



## RAM NAVAMI MESSAGE 2018

### **The Centenary Heritage**

The ethos of the centenary year celebration of Sai Baba's Maha Samadhi (Oct 2017 – Oct 2018) by His devotees / trusts is like a crescendo culminating to a euphoric height. The internet websites and other available sources reveal the enactment of a large number of multifaceted activities to spread the name, pious deeds and thoughts of Sai Baba at different places in India and abroad. During this period, Shirdi Sai Global Foundation, on its part, has played its desired role by organising two Global Conferences to celebrate the occasion in New Delhi and Hyderabad, to start with. Many more activities are proposed to be held in different cities in India and abroad.

On 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017, the Sai Global Summit captioned "Towards Eternity through Centenary" was held at Siri Fort Auditorium, New Delhi. It was attended by representatives of various Sai Baba trusts/centers/groups including those from USA, Canada, UK, some of the European countries, Australia, Nepal and others. It was addressed by the Vice President of India, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu, Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Culture and Tourism Mr. Mahesh Sharma, Mr. V K Singh, the Minister of State for External Affairs and other prominent personalities. The centenary celebration reflects the enthusiasm of the devotees to spread the name of Baba and His philosophy, in a festive environment.

During Baba's time a few festivals like Ram Navami, Gokulastami, Urs, etc. used to be celebrated at Shirdi with fanfare. The later generations continued to celebrate these occasions as a pious heritage handed over to them from the past generations.

However, if the heritage imbibed from Shirdi Sai Baba is limited to a few festivals only, it won't be serving the purpose. What one should visualise is a centenary heritage. After Baba wound up His mortal coil, His devotees continued to carry ahead the heritage during their lifetime. The succeeding second and third generations that followed, did their best to continue and preserve the heritage in terms of building of institutions in the name of Baba, opening of temples, schools, hospitals, dispensaries and carrying on with philanthropic activities like feeding the poor and caring for the poor and neglected sections of the society. Such activities are highly commendable. However, it would be appropriate to understand in its correct perspective, the different factors of this rich heritage. The idea is to imbibe the values that Baba stood for and act accordingly in its quintessence.

Baba's personality can be gauged by His pious activities at Shirdi in relation to His devotees. It never indicates that He was a religious personality of a classical variety. The classical Gurus generally believe in imparting certain ethical principles set by the scriptures, e.g., recitation of mantras, Pooja and aarti, celebration of pious occasions etc. Sai Baba's approach towards the spiritual evolution was unique. Even if He was enthralled by Lord Vithal of Pandharpura, He was not a *Vaishnavite*. Even if a devotee by the name of Megha bathed Him with the water of Godavari river and put "*tripund*" on His forehead, venerating Him to be Lord Shiva, Sai Baba was not necessarily a Shaivite. Even if His ear lobes were pierced and He practiced yoga, He was not a *Nathapanthi*. Similarly, even if He maintained the "*Dhuni*" and practiced yoga, He was not necessarily a Hindu *Jogi*. Even if He was held as a Muslim by some, He did not follow all Muslim rituals except for reciting a few Kalmas on certain occasions. Even if He manifested certain traits of Sufism, He can't be termed as a Sufi. Sai Baba amalgamated the various practices of so many different ways of religious thinking and held these different groups together in an even keel.

His main concern was spiritual evolution of the devotees through the process of upliftment of their mind and activities. He was too much of a humanitarian to be a rigorous preacher. The panoramic canvas of His humanitarian activities extends from giving medicine to the sick, saving them from diseases and danger, improving the quality of hundreds of families around Him, taking care of animals like dogs and horses and also financially helping the needy.

He did not preach dry philosophy or ethics in hyperbolic language as many others do. In simple sentences, He spelt out the ethical standards when discussing about the thoughts or activities of the devotees. He did not believe in demagogy or

pedagogy either. He communicated very spontaneously and normally with His devotees as if He was a member of their household. If some of His devotees addressed Him as God, He was like a “God here and now”, moving in the lanes and the bylanes of Shirdi and showering His blessings on them.

Therefore, when celebrating the centenary year of His Maha Samadhi, the devotees and trusts will do well to undertake such events and activities that are in line with the philosophy of Sai Baba.

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