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Introduction to Sathya Sai Baba

By Prasad Golla

(This is the first of a series of articles by Prasad Golla on the popular Indian religious figure known as Sathya Sai Baba)

Imagine meeting God face to face. Not after death, because first of all it is not guaranteed and, secondly, because we can't wait that long. We could meet him here on earth while we are still alive and before HE dies.

HE resides a few hundred miles south of where I was born in Hyderabad, India. In Puttaparthi, a small town in rural India, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in a region known for its heat and dryness (at least that is how I remember it) lies HIS abode. HE rarely travels, spending most of his time either in Puttaparthi or in Bangalore, which is southwest of Puttaparthi. HE traveled only once outside India to Uganda (Africa) in the Seventies, yet he has millions of devotees all around the World. I could guess there are hundreds if not thousands of HIS devotees in the US. Last year I met an elderly Texan who told me that his wife was in Puttaparthi on a visit. I did not inquire whether she was HIS devotee.

HE is not a recent phenomenon by any chance. HE celebrated his 75th birthday in November 2000 and has had a following since he was 14 years old when he left home and started his Ashram (abode) in Puttaparthi. ⁴ For a complete run down on his official life history you could point your web-browser to — [http://www2.acorn.net/doc/baba life.doc](http://www2.acorn.net/doc/baba%20life.doc) ³ or <http://members.aol.com/introsai/>. ⁹ For an unofficial one check — <http://psg.com/~ted/bcskeptics>. ⁸

HE was born in 1926, eight years after a well known Fakir (Ascetic and Mendicant) died. HE takes HIS name since HE is this Fakir's incarnation. An account of his birth says this:

According to the four-volume hagiography written by his (Sathya Sai Baba's) late secretary and disciple, Professor N Kasturi, Sai Baba was born 'of immaculate conception' in the southern Indian village of

Puttaparthi in 1926. As a young boy, he displayed signs of miraculous abilities, including 'materializing' flowers and sweets from 'nowhere'. At 13 he declared himself to be the reincarnation of a revered southern Indian saint, Shirdi Sai Baba, who died in 1918. Challenged to prove his identity, Kasturi writes, he threw a clump of jasmine flowers on the floor, which arranged themselves to spell out 'Sai Baba' in Telugu (Ed:- a south Indian language).¹⁰

SATHYA (or SATYA) in Sanskrit means TRUTH or TRUTHFUL. According to another account:

In a calm but firm voice, the boy announced: I am Sai Baba. Then he proceeded to relate how he had chosen this particular family for his incarnation in answer to the prayers of a devout ancestral sage. He was, he said, the reincarnation of a little-known but much respected Moslem holy man, named Sai Baba of Shirdi, who dressed like a Moslem but wore ash on his forehead like a Hindu. The original Sai Baba had died eight years before Sathya was born—the length of time he had reportedly told his devotees would elapse before his reincarnation.⁹

Shirdi is a town somewhere near Bombay (Mumbai) which is northwest of Andhra Pradesh. To find out more about Shirdi or the Original Baba, point your web browser to <http://www.saibaba.org/>.¹² Shirdi Sai Baba, almost eighty years after his death, draws thousands if not millions of devotees to his Tomb every year and has millions of devotees around the world (independently) of Sathya Sai Baba.

Now Sathya Sai Baba has millions of followers all over the world too. HIS organizations spread his word and message of LOVE through their websites. For a website near you check the official listing of HIS websites.² Here is an official version written by S. Ramakrishnan:

Baba is virtually deified by lakhs (Ed:- One Lakh is 100 thousand) of devotees the world over. In their homes and offices, his photograph finds a pride of place among the family deities. I have seen his picture adorning the tables and office-rooms of many of our distinguished leaders, editors, litterateurs, scientists, administrators, senior officials in the Secretariat in New Delhi and State capitals and even in the Indian High Commission in London.

One of the most arresting and revered personalities of the century, Baba spontaneously commands the respect and reverence of millions of people, in India and abroad. He has his own unique way of transforming people in all walks of life. Their number is legion. It is indeed true that Baba's devotees include a sizeable number of those who are drawn to him because of his superhuman power or siddhi and are proud of venerating one endowed with such a rare gift.¹¹

The Prime Minister of India, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the Chief Justices, top officials of the Indian government, and law-keepers routinely come to be blessed by HIM. I too personally traveled to Puttaparthi in the fall of 1988. I wasn't blessed by HIM, at least as far I can say. I attribute this to the fact that I wasn't particularly looking for HIS blessing (and not to mention that I was no dignitary). Though we were a few yards apart, the darshan (showing) went uneventfully.

HIS miracles are countless. Here is an excerpt from the Web site of Sri Sathya Baba Center of Akron, Ohio:

The fame of Sathya Sai Baba was spread, in the beginning, by the stories of his "miracles", acts which cannot be explained by science and which transcend physical laws. His manifestation of material objects; the creation of sacred ash (vibhutti) on the palm and fingers of his hand, to be used for spiritual and physical healing; changing an object from one metal to another metal simply by blowing on it; all of these and many more, before hundreds of thousands of people, done "by an act of will". He is known to heal the sick and maimed and blind; he has protected from harm those who called for help, even though thousands of miles away; he has appeared in his physical form in two different places at the same time; and he has raised from the dead several persons, including a man from California.³

The "Man from California" that this excerpt mentions is Isaac Tigrett, co-founder of the Hard Rock Cafe chain of

restaurants. According to an interview Mr.Tigrett gave:

The most extreme occurred in 1976. It was a time, he said, when his doubts about Sai Baba were at their greatest. Driving a Porsche Turbo through the Hollywood Hills after a late-night party, he came off the road at 80mph and crashed through a barricade into a 200ft gully. 'I had no seatbelt on. At the moment I knew I was going to die I could feel pressure on my shoulders, and I look and, seemingly to me, there is Sai Baba sitting beside me with his arms around me. The car hits the ground and turns more than a dozen times before it lands upright, totally demolished. And there's not a scratch on me. I'm thinking, this can't be true. Was it him? Was it my imagination? Did I call him and somehow create this belief in my mind that he was there?' ¹⁰



Figure 1. The 'Sarva Dhama,'
from <http://www.eaisai.com/baba/>

Sathya Sai Baba performed many such miracles. Not only can HE heal the sick and the diseased (and the deceased), HE is omniscient, omnipotent, and has complete telepathic knowledge. Even professional doctors and scientists take HIS advice on technical and medical matters. HE is known to have a thorough understanding of all the major holy scriptures of the World not only because HE is omniscient but because they are HIS own words. ⁷ HE knows everything about languages (including etymology), politics, music, etc.

"What exactly is Sathya Sai Baba's religion called?" you may ask me. HIS religion is the universal religion of LOVE.

I have come not to disturb or destroy any faith, but to confirm each in his own faith — so that the Christian becomes a better Christian, the Muslim, a better Muslim, and the Hindu, a better Hindu. There is only one religion, the religion of Love;

There is only one language, the language of the Heart;

There is only one caste, the caste of Humanity;

There is only one law, the law of Karma;

There is only one God, He is Omnipresent. ¹

HIS "religion" is further signified by HIS Organization's logos: ^{1, 13}

The emblem [see Figure 1] of the Organization was the 'Sarva Dharma' (symbol of Unity of Religions and Basic Values), depicted by an open lotus with six petals and six leaves. There is a lamp in the center. The six petals show different symbols representing world's six major religions. The 'Om' at the top represents Hinduism, the cross depicts Christianity, the crescent and star are for Islam, the star of David is for Judaism, the fire represents Zoroastrianism, and the wheel is for Buddhism. This is the Sai Emblem to show the unity of all faiths and the common basis for the values of all religions.

At the 6th World Conference of the Sathya Sai Organization, held at Prashanthi Nilayam during 18-21 November 1995, a decision was reached to replace the present emblem of the Organization with a new emblem [see Figure 2] depicting The Five Human Values: Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Nonviolence.



Figure 2. The new emblem, from
<http://www.sathyasai.org/logo/logo.htm>

If you wish you can write HIM a letter to the address found at one of HIS official sites 1. If you are wondering about writing HIM an e-mail, let me tell you what HIS website says:

An e-mail address is not available for Swami.

Your prayers to Him in any form reach Him directly.¹

Swami is a Sanskrit word meaning "a holy man." Let me end this first part of (hopefully) a multi part series of articles on Sathya Sai Baba with the following ancient Vedic Stanza that I like and is recited both in Sanskrit and English at the end of each of Sai Baba's prayer meetings:

"Asatho Maa Sad Gamaya
 Thamaso Maa Jyothir Gamaya
 Mrithyur Maa Amritham Gamaya
 Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi"

From untruth lead us to Truth,
 From darkness lead us to Light,
 From death lead us to Immortality
 Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

Yes, you can meet God. All it will cost you is a round-trip ticket to India.

References:

- 1 <http://www.eaisai.com/baba/>
- 2 <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/9158/world.html>
- 3 Web site of the Sri Sathya Baba Center of Akron, Ohio — Life of Sathya Sai Baba, <http://www2.acorn.net/doc/babalife.doc>
- 4 Web site of the Sri Sathya Baba Center of Akron, Ohio — <http://www.acorn.net/lists-ht/baba.html>
- 5 <http://www.indian-skeptic.org/html/index.html>
- 6 <http://www.indian-skeptic.org/html/byljones.htm>
- 7 <http://psg.com/~ted/bcskeptics/sbmir/contents.html>
- 8 <http://psg.com/~ted/bcskeptics>
- 9 <http://members.aol.com/introsai/>
- 10 <http://chakra.org/articles/2000/11/17/sai.baba/>
- 11 "A Baba we adore", <http://www.eaisai.com/baba/docs/>
- 12 Official web site of Shirdi Sai Baba, <http://www.saibaba.org/>
- 13 <http://www.sathyasai.org/logo/logo.htm>

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Web news

by John Blanton

[The Web is one of the least reliable sources of information, but it's free.]

Bigfoot

Or Sasquatch if you will. The legend is a never ending source for news writers in search of sensationalism and facing a deadline (that sounds familiar). And the Web is ripe with informative sites.

Raymond Gavel maintains the Bigfoot site at
<http://www.cgocable.net/~rgavel/links/bigfoot.html>

You are sitting alone in the house at night when you hear a slight noise outside, and turning your head you are confronted by a bestial black face more like a gorilla's than anything else, staring in the window at you. It's a horror movie come true, the most terrifying thing you have ever experienced, yet somehow you survive it and after a while the face is gone.

For Sasquatch enthusiasts, this is the essence of the experience. Childhood fears and things that go bump can be realized in this enduring story. Helped by a continuing dribble of sightings, a notorious home movie clip, and even a delightful TV sitcom series, the saga helps to fill the idle voids in our otherwise drab existence.

The Sasquatch Zone, otherwise known as Intermountain Research Center at
<http://www.cactusventures.com/saswatch.htm>

"...is dedicated to the collection and reporting of Bigfoot, Yeti, Yowie, and Skunk Ape sightings." They claim to get over 9000 hits per day on their Web site (compared for about 200 for the NTS Web site). Product links are a big part of The Sasquatch Zone.

If you want your product listed for sale on our site, we require a \$25.00 one time set up fee plus \$3.00 per month . For this we will eventually link your product page from every page on our site.

They do list free products for free, though.

The Washington State Sasquatch Search Group is "Washington State's Leading Sasquatch Research Organization" at
<http://www.angelfire.com/wa/sasquatchsearch/>

Documentary videos are their theme. The ad from their site touts

NEW FOR 2001 ORDER TODAY!
"On the Track of the Pacific Northwest Sasquatch"
The Washington State Sasquatch Search Group Video Documentary

With over 128,000 hits in the last two years they must be doing something right.

The Bigfoot/Sasquatch Database is from Alberta, Canada at
http://www.bfro.net/GDB/CANADA/cd_al.htm

It's just chock full of reports and sightings.

1998 (Class A) - A creature spotted walking along shoreline.
July 1995 (Class A) - Witnesses saw creature running down a mountain.
June 1991 (Class A) - Several hikers observe a light colored sasquatch dash across a trail and up a slope. Their dog pursues it for a short distance before returning.
May 1990 (Class A) - Dusk sighting of a creature standing against a tree, as witnesses drove around a curve in the road, 90 miles outside of Jasper, Alberta.
August 1988 (Class A) - Family spot large, manlike "thing" across lake, later find huge footprints near a

trash pit.

February 1977 (Class A) - Creature seen standing 75 feet from family home.

1972 (Class A) - Hundreds of tracks found near river.

1944 (Class C) - Second-hand story about a Stony Indian woman's encounter.

January 1811 (Class C) - A surveyor and trader for the Northwest Company comes across tracks of an unusually large, unidentified animal.

The Sasquatch FAQ is at

<http://members.aol.com/Mtgjudge/BigfootFAQ.html>

What is the best evidence to support the existence of Bigfoot? Whether or not "bigfoot" is real, the "bigfoot phenomenon" is real. This idea was first enunciated by Dr. Robert Pyle, in his book "Where Bigfoot Walks". The "bigfoot phenomenon" is the certain fact that we continue to receive "bigfoot" sighting reports, and we continue to find "bigfoot" footprints in the forest. Something is making the footprints, and something is being seen in the Pacific Northwest by human observers.

Turns out the best evidence is the infamous "Patterson film." The *Sasquatch* site at

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dtrapp/bigfoot.htm>

seems to be completely devoted to this incident. They have a very comprehensive accumulation of photos, artifacts, and artwork on the topic.

The word "Sasquatch" often conjures thoughts of an aggressive monster, most people, of which, do not believe is real. I'm here to tell you that they ARE real, and ARE a living model for science evasion. This animal has been historically reported and witnessed in every State and Canadian Province since the time white-man arrived on the North American continent, and well before by Native Americans. Most of the descriptions are very similar, as well as the reported behavior for these animals. They are not ghosts, goblins, or figments of the drunk imagination. They leave behind compelling evidence for their existence, and most of the evidence cannot be faked.

I will close with the Sasquatch Information Society from Seattle. They have forums, pictures, member pages, press releases, and a researcher database. All at <http://www.digitaledge.com/~bigfoot/>

I did a quick search using Google and picked up over 48,000 Sasquatch links, of which the preceding has been only the top few. Check the NTS Web site at <http://www.ntskeptics.org> for additional links and Sasquatch books.

The Florida Skunk Ape

Not to be outdone by the Great Northwest, Florida has an answer to Sasquatch. It's the Florida skunk ape, and it has a home page at

<http://64.51.130.61:80/floridaskunkape/index.html>

The goal of this site is to collect as much data as possible about the Florida Skunk Ape. We encourage everyone that had a sighting, or has knowledge of a sighting to report them immediately. Time is crucial. All contact information sent to us in a report will be kept confidential, and only with the permission of the parties involved be disclosed to our investigators. At no time will we reveal any contact information to any member of the news media.

The *Naples Daily News* reports (November 2000) at <http://www.naplesnews.com/special/skunkape/front.html>

Skunk ape or what?

It's 7 to 8 feet tall, covered in red-brown fur. And it's smelly. Whether it's in the county commission chamber, on a radio station, at his campground or to potential tourists, Dave Shealy is boldly carrying the message that the big furry critter does exist.

Another story appeared in September 1999 at <http://www.naplesnews.com/special/skunkape/shealycu.htm>

The *Marco Island Eagle* reported on approval for public funding for skunk ape expeditions in their September 1, 1999 edition at

<http://www.marcoeagle.com/islandnews/1999/september1/skunkape.html>

David Shealy of Ochopee, known as the skunk ape man, hopefully is on his way to a dream of proving that the animal, also known as the Florida Bigfoot, exists. Most of the Collier County Tourist Development Council took him seriously when they voted to recommend to the county commissioners that \$44,000 be spent on scientific and media expeditions in the special-event funding category on Monday, Aug. 30.

The rivalry between Sasquatch and the Florida skunk ape is only simmering for now. So far Florida has not threatened to secede over the issue, but anything is possible. Let's only hope they agree to take a vote before doing anything so rash.

The Fortean Times

It's on-line at <http://www.forteantimes.com/>. If you read our *Skeptical News* section on the NTS Web site you have seen many postings from *The Fortean Times*.

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents.

It was founded in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort. Throughout his life, Fort was skeptical about scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away (which is quite different from explaining a thing).

Visitors are not surprised to find a litany of strangeness here. Fort seemed to dedicate his life to the bizarre and the anomalous. He was a person who carried skepticism to the extreme of paranoia.

In keeping with Fort's legacy the *Fortean Times* supports a zoo of the outlandish. Here are some topics from just two recent days:

- 22.02.01 Net love kept corpse in freezer (Owen Whiteoak)
- 22.02.01 China challenges Man's African origins (Andrew Ffoulkes)
- 22.02.01 Cairo bones & art 6000 yrs old (Wade Gilbreath)
- 22.02.01 Jesus of Akron (PIC) (Wade Gilbreath)
- 22.02.01 Keeper killed after defecating on tiger (Owen Whiteoak)
- 22.02.01 Conman claims to turn paper into money (Owen Whiteoak)
- 22.02.01 Bizarre boiling water bug (Andrew Ffoulkes)
- 22.02.01 Balloon animals set new record (Bruce Townley)

All right, that's just one day. And not the whole day at that.

To follow up on the theme you need to go to one of the Charles Fort home pages on the Web. The Charles Fort Institute site is maintained by Bob Rickard at

<http://www.forteana.org/aboutfort/fortbiog.html>

Do we have Charles Fort books on our Web site? Bill Clinton will pardon us if we don't.

Dolly Parton Nude

Some may assert I put this item in just to get hits on our Web site after we post the newsletter. Well, forget it. I didn't have to.

Our Web hosting company provides a useful piece of software called *Urchin* that computes site statistics. One of the

stats that Urchin generates concerns the top key words that brought people to our site.

I was shocked, *shocked* to see that number one ahead of "Robert Tilton," and "extra sensory perception" is "Dolly Parton nude" with five referrals. Actually, on another day I checked DPN came up number one with over ten hits.

What this means is that people are entering "dolly parton nude" into some search engine such as Yahoo or Google, and they are being directed to our Web site.

Scandalized, I charged immediately to our <http://www.ntskeptics.org> and did my own search. Gasp! There it was. Well, not exactly.

In the January 1994 issue at <http://www.ntskeptics.org/1994/1994january/january1994.htm> Pat Reeder wrote:

As we bid adieu to 1993, let us relive some of those golden memories we'll always cherish: Princess Diana giving birth to a son fathered by a U.S. senator ... Kathie Lee Gifford replacing Jay Leno as host of The Tonight Show ... and Queen Elizabeth II giving up the throne to join a convent. Who could forget that romantic day when Madonna remarried Sean Penn, then went skiing naked? Or the titillating spectacle of Fergie posing nude for Playboy, and Dolly Parton inadvertently exposing her left breast during a live TV special?

So, people. Now you are on to one of the key secrets of the World Wide Web. You want traffic to you site? Then make sure it's sprinkled with sensitive catch phrases that will snag in the machinery of one of these all powerful search engines.

Would we ever do that? Would we ever try to grab extra traffic by mentioning PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH or by writing about Bill Clinton being ARRESTED or about some actress being prosecuted FOR PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

Nah.

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CSICOP

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

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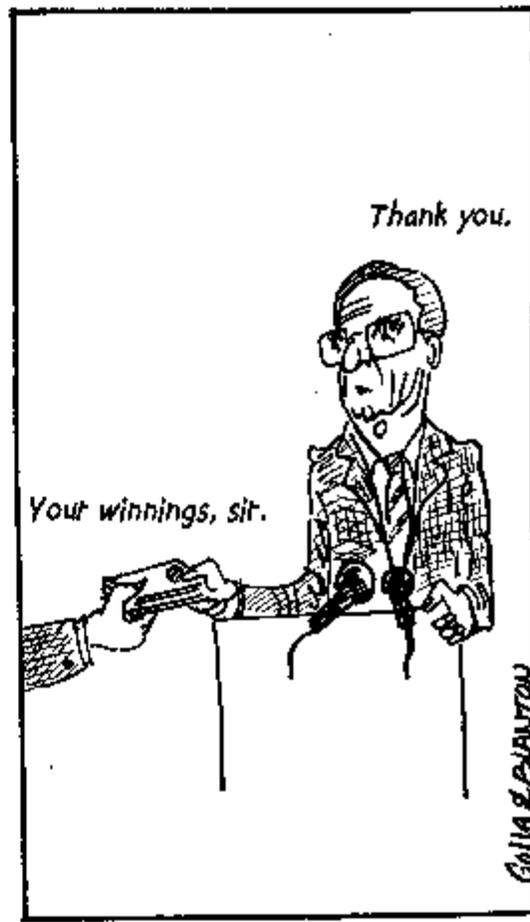
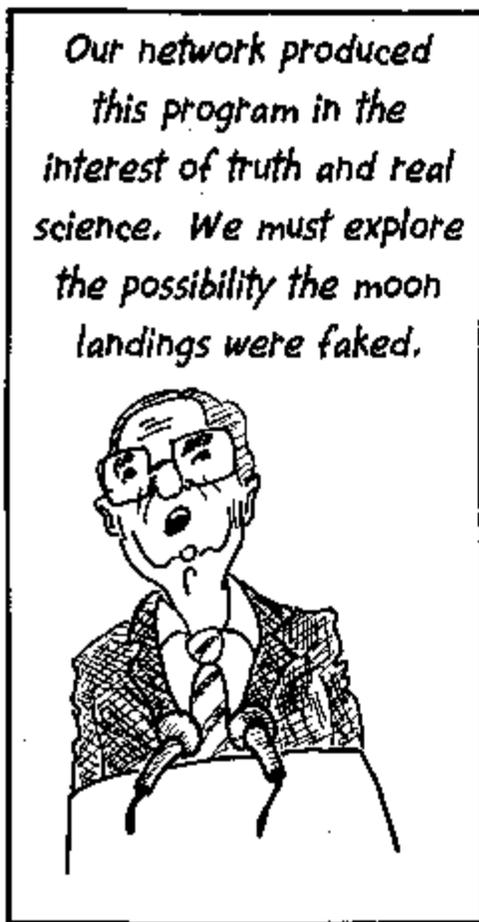
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By Prasad Golla and John Blanton

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