

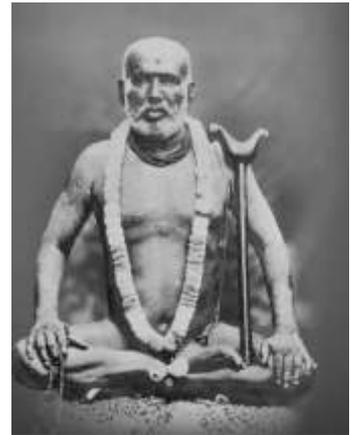


Shri Brahmachaitanya Gondavalekar Maharaj

A LIFE SKETCH



Shri Maharaj came from a family that had settled in Gondavale and, by dint of hard work, uprightness of conduct, purity of character, and devoutness of spirit, acquired a highly respected status. His grandfather, Lingopant, in particular, earned great public and government appreciation as much by his just and judicious administration as Kulkarni (village revenue officer) as by his benevolent nature. He had unswerving devotion to the family deity, Shri Vithoba, and never missed the periodical pilgrimage to Pandharpur. As age advanced he found it increasingly difficult to do the 80 km trek. One night Lord Vithoba appeared in his dream, saying, "I am pleased with your devotion and am myself coming to you so that you may be spared the trouble of going to Pandharpur; and, indicating a certain spot in his field, added, " Dig, and I shall be found there." Next morning, on following the instructions, the old man found fine black-stone idols of Vithoba and Rukmini. Overjoyed at this sign of divine grace, he installed the images in a verandah in his house.



It was in this house that Shri Maharaj was born on 19th February 1845. His father, Ravjee, had a strong inborn disinclination towards mundane life, and he mostly occupied himself with prayer and meditation. Geetabai, mother of Shri Maharaj, combined a practical mind with an intensely obliging nature and a strong devotional spirit, and was the main support for the needy in the village.



Even as a child, Shri Maharaj manifested a keen tendency for benevolence, particularly for feeding the poor and the starving; he also showed fondness for bhajan, prayer, and meditation. When barely six years old, he would slip out of his bed at dead of night and go and sit in meditation in some quiet nook by the river bank. Convinced of the necessity of a Guru (Spiritual Master) for the realization of God, he ran away from home at the age of eight to seek a Master. However, his father soon discovered his whereabouts and brought him home. With the idea of curing him of this " mad "urge and turning him toward "normal" life, his elders got him married at the age of eleven. This, however, failed to detract him from

what he considered the chief mission and purpose of human life, and it was not long before he quit home again to renew the quest for a Guru. Clad only in a loin cloth, trudging on foot, he traversed hill and plain, wood and pasture, in search of a Guru. It was the hectic period of the 1857 struggle to recapture the national freedom. This



teenager roamed through the dense forests of Mt. Abu and the Himalayas and the banks of the Narmada. He called on most of the saints of the day; but each declared that he was not the Guru for him, and sent him on. Eventually he was directed to Shri Tukarama Chaitanya (fondly called "Tukamai" by his disciples) of Yehlegaon (Near Nanded in Maharashtra), and here he found his quest fulfilled. For nine months he served the Guru unceasingly, untiringly, and with implicit surrender. He successfully passed the tough tests which were put to him by Shri Tukamai. The Guru, then convinced that the youngster had completely mastered all passions and desires and had transcended the narrow individual "self", conferred his Grace on him and initiated him, bestowing on him a spiritual name, 'Brahmachaitanya.'

A few days thereafter Tukamai instructed him first to go to the Himalayan forest (Naimisharanya) and spend two years there in solitude and meditation, to visit the more important sacred places in the country, and then to return home and devote himself to the spiritual uplift of the people. He was, in particular, enjoined to work for the middle and lower class people, to guide them to follow the ways of God while carrying on their normal social and personal life; to serve the needy and the cast-offs of society and put them on the pathway to God; and, in general, to instil a feeling of brotherhood and love among the people.

Shri Maharaj accordingly spent two years in a cave in the Himalayas, visited important holy places, went once again to pay his respects to his Guru, and then returned home to Gondavale, after a lapse of nine long years. Outwardly he settled down to common life. However, he soon gave up the hereditary official post of Kulkarni. He initiated his wife into the practice of Yoga, and of meditation on the Divine Name. She practised both with such earnestness that when, a few years later, death came to claim her, she faced it with perfect peace and equanimity. Later, on his mother's importunate pleading, Shri Maharaj married again, but he selected a girl who had been born blind!



During most of this period Shri Maharaj stayed little at home but spent the major part of his time in touring. It was during his sojourn at Indore that Govind Kulkarni and Ananta shastri Gadgoli (who later became celebrated as Shri Ananda sagar and Shri Brahmananda respectively) became his disciples. From about 1890 Shri Maharaj lived largely at Gondavale. Soon his fame as a saint spread far and wide. The number of those who came to seek his advice, succour, and support steadily swelled. Many of them lived in his company, alone or with family, for varying periods. He accommodated them all in his own house. Eventually, to provide a tangible focus for their devotion, he set up in the front part of his house a temple dedicated to Shri Rama. This afterwards came to be known as the " Senior Ramamandir," to distinguish it from the "Junior" one which he later built to cater to the needs of the still increasing number of devotees. Beside this " Junior



Ram Mandir" he also put up a Datta temple and a Shani temple, with adjoining rooms to accommodate more disciples and visitors.

A famine of unprecedented severity overtook the region in the year 1876-77, claiming thousands of lives, and another, only slightly milder, twenty years later. On both these occasions Shri Maharaj provided work and food to all those who came to him for succour, and he thus saved thousands of lives.

In the year 1897 Shri Maharaj felt that his mission of life was over, and decided to go to Naimisharanya for good. As he started on his journey, however, it was noticed that tears were rolling down the cheeks of the marble idols of Shri Rama, Lakshmana, and Seeta. Taking this as a token of divine disapproval, he decided not to quit Gondavale just then. This miracle of the weeping of the idols recurred when, in 1909, he was attacked by the bubonic plague, and, again, two days before he left the mortal body.

For quite some time before the end, Shri Maharaj had been indirectly hinting, in many ways, at the approach of the event. On Friday, 19th December 1913. He confided in clear terms to a disciple that he would leave the body on the following Monday. On the evening of Sunday he went to his cattle-shed just outside the village to pay the last visit to his cows whom he loved and adored so much. As he rested for a while at a place close by the shed, he casually remarked that he would like to make his permanent abode there. Later that night, he performed bhajan in Shri Rama Mandir, exhorting his audience, for the last time, never to forget the Divine Name, come what may. A few hours thereafter, he took a last look at the Rama image which he loved so devoutly, and then went and sat on his bed in the Siddhasana posture. Closing his eyes, and uttering his last words, "Remember, where there is the Divine Name, there I live", he extinguished life. It was 5.50 a. m. on Monday, 22nd December, 1913.



Recalling his casual remark of the previous evening, the disciples surmised that he desired his resting place to be where he had rested awhile in GOSHALA premises, and accordingly it was there that the Samadhi was built. Quite naturally, the centre of interest for his disciples thenceforth shifted to the Samadhi precincts, and a vast complex of buildings has since come up, providing accommodation and amenities for bhaktas and sadhakas, in the Goshala premises.

A Brief Outline of The Teachings of Shri Maharaj



The sole aim of all human activity down the ages is seen to be, in the ultimate analysis, the attainment of eternal and unalloyed happiness. However, with all the astounding advancement in human knowledge and civilization' so far, man is still nowhere within sight of that goal because he has been looking for it in the wrong place.



Identifying himself with the physical body, and presuming that pleasure of the senses is the only source of happiness, man attaches supreme importance to the acquisition of power and pelf, the gratification of passions and desires, promotion of self-interest, and pursuit of worldly honour and position. This results in an individual and social life that is full of selfishness, narrow-mindedness, greed, imperfections, and dissatisfaction. Such a life, however successful', eventually leads either to cloying and resultant discontentment, or to an endless search for alternatives and substitutes. Besides, the senses themselves also get fatigued or diseased and thereby incapable of deriving pleasure. And, ultimately, the body itself must yield to death, thus putting an end to all 'enjoyment'. In brief. pleasures of the senses fail to satisfy, and one is led to

the conclusion that a mind blessed with a spirit of equanimity, peace and contentment is far more conducive to happiness than merely a body wallowing in luxury.

Broadly speaking, the individual soul is part of the Universal Soul, or the Ultimate Reality, which we visualise in the word 'God'. Basically, therefore, it partakes of the characteristics and attributes of the latter, namely, eternal existence, unlimited energy, and indestructible bliss. We have forfeited these attributes for the time being because we are labouring

under ignorance of our true self, the indwelling spirit and its nature, and mistake the body to be the all-in-all. The remedy obviously lies in recapturing the awareness of our true self which is identical with God. The simplest and surest way to achieve this awareness is to repeat God's Name, to chant it constantly. (This chanting may be articulate, or with only a silent movement of the lips and tongue, or entirely inward and mute.) The Holy Name is the symbol of God the Impalpable, a symbol which stands on the threshold between the



Impalpable and the palpable, the subtle and the gross, the essence and the dross. Living as we do in the field of sensual perception we have to adopt the Name as the means of transition.



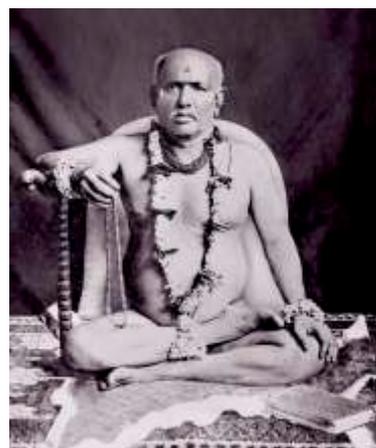
The teachings of Shri Maharaj for the common man seeking happiness may be summarised thus :

- (1) See that your conduct does not offend against any canon of moral behaviour.
- (2) Discharge your duties and responsibilities to the best of your ability.
- (3) In the field of worldly activity, endeavour your best to achieved what you think is morally and practically proper.
- (4) Neither take credit for success and achievement, nor consider failure as discredit or disappointment. Cultivate the conviction that not you but God is the author or the dispenser of each and every event in your life and, in fact,

the life of all Creation. Everything that happens (or does not happen) is by Divine Will, Wisdom, and Power.

(5) Look on life with a sense of duty, but with detachment at heart; do not get involved in anything with a sense of proprietorship or authorship but only as a duty. Abstain from all 'I' and 'mine'.

(6) Take to the Holy Name with all your heart and faith. Be sure that it is the panacea for all your troubles. The Name purifies the heart, enfeebles passions and desires, overcomes attachment for the body and for mundane, transitory life; altogether it is so powerful and effective that, if steadily pursued, it will definitely conduct the aspirant to the realization of God. In the initial stages the mind is often beset with doubts, but persistent practice in chanting the Name will gradually resolve them and in due course generate the conviction that the Holy Name is the only Reality in the Universe. It should be chanted not only fixed hours but also whenever else it is possible. Indeed, it should be practised to such an extent that it abides unceasingly in the heart, till the very last breath.



(7) The Name is so holy, noble, pure, and potent that it will purify and ennoble whosoever chants it with faith and persistence. It may be chanted by anyone without regard to age, caste, creed, or status; it may be chanted irrespective of time, place, or any other condition or circumstance.

Shri Maharaj devoted His entire life, literally upto the last breath, to advocating the Divine Name as the only remedy to make life replete with contentment, tranquillity and bliss. On everyone who came to Him, He looked with the utmost love and compassion. He took infinite pains to inculcate in people an entirely fresh and constructive perspective of and attitude to worldly life, never suggesting its renunciation, but, rather, advocating its 'sublimation' by treating it as a duty, a trust, and selfless service to God. To understand and absorb this teaching, and thereby pave the way to peace, contentment and happiness in life, would be the proper aim of a visit to Gondavale.