

Sri Shirdi Sai Baba Temple of Austin

Who Was Shirdi Sai Baba?

Little is known about the early life of Sri Shirdi Sai Baba. As a young man, He settled in the remote village of Shirdi in present day Maharashtra. He was called “Sai” by the people, and when Baba (father) is added, we have Shirdi Sai Baba. He lived a very simple life, taking up occupancy in an abandoned mosque. At first, some people considered Him odd as he did not live a regular life. He used to take alms from a few houses for his food. Every night he would collect oil from the local merchants so He could light lamps in his mosque. One night the local merchants decided to all refuse him oil. They watched him carefully after this to see what he would do. So He poured water into his oil jar, spit in it, and then used the “water” to fill the oil lamps. He then lit the lamps and they burned all night. After that, the merchants and people started to show Him more respect, and by the time of his passing in 1918, thousands of people flocked to the small hamlet of Shirdi to get the holy darshan (presence) of Sai Baba.

Baba was considered a saint by both the muslims and hindus in his community. He loved listening to the Koran or the Vishnu Sahasranama equally. He did not distinguish between rich and poor, sick or healthy, young or old, or care about caste, creed or religion. He was loving to His devotees and performed many miracles. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that from time to time He (God) incarnates in human form to re-establish order in society. To his devotees, Baba is the true incarnation of God.

The life of Sai Baba is chronicled in numerous books, the most precious of which is called the Sai Satcharitra (see http://www.saiaustin.org/Shri_Sai_Satcharitra.pdf). When available, we give away copies of this book to anyone who wants one in the Austin Temple. To His devotees Baba made certain assurances before leaving his body. They are:

- 1) Whoever puts his feet on Shirdi soil, his sufferings will come to an end.
- 2) The wretched and miserable will rise into plenty of joy.
- 3) I shall be ever active and vigorous even after leaving this earthly body.
- 4) My tomb shall bless and speak to the needs of my devotees.
- 5) I shall be active and vigorous even from the tomb.
- 6) My mortal remains would speak from the tomb.
- 7) I am ever living to help and guide all who come to me, who surrender to me, and who seek refuge in me.
- 8) If you look to me, I look to you.
- 9) If you cast your burden on me, I shall surely bear it.
- 10) If you seek my advice and help, it shall be given to you at once.
- 11) There shall be no want in the house of my devotees.

Today, tens of thousands of people visit the original Temple in Shirdi every day, and Shirdi Sai Baba temples are springing up all over the U.S. and other parts of the world, due to the universality of Baba's message.

How does the Temple view different religions?

Sai Baba Himself confused the people of His time because they could not "peg" him as belonging to one caste or one religion. He dressed like a Muslim but kept a sacred fire like a Hindu. Our view is that there is only one true religion, the religion of love. This is the great teaching of the great saints and avatars throughout history – Jesus – Buddha – Krishna – Muhammed – etc. to love your neighbor, find God within yourself and everyone and everything. To us, it does not matter whether one worships Allah, Jesus, Buddha, etc. God is one but paths are many. People from any background are welcome at the Temple.

While most members of the Austin Shirdi Sai Baba Temple are Hindus, we also have Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, and Muslims who are active in the Temple.

What services are performed at the Temple?

The central service at the Temple is called "aarati", which is a set of 4 different prayers, lasting 15-20 minutes. One is sung in the Morning, one at Noon, one in the evening, and one at night. In addition, many different Hindu ceremonies are performed for the benefit of the Hindu members by a priest.

Does the Temple perform community work?

One temple motto is "Serving hands are dearer to God than praying lips." Therefore, when opportunities present themselves, the Temple organizes members to do community service for others. This is called "seva" (service). One popular seva is feeding others in need. Currently, Temple members deliver 500 sandwiches each Wednesday to Caritas of Austin for the homeless to eat in their soup kitchen. Also, 100 "lunch bag" dinners are made every Sunday for distribution by Salvation Army to the homeless.

What are Baba's miracles?

Sai Baba promised that He would continue to protect and bless His devotees even from the grave. People all over the world continue to experience miracles coming from Sai Baba, through prayer and devotion.