to be around others who do also. Those people who love me, if I am at home, they tell me they like to see me alone, but if I go to a statue installation where there are thousands of people, they feel happier being there. Why? Because they’re among

co-lovers, fellow lovers. When one's object of love is loved by so many people, the whole expression of that love is everywhere, and that gives an added enjoyment. In *arati*, what happens is there are so many people who are expressing their love, – to whom? To the object of our own love! Seeing Baba in Shirdi, in the Samadhi Mandir when nobody else is there, is one thing, and when all the people are singing *bhajan* and looking at him and the priest is doing *arati*, that is another thing. That gives more joy, because he is the object of our love, and he is so much loved. Then you see love everywhere, expressions of love, different expressions of love. That should give you happiness, it should increase your joy.

Attend *arati*, enjoy how the people are offering *arati*. And being in the company of so many others is also beneficial, it has a good influence on your mind. That is one thing which is also true of a *satsang*. Without our realizing it, sometimes the mind becomes dry, and being in a group, surrounded by so many people's love, sitting among them, the dryness goes and we become wet with the love of our surroundings. Being in *satsang* or *arati* with others can have that influence. So try to make yourself prone to that influence, subject to that influence, and reap the benefits of that. There is a benefit in the collective expression of love. That is why I encourage it.



GURUJI: You can be a VIP, a very, very VVIP - but not a Sai devotee. Not a *devotee*! Not have that feeling, that egolessness. Kabir said, "*Main Ram ka kuttaa hun!*" "I am Ram's dog!" That is what he compared himself to, that is how he related himself to Baba, to his Ram. But we have a problem even how to do *namaskar* two or three times to Baba's photo! We ask, "Why can't we treat him as a friend?" Kabir could have been a friend to Ram, in fact, but he related himself to him as his dog! Just like a dog, when you've given him a biscuit and he goes wagging his tail, he will always be going around you – maybe for only a biscuit! Feel like that! Never have these feelings of ego, that this man has spoken to me like this, that man has offended me, or this man was a little disrespectful! We should ignore these things. Why have you come here? Focus on that! And respect for the ego - these things should not be there. Always feel like that, whether you are in Shirdi, or in front of Baba's picture itself. That is the feeling you should get. Dasganu Maharaj said, "*Apane masjidaka jhadu ganu hai*" ("Ganu is your mosque's broom"). See what a beautiful expression it is! He never wished to be his personal secretary, always standing at his side, no! A *jhadu*! I like that expression so very much. Kabir expressed it one way and Dasganu expressed it another way.

DEVOTEE: What is a *jhadu*?

GURUJI: *Jhadu* means 'broom'. It is the one thing which is actually untouchable. Usually, people won't touch it. In India, even if they touch it, they have to wash at least their feet and hands. In the house it is an untouchable object. But in the masjid, it is the only thing which had the fortune of collecting not only the dust of Baba's feet, but the dust of the devotees' feet also. It is the only thing – only the broom – that had that opportunity, had that luck. So he's chosen that. After collecting all the dust, it stays in a corner, there! And nobody touches it, it's untouchable. That is his expression - you sing it daily in the *arati*. But some people say, "Why is he giving *arati*, why shouldn't I give it? From tomorrow I should give *arati*!" Or, "When such an important person like me is here in the *satsang*, he's asking that man to give *arati*!?" Yet they sing, "*Apane masjidaka jhadu ganu hai.*" How meaningless it is! So try to do the *arati* with meaning!

In the beginning Dasganu was such an orthodox person, in his traditions, in his customs, so much so that he couldn't take even the holy water which came from Baba. He thought, "I am a high-caste Brahmin and he is a Muslim," and so many other obstructions were there. But later he was transformed in such a way that, just like in Indian society, a pariah, a scavenger,

is the lowest of castes, almost untouchable, and among objects, the tools of the scavenger, the scavenging tool - the broom - is the most untouchable, so he chose the least important object to be himself. So, in another way, he was symbolically identifying himself as a scavenger in society. See how he was in the beginning, and how transformed he was in the end!



Guruji's voice

