

Sai Baba, one of the foremost saints of modern India, lived in the little village of Shirdi in the State of Maharashtra for sixty years and elevated it to the status of a great spiritual center. He never stepped out of that village during this long period except for visits to two villages, Neemgaon and Rahata, three miles on either side of Shirdi. He never preached, toured, nor discoursed. He never advertised himself. He rather shunned and discouraged unnecessary publicity. Yet by the sheer brilliance of his spiritual fire he did draw innumerable devotees to him from all over the country, irrespective of their caste or creed. When he took samadhi in 1918 (i.e, left off his physical body) he never installed anyone as a successor to his spiritual throne at Shirdi. Yet his very power to mould and develop his devotees spiritually is such that even more than 50 years after his samadhi, Sai Baba is still a dynamic spiritual force that countless Indians invoke for their spiritual and material welfare. No wonder many of the new born in our country are named after this great God-man and hundreds of his shrines have been built and are being visited by his devotees all over India. Many more are in the offing. Many books have been written of him in various Indian languages.

What is of special relevance to present day India is Sai Baba's gospel and example is that religious and communal differences are meaningless in matters of the spirit.

Yet surprising as it may sound, a god man of his stature and fame is without a name. No one knows his original name, time and place of birth, his religion and caste, not even of his parents. He never revealed the same to anybody. Sai Baba the name by which he came to be known, is what has been used by one of his first devotees to greet him on his second arrival at Shirdi. Sai means saint and Baba means father. The name is thus just an expression of love and reverence due to such a spiritual giant as he, and is not a personal name. He allowed himself to be addressed as such, ever since.

All that we definitely know of Sai Baba is that his arrival at Shirdi was very sudden. One day he appeared as a boy of sixteen or seventeen, seated under a neem or margosa tree in the outskirts of the village of Shirdi, about the year 1854. However, even this date is not definitely noted.

An old woman of Shirdi, mother of one Nana Chopdar described him thus This young lad fair, smart and very handsome was first seen under the neem tree seated in an asana. The people of the village were wonder struck to see such a young lad practicing hard penance not minding heat and cold. By day he associated with none by night he was afraid of nobody. People were wondering and asking whence this young chap turned up. His form and features were so beautiful that a mere look endeared him to all. He went to nobody's door but always sat near the neem tree. Outwardly he looked very young but by his action He was really a great soul. He was the embodiment of dispassion and was an enigma to all. One day it so happened that God Khandoba possessed the body of some devotee and people began to ask him Deva god you please tell us what blessed father's son is this lad and whence did he come God Khandoba asked them to bring a pickaxe and dig in a particular place. When it was dug bricks were found and underneath that, a flat stone. When the stone was removed a corridor was seen in which four samayis earthen lamps were burning. The corridor led to a cellar where cow mouth shaped structures wooden boards and necklaces were seen. Khandoba said This lad practiced penance here for 12

years. Then the people began to question the lad about this. He put them off the scene by telling them that this was his guru's place, his holy water tomb or resting place, and requested them to guard it well. The people then closed the corridor as before.

Mahalsapathy was probably the first to introduce himself to Sri Sai Baba: he was so much impressed with the conversation he had with Baba that he thereafter saw him daily and introduced baba to his friends Kasinath the tailor and Appa Jogle saying that a fakir Sai Baba had made a sudden appearance on the outskirts of the village near the debris of the village wall, that he is far above the common man, a pure and holy man worth paying respects to. From that time onwards he came to be known as Sai Baba. This trio-Mahalspathy Kasinath and Joge-daily went to Baba paid their respects to him and supplied whatever little requirements he had. The news that one Sai Baba had manifested himself near the nimb neem tree on the outskirts of the village reached the ears of the late Appa Patil Kote and one day he, with his wife, went to Baba to pay his respects. He Baba left his seat got up and welcomed Appa and told his wife that she had been veritably his sister. The lady Bayajibai on seeing Baba, was so much impressed that she then and there resolved never to take her food without first feeding Baba.

At first Sai Baba prescribed and gave medicines to the ailing visitors who sought his help but never charged nor accepted any money for the same. Not only that; if he found that there was none to look after or nurse the patient, he would himself be the nurse and serve him. Once it so happened that his patient failed to observe the rules of diet, etc., that Sai Baba had prescribed and henceforth Baba gave up administering medicine and gave only his 'udi' or holy ashes for their relief.

Raghuji Gannapat Scinde Patel refers to this incident in his account As soon as Baba came to Shirdi, one Amanbhai, a Moslem gave him food. That Amabhai was visiting my mavusi's grand mother's house occasionally. Her son Ganapat Hari Kanade aged thirty-five had leprosy and fever. Amanbhai told her that a holy man had come to his house and that he could treat her son. Then Baba came in and saw the patient and told Ganapat to catch a cobra courageously as the cobra would not bite a leper. Ganapat caught a cobra and out of its poison the medicine was prepared and given to Ganapat. He began to improve in a few days. But he did not observe Baba's injunction to avoid sex-pleasures. So Baba stopped giving him further treatment. The disease developed and Ganapat died.

Baba came to this very house to treat my younger brother Bhagoji who was suffering from fever, at a very critical period, when death was imminent. Baba gave him some medicine and further had him branded with red hot iron sone on each temple and one on the back. Bhagoji recovered his health escaped death and fever.

Young Sai Baba even this title was not conferred on him by that time stayed under the neem tree for about three years but suddenly left Shirdi. No one knew where he went or why. After a year or so, he again returned to Shirdi and stayed on there till his mahasamadhi in 1918 i.e for sixty years.

Where Saibaba was during the interval between his first and second visits to Shirdi is not definitely known. However, some vague hints are given by some devotees. For instance, Amoolchand Chandrabhan Seth of Rahata says. My elder cousin Khusal Bhav who died on 5-11-1918 has told me that Sai Baba lived in a Chavadi now in ruins at Rahata for some months or so; that previously Sai Baba lived with a Moslem saint Ali Akbar Ali perhaps whose portrait is still kept in our gin i.e. Rahatekar's gin near Wadia Park at Ahmednagar that Daulu Sait had seen baba with the saint at Ahmednagar and that Baba came from Ahmednagar to live at Rahata and then went to live at Shirdi. Devotees Experiences

- The Divine Ministration
- D.D. Nanasaheb Rasne who served Baba for nearly two decades has told the author of a remarkable incident in this period of Baba's life as recounted to him by Saint Gadge Maharaj himself.

Sri Gadge Maharaj alias Sri Guzadi Maharaj a famous saint of Maharashtra, was serving in a provision store at Sivagaon Pathado. One day Sai Baba came there from Selu Manvat and begged for roti. When no one gave him any, he picked an ear of jawar from a ripe farm and went away, munching it. Gadge went home on leave, picked up roti and proceeded in search of the fakir. At last, he found the latter sitting under a tree in a nearby jungle. The fakir demanded Why have you come here

I noticed that they hadn't offered you roti and so I got it for you.

- Will you give me whatever I demand?
- You may ask for anything except money which I don't have.
- I need your life. Give it.
- How can I take it out and offer you? Take it by your hand, I am ready

The fakir then kept his hand on Gadge's head in blessing. The latter instantly galvanized with intense renunciation, at once went back bade goodbye to his family and rushed to his guru who in the meanwhile went ahead, when baba saw him he was wild and roared Rogue why have you come to trouble me further

I cannot part from you Gadge submitted.

Baba then led him to the nearby tomb of a Moslem saint commanded Gadge to dig a small pit nearby and fill it with two pot full of water. Getting down into that Baba sipped a little of the water and directed the other to do the same. Gadge obeyed and at once grew obvious of everything in a deep yogic trance. By the time he regained his sense, Baba had left.

Subsequently Gadge reached Shirdi Baba was at the mosque and the curtains within were lowered Gadge lifted a curtain up and peeped in Baba grew wild and cried Bastard have you come to eat my bones having already eaten my flesh Why trouble me even after I gave you what I have When Gadge said that he would not leave him Baba flung a brick at him. It struck the former on his brow, leaving a permanent crescent mark. Baba then calmed down and said You're fully blessed and will henceforth be a sadguru. God will bless you. Gadge instantly attained perfect Enlightenment.

Long after on the eve of his mahasamdhī Sadguru Gadge Maharaj visited Shirdi singing. Ham jato Amche Gaona I am going to my original adobe. He swept the village clean sang Bhajans and told his devotees, We shall never meet again. I am going away Then he proceeded singing to the bank of river Narmada and attained mahasamadhi.

It should be mentioned here that Sri Gadge Maharaj besides ministering spiritually to countless devotees has also left behind several charitable and educational institutions in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

This account gives us an inkling of what baba was and did even during the interval between his first and second arrival at Shirdi.

The second advent of Baba at Shirdi is interesting to note. Chand Patil was a wealthy gentleman of Dhoop village in Aurangabad district. On one of his trips to Aurangabad the horse which he was riding strayed and could not be found. He was very fond of the animal and so he searched for it carefully for two months, but he could not find it. At last, while he was returning home by walk, carrying the saddle with him as a memento of the animal, he saw a fakir sitting under a tree by the road. The fakir wore a long gown, and a cap and had a small stick in his hand. He beckoned to Chand Patil to come and rest in the shade of the tree for a while and enquired of him, why he carried the saddle and what he was searching for. When Chand Patil told him of his missing animal, the fakir smiled and asked him to search for it near a stream. Chand Patil was surprised to see the animal in the same spot where he could not find it a little earlier when he returned to the fakir in great joy, the latter told him to share a puff from his chilm. The tobacco and the clay-pipe were ready with him but he had neither fire to light it, nor water to wet the cloth through which the smoke is to be sucked. Then the fakir struck the ground with his stick and there emerged a burning ember from the earth After lighting the pipe with it, the fakir again struck the ground with the stick and water bubbled from the same spot The fakir wetted a piece of cloth in it and, using it as a filter, he puffed the smoke and offered it to Chand Patil. The latter was already stunned by the miraculous power of the fakir and he accepted the clay pipe as a sign of blessing from the powerful saint. Then he touched the feet of the fakir in reverence and begged him to grace his house with his visit. The fakir agreed and followed Chand Patil to his house.

After some time, when the Patil had to attend the marriage of one of his nephews at Shirdi, he requested the fakir to grate what is this word the occasion, Accordingly the whole party arrived at Shirdi. The bullock carts halted at the outskirts of the village. When the fakir alighted from one of these, Mahalspathy, a priest in the village temple, recognized the great saint to be the same as the lad who appeared sitting under the neem tree a few years earlier and greeted him with the words Ya Sai elcome Saint. Henceforth, he came to be known as Sai Baba Saint father. Ramgir Bua, a devotee of Sai Baba writes about Sai Baba's second arrival at Shirdi Ramgir Bua, a devotee of Sai Baba writes about Sai Baba's second arrival at Shirdi

As a boy I studied in the school at Shirdi. I was a pupil when Sai Baba came to Shirdi. He was then accompanied by one Patel of Dhupkheda who came to settle the marriage of a girl with Hamid, the son of Aminbhai of Shirdi. Baba appeared to be 25 or 30 years old at that time. He stayed there as a guest of Aminabhai. He had long hair flowing down to his buttocks. He wore a green kufni, a skullcap next to his hair and over it a bagawi topi kashaya or ochre coloured cap he carried a danda a small baton in his hand along with a chilm pipe and match box. He got his bread by begging. Devotees Experiences.

Four or five months after his arrival at Shirdi, Baba started wearing a white gown and head-dress. Even after his second advent at Shirdi, Sai baba seemed to have lived under the neem tree for some time and a particular incident was responsible for Baba's changing his residence to the old dilapidated mosque in the village. The details of the incidents that I could gather, are as follows

Once there were very heavy rains at Shirdi and a large portion of it was flooded. After a long while some of his very early devotees remembered the homeless fakir and wanted to see how he fared and where he took shelter from the rain. Mahalsapathy and a few others rushed to the margosa tree and were stunned to see that Sai Baba was there under the same tree, half-reclining, in a state of samadhi. Water flowed all over him. All the rubbish and filth gathered over his body. They dared not wake him up from that state. A few hours later, when the water had drained away, they returned to see him still lying on the damp earth; his body and face were completely covered with mud deposited by the receding water. They felt guilty was their sole protector and guide in all their sufferings This is an incomplete sentence. Later, when he returned to the worldly place of consciousness, these devotees persuaded him to take shelter in the small, dilapidated mud-built mosque in the village. Probably the Hindu natives of the village felt that Sai baba' was a Moslem and so unfit to take shelter in Hindu temples as did the other Hindu saints like Janakidas and Devidas. This shift of his abode seemed to mark a change in his career. He burst into fame not long after this event.

One Taty Baba Kote writes that before Sai Baba came to live in the mosque, he lived for some time in a jungle of thorny trees Babul or Acacia and that he was taken to be a madman by the village urchins who often stoned him. But he never got angry with them nor protested against their waywardness.

Thus the birth, parentage, religion, caste and the native place of Baba remained a mystery. Many people repeatedly asked him about these details but he quietly put them off the point with a smile. Once a thief who was arrested by the police told the Dhulia Court that he was given the valuable articles in his possession by Sai Baba of Shirdi. Then the Dhulia court sent a Commissioner to record Baba's replies to the inquiries. The inquiry went on thus:

- Commissioner: What is your Name?
- Sai Baba: They call me Sai baba.
- Commissioner: "Your father's name?"
- Sai Baba: Also Sai Baba.
- Commissioner:Your guru's name?

- Sai Baba: Venkusa.
- Commissioner:Your religion?
- Sai Baba: Kabir.
- Commissioner:Caste or Community?
- Sai Baba: Parvardigar (God).
- Commissioner: Your age?
- Sai Baba: Lakhs of years.

It is evident from these replies that Baba did not look upon himself as his body and so he never revealed anything of his early life to any devotee.

However, once he is reported to have told late Sri Mahalsapathy that he was born in a Brahmin family in the village of Patri and that at an early age he was given away by his parents to a fakir. Perhaps we should take it as a cryptic and allegorical statement that was characteristic of him. For instance, he always referred to God as the merciful Fakir, He also said once, I came here to Shirdi from Aurangabad. My mama uncle brought me down here. He once told Swami Sai Sharananandaji, I was only eight years old when I left my parents and came to the Gangas. Baba always referred to the Godavari River near Kopergaon as Ganges Then I came to Shirdi. This is perhaps an instance of Baba identifying himself with Sripadavallabha the first manifestation of Lord Dattatreya who left his home at the early age of eight.

Dr. K.B. Gawankar, in his book on Sai Baba, has recorded a few more of Sai baba's reminiscences of his pre-Shirdi days. Once Sai baba told his devotees, Bade baba and Bapugir Gosavi, I grew up in Mahurgad a holy place sanctified by the presence of Lord Dattatreya); when people pestered me I left for Girnar; there too people troubled me much and I left for Mount Abu. There too the same thing happened. Then I came to Akkalkot and from there to Daulatabad. There Janardana Swami a great saint did me a lot of seva i.e. service. Then I went to Pandharpur from there I came to Shirdi.

Dr. Gawankar also records a significant aspect of Sai Baba's life. Once baba asked Smt.Kasibai Kanitkar Did Lord Datta give you anything at Kopergaon? No she said.

Do you know Sakharam Maharaj of Angaonkawad famous saint of that place. He is my guru bandhu. We served the same guru. We planted two mango saplings there.

Next day when Smt. Kasibai went to Kopergaon to see the saint Sri Sakharam Maharaj he gave her two mangoes and said Sai has sent these for you.

There is a mention in Sri Sakharam's biography of his frequent chattings with a young fakir Who according to Gawankar was undoubtedly Sai baba himself. It is also recorded that once Sakharam Maharaj told his devotees that he was going to his brother and then he proceeded towards the river Kamode. Devotees who accompanied him thither saw a fakir on the opposite bank of the river. He was the fakir aulia of the Nizampur Dargah. They saw each other and exchanged hearty smiles and returned to their respective abodes. Dr.Gawankar conjectures

that it is possible that the fakir auliya was Sai Baba himself. Chronologically, this incident took place between Sai Baba's earlier disappearance at Shirdi and his second and permanent arrival there in 1858.

How dearly Sai Baba cherished this phase of his life can be seen from this incident: Bapusaheb jog was a devotee of Sri Sakharam maharaj. On one of his visits to the latter's mutt monastery at Angaonkawad, he saw the two mango trees that were mentioned earlier by Sri Sai baba. On one of his later visits, jog plucked a mango from one of them as an offering to Sri Sai baba but realized his error when he found it to be too unripe. Then he purchased two good fruits on his way for Sai Baba. Later when he offered the two ripe mangoes Sai Baba would not, take them! He only wanted the mango that jog had plucked at Angaonkawad! When Sai Baba took it in his hands tears of joy flowed freely from his eyes. Baba examined it and said, "It is not yet ripe." Bapusaheb jog said, "Yes, Baba." Sai Baba stared at it for a while and with a sportive sparkle in his eye said, "Is it so?" and ordered that it should be cut and distributed to all the devotees assembled there. Everyone was surprised to note that the mango was indeed ripe and sweet!

Another reference of Sai baba to his early life relates to his meeting with his guru I found my master in the chavadi here. His calm, peaceful, cheerful and meditative face attracted me, almost bewitched me so much so that my eyes were riveted on his face and even a moment's separation made me uneasy. In His company I used to forget even hunger and thirst. I served him with all my heart for more than 12 years. The duties I had imposed on myself for him were very arduous. He never left his seat for any purpose, not even to answer the calls of nature. Merged in meditation, he entirely forgot that he had a body, mind, etc. He ate, passed urine and stool there only, on his seat. I fed him, changed his clothes, swept and kept his seat always clean. As a reward for this he gave me his blessings saying, Wherever you are, here or even beyond the seven seas, I will ever be with you to guard and protect you'at the start he had asked me to pay his fees dkshina; and on my asking what his fees were, he coolly said that his fee was only two paise and these paise were not the government currency I had been using. His two paise consisted of two things, nishta (absolute faith) and saboori cheerful patience. I readily gave him these two paise and though I was very eager to obtain from his holy mouth some holy spell or formula which I could go on chanting and repeating, he whispered nothing in my ears. He simply said, I shall ever be with you, protecting you by my mere glance, in the manner of a tortoise protecting its young ones. The entire credit of all my glory goes to this Guru. It is the outcome of his blessings.

One another occasion, writes Swami Sai Sharananandaji in his book Shri Sai, the Superman, He (Sai Baba) said to this writer, My guru's name is Roshan Shah Mia. The same writer who lived for quite some time with Sri Sai baba adds, Subsequently, I marked that Shri Baba was, from time to time, also using the word 'Roshan'. He used it particularly when he told some parables. It seems Roshan Shah thereafter had cast off his mortal coil (his body) and Baba entombed him under or near the nimb (neem) tree at present found in Shirdi Navlkar's wada or mansion. When the previous owner of this wada, R. S. Sathe, wanted to put up a story and terrace, at the time of putting up a stair-case he unearthed a tomb with an under-ground cellar or a cave under the tree. Baba was asked as to what should be done about the tomb and the cave. Baba said that the place belonged to his elders and it should neither be disturbed nor opened but it should be covered up with a stone as before. Some boys

playing hide and seek removed the stone and found under it, several steps leading further down. They said that the cave was dark but rather long. Baba once told Shri Sai Sharananandji, pointing to a pillar near his dhuni (the sacred fire) in the mosque (Dwaraka Mai) that there was a cave there under to which he always confined himself, that once his beard grew so long that it reached the ground and wept it; that he never came out except to meet some holy or religious man. Throwing light on his life during this period, once Sai Baba admonished Sagunmeru Naik, What Can't you put up with a day or two days' starvation I lived on margosa leaves for twelve long years

A devotee of Sai Baba, Hari Vinayak Sathe, reports, Baba told me that the tomb close to that (neem) tree was that of his guru. He gave his name. It ended with 'Shah or 'Sah. Some of Sai baba's devotees felt that they heard baba say that his guru was Venkusa. While Roshan Shah is a Moslem name, Venkusa is a Hindu name. Whether this ambiguity lay in Baba's pronunciation or in his giving different answers to the same question when put by devotees of diverse temperaments, we cannot determine.

Our attempt at tracing the period of discipleship of Baba is already complicated. On the one hand we have his statement that when his mother rejoiced at his birth he himself wondered why she should be so elated, as he had always been in existence i.e as the eternal spirit and he did not wrongly identify himself with his body. On the other side we have references to his discipleship. What is discipleship to one who was already perfect

Again we cannot be very sure of the literal truth of the story of Baba's discipleship. For he once gave a different account of it altogether. It is worth quoting in its entirety

Once four of us were studying religious scriptures and we began to discuss the ways of realizing Brahman. One of us said that we should elevate ourselves and not depend on others. To this the second replied that he who controls his mind is blessed, that we should be free from thoughts and ideas and there is nothing in the world without us. The third said that the world of phenomena is always changing, between the Real and the unreal. The fourth i.e., Baba himself urged that mere learning is worthless and added, Let us do our prescribed duty and surrender our body, mind and five pranas or life impulses to the guru's feet. Guru is "God, all-pervading. To get this conviction, strong and unbounded faith is necessary.

Discussing thus we four men began to ramble through the woods in quest of God. On the way a labourer met us and asked us where we were going in the heat of the day. We did not reveal the object of our quest to him. He then warned us of the danger of our losing the way in the woods if we went without a guide. Finally he said, you may not give out to me your secret quest will you sit down, eat bread drink water take rest and then go! But we rejected his offer and walked on. We lost our way. Ultimately through sheer luck, we came back to the place from where we started.

The labourer met us again and said. By relying on your own cleverness you missed your way a guide is always necessary to show us the right way in all matters. No quest can be successfully carried out on an empty stomach.

Unless God wills it, no one meets us on the way. Do not reject offers of food, which are to be considered auspicious signs of success. He again offered us food and asked us to be calm and patient.

I was hungry and thirsty and I was moved by the extraordinary love of the labourer who looked quite illiterate and of a low caste. I thought that acceptance of his hospitality was the best beginning of gaining knowledge. So I respectfully accepted the food he had offered.

Then the guru stood before us and asked. What was the dispute about I told him everything that had happened. Then he said, would you like to come with me I will show you what you want, but only he who believes in what say will be successful I bowed to him reverently and accepted him as my guide. But the other three spurned his hospitality and his guidance and wandered away. They no longer searched for God but rambled idly in hunger and thirst.

Then he the guru took me to a well, tied my legs together with a rope and suspended me head downwards from a tree that stood close by. My head was three feet above the water, so that I could not reach it. Then he left me and returned again after about five hours and asked me how I was getting on. I am in bliss supreme, I replied. The guru was much pleased with my reply, embraced me, stroking my body with his hand. He accepted me as his disciple. I forgot my mother and father and all my desires. I loved to gaze on him endlessly I did not want to go back. I forgot everything but the guru. My whole life was concentrated in my sight and my sight on him. He was the object of my meditation In silence I bowed down.

However, that Baba had a guru is certain for he had a brick with him which he always used as a pillow when he slept, and on which he always kept his hand when he sat. He said of it, This brick is my guru's gift, my life's companion. Probably the two accounts of his discipleship supplement each other.

Earlier biographers of Sai Baba have taken this episode, especially his being suspended head downwards, three feet above the water in a well, as being merely symbolic. Though their explanation of the symbolism is illuminating, the possibility of it being a literal fact cannot be ruled out. The earlier writers based their conjecture as to the symbolic nature of the episode on the common experience that 'no one can be at ease and feel bliss if he be suspended with a rope head down and feet up in a well for hours together A similar incident took place in the life of Hazrat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, a contemporary of Sai Baba, which shows that the incident could literally have taken place. I shall quote at length from my unpublished book on the great saint:

The uncanny ways in which he transmitted various spiritual experiences are no less striking. One day someone asked Tajuddin Baba, Master how can hal bliss be experienced Baba took off his cap and kept it on the ground top downwards. The seeker was suddenly overwhelmed with the direct experience of hal and in that ecstatic state, stood on his head and started dancing on his head and hands Only after baba turned the cap into the normal position did the visitor get out of the ecstatic mood and he stood upright. Then Tajuddin Baba asked him have you realized how it is to be experienced The question has a deeper significance than is apparent. He, as a spiritual teacher out of his grace, has to grant it to his disciple and that is the only way of experiencing hal.

This incident also shows that mystical states of consciousness are not merely subjective states which the saint has to experience for himself through self-conditioning or auto-suggestion, without any objective reality about them. He could at will communicate it to one who could not obtain the experience through his own endeavors. This finds a parallel in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa giving an experience of God to Vivekananda at will.

This experience of hal by Tajuddin Baba's disciple and his experience of bliss in an inverted position shows that it is not only possible but conducive to certain types of spiritual ecstasy conferred upon disciples by their gurus. Indeed the hanging of a sadhaka head downwards into a well seems to be a specific technique adopted by certain gurus to help their disciples achieve quick spiritual progress and some saints used the technique even for themselves. Baba Farid Ganj Sakkar, the guru of the celebrated saint of Delhi, Sheikh Nizamuddin Aulia, hung himself head down into a well for forty days. But he administered no such method to his disciples. So it is a technique, which was called for by an individual need.

Excerpt from Book Sai Baba The Master By Acharya E. Bharadwaja