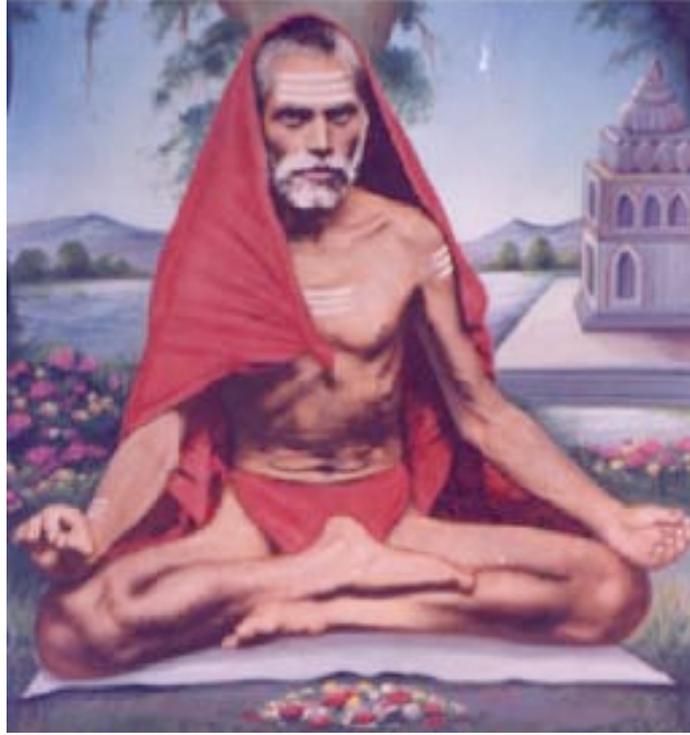


॥ दिगंबर दिगंबर श्रीपादवल्लभ दिगंबर ॥



Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati **Tembe Swami Maharaj**

(A Compact Biography)

1. THE BEGINNINGS

Background

India in the middle of nineteenth century was in a state of confusion and turmoil. The British, through the medium of East India Company had struck political roots and were about to begin the severe assault on the Indian Culture and religion. The roots of the ancient Vedic

religion, which had withstood the centuries of Muslim rule, appeared to be shaking under the Western influence. The Varnashram system, which had stood the test of time over millennia, was destabilized. The Brahmins who were supposed to guide the society were, for most part occupied by worldly pursuits. Even the awareness of true religion was fading from social psyche leave alone its knowledge. The confusion in the ranks of Vedic (Hindu) intellectuals was to manifest in the forms various 'Samajas' that took birth in that century. The people were losing their faith in the traditions, having forgotten the essence of the principles and practices of religion. The doctrines of our religion appeared ambiguous and contradictory, the practices so diverse as to be conflicting and mythology bereft of any meaning. There was a dire need for a person who could not only make the people clearly understand these doctrines but also presented, in the form of his own dedicated life, the ideal practice of religion and guiding them on the path to Divinity. Such a person indeed was Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati, the great saint and ascetic who revived the ancient Dattatreya tradition and embodied in his short life the ideals of Brahmacharyashram, Grihasthashram and Sanyasashram.

Family and Birth



Home Shrine of Shri Swami Maharaj

He was born in the village of Mangaon near Savantwadi, then a princely state, in southern Maharashtra in a traditional Brahmin family.

His parents were devotees of Lord Dattatreya, his father Shri Ganesh Bhataji Tembe spending years together in the remote Ganagapur temple of the Lord in Karnataka. His mother Ramabai also used to spend her time in religious pursuits like jap (recitation of mantras), pradakshina, path, atithisatkar (hospitality) etc. After a particularly long stay in Ganagapur, Lord Dattatreya appeared in a dream and instructed Shri Ganesh Bhataji to return to Mangaon and lead the life of a householder (grihastha), promising to incarnate as their son. It was after his return from Ganagapur that his eldest son Vasudeo was born on the 5th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravan of A.D. 1854. Tembe family was endowed with spiritual riches (daivi sampat) but had little temporal wealth. Their priestly duties were not adequate for the livelihood and Vasudeo's grandfather took to agriculture as a side business.

Elementary Education

At the age of three years Vasudeo started going to the private school in the Yakshini temple in the village. He had to learn writing with his fingers on a layer of dust, a very tiring and painful mode. Apart from the secular education in the school, Vasudeo also received traditional oral education from his grandpa Hari Bhataji. With his sharp intellect and quick memory Vasudeo soon mastered the basics of Sanskrit grammar and poetry.

Brahmacharyashram

As per the tradition Haribhataji performed the Maunjibandhan of his beloved grandson Vasudeo, which consists of initiation to the Vedic studies and Brahminhood and the first of the four Ashramas, Grihasthashram. Immediately after this, the young Vasudeo started the daily rituals ordained by the scriptures viz. Sandhya twice a day, 1000 recitations of Gayatri mantra, daily reading of shri Gurucharitra – the bible of Shri Datta tradition etc. He also completed a 2.4 million recitation of Gayatri. He strictly followed the religious disciplines prescribed by scriptures, particularly the Gurucharitra. He then started the study of Vedas, the holiest of the scriptures, under the guidance of Shri Tatya Bhataji Ukidave. He woke up daily before sunrise and took his bath and insulated himself from all impurities and contamination during the religious practices. He only took fresh, pure (sattvik) and vegetarian food prepared by himself or by his mother and never ate outside his home. The food prepared in this fashion, he used to first offer to sacrificial fire (Vaishvadev), the cow (Gograas), to the crow

(Kaakbali) and finally to the Lord Datta, before partaking it in the manner ordained by scriptures. During the meal any impurity in the environment led him to leave his food and fast for the day. He used to observe the fasts on the 11th moons (Ekadashi) of both the fortnights, when he did not even drink water and did not sleep during the day or in the night.

Vasudeo, with his sincerity, sharp intellect and phenomenal memory, soon completed his study of the Vedas and became proficient in the priestly duties. Soon, he became a respected and beloved figure in the neighborhood and started contributing to the family livelihood.

During this period, he also studied some astrology and Sanskrit poetry with one Shri Sadhale shastri. However his astrological calculations soon started embarrassing Sadhale Shastri by being more accurate than the latter's. This led Sadhale to stop Vasudeo's tuition.

Mantrasiddhi

Vasudeo's austerities, dedicated practices and devotion soon led to his acquiring mantrasiddhi i.e., supernatural powers operating through vedic mantras. There are numerous examples of these. Once he was traveling by foot with a fellow priest, to a nearby village through a forest. Suddenly they saw snake slithering ahead of their path and his companion asked him whether Vasudeo could try a mantra on it. Quickly Vasudeo held some dust nearby in his hand and reciting an appropriate mantra, sprinkled it in a circle around the passing snake. Suddenly, the snake was stopped in his tracks. It could not cross the circle and started moving round and round within it. The two priests went about their way and having finished their business in the neighboring village, returned to their homes, forgetting all about the snake. Only the next afternoon, Vasudeo suddenly remembered the snake and went to the spot along with his friend. To his horror, the snake was lying listless in that circle apparently totally exhausted after unsuccessfully trying to break through the circle. Quickly, Vasudeo took some more dust and reciting an antidote mantra, sprinkled it over the poor creature. The snake, as if suddenly released from the bondage, sprang away into the bushes. This so deeply affected Vasudeo – we better call him Vasudeo Shastri or simply Shastriji, that he never again used that mantra

Once at his sister's place, Vasudeo displayed his mantric prowess by turning her intractable cow docile. He also helped local police by providing an accurate description and modus operandi of a particularly

evasive gang of robbers. Another time, he correctly predicted the capture of the accused by the police of another state. He also helped people in distress by relieving them of their chronic ailments. This augmented his reputation in Mangaon and the surrounding area. He was now respectfully addressed as Shri Vasudeo Shastri.

However, it must be emphasized here that Shri Vasudeo Shastri never employed his powers for either monetary gain or to impress others in any way. He only used his powers to help the needy and to relieve suffering. We shall see that this compassion for his fellow beings continued to be a major motivation in his entire life.

2. HOUSEHOLDER (Grihashthram)

Grihashthram

Shri Vasudeo Shastri was married at an early age of 21 years (1875 A.D.) much against his wishes. One Babaji Pant Hawaldar of Ranganagad, a nearby village, approached his teachers Ukidave and Alavani to get his rather plain looking daughter with defective foot, married to Vasudeo. Together, they practically settled the marriage without a word to Vasudeo. When his mother learnt of this, she was dismayed that her son has taken such a major decision without even consulting her. When Vasudeo later told her that he knew nothing of the matter and had not even set eyes upon the girl, she was somewhat pacified. Eventually, Vasudeo had to bow to the wishes of his teachers and thus married to Babaji's daughter Bayo whom, as per the custom Vasudeo's mother christened as Sou. Annapurna. Soon after the wedding Vasudeo commenced the worship of ritual fire (*smartagni*) and completed a *Gayatri purashcharan*.

Subsequent to marriage, the need to earn some extra money took Vasudeo to Goa for a few months. He studied astrology with Shri Neelkanth Padye, a renowned astrologer in those days. Vasudeo's sharp intellect and adherence to religious discipline, earned him the affection and respect Shri Padye. However, Vasudeo had soon to return to Mangaon because of his father Shri Ganesh Bhataji's illness. Despite Shri Padye's having held his belongings to ensure Vasudeo's return, he never did.

Vasudeo lost his pious and simple father at the age of 23(1877 A.D.). Shri Ganesh Bhataji was a spiritually evolved soul and knew the time of

his death beforehand. He was only 56-57 at the time.

Shastriji's married life was not exactly a bed of roses. Sou. Annapurna never got along well with her mother-in-law. She had to suffer a lot of verbal and at times corporal abuse at the hands of Vasudeo's mother. Shastriji being a devoted son never even uttered a word in his wife's defense in spite of sympathy for her, lest his mother be offended. Annapurna felt neglected and at times rebelled by not cooperating in the various religious rituals, which formed such a major portion of Shastriji's life. These continuing domestic clashes sharpened his inherent detachment. The thoughts of renouncing it all for an itinerant life were growing stronger by the day. One day, he left home quite determined to get initiated as a monk (*Sanyasi*) and went to Savantwadi. There, in a chance encounter, a spiritual being (*brahma-pishach*) told him through the medium of Shri Aanaavkar, quite unexpectedly, that his thoughts of renunciation are premature and he has much work to do at Mangaon. This made him change his mind. This particular brahm-pishach, on his own admission was the spirit of a learned and virtuous predecessor of Aanaavkar (a Brahmin) who accidentally killed a cow while trying to drive her away from his garden. He never told this to anybody nor did he perform the necessary absolutions (*prayaschhitta*). On his death, the Chitragupta (the angel of judgment) gave him a choice between the births of tiger or abrahm-pishach. He opted for the latter since this would preserve his memory and knowledge. According to him this birth would last for from hundreds to thousands of years. This Aanaavkar spirit was indeed very knowledgeable and was several times instrumental in solving Shri Vasude Shastriji's problems in astrology and scriptural interpretations.

Narasobawadi

He now started feeling the urge to travel to Narasobawadi, the place where Shri Narsimh Saraswati Swami Maharaj, the second incarnation of Lord Dattatreya in the age of Kali (15th Century A.D.), spent 12 years in austerities, situated at the confluence Krishna and Panchganga. The Lord Dattatreya is worshipped here in the form of His feet or Padukas installed under the ancient Audumbar tree, alongside the riverbed. Doubtful about his mother's consent for traveling to Narasobawadi (also referred to as Wadi), he kept his thoughts to himself. One night a Brahmin appeared in his dreams and said, "Shastriji, if you are so keen to go to Wadi why don't you? Your mother will surely consent and you will get company as well as the money!" After this dream, Shastriji spoke to his mother who said, "I have no objection! Take a trip if you so wish!" The other predictions in the

dream also came true and Shastriji arrived in Wadi. On the way he was instructed through another dream to contact Shri Govind Swami a self-realized soul then staying in Wadi.

Shri Govind Swami

On reaching Wadi, Shastriji took the customary dip in the Krishna River and wet and fresh from the dip, took a vessel full of the holy river water to be poured over the padukas in the temple. The priests, doubtful of his identity, did not allow him into the sanctorum. Disappointed, Shastriji started climbing up the steps of the riverbank, when Shri Govind Swami, who was ordered by the Lord Himself, came down the same steps addressing Shastriji in a surprisingly familiar manner, "welcome Vasudeo Shastri! It appears the priests haven't allowed you to worship the Lord's feet! Come with me, please." With these words he handed his sacred staff (Dand) to Shastriji and took him back to the temple. Thus accompanied by the revered sage, Shastriji was naturally allowed access to the Padukas. From that day onwards Shri Govind Swami became the mentor and the guide of Shri Vasudeo Shastri.

One night, during his maiden visit to Wadi, Shastriji descended to the river to wash his feet. On his way back, he went to the temple and as he was circling it, he was suddenly confronted by a tall and radiant monk who admonished him, "are you not aware of the rule forbidding visit to the temple at night after the night service?" Shastriji paid his salutation and asked his pardon. When he recounted the event to Shri Govind Swami, the monk was none other than Shri Narsimh Saraswati Himself. During this visit, Shastriji was initiated to the regular worship of Shri Datta Padukas, in addition to the Panchayatan worship he was practicing, by the instructions from Lord Dattatreya, under the guidance of Shri Govind Swami. He was also ordered to perform ritual of reading of Shri Guru Charitra.

Lunar Fast (Chandrayan Krichhra)

By the time he returned from Wadi, the renovation of his old house he had commenced while leaving, was nearing completion. He undertook to carry out the house warming rituals (Vastu Shanti). However, his wife could not join him within the auspicious time. Shastriji, dejected by this, exclaimed, "no one will live in this house. This place will be asylum (dharmashala)." That is what came to pass. His brother Shri Hari Bhataji performed the ritual later.

Such events continued to add to Shastriji's detachment and goaded him to austerities to dissolve his sins and cleanse his mind as prescribed by scriptures. Thus he set out to undertake the rigorous lunar fast. The fast is to be commenced on a day of dark moon (Amavasya) by totally abstaining from food. On the first day of the bright moon fortnight, one serving of food of the size of hen's egg is taken. This is increased by daily increments, to a meal of 15 servings on the full moon day. During the dark fortnight, the food intake is decreased by one serving each day till the next dark moon, when a total fast is observed. During this period, all daily injunctions viz. three baths and Sandhya thrice a day, the daily worships, recitations and other sever austerities continued. Shastriji had instructed his family to refrain from feeding him anything, even water, in the event of his getting unconscious. The fast was successfully concluded. However it left Shastriji sick and tired and he could hardly walk. Even so, he set out for Wadi along with his mother, for the celebration the birth anniversary of the Lord Dattatreya.

Wadi Again

This time his stay in Wadi extended to four months. Shri Govind Swami urged him to undertake the path of dedication to Lord Dattatreya, which he ignored. The same night the Lord Himself appeared in his dream and bequeathed the mantra. Even as he woke up from his dream Shri Govind Swami called out from his bed, "Shastriji, got your mantra? I shall teach you the practice (vidhan) tomorrow." This greatly accentuated Shastriji's reverence for Shri Govind Swami whom he now accepted as his Master. Next Shri Govind Swami gave him on the practice of the mantra and also instructed him to read Shri Shankaracharya's bhashya (exposition) on Upanishads.

Shri Mouni Swami

During this period, Shastriji's urge for renunciation surfaced again. However Shri Mouni Swami told him that he has to stay at Mangaon for some more days. Shri Mouni Swami hailed from the Solapur area. Leaving home in childhood in search of Divinity, he travelled to holy places traversing the country from Kashi to Rameshwar on foot, several times, performing austerities and living only on neem leaves for years. At the youthful age of 25 years, he was initiated to ascetic life (Sanyasi) and christened Pradyumna Saraswati by his master. However, having abstained speech (Mouni) for several years, he came to be addressed as Mouni Swami. Absorbed always in the

contemplation of the Brahma (Godhead), he had a child-like disposition. He was greatly respected and his utterances always came to pass. Even Lord Dattatreya seemed to respect his word. He passed away in Wadi only. He had great affection for Shastriji.

3. THE MANGAON TEMPLE

Idol

Towards the end of his stay at Wadi, Lord Dattatreya communicated to Shri Vasudeo Shastri his plan to "reside in Mangaon for seven years". Soon thereafter Shastriji set out for Mangaon for the necessary preparations for the Lord's stay. After paying his respects to the Mother of the Universe (Mahalaxmi) at Kolhapur, he was passing through the market of a town called Kagal, thinking about the idol of Lord Dattatreya for the proposed temple at Mangaon. Suddenly his eyes fell on a sculptor's shop when the sculptor himself came out of the shop and after salutations started saying, "Shastriji, please give me the specifications of the idol you want and I shall make exactly what you want. Please do not worry about money." The sculptor had received instructions from the Lord to make the idol for Shastriji. Consequently, Shastriji stayed at Kagal for a couple of days. As per his instructions, the sculptor made a brass idol about seven fingers width tall, sitting in siddha posture with two arms signalling bestowal (var) and protection (abhay). The sculptor's charges amounting to about 20-25 rupees were paid collectively by some local gentlemen.

The Temple

Taking the idol Shastriji returned to Mangaon. As he was nearing his home, an empty space caught his attention, which he thought, would be suitable for the temple. However as the land belonged to someone else, he kept his thought to himself and kept the idol in a corner in his home. Within a couple of days the widow of the owner of the land had a dream instructing her to donate her land to a Brahmin. She approached Shastriji's mother for advice. On her suggestion, the lady donated her land to Shastriji for the proposed temple.

Having thus received the idol and the land without much effort, Shastriji immediately started the construction of the temple. With

inspired assistance from the residents in the form of material, money and labour, the temple facing east, was completed in a mere seven days. A well was dug up nearby in three days. Shastriji constructed the sanctum with bricks laid by his own hands. The idol from Kagal was consecrated in the new temple on the 5th bright day of Vaishakh of A.D. 1883.



Mangaon Temple

As per His pledge, the Lord started residing in the Mangaon temple, as evidenced by the subsequent response of the people, their experiences and general prosperity of the place. The place became well known in a short span of time and people started coming in hordes, especially on Saturday evenings when a palanquin with the mobile idol of the Lord used to be taken out, circling the temple three times, singing the Names of the Lord, bhajans and songs in his praise. The offerings of the devotees used to be collected in heaps and distributed as prasad. The festival of the Birth Anniversary of Lord Dattatreya was also celebrated on a large scale. Around 8-10 thousand people used to partake the meal (prasad) on the occasion. People afflicted with evil spirits etc. used to attend the Saturday palanquin. They used to get the advise on the ways to relief through Shastriji. Many people came with some wishes and done following Shastriji's advice, which consisted mainly of some form or other of the worship of the Lord, fulfil those.

Since Shastriji believed this temple to be an extension of the Narsobawadi temple, all cash offerings in excess of a rupee used to be sent to Wadi. Only a quarter of the remaining income was paid to Shastriji's family. Shastriji used to stay alone in the temple premises and used to obtain foodstuff by begging and cook himself after distributing to the guests of the temple. He used to discharge his priestly duties with great dedication, strict discipline and deep love. A couple of cows and dozens of dogs formed a part of the temple establishment and were well looked after. All major traditional Hindu festivals were celebrated in the temple as in any Hindu family.

An Audumbar tree grew in the foreground of temple. A platform was built around it and Shri Datta Padukas were installed on it and regular worship accorded to them. Everything was conducted strictly according to the scriptural code and the instructions from the Lord. Smallest deviation or contamination, used to invite disapproval of the Lord and sometimes the guilty used to be punished and purification carried out.

As the temple grew in stature, people started addressing Shastriji with the respectful epithet of Buwa. Personal conduct of Buwa was ideal. Getting up two hours before sunrise, he used to practice Yoga. Then after ablutions and bath, he used to perform his personal prayers and worship and then perform the worship of the temple idol. Then he used to go round to collect foodstuff by begging and also pick up wood for fuel, on the way back. After cooking the food himself, he used to offer it to the sacrificial fire (vaishwadev) and set aside portions for the cow and guest/s and then partake the remaining food, which mostly consisted of rice and green beans (moong daal). In the afternoon, some students used to come to take lessons in scriptures, grammar, poetry etc. Some distressed persons seeking relief or some seeking fulfilment of desires or a few genuine seekers of truth used to come and seek Buwa's advice in the afternoon. Later in the afternoon Buwa gave religious discourses. With sunset, evening services (Aarati, mantra pushpa) were conducted. Then, before going to bed he used to read religious and spiritual books and practice yoga. He did not have any physical contact with his wife unto this time.

Shri Gurucharitam

At this stage, Lord Shri Datta commanded Buwa to render the Marathi Gurucharitra in Sanskrit. Buwa started composing the manuscript and completed it in less than two weeks. On completion he heard the voice of the Lord saying "this book has two thousand verses). When Buwa counted the verses were substantially less than 2000. After some

thinking, he recounted the verses in the manner of saptashati, counting half-verses and uvach mantras, the count added up to 2000. This was the first major work of Buwa and his friends were surprised to see him compose it. They asked him, " Buwa, you have hardly been out of Mangaon. How come you can compose such wonderful book?" Buwa replied, " I do not compose it. I just copy on paper the words I see!" The saintly quality of disowning all credit for their achievements was thus evident in Buwa. Once, while performing a noontime Aarati, an inspired poem gushed out from Buwa's mouth. When he wrote it out in the afternoon, recalling the words, it was found that the poem (Aarati) comprised of the meaning of the four mahawakyas (the great sentences), which form the basis of Vedic philosophy.

Yogic Progress

Buwa was a regular and advanced practitioner of Yoga, the ancient Indian science of union with divinity. Starting with physical disciplines viz. postures, attitudes, cleansing practices, the student progresses through breath control to command the life force (prana) and finally the mind. Complete cessation of pranic and mental activity is the final aim of Yoga, when the Yogi or seer gets established in his Real Nature (Patanjali's Yogsutra). He thus realizes his Self and is completely freed of all worldly sorrows, bonds and cravings and attains Knowledge, Bliss and the Essence of Being. For years Buwa used to go to a cave near Mangaon for yogic practice. Later he was directed by the Lord to practice yoga at the temple itself. Once due to some error in the practice of yoga Buwa was afflicted with persistent hiccups. Lord Dattatreya directed him to a revenue officer in a village named Kapashi. When Buwa approached him, the gentleman flatly denied any knowledge of yoga. Ordinarily a genuine student of Yoga or any traditional Indian science will not reveal himself to every other curious person. The traditional knowledge is guarded as a valuable possession and revealed only to a genuine and sincere student who will use it selflessly for the good of humanity. The purpose of this secretive tradition is to prevent the knowledge from falling into the wrong hands whereby a lot of harm can incur to the society. Buwa was not to be denied so easily, however. He told the revenue officer that he had come to seek his guidance on Lord Dattatreya's instructions and would not leave without obtaining it. Finally, on himself receiving Lord's signal, the yogi not only told Buwa the cause and cure of the hiccup, but also gave an ancient manuscript of the conversation between Kabir and Dharmdas which was very helpful for Buwa's further progress in yoga.



Mangaon Cave for Meditation

With constant guidance and help from the Lord, Buwa soon became an adept and a master. He soon acquired the supernatural powers (siddhis) associated with higher stages of Yoga. He started reading minds and would tell people about their problems as soon as he saw them. This went on for almost a year when Lord Datta forbade it. In his entire life, Buwa was to later reveal, he had rarely availed of these powers.

The Black Magic

As Buwa's fame started spreading and his reputation growing, there were people jealous of him. Some of them established Datta temples in competition. Not only they failed to evoke any response but also some of them met with some misfortune or other and these temples were closed down. Buwa also incurred enmity of some persons while protecting some victims of their black magic. One such person targeted Buwa himself. Though fully capable of retaliating the magic Buwa

desisted from doing so as it would have harmed, even killed the perpetrator. Such was his commitment to non-violence that he preferred to suffer the consequences of the black magic rather harming its perpetrator. Thus he was afflicted with chronic dysentery and suffered from it all his life. The ailment interrupted the yoga practice and Buwa was directed by Lord Datta to consummate his long neglected marriage.

Family Way

Buwa's family was happy to get the news. A small room in the rear of the temple served as the venue of Buwa's married life. Buwa continued to take his lunch at the temple. Sou. Annapurna- his wife however, used to go home for lunch and return at nightfall after finishing her household chores at home. One night, when she returned to the temple, Buwa was not in their room. She came to the sanctum looking for him where he was engrossed in reading something. So she sat outside waiting for him to finish since women were not allowed inside the sanctum. After considerable time, Buwa came out of the sanctum and found his wife in deep meditation. Calling her out and even shaking her too failed to break her trance and Buwa had to employ some yogic techniques to wake her up. After opening her eyes she said, "why did you wake me up? I was in such a bliss!" This is an example of God's grace leading a true devotee to the highest yogic state even without any study of yoga.

Goodbye to Mangaon

Soon Sou. Annapurna was pregnant. Unfortunately, Buwa's mother reacted adversely to the development and was nasty to her daughter-in-law. Buwa was pained at this. Even as he was wondering about the future, one morning after the daily worship, the Lord told him, "We have to leave Mangaon today!" When Buwa remonstrated that it was not yet seven years, he was assured that it was seven years by lunar calendar! He was further instructed by Lord Datta to take the idol and his wife along. Accordingly, he packed up and took leave of his mother who thought he is going on another of his pilgrimage to Wadi and was a bit indifferent. He then told his wife to accompany him if she wished. She immediately prepared to join him. Buwa instructed her to remove all jewellery except the Mangal Sutra and she complied. Thus within an hour of the Lord's order, the couple was on the way to Savantwadi. Buwa was carrying two idols, a small box of gadgets of daily worship and a metal flask for water. His wife carried a change of clothes. These

were the only belongings they took while leaving Mangaon for good. He told the relatives and acquaintances who came to see them off that he had nothing in Mangaon. They reached Savantwadi in an hour or so where Sou. Annapurna took her lunch at Naropant Ukidave and Buwa cooked his meal from the foodstuff obtained by begging. Ukidave pressed them a some clothes and essentials for the way and by evening the couple resumed their to Narsobawadi.

On reaching Wadi and paid homage to the lotus feet of Lord Datta and to the two revered saints, Shri Govind Swami and Shri Mouni Swami and acquainted them with the Lord's order to live in Wadi. The couple then settled down in a dharmashala (public shelter). Buwa used to bring daily rations by begging and his wife used to cook the food. They often entertained guests with the same Spartan fare. Once all sanyasis (monks) in Wadi came to them for lunch since the all priests of Wadi were in the mourning. In due course, Sou. Annapurna delivered a stillborn child.

Shri Govind Swami's End

Later Shri Govind Swami's end approached. He called Buwa and elucidated the ten major Upanishads to him and gave the books and shaligram to Buwa. Shri Govind Swami soon became ill and asked Buwa to read Manan or the book of contemplation. While Buwa read it to him Swami explained its concealed meaning and in the end, blessed him. The day prior to Shri Govind Swami's end Buwa came to know of the imminent end and spent the day by Swami's bedside. Everybody in Wadi including Mouni Swami grieved the eventual passing away. His body was flown into the Krishna waters as befitting a Sanyasi. Buwa only performed the last rites.

4. RENUNCIATION

Wife's Death

A short while after this, Buwa received divine orders to proceed to north. Defying all entreaties of the priests in Wadi, Buwa took leave of Mouni Swami and proceeded to Kolhapur, Pandharpur, Barshi and finally Gangakhed. At Gangakhed, his wife died of cholera on the 14th dark day of Vaishakh, 1891 A.D. Buwa looked after her in her last illness and performed the last rites. Thus he was now completely free

of all family bonds. Even as he was looking forward to be initiated to the monastic life, he had a premonition of his own death by cholera. He was so frustrated and angered that he started abusing the Lord. He blamed the Lord for not permitting him to take sanyas and now confronting him with an unclean death. By the Lord's Grace, the death was averted and on 14th day after his wife's death Buwa took the vows of asceticism.

Vows of Asceticism



Shri Swami Maharaj as a Sanyasi

On 14th day after his wife's death Buwa took the vows of asceticism. The previous night the Lord appeared to him in a dream and initiated him to pranav mantra and ordered him to eat only madhukari food i.e. food solicited from three or more Brahmin households and not to accept monastery food. Next morning, Buwa went to the banks of Godavari, called learned Brahmins and performed the absolution rites (prayashchitta). Even as Buwa was wishing for, a sanyasi appeared from across the river and administered the vows of sanyas. Thus Shri Vasudev Shastri fulfilled his long cherished desire to become a sanyasi. It is notable that he entered the fourth ashram immediately after the termination of Grihasthashram (householder), following the injunction

of the scriptures never to stay without ashram. It would now be appropriate to refer to him as Paramhans Parivrajakacharya Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati Swami Maharaj.

Sceptre

Shri Swami Maharaj was ordered by the Lord to proceed to Ujjaini and receive the monastic sceptre from Shri Narayananand Saraswati. Accordingly he proceeded, on foot as he had always done, to Ujjaini via Washim, Umardhed, Mahur, Khandwa, Badhawai, Onkareshwar, Mandaleshwar and Balwada. Staying in a Datta temple in Ujjaini, he went to Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swami Maharaj and solicited the sceptre. With the consent of his master Shri Achyutanand Saraswati Swami Maharaj, Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swami Maharaj ritually presented the sceptre to Shri Swamiji and bestowed upon him the Yogpatta (monastic name) of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati. That day, on repeated entreaties of his Guru Swamiji partook the food at the monastery, thus violating the Lord's orders. As a result, he started continuous vomiting which ceased only after Shri Narayananand Swami prayed Lord Dattatreya and asked for His forgiveness. Throughout Swamiji's life, he had to strictly obey the Divine orders and any deviation invited punishment from the Lord. Swamiji spent his first Chaturmaas with his monastic guru at Ujjaini that year.

Thus began the itinerancy of Swamiji. The purpose of his life was revealed to him by Lord Dattatreya when he ordered him to travel all over India and preach the Sanatan vedic path and bring back the people gone astray from Varnashram dharma. He traversed the country for the next 23 years following strictly the harsh discipline of the Sanyas Ashram. A brief chronology of major events in his life and an itinerary appears elsewhere.

Possessions

His possessions included 4 loincloths, 2 robes, the sceptre, a Kamandalu (wooden or bamboo water vessel), occasionally a woollen cloth, a book of Upanishads, a case of worship utensils, two idols of Datta and a cord to draw water and again occasionally some paper and writing materials. He had no other belongings. He washed his clothes and utensils himself and never accepted anyone's service or anyone's touch. If anybody touched him, he used to take a bath. Similarly, he used to take a bath every time he passed stools.

He always travelled on feet and never used sandals. He used to walk fast. He avoided towns and cities and used to travel along riverbanks. He preferred to travel alone. He passed through dense forests, hot deserts and steep mountains, facing extremes of weather wearing only a robe. Only once, after a dip in the Ganges at her source, when he almost froze to unconsciousness, people warmed him with a fire to revive him. Otherwise he never permitted himself any exposure to fire in accordance with the Sanyasin's code. He usually preferred to stay in some temple or other rather than homes. He was always on the move. He used to unhesitatingly set out on paths long abandoned due to development of railways and roads, often against the advise of the residents of the area. Sometimes Lord Dattatreya or other divine beings (viz. Ashwatthama) guided him.

Only on a few exceptional occasions he stayed in one place for more than a week. As per the Sanyasin's regulations he used to stay at one place only during the two months of rainy season. This period is known as Chaturmaas. Most of his 23 Chaturmaas were in small villages and remote places. Once people came to know of his Chaturmaas, they used to throng the place fighting great hardships and defying epidemics like cholera and plague.

Person

Swami Maharaj was medium built, dark complexioned and not greatly impressive till he started speaking. His speech was soft but assertive, clear and incisive but warm and kind, detached and yet captivating, erudite and yet illuminating, concise but deeply influencing. He had flashy and piercing eyes, which appeared to look deeply into you. His austere lifestyle, deep and extensive knowledge of scriptures, his stringent adherence to religious code, his selfless approach and last but not the least his spontaneous, indiscriminate and innate compassion and genuine concern for all he met, won him the life long devotion of literally thousands of disciples, all across the country. In return he provided for them an ideal, a spiritual guide, a solace and succour, a symbol and an approach to the Divine.

Daily Schedule

Shri Swami Maharaj woke up early about three hours before sunrise and after the morning ablutions, used to take his morning bath. He used to bathe at least thrice a day. After his bath, he used to worship the sceptre and perform the Pranav (Om) incantation and then offer

ritual bath to the Datta idol and apply ashes to Him by way of worship. Indian monks are not permitted to pluck flowers and leaves (Tulasi, Bel) etc. Hence the idol got these offerings only when someone brought them for Swami Maharaj. The mornings were mostly devoted to teaching the students.

Shri Swami Maharaj was a virtual living encyclopaedia of Vedic culture and used to teach seemingly unlimited range of subjects viz. Sanskrit grammar, Vedic texts, the technology of vedic rituals, the six systems of Indian philosophy (Yoga, Nyay [logic], Sankhya, Mimamsa, Vedanta, Vaisheshik), Ayurveda (Indian Medicine) etc. His knowledge in these subjects was not merely theoretical but he was a Master who could guide a sincere student to the ultimate goal of all these Indian systems namely Self-realization. He was apparently well versed in several arts viz. music, poetry, spinning, weaving etc. He even advised right moves to chess players, sometimes without watching the game, though he never played himself. No sincere student was ever turned away by him. It was impossible to gauge the range and depth of his knowledge. Once at Narsobawadi, an old Brahmin, proud of his accomplishment in Samaved (the third of the Vedic quartet) came to Shri Maharaj and insisted on singing the Vedic Mantras, in spite of the latter's suggestion to sing before the Padukas. Suddenly his memory failed and he could not recall even a single Mantra. Shri Maharaj then rendered a Mantra, convincing the Brahmin of Swamiji's omniscience and deflating his pride.

At noon he used to set out to solicit food (Bhiksha). A Sanyasi cannot cook his food and hence has been ordained to solicit cooked food (Madhukari). Swami Maharaj used to accept food only from three to five homes of Southern Brahmins following the scriptural injunctions. There were periods in his life when travelling through certain parts of India, he did not encounter Southern Brahmins and had to live on coconuts, groundnuts and other 'dry' food. This often worsened his dysentery and caused much physical suffering. However this did not affect his schedule, pace, activity or the continuous journey. If anybody saluted on his way to Bhiksha, he used to fast that day. Sometimes such a fast used to follow the mandatory fasts of the 11th day (Ekadashi). On the day of fast he used to take a glass of buttermilk or a fruit. This did not seem to affect him in any way at all! He then used to dip the sack of collected food in river water and hang it so the water dripped out and with it all the taste! A Sanyasi, as indeed any seeker of truth, should eat only to support life and should be totally indifferent to taste. Swami Maharaj provided a shining illustration of this rule. The food was then offered to Lord Dattatreya, and split into three equal portions. After giving one portion each to the River and Gomata (cow) he partook the

remaining one portion. He thus literally observed the rule of Sanyasi eating only eight morsels of food, that too only once a day.

In the afternoon, he used to entertain people. Some of them were genuine seekers knowledge and truth while a vast majority sought his advice for their personal problems. He gave all a patient hearing and offered solutions that satisfied everyone. After evening bath it was time for discourses on Puranas or scriptures. He had an excellent style of discourse, explaining the subject clearly with illustrations and authenticating his statements with apt quotations. Though he referred to Vedic mantras, he considered it a sacrilege to pronounce a Vedic sentence in discourse. Not only did he follow this canon himself but also insisted on adherence to it by others. There were occasions when he walked out of a discourse when the speaker uttered a Vedic Mantra.

After the discourses, depending on the people around, there used to be Bhajans and Kirtans. After that, often there used to be some more individual interviews. It was well past midnight before Shri Swami Maharaj could lie down for a few hours of rest. How he managed with so little food or so little sleep is as beyond human comprehension.

5. LOKASANGRAH

Introduction

(Garnering of people, towards the divine). Shri Swami Maharaj was a Master, an Adept, and a liberated and self-realized soul. He had no desires or aspirations of his own. His only motivation in life was to obey his Lord and Master Shri Dattatreya. All his actions were directed by His will. Inherently reserved and reclusive, he was forced to spend long periods of his life amongst crowds. Sometimes he deliberately chose to spend his Chaturmaas in remote inaccessible places like Narasi, Kurugaddi etc. However, people sought him out before long and gathered in large numbers. He thus used to be surrounded by people almost continuously with hardly any privacy. All people had equal access to him. There was no discrimination in spite of his personal strict code of purity. Only criterion was the sincerity of the visitor. People of all castes and even those following non-Vedic religions viz. Muslims, Parsis etc. were the recipients of the grace of Shri Swami Maharaj. He used to instruct them some practice or other consistent with their faith. For examples, Muslims were often asked to

repeat the Quranic verses and benefited from it. Proselytisation was a word not found in his dictionary. Having realised the essence of all faiths, he only guided everyone on their respective predestined paths all of which he knew to lead to the one Reality. No one got a private audience or any special treatment. Even royalties had to mingle with ordinary folks while visiting him.

However, he was rather strict with Hindus, especially Brahmins. He expected to observe the minimum expected religious conduct and frowned upon those going wantonly astray. If a Brahmin sporting a crop cut instead of shikha-sutra or a widow wearing long hair did not get his audience. Only a suitable change in their demeanour after prescribed ablutions rendered them eligible to meet Shri Maharaj. Once a person repented and wanted to make amends, Shri Maharaj used to offer his personal guidance to him, teaching even the most elementary practices.

Of course, there were those who either wanted to judge or in their erroneous thinking, expose Shri Swami Maharaj. He usually recognised their attitude in advance and totally ignored them. Once he told a personal secretary of a ruling Maharaja to go home and live happily and not waste time in this 'gathering of lunatics'. If a person persisted in confronting him, he refused to speak. Once an Aryasamaji started arguing with him and finding no response from Shri Maharaj, began shouting at him. Shri Swami Maharaj quietly said "why are you so angry? If you wish to hit me, go head and satisfy your urge". Further incensed, the fellow was about to slap Shri Maharaj when a lady devotee nearby screamed and he ran away. Another such acolyte once entered into a similar one-sided argument, insulting Shri Maharaj in exasperation. A disciple of Shri Maharaj cast a spell making him speechless. After a while, taking pity on the fellow, Shri Swami Maharaj got him released from the spell.

Apart from caste or community, the people coming to Shri Swami Maharaj could be classified as:

1. Those seeking relief from some or the other distress in their lives.
2. Those seeking the fulfilment of one wish or the other,
3. The seekers of Truth beseeching his guidance,

4. Realized souls seeking only his company.

The first two categories are in reality one in the sense that both these relate to changing the circumstances of one's life to one's liking, whether by removing a painful one or by adding a desired one.

Relief to the Distressed

Maximum number of people sought relief from some suffering or the other. If we even cursorily view the life of Shri Swami Maharaj, the amount of suffering he underwent is phenomenal. He never seemed to resist it at all. He himself was afflicted once by plague, thrice by cholera, twice by leprosy, once by leukoderma, twice by snakebite and lifelong by dysentery. However he never took any medicines and placed himself unreservedly at the disposal of Divine will. His family life was full of tensions and tribulations. He neither complained nor made any efforts to change it. In fact he utilized it to intensify his detachment. There are several events that illustrate his indifference to physical sufferance. Once, towards the conclusion of the Narasi Chaturmaas, after the ritual shave, at the suggestion of a devotee the barber inspected the feet of Shri Swami Maharaj and removed twenty thorns stuck in it! Shri Swami Maharaj himself had never even given any indication of this. During one of his long stays at Brahmavart, Shri Maharaj used to stay in a hut on the bank of Ganges. That being the summer season, the river stream was thin and far receded from the bank. Because of dysentery, Shri Maharaj had to frequently relieve himself. Each time he used to take a bath, treading the 500 metre stretch of scorching hot sand to the stream, in the manner of a person walking in moonlight, and return in the same fashion afterwards. The Late Shirlolkar Swami, Shankaracharya of Karvir and Sankeshwar seats, who had watched Shri Maharaj then, used to express his sense of blessedness at having set eyes on such a holy person so totally immersed in the Divine and so unaffected by the physical.

In glaring contrast, Swami Maharaj was very sensitive to the suffering of the others. He not only listened sympathetically to the people bringing their sorrows and pain to his notice but also provided counsel which if followed would almost invariably relieve their suffering. According to the Vedic tradition all sufferings arise from three sources.

Adhyatmic

Adhyatmic afflictions are those originating in the body. These consist of the thousands of ailments that human beings suffer from. Shri Swami Maharaj had a plethora of knowledge of herbal remedies and he cured literally thousands of patients. He not only prescribed the cures but also went to considerable trouble to make the herbs available. He did pass this knowledge to a few selected students like Shri Ganesh Satavalekar of Kolgaon, Shri Gangadharant (Baba) Vaidya of Nisarpur and others. During epidemics, he used to organize mass production of the required medicines to be distributed to the needy.

In selected cases, he used to advise yogic practices to cure them. A Brahmin suffering from loss of appetite and pain in abdomen was asked to do the head-down position (viparitkarani). This not only relieved his pain but also improved his appetite so much as to make his wife find difficult to feed him. When she complained to Shri Maharaj, he asked the Brahmin to discontinue the practice that brought down his appetite to more manageable proportion. Once he made Shri Gulavani Maharaj practice peacock position (Mayurasan) to cure his fever.

After his Mahasamadhi (dissolution of physical body), an artisan working on the ongoing construction developed an infection of foot that disabled him completely. He was sorely disappointed at being unable to participate in the sacred work and was planning to return home. One morning, an ochre-robed monk appeared to him and pointed to a shrub to be crushed and applied to his sore foot. On complying with this, his foot got well the very next day and he could join his work. Later when shown the picture of Shri Swami Maharaj, he identified him as the Baba who pointed out the shrub!

Of course many an apparently physical illness are caused by supernatural beings and in such cases Shri Swami Maharaj used to advice the relevant remedies to be discussed later.

Adhidaivik

Adhidaivik misery is the one induced by the supernatural entities. This term is employed here to refer to the entities with superhuman powers viz. Dev, Asur, Rakshas, Gandharva, Yaksh, Naag, Kinnar and other spirits. These could be either evil or good. These are supposed to dwell in the higher spheres of Universe and are endowed with subtle bodies. Human beings acquire these forms of conscious beings depending upon their Karma. The Devatas are the benevolent spirits dwelling in

Swargalok i.e. Heaven while Asuras, Rakshasas, Naagas dwell in the Patal and other netherworlds. Some sinful actions lead a person to the Pishacha Yoni or ghost entities, dwelling in the lower sphere Bhuvanlok near the mortal Bhulok. These entities are evil spirits with a strong link to humans in the form of some unfulfilled longing, a revengeful urge or a profound feeling of guilt etc, that blocks their way to further evolution to superior existence.

Devatas

Devatas or the benevolent entities function as deputies of the supreme God carrying out well-defined functions and endowed with divine powers. The interaction of Devatas with human beings are dictated by the Karmic chart of the individual, the Devatas thus dispensing ill-effects of sins and the rewards of good deeds, impartially. Thus an individual will suffer a particular defect in his life, for example poverty, because of his Karmic deficiency. The respective Devata dispenses this defect (in this case poverty). The individual can, within limits, mitigate such blemish in his life by propitiating the particular Devata. Since all Devatas are manifestations of the One Supreme Being (God if you please), propitiating Him in the form family deity (Kul Devata) or personal Deity will also benefit the person. However, most people are not aware of the reasons of their miseries and even if they could guess these, they would not know the remedy. If by some stroke of luck, they somehow deduced the way, ordinary human beings will find it near impossible to tread the path. That is where the role of saints like Shri Swami Maharaj comes. They not only clearly visualize the causes of the particular imperfections in the human life, but also know the way/s to remedy those and have the capacity to help the people towards it. It is indeed the great good fortune to come into contact with such a saint! People with chronic and incurable diseases, men facing ruin in their life because of career or financial problems, women with marital problems, infertility, abortions or stillbirths, parents of handicapped children, in short all imaginable difficulties in human life, came to Shri Swami Maharaj.

In those cases where he perceived the problem to be mainly of Adhidaivik origin, he would advise the individual/s to some form of prayers or services to propitiate the particular deity. These services could be a specified worship, jap (verbal or mental repetition of a specific mantra), Saptah (seven-day service consisting of the ritual reading of a particular sacred book) of Shri Gurucharitra, circumambulation of the sacred Audumbar tree(Ficus glomerata) or a temple or sacred book. The duration and magnitude of practices were

related to the severity of affliction. A gentleman from Savantwadi once came to Shri Maharaj at Chikhalada. He could not hold food in his stomach and had as a result become very weak. Shri Maharaj told him that this is the consequence discontinuation of the services to Kul Devata and gave him Datta Mantra and Devi Mantra for Jap and also some medicine.

During his last stay at Narsobawadi (1910), Shri Swami Maharaj directed the priests there to offer Abhishek (ritual shower accompanied by Vedic chants) to the Padukas as measure to restrain an imminent epidemic of cholera. When people asked him, "how does Abhishek help prevent an epidemic?" Shri Maharaj explained, " death is also a manifestation of the God and the epidemics are his Shaktis (powers or consorts). By mollifying God through the services prescribed in scriptures, his Shaktis are also appeased." Accordingly the Abhishek was performed and the epidemic averted.

One Shri Vasudeo Thakur of Indore came to Wadi and sought the help of Shri Maharaj regarding his wife's health. Shri Maharaj told him that this was the consequence of the Samadhi (memorial) of his saintly ancestor being neglected. Shri Thakur went his hometown and sought out the Samadhi and made arrangements for its upkeep and regular worship. This brought about the improvement in his wife's health. Similarly a visitor whose offspring did not survive, had thriving issues after he followed Shri Maharaja's advice to perform Mangal (Mars) Vrat (propitiatory fast).

Adhibhoutik Distress

This is the one caused by five elements of nature, Space (Akash), Wind (Vayu), Light (Tej, Agni), Water (Aap) and Earth (Prithvi). Some of the examples are, earthquakes, floods, fires, lightening, storms etc. One lady devotee of Shri Swami Maharaj, deserted by her husband, was living by tending a small farm. Once, when the harvest was reaped and stored in a heap out in the open, off-season rainstorm threatened to wash her produce, which was her only source of livelihood. She had treasured the dust from the feet of Shri Maharaj in a small container. She sprinkled the dust around the harvest and prayed to Shri Maharaj to protect her food promising to serve meal to priests in Wadi in return. A heavy rainstorm did follow but not a drop fell on her grain.

Other devotees have noted such miracles. During his last Chaturmaas at Garudeshvar, Shri Swami Maharaj and hundreds of devotees were celebrating Gokulashtami (Lord Shrikrishna's birth anniversary) and

singing Bhajans on the bank of Narmada. Suddenly the sky was filled with dark clouds and a rainstorm burst out on the other bank of the river. Shri Maharaj reassured the devotees to carry on with the Bhajans and not to worry about the storm. The Bhajans proceeded uninterrupted till midnight. On conclusion of the ceremonies, everyone came indoors, the storm burst out in vengeance. Shri Maharaj commented, "that is the storm we escaped!"

At Mangaon, in his householder days, on a Gurudwadashi day, just as hundreds of people were to sit for Prasad (meal), a heavy rain threatened to disrupt the arrangement. Shri Maharaj instructed his disciples to give a large offering (naivedya) to the rain, remarking, and "he has also come for the Prasad like you!" Accordingly, a large plateful of food was served and offered to the rain God. The meal went of unhindered even as heavy rains lashed the surrounding area. Similar incidents have taken place at least twice more in the life of Shri Swami Maharaj.

Again at Garudeshvar, once the only large cooking pot slipped from hands while washing in the river Narmada and started floating away. When the worried ladies apprised Shri Maharaj, he went to the riverside and touched the water with his sceptre, saying. " What would Mother Narmada want the pot for? Why will she hamper the nourishment of her children?" As soon as Shri Maharaj said this, the large metal pot now flowing down the river stream, started moving towards the bank and was recovered safely.

A self-realized soul, the scriptures say, becomes one with the nature and enjoys their amity.

Evil Spirits

They are Known as Pishacha, the ghosts are responsible of some of the worst suffering to humanity. These evil spirits usually afflict subjects that are related to them and are directly or indirectly responsible for their condition. They, because of their superhuman powers are capable of causing a variety of troubles that can be very difficult to recognise. Only men or women with special powers can recognise and deal with these spirits.

One common manifestation, of course is physical ailments. At Havnur, a young married lady, suffering from stiff joints and loss of sight, was brought on a stretcher by her brother to Shri Maharaj. As Shri Maharaj sprinkled some water in his Kamandalu, and asked his brother to apply

it to her head and feet, the spirit started shouting that it was ready to leave the lady. With an assurance from Shri Maharaj of release from the evil state, it left the lady and she got up and walked to her home, apparently cured of all her ailments. Such miracles took place in several other places also.

In another instance, a rich man was told by Shri Maharaj to spend the money owed by his forefathers to the spirit on feeding Brahmins, which released his wife from that malady.

At Banvasi, in Karnataka, a man complained that every time he builds a house, an evil spirit destroys after forewarning him. On carrying out some religious services as advise by to Shri Maharaj, he succeeded in building the house.

One Shripad Shastri Iyer brought his sister to Shri Maharaj with complaints of recurrent fainting, which was not amenable to any treatment. When to Shri Maharaj diagnosed her case as Pishacha affliction, the Shastri doubted it saying he believed in the existence of ghosts but did not think they could interact with human beings. Shri Maharaj suggested an experiment. He gave Shastriji a brick with a mantra inscribed on it and asked Shastriji to recite the mantra 21 times a day burning some incense in front of it. As predicted by to Shri Maharaj, the ghost started speaking through the sister after 21 days, stating the reasons for his getting the Pishacha yoni and troubling Shastriji's sister. It finally conceded his inability to further stand the assault by to Shri Maharaj and left resulting in the curing of Shastriji's sister.

The evil spirits often interfere with conception and even cause abortions and stillbirths. One Bhairav Prasad from Mandalamahapur had lost five sons when he came to seek the grace to Shri Maharaj. He was advised to carry out the last rites of the spirit (Narayanbali), read Shri Vishnusahasranam regularly and perform some atonement rituals. Sometimes, people failed to carry out the advise of to Shri Maharaj or in some transgressed the prescribed code of conduct. This resulted in their misfortune. The evil spirits are wily and always try to divert their victims from the virtuous paths. Those who are steadfast succeed in getting rid of the spirit whereas the unfortunate ones, who willingly or unwillingly, are led astray, succumb.

Rationale

Thus, it is that Shri Maharaj, in a selfless, indiscriminate and unreserved exercise of all his knowledge and powers, strived to

mitigate the sufferings of all supplicants and brought happiness and fulfilment to their lives. Only a few representative events have been narrated here. Throughout his life and even after the dissolution of his physical shell, thousands of such episodes have been recorded. This appears a bit puzzling to some people. Why should a Sanyasi who has renounced the world, having realized the ephemeral nature of life and having grown out of all desires and aspirations of his own, should care so much for the little joys and sorrows of fellow human beings? Shouldn't he impress upon them the need to follow his example and strive to detach themselves from the petty and illusory pleasures, rather than pandering to them? In fact, one accomplished Vedanta scholar whom Shri Maharaj also regarded highly, Shri Eksambekar, asked him as much. Shri Maharaj practically evaded directly answering the query. However, we do find an explanation of this conduct of Shri Maharaj, in his major work, "Shri Gurucharitam" also known as "Dvisahasri" the Sanskrit rendering of the Marathi "Gurucharitra".

"Such popular (favouring the devotees) acts are performed (by the Lord) for establishing the path of devotion, the purpose thereto being to inspire faith amongst people and make them somehow (by love or by temptation) seek me (Shri Guru); for unless they come to me, there will be no release from this recurring cycle of life and death and consequent chain of suffering. As the people engrossed in sensual pleasures do not have any inclination to the Path of God, the Lord, sensing their grateful disposition, performs the miracles to make them happy. This will induce them to strive for His Grace and follow the path of Devotion which alone can purify their souls of the dross accumulated over the endless series of lives and engender the intense urge to liberate themselves." These stanzas are followed by the sequential progress of such an aspirant to Self-realization.

Thus, it becomes clear that the main purpose of these exertions of Shri Swami Maharaj, to improve the worldly lives of the supplicants, was to induce in them a faith in God and build it into loving relationship and eventually to Self-realization.

6. SEEKERS

Seekers of Truth

The sincere seekers of Truth were of course much smaller in number. In the long run, all followers of Shri Swami Maharaj eventually graduated

to the aspirant stage. However, this evolution can extend over more than a single lifetime. Those who came to Shri Maharaj primarily in search of God, were indeed blessed! For, what better goal can one set for oneself than the realization of Self, which is the very essence of existence. And they could not have hoped for a Master more perfect than Shri Maharaj! Well versed in the theory and the practice of the various disciplines of Indian spiritualism, he could appraise the seekers accurately as to their spiritual constitution, stage of development and inclinations and accordingly assign the appropriate path and guide them on it. Being an accomplished Master, he continuously protected them on their path and augmented their progress with his own formidable powers.

Sanyasi Disciples

Shri Swami Maharaj was very discriminating and conservative when it came to initiating disciples into the ascetic order of Sanyasi. He thus initiated only one of his disciples, Shri Narsimh Saraswati (Dixit) Swami Maharaj, that too after a rigorous test of his devotion. However, several of his disciples entered the order after his Mahasamadhi. Chief amongst them are Shri Yoganand Saraswati, (formerly Shri Ganda Maharaj) and Shri Shirolkar Shastri who ascended to the seats of Shankaracharya of Karvir and Sankeshwar monasteries. Besides these, Brahmananda Saraswati of Nellore was a devotee of Swami Maharaj. The Sanyasis of the various orders established by Shri Adi Shankaracharya pursue the Dnyan Yoga or the path of knowledge. The emphasis in this path is on enquiry of the Self. Only the seeker who is completely detached from sensual pleasures, quietened the turbulence of desires, acquired a control over his sense organs (Indriyas), is unreservedly devoted to his Master whom he serves and obeys implicitly and has intensely burning aspiration to realize the Self, is eligible to join this path. The Master imparts the knowledge to him through the Mahavakyas and after listening (Shravan), he contemplates (Manan) and finally meditates continually (Nididhyasan) on these till he is established fully in the Truth.

The Eight-fold Yoga of Patanjali

We have already seen endeavours of Shri Maharaj in this field. He has initiated many disciples into the elementary practices of purification (Shuddhi kriyas) and guided them through the advanced Asanas (positions), Pranayam (control of life force), mudras like Khechari and deeper and deeper stages of meditation (Dhyan) to Nirvikalp Samadhi,

the final goal of Yoga. Some of the prominent disciples who in turn themselves became Yogic Masters include, Shri Ganda Maharaj (Shri Yoganand Saraswati), Shri Sitaram Maharaj Tembe (younger brother of Sri Maharaj), Shri Yogiraj Gulavani Maharaj, Shri Rang Avadhut Swami Maharaj (all Naishthic Brahmacharis or avowed celibates), Shri Balasaheb Vaidya, Shri Narahari Diwan of Vathar (near Kolhapur), also known as Datta Maharaj of Ashta, Shri Govind Pundit of Bhelasa (MP).

Vedas and Scriptures

We have seen that Shri Swami Maharaj was born of parents who were ardent devotees of Shri Datta Prabhu and had filled their lives with service to the Lord and their minds with loving devotion to Him. Thus Shri Swami Maharaj inherited these qualities and was well advanced on the path of devotion even as a child. He started regular recitation of Shri Gurucharitra immediately after Upanayan. Since his childhood only he was drawn to Narsobawadi. This pull became stronger after his imposed marriage. We have to conclude that this attraction was mutual as the Lord had to prod him with a dream to overcome his fears about maternal resistance and even arrange for his passage and company. Thus it is the divine will that took him to Wadi where he was destined to meet his spiritual mentor, Shri Govind Swami. Shri Datta Guru also saw to it that Shri Maharaj (then Shri Vasudeo Shastri) could bathe the Padukas through the medium of Shri Govind Swami, against the objections of the priests. The Lord appeared to Shri Maharaj, during the very first visit to Wadi, even though to admonish him for the untimely visit to the temple! Also, in the same visit, Datta Prabhu initiated the reluctant Vasudeo Shastri to Dattopasana (worship of Datta) in the dream. All these events suggest that at this stage, it was the Lord wooing his devotee rather than the other way round. This peaked of course into the Lord inviting Himself to Mangaon for a long seven-year stay! The Apostle(nine page) This was a turning point in this complex relationship. From now on Shri Swami Maharaj was an authorized agent, messenger, His empowered delegate, to wit an Apostle of the Lord, to carry out the Divine Mission. Datta Prabhu ordained all the activities of Shri Maharaj viz. his travel, itinerary, discourses, literary composition, the chaturmaas sites and so on. Again Shri Maharaj was penalized for the slightest deviations. After the Mahatpur Chaturmaas, Datta Prabhu ordered Shri Maharaj to leave immediately for Brahmavart. Since a solar eclipse was imminent, Shri Maharaj intending to complete the ecliptic rituals there stayed on. This led to his being bitten by a highly poisonous snake and in spite of almost continuous yogic Samadhi he suffered for ten days. He fully recovered only after he left Mahatpur.

Shri Keshavrao

One vaccinator named Shri Keshavrao of Sarangpur provides an illustrative case. During the first year of taking ochre robes, Shri Maharaj spent a few days in Sarangpur on way to Brahmavart. Keshavrao, at the instance of his mother, came to Shri Maharaj to invite him for Bhiksha (food). Noting that Keshavrao did not display any marks of Brahminhood, Shri Maharaj declined the invitation. Keshavrao explained that he was a Karhade Brahmin from Pune and though not regularly practicing any Brahmakarma, he assured that he would see that some Brahmin completed the rituals the next day. This only further upset Shri Maharaj who asserted that he would shun his very sight leave alone accept his food. As Keshavrao left, the onlookers told Shri Maharaj that Keshavrao was an evil person and wouldn't return. However Shri Maharaj only said, "wait and see! Keshavrao has to return". Stung by the harsh censure from Shri Swami Maharaj, Keshavrao reached home and narrated the happening. His mother, rather than sympathising, scolded him further and considered the refusal of Shri Maharaj to partake their food a blot on their Brahminhood. This caused Keshavrao to repent and return to Shri Maharaj with folded hands. Prostrating before Shri Maharaj, he begged forgiveness for his conduct and beseeched him to accept their food, promising to obey Shri Maharaj in future and to observe the daily religious services. His mother followed him and entreated Shri Maharaj to train her son in Brahmakarma. Shri Maharaj relented and undertook to teach Keshavrao and after he learnt and began religiously practicing the duties of a Brahmin, partook food at Keshavrao's place.

Bhakti

Shri Maharaj propagated the path of devotion and Love on the largest scale. In this path, the seeker establishes an emotional relationship with the Lord and progressively focuses his mind on to the Divine. The relationship can be any, e.g., Father, Mother, Son, Brother, Master, Lover, Husband, etc. As the seeker advances, this relationship grows in intensity and obscures all other relationships. Finally, the whole world becomes unreal and the seeker's mind gets immersed in the Divine and finally merged into it. This path can be followed by all human beings and has the maximum latitude in terms of conduct. What matters is the intensity of Love for the Divine and unconditional surrender to the Divine will. Actually, in most cases, the path of Bhakti starts as supplication to the Divine for some desire or longing (Sakaam Bhakti), Thus, the above-described instances of relief from distress or fulfilment of desire are actually examples of Sakaam Bhakti. This will

intensify the faith of the seeker propelling him on to the Path of Devotion sans desire (Nishkaam Bhakti). As mentioned earlier, this path is open to all, men and women, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, race, education or the lack of it. In Puranas, there are examples of even non-human Bhaktas. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point.

Jagala: When in Shinor, Shri Swami Maharaj was stopped by a fisherman, named Jagala, who had run away from home immediately after his marriage was arranged. He was staying in Shinor for two years. He was totally indifferent to physical discomforts and harsh climatic variations. Shri Maharaj just looked at him once and said, "So you are staying here? Come to Markandeya temple at nightfall" and proceeded with his routine. He then called the devotees in Shinor and told them that from that night, he will give discourses on Gita. At the nightfall, the people gathered for the discourse. Jagala too came and sat in a corner. The nightly discourses continued and Jagala attended those regularly. After the penultimate chapter (Ch.17) of Gita, he said that he did not want to listen any more and return. Jagala died two months later.

Saraswati Bai: A prostitute named Saraswati Bai repented and came to stay in Narsobawadi. She used to sing Karunatripadi before the Padukas on instructions of Shri Dixit Swami Maharaj. Once she sang the prayer before Shri Maharaj. Pleased by her sincerity and devotion, Shri Maharaj composed a hymn in praise of Shri Guru (Gurustotra) for her and imparted some training in meditation. The lady spent the rest of her life pursuing the path of devotion and leading a pious life.

7. REALIZED SOULS (DHYANI) AND SHRI MAHARAJ

Shri Maharaj came into contact with several souls apart from Shri Govind Swami, Shri Mouni Swami, Shri Narayanand Saraswati who were his Gurus. Their interaction is indeed beyond ordinary human

comprehension. However, one can still benefit from observation of these interactions. One has to keep in mind that such great souls have merged their minds with The One Reality and through It, unified with each other. The very concept of interaction is probably invalid in this context. In fact, there are instances where Shri Maharaj and the other Saint have met and just sat together without exchanging a word, apparently rejoicing in each other's company. This was the case with a Paramhansa who passed by the hut where Shri Swami Maharaj was staying in Brahmavart. Lord Dattatreya had told Shri Maharaj to expect him.

* Shri Rajarajeshvar Swami

* Shri Shantashram Swami

* Vaijnath

* Shri Rajarajeshwar Swami

* The Akkalkot Swami

Shri Rajarajeshvar Swami

The then reigning Shankaracharya of the Shringeri seat, Shri Rajarajeshvar Swami was an ardent admirer of Shri Swami Maharaj, ever since they met at Haridwar and spent the Chaturmaas (Shri Maharaja's 3rd), together. At the instance of the Shankaracharya, Shri Maharaj gave discourses on Adi Shankara's Bhashya on Upanishads. After his 17th Chaturmaas at Thanjavur, while traveling along the Kaveri River, Shri Maharaj learnt that the Pontiff was staying at Shrirang to pay obeisance to him. Delighted to see him the Shankaracharya welcomed him. Shri Maharaj then composed hymns in praise of Sharadamba and Shankaracharya. The Acharya responded with a stotra in praise of Shri Maharaj. He arranged for the Bhiksha (lunch) of Shri Maharaj and later honored him in following words, addressed to his disciples:

"You have not recognized the great Swamiji who has arrived today. He is Shri Datta Prabhu himself incarnated by the intense devotion and great virtue of his parents. His continuing endeavor of revival of Vedic religion is comparable to that of Shri Adi Shankaracharya. Strictly living by the

Varnashram Code of Vedic religion, he has been responsible for religious and spiritual uplift of a large number of men and women. Traveling on feet from Setu (Kanyakumari) to Himalayas, he has educated the seekers in the paths of Action, Worship and Knowledge, according to their eligibility. We pray to God to grant him a full life to enable him to further his work of the revival of Vedic religion.”

In reply Shri Maharaj said that he did not deserve the high praise His Holiness had so gracefully accorded to him; he also added that Shri Rajarajeshvar had graced the Shringeri Seat. The two saints kept in frequent touch with each other through their disciples and Shri Maharaj used to send copies of his works to the Shankaracharya at the latter’s instance.

Shri Shantashram Swami

In those days, there used to stay a great Sanyasi in Benares by the name Shri Shantashram Swami. Hailing from Karad in Maharashtra, he had performed weekly revisions (Parayan) of Shrimad Bhgawat Puran continuously for 40 years in Kashi. By his constant austerities and the devoted study of Bhgawat, he had attained communion with the God. It is said when on occasions he overslept and did not wake up at the usual hour of 4 a.m. in the morning, the Lord of Kashi himself used to knock at his door to wake him up! Though not formally educated in either Sanskrit or the Scriptures himself, he used to be consulted by the highest authorities in Kashi for the interpretations of certain abstruse passages in Bhgawat Puran. He had heard about Shri Maharaj, then staying at Brahmavart (1913 A.D.), for three continuous years, and was looking forward to seeing him in Kashi. When in spite of several requests of different persons from Kashi, Shri Maharaj did not visit Kashi, Shri Shantashram Swami decided to visit Brahmavart himself. When the two saints met, it is recorded that both of them were so overwhelmed with Love that tears of joy started flowing incessantly from their eyes! Shri Shantashram Swami was so enchanted by the ambience of the place and the various religious services, discourses etc. going on there, that he stayed there for four months.

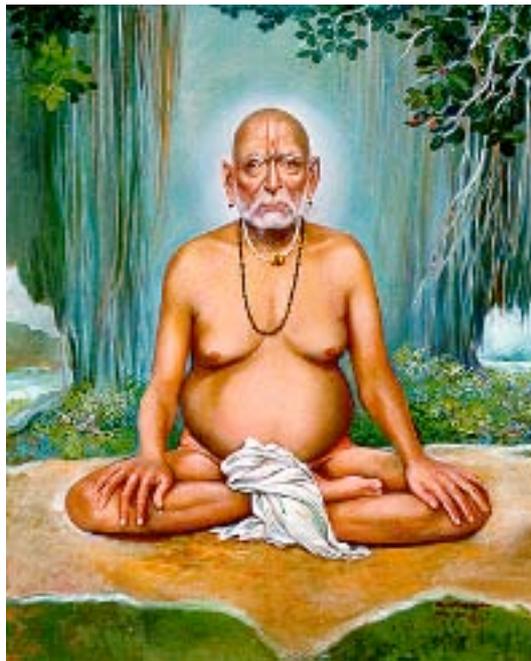
Shri Kevalyashram Swami of Gurlhosur also admired Shri Maharaj and used to make him stay at Gurlhosur for weeks.

Vaijnath

Strange are the ways of saints. Having attained the highest Spiritual Goal, they adopt bizarre life styles to shield themselves from the crowd of people with worldly desires. They may display a childlike (Baal), a crazy (Unmatta) or a ghostly (Pishach), behaviour just to avoid crowds. One such saint was Vaijnath of Shri Narasobawadi. He was known to be a very straightforward person with a childlike simplicity. He never performed any religious service, spending the morning just carrying a lota (vessel) around. In the name of bathing, he used to brush himself with mud in the river for hours. He never went to the temple nor worshipped the Padukas. If anyone questioned him about this, he would claim to be possessed by ghost who did not let him perform any puja etc. When invited for meals, he never accepted more than two paise as Dakshina (monetary offering accompanying a ritual meal). He kept all his money with a trusted person and kept the accounts himself. He thus had a balance of all of eight rupees! Once when Shri Maharaj was camping in Wadi, Shri Ganda Maharaj, a major disciple accompanying Shri Maharaj, suggested to Vaijnath that he perform a Mahapuja with part of that money. Vaijnath gave his stock reply that he had saved the money for a visit to his brother and won't hear of spending it! The people from Wadi told Shri Ganda Maharaj that this was just a ruse and in the several years that Vaijnath was in Wadi, he never once went to see his brother. Finally they escalated the matter to Shri Maharaj. Shri Maharaj told them that they did not understand Vaijnath correctly; by being possessed by the ghost, he meant Divine possession and by visit to his brother, he meant the dissolution of his body to be one with the Reality. His savings were thus set aside for his last rites. He is a Self-Realized soul whose language was mysterious to ordinary folk. Shri Maharaj then requested Vaijnath to spend seven rupees on Mahapuja and keep one for "the visit to your brother". Vaijnath readily agreed but expressed his inability to perform the Puja, as "the ghost" won't let him. Shri Maharaj further urged him to "tell the ghost to release you for a day". This having agreed upon, Shri Maharaj proceeded to invite the entire town of Wadi to partake the prasada at the Mahapuja of Vaijnath. Many were worried how seven rupees would suffice to feed the entire town. However, inspired contributions of foodstuff by many citizens, saw thousands partake food to their heart's content at that Mahapuja. Shri Maharaj went around feast in the company of Vaijnath supervising the arrangements.

The Akkalkot Swami

Once, on his way to Pandharpur from Wadi (1905 A.D.), at a place called Kamalapur, a tall man with hands extending to the knees appeared to Shri Swami Maharaj in his dream and asked him, " you travel all over and also compose poetry. How come you pay no attention to me?" On waking up, Shri Swami Maharaj enquired with the Lord about the personage. The Lord answered, " He is The Swami of Akkalkot and he desires you to visit Akkalkot and write his life in verse." Shri Swami Maharaj said, "This tongue (pen) is dedicated to the feet of Lord Datta. If you command and the (relevant) information is available, it (the life) may be composed." The Lord asked Shri Swami Maharaj to visit Akkalkot on the way to Pandharpur. Accordingly Shri Swami Maharaj paid his respects to Swami Samarth at Akkalkot. *Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot* is considered an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya and has massive following in Maharashtra and Karnataka.



Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot

Shri Maharaj has come into direct or indirect contact with most of the contemporary saints and shared a mutual regard and reverence with them. *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi* considered him a brother, for example. *Shri Brahmachaitanya Godavalekar Maharaj* and *Shri Gulabrao Maharaj* also held Shri Swami Maharaj in high regard.

8. DIVINE ENCOUNTERS

The universe, say the scriptures, was created by the Supreme Lord (Parameshwar) from himself. That is to say the Lord is the maker as well as the stuff of the Universe. This is one of the tenets of Shri Shankara's non-dual doctrine. Thus the Lord pervades the whole world. This is the basis of the so-called pantheism the Hindus are often accused of. However, the Hindus, even the least educated ones, are very clear in their minds about the unity of all deities that they worship in the forms of Rivers, Mountains, Trees, Snakes etc. They are well aware that all these subsidiary deities, right up to the Trinity of the Creator, the Sustainer and the Destroyer are ultimately rooted in the One and the Only Supreme Being. Further, the belief in these deities, as most religious beliefs indeed are, is engendered by the experiences of Saints and holy persons. Such humans that have purified their minds by austerities, services and devotion to the God in one of His multifarious forms, do encounter the all-pervading Divinity in one form or the other. The lives of such people are full of these encounters. We, the ordinary humans, find it difficult to believe these. However, there are thousands of such instances in the recorded history of mankind, that can be verified and display a remarkable consistency. Thus the least we can do is to keep our minds open. If we are so lucky as to have faith, we can even benefit from these.

To the person who has these experiences, these are a part of reality and no cause for alarm or wonder. Shri Swami Maharaj was such a person. He almost constantly came into contact with divine beings from his earliest days. We have seen how at Wadi, he was admonished by Shri Narasinh Saraswati for contravening the rule not to visit the temple after the Lord was put to bed (*Shejarati*). There are many such instances. Let us recall here a few representative ones

Rivers

- * Nirmala
- * Krishna
- * Narmada
- * Pinakini

Others

* Nara-Narayan Sages

* Ashwatthama

Nirmala

Once while returning from Wadi, in his householder days, a celestial lady appeared before Shri Maharaj and said, "Please do not proceed without first christening me". Recognising her as the River flowing by Mangaon, Shri Maharaj named her *Nirmala* at which she disappeared. The name has now been widely accepted.

Krishna

The two incarnations of Lord Dattatreya in the present age of Kali, have shown a special inclination to the River Krishna. The first one, Shripad Shrivallabh spent most of his earthly life in Kurugaddi, which is an island, about a mile across, enclosed by the two streams of the River. In his second earthly sojourn, the Lord appeared as Shri Narasinh Saraswati Swami Maharaj and spent 12 years at the confluence of Krishna with Panchnadi, at Narasobawadi and 36 years at Ganagapur, near where River Bhima, a tributary of Krishna is joined by Amaraja. Thus Krishna occupies a special place of reverence in the Dattatreya tradition. Naturally Shri Swami Maharaj held Krishna in great regard. For years, the priests of Wadi had been requesting Shri Maharaj to compose Shri Krishna Lahari, a hymn to Krishna in Shikharini metre on the lines of similar Lahari hymns composed by major poets like Shankara and Jagannath Pundit in praise of Ganges and other rivers. Shri Maharaj himself had composed Shri Narmada Lahari. On his way to Ganagapur, Mother Krishna appeared to Shri Maharaj and directed Shri Maharaj to compose Krishna Lahari. Un an inspired outpouring, Shri Maharaj composed 51 stanzas in a very short time when the Mother Krishna said, "Enough" and disappeared.

A touching incidence illustrates the special bond of devotion that existed between the two. After the Chaturmaas at Thanjavur, Shri Maharaj, travelling along the banks of Krishna, arrived at a small place on the 14th bright day of Phalgun. The next day being the full moon, Shri Maharaj, as per the rules of Sanyasi, had to perform the ritual tonsure. When he started to look for a suitable place to stay in that

village, the villagers, instead of helping him, started asking irritating questions and in general teasing him. Tired and hungry, he went to the Mother Krishna and complained, "Oh Mother! Of what avail is my regard for you? Don't you reciprocate it in even a small measure? If I have to go without a tonsure tomorrow, I shall never again perform one and renounce the monastic sceptre. It appears futile to obey you in future!" That night Mother Krishna appeared to Shri Maharaj in his dream and assured him that she fully reciprocated his regard and the tonsure would be arranged. The same night she appeared in the dreams of several prominent villagers in her frightening form and admonished them for having ill-treated the great Sanyasi. She further warned them that unless they sought the forgiveness of the saint and arranged for his tonsure, a great calamity would descend on to them and destroy them all. Disturbed by the frightening dream, these villagers related the same to each other only to find that they all had a similar dream. Scared further by the strange coincidence, they came seeking Shri Maharaj and prostrated before him begging his forgiveness. Needless to add the tonsure was duly arranged and Shri Maharaj accorded great hospitality and respect. At the insistence of the villagers he stayed there for a fortnight.

Narmada

On his return from a two-year sojourn in the Himalayas, Shri Maharaj was staying at Brahmavart on the bank of Ganges. Mother Narmada wanted him to spend some time in Her vicinity and she conveyed her wish to Shri Maharaj in a dream, which he ignored. Someone advised a Brahmin afflicted by a skin disease to drink the Paad-teerth (washings of the feet) of Shri Maharaj. As Shri Maharaj never let anyone have his Paad-teerth, the Brahmin one day surreptitiously approached Shri Maharaj from behind when he was busy writing with his feet folded back. The Brahmin quickly poured some water over the feet and drank the washings and applied to his body. Startled, Shri Maharaj asked the Brahmin the reason for his behaviour. Brahmin related his misery and begged his pardon. This upset Shri Maharaj very much and in spite of a bath in Ganges and hymn composed in her praise, he contracted the Brahmin's ailment and developed a rash all over his body. That night he was directed by the Lord to bathe in Narmada for three days to get relief from the contracted disease. Shri Maharaj, then travelled to Nemavar, considered the Navel of Narmada, and prayed to her and composed the hymn, Narmada Lahari in her praise. Thus began the long and loving association between Shri Maharaj and Narmada Mata. Not only did Shri Maharaj spend maximum number of chaturmaas on the banks of Narmada but also found his final resting place,

Garudeshvar, in her sacred environs. Narmada Mata used to look after Shri Maharaj like her own child. Thus, she counselled him about the mantra to get over the sprain he developed on the way to his Bhiksha; directed him to the proper village where sufficient Southern Brahmins lived, to ensure proper Bhiksha (food) for him; returned the cooking vessel flowing down her stream; caused her threatening waters to recede even as Shri Maharaj touched the stream with his sceptre praying.

These are only some of the recorded such instances.

Thus, the rivers whose banks Shri Maharaj frequented were, at least to him, conscious, sentient, divine beings. Each river, or for that matter each temple or holy place (Teerth) he visited, he has composed a hymn dedicated to the particular place or its presiding deity. (These hymns can be referred to in the Stotras elsewhere on this site.

Pinakini

In the hot summer of 1907 A.D., while he was travelling along the banks of Pinakini, a small river in Tamilnadu, the full moon of supernumerary Chaitra month approached. The river was so dried up that it was not possible to take a dip in her stream after the mandatory tonsure. The local Brahmins discerning the difficulty of Shri Maharaj promised to make a hole in the riverbed deep enough for a dip. After the tonsure, even as Shri Maharaj approached the river, the waters started rising and came up to the chest of Shri Maharaj, thus enabling him to immerse himself in the river water and complete the bath. Following verse spontaneously issued forth from the mouth of Shri Maharaj:

“She who from her small form due to the extra month of Chaitra, in a moment, augmented her stream, for the bath of my tonsured self. Pinakini ought to be worshipped by all.”

Shri Nar-Narayan Muni

In his fourth Chaturmaas, Shri Maharaj was on his way to Badri Narayan, when he came across a peak overlooking a steep chasm blocking his path. Even as he was wondering whether to proceed or no, he saw two men descending the peak. They advised him go back

since the path was dangerous and he could die. Shri Maharaj answered that he had come to the place to visit Nar and Narayan (ancient seers worshipped as incarnations of Lord Vishnu) and did not mind losing his life in the attempt; hence he would not hear of returning! Suddenly the two men disappeared and Shri Maharaj had the vision of *Shri Nar-Narayan muni*.

Ashvatthama

When travelling from Chikhalada to Garudeshvar, towards his final Chaturmaas, Shri Maharaj had to pass the dense and dangerous forest named after Shoolpaneeshvar (the Lord holding a spear i.e. Shankara). There wasn't even a discernible trail to lead him. Shri Maharaj met a tribal on his way who offered to guide him and signalled Shri Maharaj to follow him. As the temple of Garudeshvar appeared, he pointed it out to Shri Maharaj and started leaving. Suspicious at his behaviour, Shri Maharaj asked the tribal to reveal his true identity. "I am Ashvatthama", the latter replied and beat a hasty retreat. Ashvatthama is a legendary character from Mahabharat, believed to be one of the seven immortals.

In places where visitors are not allowed to touch the idol of presiding deity, Shri Maharaj was allowed to approach the Deity and worship by touching it. *Badri Narayan* and *Tirupati Balaji* are two such examples. At Tirupati Shri Maharaj stayed on till the priests sought him out, on communion from the Lord Venkatesh Himself, and escorted him to the sanctum, allowing him to touch and worship the Lord.

There are innumerable accounts of Shri Maharaj communicating with divine beings and even the deities of epidemics and evil spirits and helping devotees with these communications. Perhaps our knowledge of these incidents is only the proverbial tip of the iceberg; Shri Maharaj most probably experienced such encounters daily. The space does not permit inclusion of all such occurrences. Of course, Shri Maharaj was all his life in continuous communion with Lord Dattatreya, his individual (*Isht*) God, Master and Guide.

9. DATTA (Lord Dattatreya)

Shri Gurudev Datta



Shri Shri Dattatreya Prabhu

We shall now try to examine and if at all possible, try to understand the relationship between Shri Maharaj and his chosen form of the Godhead whom he dedicated his life as completely as humanly possible. At the beginning of the universe the Supreme Being Shri Vishnu created Brahma the creator and ordered Him in turn to create the world. Amongst his first creations were the Seven Great Seers (Saptarshi). The chief amongst these was Atri meaning bereft of (beyond the influence of) the three (basic principles or Gunas of Maya – the power of Brahman the Supreme Being). Atri is the Seer of 5th Mandal of Rigved and is credited with the first correct prediction of solar eclipse. He is also one of the earliest physicians in Indian tradition and the composer of Atreya Sanhita. He was married to Anasuya (the one without malice) renowned for devotion to her husband (Pativratya). Jealous of her fame as Pativrata the consorts of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh persuaded the three Supreme Lords of the Universe to visit the Ashram (abode) of Atri and deflect Anasuya from her steadfast religious path. Disguised as hungry Brahmin guests

(Atithi), they presented themselves at the door of Atri's Ashram at noon soliciting food. A guest arriving at the middle of the day is considered God and Anasuya's creed ordained her to serve them as such. Welcoming the three guests, she washed their feet and offered them seats. Apologizing for the Rishi's absence that had yet not returned from his austerities, she asked how best she could serve them. The three Gods pleaded to be very hungry and argued that the Rishi may be indefinitely delayed because of his love for religious deliberations, demanded that they be served food urgently. Complying with wish, Anasuya served their plates and offered them with the usual sacraments. However the disguised Lords refused to consume the food unless she served it naked! Momentarily shocked by this strange and offensive request the great Pativrata argued to herself that these atithis could not possibly be ordinary ones. They had to be some very holy persons or possibly even Gods, testing her steadfastness on the religious path. Besides, she thought to herself, being the consort of the great seer Atri, Kaam or the God of sex, dare not disturb her! Thus determined to guard her religious purity, Anasuya remembered her holy husband and removed her clothes and holding some water in her hands she appeared before the guests and sprinkled the water over them. The power Anasuya's Pativrata [1] transformed the three Gods into newborn babies. Anasuya's inherent maternal instinct caused her breasts to overflow with milk as if she herself had just delivered the babies. Moved by their hunger she started feeding them in turn and singing lullabies to soothe them. Atri returning from his meditation, learnt about the miracle from Anasuya and recognizing the Trinity was rejoiced. He prayed the Supreme Lords and apprised Anasuya of her great fortune. The Three Gods appeared before the couple in their original form and commended them at this show of spiritual greatness and invited them to ask for a blessing. At Anasuya's suggestion the Rishi wished the Gods to be their sons and stay with them. Granting the wish, the Gods departed to their abodes even as their baby forms stayed on in Atri's Ashram. The learned Seer named the three sons. He named Shri Vishnu, who gave himself as Datta (the given one), Shri Brahma as Chandra and Shri Mahesh as Durvasa. Chandra (comforting one), the Moon-God went to his abode and Durvasa went to forest to practice austerities. They reassured their parents that Datta would stay with them and harbor their quintessence and thus come to embody the Supreme Trinity in One. Thus came into being the Adi (Primal) Guru, the eternal incarnation of the Supreme Brahman, forever working for the spiritual uplift of all sentient beings throughout the ages.

Lord Dattatreya, from his incarnation in the Satya Yuga (the Age of Truth), the first of the four Ages, has been bestowing the True

Knowledge, which in essence is the direct cognition (Aparoksha Dnyan), as against didactic understanding (Paroksha Dnyan) of the Self that frees one from the bondage of Maya, the apparently never-ending cycle of birth, death and rebirth, which is the root cause of all misery. He not only guided and helped disciples like Kartavirya, Parashuram, Yadu, Aayu, Prahlad and Alarka, but also through such disciples as Vishnu Sharma, established traditions of spiritual knowledge to help all sincere seekers. The word tradition is used here to refer to the continuous chain of Masters, each initiated by his predecessor, thus comprising a perennial source of spiritual knowledge. The existence of several such live traditions is the unique asset that endows India with the potential to be the spiritual lighthouse of the world. Even in the more recent times, Lord Dattatreya has been the source and sustenance of the major spiritual traditions like the Mahanubhav, Nath and Varkari.

The origin of the main Datta tradition, particularly prevalent in Andhra, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat, was established and propagated by the two incarnations of the Lord. The first one was *Shripad Shrivallabh*, born in Peethapur, a coastal town in Andhra Pradesh. The second one was *Shri Narasinh Saraswati*, born at Karanja in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Both incarnations were caused by the Lord's boon to a virtuous woman to endow her with a revered and wise son like Him. Since there is no other like Him in the universe, He had to incarnate each time to fulfill the blessing. Another similarity in the two incarnations is that they both renounced worldly life at a tender age, without marriage and performed a pilgrimage of India, initiating Yogis and seekers, directing populace to the righteous path and establishing the edifice of Vedic religion, before settling down in a chosen place (Kurugaddi in case of Shripad Shrivallabh, and Ganagapur in the case of Shri Narasinh Saraswati) on the banks of Krishna or her tributary, to carry on their work. Both have "disappeared" from public view with no records or witnesses of their physical death. Their biographies are recorded by Shri Saraswati Gangadhar, the great-grandson of a major disciple of Shri Narasinh Saraswati, Sayandeo, in the Marathi book entitled *Shri Gurucharitra*, considered sacred by the followers of the Datta tradition. One of the major contributions of Shri Swami Maharaj was translation and interpretation of this gospel of the Datta tradition. We have recalled briefly the history of Shri Datta tradition to set the backdrop for an attempt to understand the relationship between Shri Swami Maharaj and his Lord and Master Shri Datta Prabhu. This task is indeed beyond human capacity and is undertaken here, not with any hope of success but because even a futile attempt may still purify the enquirer's psyche and push him onwards on the path of Realization.

[1]. Alas, English language does not have words to translate this and many words like these! Even these very concepts are alien to Western culture. Isn't it a pity?

The Wooing

We have seen that Shri Swami Maharaj was born of parents who were ardent devotees of Shri Datta Prabhu and had filled their lives with service to the Lord and their minds with loving devotion to Him. Thus Shri Swami Maharaj inherited these qualities and was well advanced on the path of devotion even as a child. He started regular recitation of Shri Gurucharitra immediately after Upanayan. Since his childhood only he was drawn to Narsobawadi. This pull became stronger after his imposed marriage. We have to conclude that this attraction was mutual as the Lord had to prod him with a dream to overcome his fears about maternal resistance and even arrange for his passage and company. Thus it is the divine will that took him to Wadi where he was destined to meet his spiritual mentor, Shri Govind Swami. Shri Datta Guru also saw to it that Shri Maharaj (then Shri Vasudeo Shastri) could bathe the Padukas through the medium of Shri Govind Swami, against the objections of the priests. The Lord appeared to Shri Maharaj, during the very first visit to Wadi, even though to admonish him for the untimely visit to the temple! Also, in the same visit, Datta Prabhu initiated the reluctant Vasudeo Shastri to Dattopasana (worship of Datta) in the dream. All these events suggest that at this stage, it was the Lord wooing his devotee rather than the other way round. This peaked of course into the Lord inviting Himself to Mangaon for a long seven-year stay!

The Master and the Disciple

The seven years in Mangaon, Shri Guru Raj closely guided Shri Maharaj in every aspect, be it daily worship, family problems, scriptural knowledge or yogic practice. During this phase, we find their relationship predominantly a Master-Disciple one. The Lord directed every action of Vasudeo Shastri and the slightest deviation invited harsh punishment. Examples of such disciplining are numerous. Once when Shastriji was forced by his mother to accompany her to Gokarn for pilgrimage, he was bitten by a viper on the way and felt better only when the pilgrimage was abandoned. Tasting a sweet at the instance of mother against the Lord's wishes led to Shastriji developing a stroke only to be relieved by the mother's prayer to the Lord for forgiveness and a promise not to force Shastriji to disobedience. Shastriji's father-

in-law, Babaji Pant once compelled Shastriji to take some medicine for a prolonged fever urging that the medicine was pure. As soon as Shastriji took the medicine, he threw up and fell unconscious. The terrified Babaji Pant confessed to have lied and prayed for the pardon of the Lord. This led to Shastriji's quick recovery; but he had to perform absolutions afterwards.

Whenever in doubt Shastriji used to pray to the Lord and he used to receive instructions either in the dream or in waking state as a spoken word. Step by step, the temple of Mangaon evolved into a pilgrimage place for the devotees of the Lord; and simultaneously Shastriji grew in spiritual stature, attaining perfection in Yoga and in Vedic knowledge even as his devotion became more and more intense. On occasions, the Guru Raj used to test him. Once Shastri Maharaj had a vision during meditation. A man came with a palanquin and informing Shastriji that his stay on earth had come to an end and instructing him ride the palanquin. As unperturbed Shastriji complied the vision disappeared. On another occasion, he was forewarned during meditation of his imminent affliction by leprosy. On waking up, a hand and a foot of Shastriji were numb. This continued for four days. Shastriji accepted it as Prarabdh. However, he was soon cured of the malady. When enquired about the incidence, the Lord said, "Just tested your determination!"

In seven years, Shastriji's preparation was complete and so was his utter surrender to the Lord's will. Thus the guest from Wadi returned with his host. After a brief stay during which Shastriji served his mentor Shri Govind Swami in the latter's terminal illness and received important scriptural instructions. The Lord put him through a severe test after leaving Wadi when confronted with death within a few days of his wife's demise. His frustration and verbal tirade against the Lord was a sign of his deep desire for a monastic life and service to people. This had in fact been the Divine design throughout. Perhaps Datta Guru wanted to test Shastriji's commitment. Once this was accomplished, Guru Raj himself initiated Shastriji to Sanyas at Gangakhed.

The Apostle

This was a turning point in this complex relationship. From now on Shri Swami Maharaj was an authorized agent, messenger, His empowered delegate, to wit an Apostle of the Lord, to carry out the Divine Mission. Datta Prabhu ordained all the activities of Shri Maharaj viz. his travel, itinerary, discourses, literary composition, the chaturmaas sites and so on. Again Shri Maharaj was penalized for the slightest deviations. After

the Mahatpur Chaturmaas, Datta Prabhu ordered Shri Maharaj to leave immediately for Brahmavart. Since a solar eclipse was imminent, Shri Maharaj intending to complete the ecliptic rituals there stayed on. This led to his being bitten by a highly poisonous snake and in spite of almost continuous yogic Samadhi he suffered for ten days. He fully recovered only after he left Mahatpur.



Shri Swami Maharaj as an Apostle
of Datta Prabhu

On another occasion Shri Maharaj, on the entreaty of local people and their threat to otherwise sink all food into the river and fast, extended his stay by a day. The same day, the Lord appeared to him in dream and slapped hard in his face. The next morning, not only that side of face was swollen, but the corresponding eye was also blinded. Shri

Maharaj, recognizing this as the punishment for the disobedience, prayed, "Oh Lord! I have not defied your orders for any personal reason. I just meant to spare the Brahmins from going without food. If you still disapprove, you are welcome to blind the remaining eye!" Datta Guru just smiled and Shri Maharaj regained his eyesight.

Even while traveling, if Shri Maharaj did not take the direction commanded by the Prabhu, there would be a loud and painful banging in his ears till he corrected the direction. Once, after the Muktyala chaturmaas, Shri Maharaj took a jungle path to avoid crowds and settled down at Manthankaleshvar on the bank of Godavari. Datta Guru instructed him to move on since the Chaturmaas was still not due. On Shri Maharaj protesting that there will be too much throng of people ahead and he would like to have a quiet Chaturmaas in the jungle. Shri Guru again urged him not to stay in the uninhabited forest for Chaturmaas. When Shri Maharaj appeared to be adamant, Datta Prabhu suddenly appeared in the form of a White rider flourishing a cane and threatened to lash him if he did not move on instantly. Beholding the anger and the fierce demeanor of Datta Prabhu, Shri Maharaj praised him in Marathi verse:

"Salutations to the rage of Rudra, salutations to the arch of Ram".

This pacified the Lord and Shri Maharaj moved on.

Numerous people reformed their ways and started following the Vedic path under the influence of Shri Maharaj. Though firm in their faith, when confronted with the criticism of family and friends, they found themselves inadequate to defend their transformation. Many such followers once requested Shri Maharaj to write an article to help them counter the verbal assaults of their critics. As soon as Shri Maharaj started writing the article he developed fever. This recurred every time he resumed the said piece. Finally the Prabhu said, "You should be permanently kept in this state (fever) to stop this wayward writing." Thus realizing that Shri Guru did not approve of it, Shri Maharaj gave up the composition. Similarly, at the instance of some devotees, Shri Maharaj sat down to write an article against remarriage, a burning controversy those days, he heard the Lord's words, "Put down the pen!" Shri Maharaj stopped all writing for one year. Then he just happened to pick up a small stick and doodle the names of Lord on a piece of paper. Suddenly recalling the Lord's injunction, he put the stick down. At that time, Shri Guru Raj clarified to him that the restriction

applied only to that article and thus Shri Maharaj resumed writing.

The Protector and Provider

Implicit in the insistence on strict obedience is the assurance of full protection and constant sustenance of the devotee. This is best exemplified by two events. When Shri Maharaj commenced his Chaturmaas at Pavani (1909 A.D.), thousands of devotees and disciples started arriving from all over India. As many of these areas were afflicted by the epidemic of plague, people feared the spread of the epidemic to Pavani. An incidence of a rat death in one of the temples accentuated these fears. When apprised of this, Shri Maharaj prayed to Shri Datta Prabhu, "O Lord! I have initiated the present Chaturmaas on your orders and all these children of yours have assembled here. If any of them happens to succumb, it will tarnish your glory. Hence I am compelled to interrupt the Chaturmaas and move on." The Lord assured him that nobody would be harmed till the conclusion of the Chaturmaas. Shri Maharaj conveyed this to all and their fears were soothed and Chaturmaas passed off without any mishap. However, as soon as Shri Maharaj set his foot out of Pavani, the place was assaulted by the epidemic taking a heavy toll.

Shri Maharaj spent his last year or so at Garudeshvar. During this period also, there used to be a continuous flow of visitors with hundreds of persons camping every day. The expenses towards the arrangements of food and provisions were met from the money people used to offer Shri Maharaj, who himself never even touched it. This money, referred to as the Lord's treasure was kept in a box. One Mr. Sabnis looked after these arrangements. Once Mr. Sabnis noticed that there remained only three rupees in the box, after paying for the provisions. A bit anxious, Mr. Sabnis brought this to the notice of Shri Maharaj who only said, " Everything happens by God's will; why should we worry? Even assuming that no cash flows in, there is always plenty of water in Narmada to drink!" After about 8-10 days Shri Maharaj asked Mr. Sabnis to pay up a supplier. As soon as Mr. Sabnis opened the box, the sight of gold coins spread all over the box pleasantly surprised him. On enquiry he came to know that a devout couple from Varhad had placed those coins worth 3000 rupees in the box.

The Conflicts

We have seen how there arose situations where the Lord and His Devotee were set against each other. During the Pavani Chaturmaas,

the priests from Wadi came to Shri Maharaj to seek relief from a chain of calamities that befell them then. Not getting a positive response from Shri Maharaj, once they refused to proceed with their meal unless Shri Maharaj promised to come to Wadi to help them. Shri Maharaj prayed to the Lord for direction. Shri Guru told Shri Maharaj to proceed to Wadi after the Chaturmaas instead of going to North. When this was conveyed to the priests from Wadi, they commenced their lunch. In the evening, at the time of daily discourse, Shri Maharaj was possessed by the Lord and he, flushed with anger uttered the following words, "(should we) come to Wadi to set up shop?" Thus it became apparent that the Lord was annoyed at the coercive behavior of the priests at the lunch. When after the Chaturmaas, Shri Maharaj started his journey to Wadi, the Lord ordered him to return. Shri Maharaj prayed to Prabhu, "It is by your order that I promised the priests to come to Wadi. Now I must keep my word come what may! If you do not approve, this body is at your disposal. But it is not right to break a promise." For this defiance on his part of Shri Maharaj was afflicted with rheumatism making it painful even to stand up or sit down. When in spite of this suffering Shri Maharaj continued his journey for about 25-30 km in the direction of Wadi, he started passing blood in feces. Braving all these odds, Shri Maharaj went to Wadi to fulfill his promise! There is no record of the Lord's reaction, but no doubt he must have been very proud of his disciple.

One more point of contention between Shri Maharaj and the Prabhu was about visiting Kashmir. On several occasions Shri Maharaj ignored the Lord's directions to proceed to Kashmir. Once when the Lord was insistent, Shri Maharaj prayed him to physically transport him in the manner of Tantuk- the weaver in Gurucharitra. That was the end of the controversy.

One more very touching incident comes to mind. When leaving Mangaon, the Kagal idol insisted on accompanying Shri Maharaj. When Shri Maharaj told that it might not possible for him to offer Him all the services while on the move, the Lord (idol) said He would be content with water and ashes. The idol stayed on with Shri Maharaj and he offered regular worship. Once at Brahmavart, a learned scholar questioned his idol worship, Shri Maharaj said he was ready to give it up, but the idol wouldn't leave him. On the scholar's insistence he left the idol into the Ganges. However, as soon as they came out of the water, the idol reappeared before them and the scholar repented and became an ardent devotee of Shri Maharaj.

In 1894 A.D., after the Chaturmaas in Petlad, Shri Maharaj came to Chikhalada and stayed on till Deepavali, at the instance of many

devotees and seekers who wanted to learn yoga as well as scriptures. On the eve of the first day of Deepavali, the Lord reminded Shri Maharaj of the festival and demanded He be offered Mangal Snaan (auspicious scented hot water bath). Shri Maharaj remonstrated that being a Sanyasi, he could neither touch (use) fire nor obtain any scents and perfumes. He further reminded the Lord of His promise to be content with water and ashes.

Next day, Shri Maharaj bathed the Deity with cold water and applied ashes and proceeded with his routine. At noon, after the Bhiksha, when Shri Maharaj approached the Lord to dedicate the solicited food (Naivedya), he heard the screaming voice of the Prabhu, " How dare you offer me food on a Deepavali day without the auspicious bath? I am sitting in the Narmada! I don't want your Naivedya." When Shri Maharaj came to the riverside, he heard a child's cry. Following the direction of the sound he went into river, when a mystical light guided him to the location of the deity. Overwhelmed with love, Shri Maharaj dived into the river and clutching the Lord to his heart, came to the bank. In the meanwhile the devotees of Shri Maharaj had already gathered to find out why Shri Maharaj went to the river at the lunch hour. When these people learnt of the Lord's wish, hot water, perfumes and other requisites were procured and the Lord was ceremoniously worshipped. Shri Maharaj composed the following verse commemorating the Lord's Leela (play):

"Even though friends may fight,
They soon enough reunite
When consorts do skirmish
Their love doesn't an iota diminish.
With the Devotee the Lord's conflict,
Is a signpost of love transcendent.
Says Vasu such merriment,
Gives Datta deep enjoyment."

The Medium and the Mediator

One more interesting aspect of this multifaceted relationship becomes apparent when we look at the role Shri Maharaj played in the reform of priests of Narsobawadi. Lord Datta Himself had cultivated the prestige and influence of Shri Maharaj in Narsobawadi. Shri Maharaj himself revered Wadi and the priests as the primal seat and servants of the Prabhu. Once, in Indore, a priest from Wadi arrived just at the time when the devotees there were planning to take out a procession of

Shri Maharaj riding an elephant. As soon as he saw the Wadi priest, Shri Maharaj insisted that the priest and not himself should ride the elephant. The priests also had come to recognize the Divine mandate of Shri Maharaj and respected him as such. Gradually, a bond came into being whereby the priests would approach Shri Maharaj with their problems and request him to intercede with the Lord on their behalf. The Lord not only recognized this but also used the services of Shri Maharaj to communicate with the priests. We have had an occasion to examine an episode of this mediating role of Shri Maharaj under "The Conflicts." Another illustrative episode is recalled here.

After spending three consecutive Chaturmaas in Brahmavart, Shri Maharaj arrived to Wadi in 1898. One evening, after the regular obeisance to the Padukas during the Palanquin ceremony, Shri Maharaj started climbing the steps to his room. Suddenly he went into the trance and the Kamandalu fell from his hand on the stone steps. However, it miraculously escaped any damage at all. Still in the trance, Shri Maharaj continued to walk and sat down in the temple of Shri Narayan Swami. "Call the priests of the four divisions!" exclaimed Shri Maharaj in a forceful voice. Soon the priests gathered and Shri Maharaj continued to speak thus: - "The Lord is weary of your present conduct and has brought me here to improve the same. You are not following the precedents laid down by your ancestors. If you do not still reform, you will invite further punishment, far severer than what you have been suffering these last three years." The terrified priests prayed most humbly for forgiveness and guidance. After a couple of hours in the trance, Shri Maharaj returned to the normal state. When someone asked him as to the ways to pacify the anger of Shri Datta Prabhu, he answered, "I am just one of you. I don't know anything."

Shri Maharaj was in Wadi in the Deepavali festival of 1906 A.D. In the five days of the festival, the Padukas are bathed with hot water. On the first day (the dark 14th of Ashvin), Shri Maharaj was also given hot water bath along with the Lord. However, the priests did not check the temperature of water poured over the Padukas. This resulted in Shri Maharaj passing blood in urine. When Shri Maharaj queried Shri Datta Prabhu about this, the Lord said, "If a single hot water bath has caused this to you, imagine what I must be suffering while the priests are pouring scalding water over me every day!" When questioned the priests confirmed that nobody checked the temperature of water before bathing the Lord. Shri Maharaj told them that he was receiving the punishment for their mistake. On his advice the priests placed a coconut before the Lord and prayed pledging to test the temperature of the water in future. This relieved the suffering of Shri Maharaj.

In a similar incidence in Kurugaddi, Shri Datta Prabhu caused some dead sparrows, eggs and other dirt to fall in the hands of Shri Maharaj. Even as he was throwing these away in disgust, the Lord remarked, "We have thrown these things on your body just to make you realize how we are suffering such filth to soil our place." The next day, Shri Maharaj actually saw a sparrow killed by a bat fall on the Padukas. He then made arrangements to repair the gaps in the roof of the Kurugaddi temple and to fix a door to the sanctorum.

It should be mentioned here in the passing that, Shri Maharaj was instrumental in reviving some major places of Shri Datta worship like Kurugaddi and Peethapur. At Peethapur the local residents were even not aware of the actual birthplace of Shripad Shrivallabh till Shri Maharaj pointed it out. Shri Maharaj has also installed several Datta idols in different parts of India.

Love

The Supreme Being referred to as the Brahm in Vedic literature, is beyond human concept and articulation. Its attributes like the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer refer to its relation to the world but say little of its nature. The Shrutis (Vedas), after striving to define the indefinable, end up saying, "not such, not such"! Only three major attributes emerge consistently from the subjective experience of the Seers, viz. Truth, Existence and Bliss (Sat, Chit and Anand). These seers could only say that It Exists (Asti), It is Conscious (Bhaati) and It is Beloved (Priya). Thus the Being, Knowledge and Love are the aspects of God that are common to all religions and form the basis of all approaches to Him. Indian tradition, from the ancient Rishis to the Saints, has placed love above wisdom in the pathway to God. This love, referred to as Bhakti, forms the very essence of the fascinating relationship between Shri Maharaj and Shri Datta Prabhu. All the facets of this bond we have so far studied are firmly and deeply rooted in love. It is this deep love that enabled Shri Maharaj to transcend the limitations of human body, mind and ego; it is this love that motivated the tremendous efforts he put in, austerities he practiced, sufferings he underwent; it is because of this love that he could so completely, unreservedly dedicate his whole life, his entire being to God.

The heart of Shri Maharaj was always filled with this Divine love. Sometimes even the utterance of Divine Name sufficed to trigger an outburst of this passion, choking his voice, causing a profuse flow of tears and even leading to a trance. In the 1906 visit of Shri Maharaj to Wadi, he used to perform his evening rituals at the Sangam

(confluence) after which he used to explain Shri Krishna Lahari. Once just as he was speaking, the temple bells started ringing as usual for the evening worship accompanied by burning of incense before the Lord. Suddenly Shri Maharaj became speechless and tears started incessantly flowing. Recovering after a short while, Shri Maharaj said, "Behold our great fortune and rejoice! The Lord, the Ocean of Mercy, has come to live here for the benefit of His devotees! His grace towards his children is indeed indescribable."

Once while teaching grammar to some students in Brahmavart, Shri Maharaj encountered the word "Krishna" which led him into a trance. Such trances were frequent occurrences with Shri Maharaj. He used to lose all awareness of the outside world during such trances. Once at Wadi, when he went into a trance lasting for a couple of hours, the priests formed an enclosure around him with sheets of cloth for his protection. Later on he told them this was neither necessary nor desirable for such a trance could occur in jungle or other deserted places; secondly, the sight of such a trance can be an uplifting and purifying experience. In Wadi again, even as he remained in the trance for almost all day, he appeared at noon on the streets of Wadi soliciting Bhiksha! When Shri Ganda Maharaj asked him as to how this could happen, he pleaded ignorance saying, "You were with all the time! I did not move out." Listening to Bhajans at times induced such trances, as happened at Sadalage, a village south of Wadi, while he was listening to an Abhang of Shri Saint Tukaram. The trance lasted three hours.

These are some of the obvious expressions of the deep ardor that ever filled the heart of Shri Maharaj. The following incident at Narasi reveals that the emotion was mutual and the Lord returned his love in equal measure. Once when Shri Maharaj had gone to the river for alone for his midday bath (Sanyasis are required to bathe thrice a day), a village woman happened to come there to collect water. She saw Shri Maharaj sitting under a tree and there is six-month-old baby in his lap, sucking left and gazing at Shri Maharaj who is returning the loving gaze. She was so dumb-struck by the sight that she forgot filling her pot and just stood there watching in a daze. In a little while Shri Maharaj happened to notice her when the child disappeared and the lady lost her consciousness. Shri Maharaj went to her and revived her by sprinkling some water and told her she was fortunate to have witnessed the holy sight and told her to keep it secret. She filled her pot with water and returned home. However she could not keep the experience to herself and the story got around.

One and the Same (Nonduality)

The more one's understanding of this spiritual tie gets deeper the less perceptible becomes the distinction between the two and the more convinced one gets of their essential unity. Did not Lord Dattatreya Himself tell Shri Ganesh Bhatiji that He would incarnate as his son? The Lord instructed several devotees that He was dwelling in the form of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati. An evil spirit possessed one Shri Alandikar's wife as she put on some jewelry gifted by some bandits in return Shri Alandikar's priestly services. Alandikar tried many means to relieve his wife of the affliction for ten years without any success and finally landed in Ganagapur. After a few days, he was directed by the Lord to leave Ganagapur immediately and go to Garudeshvar on the banks of Narmada where the Lord said, "I am residing under the name of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati." Following the Divine instruction, Alandikar went to Shri Maharaj at Garudeshvar and his wife was ridden of the evil spirit by the grace of Shri Maharaj.

Again at Garudeshvar, Shri Maharaj instructed one demon to go to Narsobawadi and serve Lord Dattatreya there. The demon replied, "The Lord Datta of Wadi is here, what is the of going there?" Shri Maharaj ordered him to shut up and sprinkled a little water over the possessed lady, at once releasing the demon from that mean state.

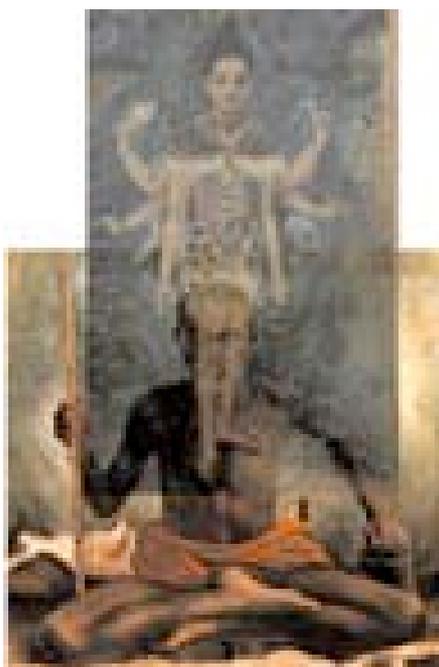
One Tukaram went to Ganagapur and performed penance in the service of Lord Datta, living only on fruits for three years, with a keen desire to be blessed by the vision of the Lord. The Lord ordered Shri Maharaj, then in Pandharpur, to go to Ganagapur and stay there for three nights. After reaching Ganagapur, he was directed to see Tukaram and fulfill his urge and compose for him, a hymn in the praise of the Lord.

The most authentic first hand account of Shri Maharaj being Lord Dattatreya incarnate comes from one of his major disciples Yogiraj Shri Gulavani Maharaj. In the month of June, Shri Vaman Rao Gulavani, then 23 years of age, had come to Ganagapur to complete seven Saptahas (seven day reading) of Shri Gurucharitra after having completed seven at Wadi. After the sixth Saptah, a Ramal astrologer predicted that if he did not meet his Master (Shri Maharaj) within the next six months, he would never meet him in his life. Shocked by this prediction, Shri Vaman Rao was stricken by an irresistible urge to meet his Master. Completing the seventh and final reading in one day and giving away his umbrella to the priest towards the expenses of the closing ritual (samapti) of the Saptahas, he set out on foot to seek out Shri Maharaj. His two-month pedestrian search for Shri Maharaj, with practically no money, in

the hot summer over a dry, dusty terrain, is in itself a saga of indomitable perseverance and penance which was rewarded not only by his meeting his dear, revered Master but also by a ten-day stay in his august and holy company. During this period, he was blessed by exclusive discourses by Shri Maharaj on the entire 18-chapter Bhagvad Gita; Santha of Shri Vishnu Sahasra Naam from Shri Maharaj; instructions on yogic Pranayam and Ajapa Jap; and the continuous grace flowing from Shri Maharaj.

After ten days of this blissful sojourn, Shri Vaman Rao had to leave as the first anniversary of his father's death was approaching. Starting early, he went to the bath in Tungbhadra river in the sacred company of Shri Maharaj who bathed Vaman Rao with his hands. They went to Madhukari together and at lunch Shri Maharaj served a portion of from his plate to Vaman Rao as Prasad. As the time of departure neared Vaman Rao could not control his grief at the prospect of separation from Shri Maharaj. Finally, the moment of parting came. Shri Maharaj was sitting in his customary Siddha position, with a coconut, sacred ashes and Prasad by his side, on a small platform. Shri Vaman Rao prostrated before him. Shri Maharaj blessed him with customary "Narayan" and gave the prasad, coconut and sacred ashes asking him to take care. Shri Vaman Rao, with tear-strained face and a heavy voice asked, "When shall I see you again, Master?" Shri Maharaj, with an upward shake of his head pointed to himself and said, "Remember this as it is, that is all!"

At this moment, the physical form of Shri Maharaj appeared to become transparent and Shri Vaman Rao saw the figure of Lord Dattatreya clad in tiger-skin, with His feet at the heart of Shri Maharaj, smiling benevolently at him. Shri Vaman Rao prostrated again and as he got up, he saw the usual form of Shri Maharaj asking him hurry up so as not to miss train. Shri Vaman Rao, luckily for us, was an accomplished painter and not only memorized the enchanting image of the Lord but also reproduced it in an exquisite miniature which he placed in his sacred book of Shri Guru Charitra. When Shri Vaman Rao went to stay with Shri Maharaj at Garudeshvar, he, on the latter's instruction put a metal frame on it. Shri Maharaj placed it on a wooden platform and performed the ritual worship. The picture continued to receive regular worship throughout the stay of Shri Vaman Rao at Garudeshvar at the end of which, Shri Maharaj handed it back to Vaman Rao. This picture is in the sanctorum of Shri Vasudeo Nivas.



Shri Swami Maharaj and Lord Dattatreya,
One and the Same

10. PASSAGE TO ETERNITY

The Rumor

In the summer of 1906 A.D., when Shri Maharaj was staying in Chidambar Kshetra, some mischief-monger set off a rumor of his Mahasamadhi (physical dissolution). A search party from Wadi went right up to Rameshwar and not finding him there returned to Thanjavur. When they neither found him there nor got any trace of him, they almost despaired. Shri Maharaj divined this and left Chidambar and met the party in the Mayavaram market to their great relief and joy. Shri Maharaj then told them not to believe such rumors since "the place and the time of the demise of this body will be known to all well in advance."

The Omen

In the 1911 A.D. Chaturmaas at Kurugaddi, a crow pecked Shri Maharaj pecked thrice on his head. Shri Maharaj announced that a person so stricken by a crow did not live longer than six months and urged all to end their attachment to "this body." Shri Datta Prabhu, however, instructed Shri Maharaj to bathe in Godavari at its confluence with Venganga for relief from the hazard. These events illustrate his total lack of fear for death and detachment from body.

Garudeshvar

Shri Maharaj arrived at Garudeshvar, guided by Ashvatthama (vide supra). Garud (eagle), the vehicle of Shri Vishnu has performed penance at this place to obtain Shiva's grace. Within a month of his arrival, he declared to Shri Ram Shastri Prakashkar that he would not be going anywhere henceforth. The desolate temple soon grew into a place of pilgrimage as hundred of devotees of Shri Maharaj started pouring in from all over India. The devotees constructed some shelters with kitchen and other bare amenities and organized daily activities. On any day, there would be hundreds of persons to be fed. The things proceeded smoothly. Many a time Shri Maharaj used to order preparation of a particular cuisine in anticipation of the guests who usually arrived at noon. Each day some miracle or the other was witnessed. People of all religions and castes came to seek relief from their problems. Shri Maharaj helped everyone without disturbing his faith. To the Muslims he would instruct to chant Ayats from Qura'n. Even some Parsis came and received his grace.

The Message

One morning, after the daily discourse, Shri Maharaj addressed the assembly as follows. Today I wish to convey to you the essence of all that I have been preaching all my life through my discourses and writings. The primary objective of human life is to obtain liberation (from the recurring cycles of birth and death). To this end, one should carry out one's religious obligations as ordained by the scriptures, consistent with his Varna and Ashram. This will lead to the steadiness of mind so essential for the next step viz. study (*Shravan*), contemplation (*Manan*) and meditation (*Nididhyasan*) of *Vedanta* (conclusion of Vedas). Emphasis should be on the study i.e. the listening to discourses by detached and realized persons. This will diminish the temptation of mind. (The resultant) Righteous (*Sattvic*)

tendency is alone conducive to the spiritual ascent of man.

To cultivate the Sattvic nature, diet has to be wholesome (Hit), measured (Mit) and pure (Medhya). The signs of Sattvic nature are:

Firm faith in one's religion,

Meticulous observance of religious conducts viz.

1. *Snaan* (bath),
2. *Sandhya* (prayer),
3. *Dev Puja* (worship),
4. Five major *Yadnyas* (sacrifices),
5. *Atithi Satkar* (honor to the guest),
6. Service to *Gomata*,
7. Sincere attendance of *Katha, Keertan, Bhajans, Puran* etc.,
8. Soft and kind speech,
9. Refraining from harming anyone in any way,
10. Service and obedience to parents (for men)
11. And to husband, in-laws (for women) and other elders.

One may pursue any means for livelihood viz. commerce, agriculture or service. However, one should never abandon the conduct ordained by Vedas and obedience to the *Guru*. Observance of one's religious duties only purifies mind. Only purified mind gets established in *Upasana* (progress towards God), which in turn is the only source of Peace of mind. Only a peaceful mind is capable of self-knowledge which is the sole means of Liberation." Shri Maharaj further exemplified the seven grounds (levels) of Knowledge and concluded that, " This is a brief summary. One who follows this advice will finally attain complete happiness.

The Preparations

In the summer of 1914 A.D., the chronic dysentery afflicting Shri Maharaj exacerbated and his health declined rapidly. Learning this, the priests commenced Santat Dhara (nonstop shower) worship to Padukas. When Shri Maharaj was informed of this, he sent a message to the priests not to unnecessarily trouble the Lord, "since this body is soon due to fall".

The Eternal Physician

When the devotees started pressing Shri Maharaj to take some medicines, he replied, " I am soon quitting this body; as such on medicines are necessary. Shankaracharya lived only 32 years. This frame has endured much longer. This was afflicted twice by snakebite, thrice by cholera, once by Sannipat, once by plague, twice by leprosy and twice by leukoderma. Dysentery is almost constant. Who gave medicine then? The physician engaged (Shri Datta Prabhu) at birth is still there!"

The Exit

Shri Maharaj was originally scheduled to depart on the dark 8th of Jyeshtha month; however he did not prefer to go that day. Hence, noting the exact timing of the Tithi, Shri Maharaj made someone sit him up and went into Samadhi for three hours. On waking up from Samadhi he said, "today's scheduled departure has been avoided." By the dark moon (Amavasya) of Jyeshtha, he was very weak in acute pain. He called Shri Appa Shastri Jere from Wadi and whispered in his ears, "I have been a subject of black magic in my householder days; however I have no desire to retaliate." Even on that last day he tried perform Nityakarma; but he could not even hold water in his hand and gave the effort saying, "God's will". "Once today's Amavasya is past, this body has to be quit" he said. Accordingly, as soon as the Amavasya gave way to bright Pratipada of Ashadh, Shri Maharaj sat up facing the Lord to the west, performed Tratak (steady gaze), controlled breath and quit the body with a loud chant of "Om". The day was Tuesday, Nakshatra Ardra, Ayan Uttara.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief biographical sketch of *Shrimat Paramhans Parivrajakacharya Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swami Maharaj* has been primarily and extensively sourced from the Marathi Biography of Shri Swami Maharaj "*Shri Gurudevcharitra*" by *Param Pujya Brahmarshi Shri Datta Maharaj Kavishvar*. We have the utmost happiness and heartfelt gratitude in acknowledging his debt.

Other sources include "*Smruti Sourabh*" by the *Vaidya* brothers of *Nisarpur* and the Marathi guide by *Late Shri R. B. Diwanji* of *Nagpur*.

We are also grateful to *Gurubhakt Shri A.S. Potbhare* for helping me write this account of Swamiji's life and providing some very good photographs.

We gratefully acknowldge *Sarvashri Shri V.G. Chorghade, Shri G.V. Pimpalpure (Nagpur), Prof. R. L. Joshi (Solapur) and Shri S. V. Kalmankar (Thane)* for their valuable review and suggestions.

[http://www.shrivasudevanandsaraswati.com/
swamilife/swamibiogtaphy.htm](http://www.shrivasudevanandsaraswati.com/swamilife/swamibiogtaphy.htm)