

"Love and serve; that is meditation"

Interview with Sai Baba

23rd January 1991

Olande Ananda

Having gone on 22nd afternoon from Bangalore Maha Bodhi Society by car to Puttaparti, a 3 hour drive by Ambassador over the flat and hot and dry countryside of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, Ven. Sanghasena, President of the Maha Bodhi Society, Bangalore, Michael Moebius, Lutheran Pastor from Flensburg, Germany and Sotthi, Ladakhi boy and myself attended the 5 p.m. Bhajan, having missed the Darshan. However, Baba came out during the Bhajan and we had a fairly good glimpse of him. Just in front of me in the queue Mr. Lionell Perera from Colombo, who had wanted to join me in Berlin Vihara in 1987, invited us to attend his Bodhi Puja at the Bodhi Tree.

On 23rd at 4.30 a.m. we had gone for the Omkar chanting and the Nagara Sankirtan, at the end of which I noticed people reserving seats near the entrance to Baba's palace. So, Ven. Sanghasena, Sotthi and I sat down, Michael being in a different place due to a stomach upset. Soon after that, numbers were given to the front row of the crowd, and the lines, according to those numbers were called to come inside for Darshan, in front of the Mandir. When Baba came out for Darshan it was 7:03 a.m. and he at first took a little distance from the ladies, but slowly came closer to them, receiving their letters with questions, blessing sweets and flowers, blessing them and throwing them to the crowd. Then he moved over to the men's side and very near me he was taking the letters of people with their questions. And also he looked straight into my eyes; I did not do vandana or worship, but smiled at him. And then, as he had passed by, having materialized some Vibhuti (holy ash) for some other person, he looked at me and I did Anjali Namaskaram and he waved, to get up and go inside for a personal interview.

So, myself, Ven. Sanghasena and Sotthi went, together with

some other people, who were individually called. Everybody could see us; we were quite conspicuous in our Buddhist monks' Robes. And then we sat down on the marble floor near Baba's room at one end of the Mandir. We were the first of a few. There was a group of ca. 6 Italians, 2-3 Frenchmen, one man from Madras and the three of us, all in all about 10-12. So, when Baba had finished his rounds, he came over and took us inside the room, where a big chair with red velvet was standing. We were all seated on the ground. He asked me where I am from. I told him: From Holland; then he asked Ven. Sanghasena: Ladakh, and from other people as well. After finishing that round he looked again at me, and said: "Buddham saranang gacchami, Sangham saranang gacchami, Dharmam saranang gacchami." Then he straight away asked from me: Where is God? - I said: "He is everywhere!" and Baba retorted: "That's book-knowledge!" So then I smiled and he said: God is everywhere - god is also in you; you are also God, this room is God, everything is God; do not make distinctions. And also do not make distinctions between Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. People are making those distinctions and fighting war amongst each other. If they would realize the oneness in diversity, they will not fight about the differences. Then after some time, he also asked some questions from the others and asked the whole group of about 6 people from Italy to come inside the inner room. So, we thought we were left out! They went in for a private interview into the other room for ca. 10 minutes, while we were waiting in the fore-room.

But then, when they were finished, Baba asked myself and Sanghasena to come to the other room, in which another big throne with red velvet and about 4-5 comfortable chairs were standing, and we were asked to take seats in the chairs and He sat down very relaxed. I felt no tension; very comfortable, and Baba asked us, where we came from, again, and also what we were doing. So, I said I am teaching meditation. So he asked: "What is meditation?" and I said: Meditation is the development of the mind to reach the Highest. Then He said: "Meditation is not unconsciousness! Make life into a meditation by loving and serving everyone. Love and serve; that is meditation. Meditation is concentration with determination!" Then I said: I have a problem: How to reach the Highest, God or Truth which is beyond all concept, beyond all thought and

image. How can I strive after that which I don't know? Baba's answer was simple: "Through Love. Love and serve. That is the way. Not love in the sense of physical lust; that is the body, but Love from the Heart; that is Compassion, real Love (Metta and Karuna), God. Love and Truth, those are the two factors which is God. Then I said: Baba, I have been here already in 1973. He said: I know, I know; but you were not yet a monk at that time - I know everything! - I was very surprised. I remember how I tried to touch his feet (do Padanamaskaram, prompted by my friend Sai Ram Yachendra, Venkatagiri Maha Raja's nephew, in 1973 - and Baba said: No-No!) He apparently remembered that incident; he said he remembered; or did he read my mind and go down my memory-lanes? And when we came back from the private interview into the other room, he asked from me in front of all the other people: Do you teach Buddhi? I said, I don't particularly teach Buddhism, but I teach meditation and mindfulness in daily life. Then he answered: Do not make such distinctions between people as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jew and Christian, but rather teach the Unity in diversity, the unity of all religions, the unity of all people; that is what the world needs. While we were still in the private interview room, he asked: "How is your health?" Sanghasena said: My health is not so good. Baba said: "but also not so bad! You have a stomach problem; I know! - because before 2-3 years you did not eat regularly and the stomach has been giving you problems, i.e. gastritis. But I will give you some Vibhuti; you mix it in water and drink it for three days and you will be all right." And actually, I thought of reminding Baba of giving this Vibhuti when we were in the other room, if he should forget; but Sanghasena said: NO, he won't forget. And actually he didn't forget, because when we came to the other room, Baba distributed packets of Vibhuti to all, and when in front of Sanghasena, he told him again; just mix it with water and drink it for three days and you'll be all right. This showed his personal concern, his not-forgetfulness, his kindness, his compassion and his immediate understanding of the Situation.

During our private interview, Baba also said to Sanghasena: "During your meditation, your mind is going all over the place; sometimes you have very bad thoughts; thinking of women etc. Try to be one-pointed, concentrate.

Then Ven. Sanghasena mentioned: Yes I want to reach one-pointedness, Samadhi. Then Baba said: Samadhi or meditation is not unconsciousness. Do meditation in every action that you do. Start the day with Love, fill the day with Love and end the day with Love. Serve those around you. When I mentioned that I am teaching meditation, he also said: Meditation like that is not enough. Then when I mentioned that I am also doing social service like the distribution of spectacles, he said: "Oh, that's very good." Then I mentioned the water project and other village development projects. And he said: "Yes, that is good".

So, we actually got out of there at least 3/4 hour that he spent with the group of 12, at least 15 minutes and extra special attention, even in the group. Just imagine, there are about 3000 people sitting outside, some of them having waited for years to get a private interview! We were at least for 10 minutes in the private interview room, in such a relaxed atmosphere, where I did not feel the tension and the expectation that I used to have when I saw him before, but I could look straight into his eyes, smile at him, be with him, understand what he was saying and I felt a deep sense of peace and a Spiritual Charge in the atmosphere which I also felt very much in the round building (R-2) where we were put up; as soon as I entered, especially the balcony on the 3rd floor, I could feel the intense Vibration; also during the Omkar in the morning; during the Bhajan, right from the moment when we arrived on the 22nd, yesterday evening; and while not so much - during the Nagarasankirtan -, but especially sitting silently, there was that same sort of Vibration and Charge in the atmosphere that I had experienced in 1973 in Whitefield even and more than those days, this time I felt that there were no disturbing or intruding thoughts and I felt very much at home without tension.

It is interesting to note that Michael could not make his mind settle down. The way he experienced the Bhajan in the evening of the 22nd: Michael experienced the kind of devotion and the rapt attention and the way that people were being mesmerized or taken in with great rapture as leading to thoughts about what happened during the Nazi time, when masses of people were following a leader. These kind of thoughts were coming into his mind; typically

German conditioning. And this morning Michael told me that from the very beginning, when he first heard about Baba through Govind in 1980, during the interreligious dialogue, he had been prejudiced against such people; such people meaning, those who perform miracles, who manipulate and influence other beings and had to work with this prejudice and overcome it in him self. When I asked him whether this visit was enough, Michael said: Well, either it's enough or I would need another 4-5 days to really be able to get something different from Baba and also to work through my prejudice. He has had a bad experience with another person, when he was a Student in Germany, who was also like a guru and manipulating people around him; and he didn't want anything to do with him. Actually, I told him, I think it is the fear *in* him of his own weakness, to be manipulated. the personality cult-aspect also by the Sai Baba movement, is something that Michael has a resentment against.

So, anyway, our morning was most auspicious, successful, happy and peaceful. We felt very much blessed, privileged to be selected out of such a vast crowd. Many people after the interview and after the Bhajan and Darshan came to us: You have been for an interview with Baba. What did Baba say; what did Baba give?

A very surprising thing to me was that Baba could speak such good English, so fluently, using very good words without faltering. But when a lady from Italy, not speaking any English spoke to him in Italian and wanted to show some pictures, Baba asked from the Madrasi man: "What language is she speaking?" Not knowing the answer, Baba said: "She speaks in German...." I retorted, No, Italian. Then Baba said: "I understand all languages, NAMELY THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART!" From an Italian man, Baba asked:"Are you a Christian?"- Yes - Then Baba waved his hand and a silver ring with a golden Cross appeared from thin air, which exactly fit the left ring finger of the Italian! Baba said:"You see; this hand is empty; from emptiness everything comes, from emptiness everything arises and into emptiness everything disappears. Emptiness and creation are the same. Emptiness is everywhere." This comes very close to the Zen teachings: Samsara is Nirvana. Nirvana is Samsara. Emptiness is fullness. And everything comes from Emptiness and goes back into Emptiness. He also pointed his

finger menacingly at the Italian man and his girl-friend and said: "You are very naughty. Do not think of her as your wife before marriage!" The Italian man then was repenting his sins with folded hands. Another young lady with a little boy, her son, when she got Vibhuti from the materialization, was shedding tears and later on also she was crying, either from happiness or from her personal sorrows, was hard to distinguish. The other Italian lady came in a beautiful Indian dress with gold embroidery and had a basket full of incense and objects, to be blessed by Baba. When he entered the room he said ugly: "Oh, a real market!"

[The end is missed]