

### Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba

As Gathered During a Field Research in Shirdi and Other Locales  
in October-November 1985

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## 14 **Bombay** Monday, October 28, 1985

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### Excerpts From My Diary

11:15 a.m. Had a good dinner yesterday and slept well. This morning I changed one hundred dollars into rupees. This afternoon we will go visit Swami Ram Baba: I am very eager to meet him.

10 p.m. We met with the venerable Swami Ram Baba at his home in Bandra around 8 p.m. It was a profound spiritual experience, in a way the crowning of my research work in Shirdi. He is certainly a great saint and I could feel his spiritual eminence, beyond words. At the end of our meeting I was given *prasād*. However, I could not record his talk nor take photos of him - he advised me to do 'click' in my heart! - and therefore I synthesized his words and teachings and my overall impressions of him on tape as soon as the meeting was over (I recorded my seventh mini-cassette).<sup>1</sup> I now go to sleep, grateful for all of today's experiences and blessings.

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<sup>1</sup> On Swami Ram Baba, see [http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/ram\\_baba.html](http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/ram_baba.html). See also Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh: Leelas During His Sojourn in Shirdi*, 179-80.

## Interviews of the Day

In Bombay, Swami Ram Baba's house, 8 p.m.

**Summary of a meeting with Swami Ram Baba at his Bombay apartment located in Bandra, Sheesh Mahal Building 9, Pali Hill 5-A, Demonty Road, behind Macronoells Roof Garden.**

I recorded these comments soon after the meeting ended.

An extraordinary experience. Truly a saintly man. I did not record his words since he didn't allow me to do so. It would have spoiled the religious atmosphere I suppose. Anyway, it has been a highly spiritual experience. Swami Ram Baba talked for quite a long time.

Swami Ram Baba is said to be one hundred and twenty-five years old now, having been born around 1860.<sup>2</sup> However, he seems to be half his age: his skin is smooth like that of a young man. He is very tall with a white, long, flowing beard. His hair is thinning white. He wears an orange robe. He sits on a comfortable chair and is able to speak very fluently in English, and apparently he also masters several Indian languages.

He spoke for quite a long time in general terms on the subjects of spirituality, on the search for inner peace, and on various fundamental issues... As he said: "Head, heart, hands, tongue".

About Shirdi Sai Baba, he said that there are no words for describing his personal relationship with him, nor is it possible to describe Shirdi Sai Baba's greatness. He literally stated: "There are no words", thus agreeing with what most of the villagers in Shirdi told me.

Swami Ram Baba laid emphasis on the implicit, fundamental need for *bhakti*, devotion, and for total surrender, *śaraṇāgati*, which one must have toward the teacher, toward Shirdi Sai. These are the crucial elements.

He then elaborated a bit on two other basic points: *śraddhā*, faith, and *sabūrī*, patience. He spoke of faith and patience as the two essential qualities. He also said that in his experience Sai Baba is the All, the Absolute, God. The experience which these avatāric personalities can produce in the heart of devotees is incommunicable. Swami Ram Baba said that it is only through their grace that one is capable of catching a glimpse of their splendor, of their teaching, and thus grow in one's *sādhana*. He said: "It is only because of Sai Baba or Sathya Sai Baba's grace... the grace of all these personalities". He also mentioned several other spiritual figures such as Ramana Maharshi<sup>3</sup> and Shivananda who, according to him, had personally known Sai Baba for about ten years.

Swami Ram Baba said that the work containing the whole message and teaching of Shirdi Sai is the book of Govind Raghunath Dabholkar alias Hemadpant, the *Shri Sai Satcharita*. He also noted that it should be read in Marāṭhī, since translations will never do justice to the original which rep-

<sup>2</sup> Apparently, Swami Ram Baba died in 1989 at the age of one hundred and twenty-six. If this is correct, he would have been one hundred and twenty-two in 1985, not one hundred and twenty-five.

<sup>3</sup> A famous South Indian *guru*, Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) had a decisive religious experience at the age of seventeen, in which the sudden awareness of the immortality of the self (*ātman*) dispelled his fear of death. A non-dual Vedāntin, he established himself as a renouncer on the Arunachala hill near Tiruvannamalai, where he remained for the rest of his life.

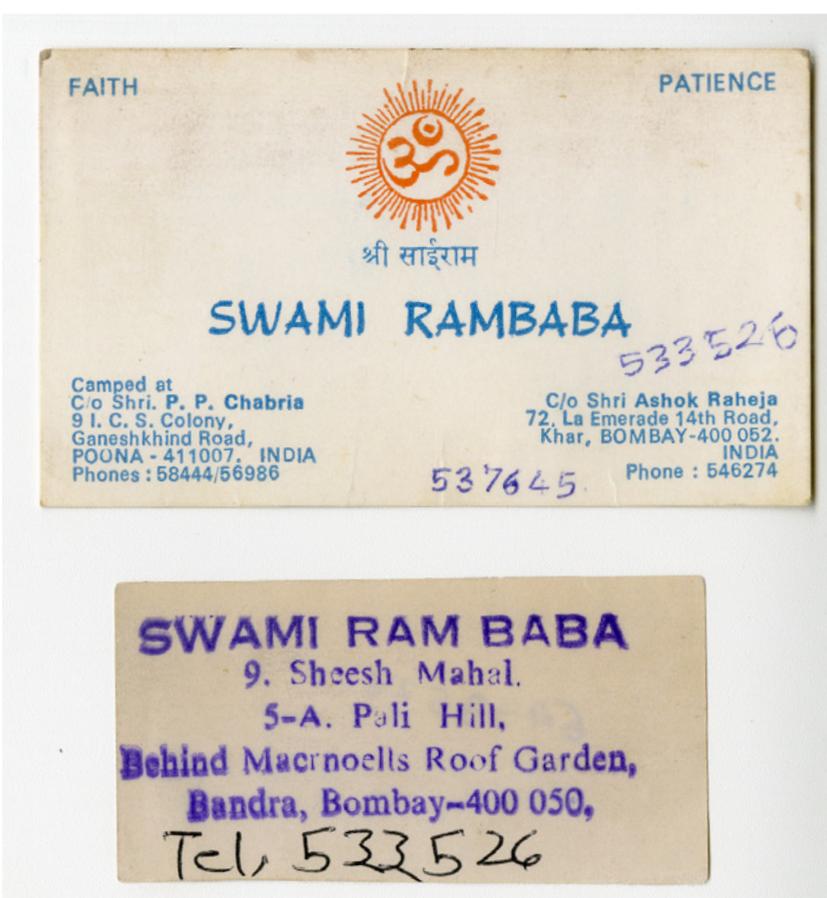


Figure 85 Swami Ram Baba's address cards

resents a kind of unique accomplishment. Speaking through this work is Shirdi Sai himself, Hemadpant being only his instrument.

Swami Ram Baba blessed me several times for my research, asking my name, and he also blessed me by touching my head and giving me *prasād* (two apples and a very tasty sugar candy, which I ate on my way back).

Swami Ram Baba has very piercing eyes, and truly, in his presence, one feels he is close to God. He didn't want to speak about his own personal experiences with Sai Baba. He simply said: "There are no words". When he said so, he closed his eyes, as if in a state of profound introspection, and would repeat: "There are no words, words would just ruin and dispel the essence". He also said that, when one goes to Shirdi, one should concentrate on this essential only, that is, on Shirdi Sai. One must look at him in the eyes as soon as he or she enters the *masjid*, without caring about the people there, the noise, and all the rest. All these things are mere distractions. Thus one must concentrate on the essential, looking at Sai Baba in the eyes, having his *darshan*, going to the *kākaḍ ārtī* at 5:15 in the morning, and concentrat-

ing one's mind on his image, on his *samādhi*. This is true experience; all other things must be left behind.

In Swami Ram Baba's apartment there were also other people, devotees of his I suppose. On the walls of the room there were many pictures of Shirdi Sai, as well as of Jesus and other Indian saints.

In his way of speaking, he showed a universalist approach. He said: "Truth is only one, and it is we who give it different names, different interpretations. In reality, it is one only".

He told us that Shirdi Sai, as all *avatāric* personalities, was someone who had renounced everything. That is, he had died to himself, had totally renounced his ego, and precisely for this reason he lived to the full. Swami Ram Baba also added: "And he is present. Shirdi Sai has not gone away, but is always present here with us. With me. Even to talk about him means to diminish his reality".

I didn't take any photographs of Swami Ram Baba. Indeed, I had asked him if I could take one but his answer was: "It is better to do 'click' in your heart, that's the appropriate place". This small incident brought to my mind an episode reported by Narasimhasvami in his *Charters and Sayings*: Sai Baba answered somewhat similarly to some boys who wanted to take a photograph of him.<sup>4</sup>

Swami Ram Baba also spoke about Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba since Mr. H.J. Agrawal, who accompanied me, mentioned him saying that he and his family are devoted to him. He seemed pleased to know that. He said he considers Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba as a divine incarnation, an *avatāra*, and that he is favorably impressed with the institutions he has founded. He said: "Sathya Sai Baba gives food to the poor and education, through his schools, to the minds of the youth". Moreover: "In front of Sathya Sai Baba, as with Sai Baba of Shirdi and others, one must come in an attitude of wanting to listen, so as to understand, comprehend".

Just before we left, he told us: "I give you my blessings, but since you are going to Puttaparthi, try to get the most out of the experience by being close to the Swami".

In what Ram Baba said one could feel a sense of spiritual oneness, a oneness of feelings. His main point was that the experience of Sai Baba is ineffable, and that it is only through Sai's grace that one can attain blessings, teachings, and final realization.

Speaking in more general terms, Swami Ram Baba referred to the thousands of books and messages which create more confusion than intelligence in man. He said that the mind constitutes man's greatness, and that man must learn to use it with discrimination, *viveka*, since the mind is the true computer. All other computers are pure instruments which only mind can make use of. It is the mind that took us to the moon.

Everything is science, he said. Science must not be given a negative connotation. It is man who makes it good or bad. Even defecating, eating, talking, living... everything is science. Hearing Swami Ram Baba speak of science and computers at his venerable age of one hundred and twenty-five years with such mental agility and acumen left me stupefied. Indeed, he sets a remarkable example of one living in the present, who is not imprisoned in the memories of his long past.

<sup>4</sup> See Narasimhasvami, *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*, 275 ("Photographing Baba").

Speaking of books, he said they should be 'digested' slowly and, above all, they should cost less. One who is really desirous of learning cannot afford them; on the other hand, he who is rich buys books, but then puts them on a shelf of his library and doesn't even look at them.

He spoke in general terms of the importance of attaching oneself to a teacher or to God himself, the Sadguru who lies within, of learning how to listen to his voice in silence, the inner voice.

Other devotees present at the meeting asked Swami Ram Baba how and when a person knows that he is really on the spiritual path. He replied that it is like asking a man why he is hungry. If he is hungry he eats, it is natural. And so it is on the spiritual path: there is a hunger and an urgency, an intense desire for union with God, for self-realization, for the elimination of the ego. Then it becomes natural for a man or woman to begin the search; it comes spontaneously. This urge, as Swami Ram Baba called it, seems to be a rare gift indeed.

He mentioned the *Bhagavadgītā* and the proliferation of commentaries on it, saying: "Only Kṛṣṇa really knew what he said to Arjuna". He added that Arjuna had to do his duty, to wage war, as that was his *dharma*.

I brought to Swami Ram Baba the greetings of Mr. Baldev Girme and his wife and of the cashier of The Pilgrim's Inn in Shirdi, who sent him photos and *prasād*. When I gave the gift packet to him, he kissed it and held it to his breast most reverently.

The experience of meeting and conversing with Swami Ram Baba was a great spiritual reward. When I think that this holy man was already around a hundred years old when I was born in 1962, the whole thing becomes surreal, dream-like. It was a profound teaching for me, and I shall never forget the old man with the fresh young face, and the mentality and intelligence to match.

