

Rich Cultural Heritage of Bharat

Prasanthi Nilayam

17 June 1996

Editor's note. This discourse does not appear in the *Sathya Sai Speaks* series. It appeared in *Sanathana Sarathi*, July 2008.

A foolish man is respected only in his house and a village headman is respected only in his village. Similarly, a king is respected in his kingdom only. But a learned person is respected everywhere.

(Sanskrit verse)

Howsoever foolish a man may be, he will be respected in his house. Parents will love their children even if they are foolish. What is the reason? Parents are bound by the bond of love, and they cannot give up their feelings of attachment for the child.

A village headman may commit any number of foolish acts, still the villagers will give him respect. What is the reason? The reason is that he holds the authority in his hands. Since people give respect to authority, they also give respect to the person who possesses it.

In this *Kali Yuga* (the age we are in), people give respect to wealth and power, and not to virtues and character. Whatever type of person a king may be, his subjects will have to give him respect. The reason is that he wields power. It is only the learned man who is respected everywhere.

Profundity of Indian culture

What sort of knowledge earns respect? "The noblest knowledge among the types of knowledge (*Jnananam jnanamuttamam*)." It is the knowledge of the Self (*Atma vidya*). Knowledge of the Self is respected everywhere, without any limitations of place, time and circumstances.

This is the knowledge of the Brahman (God), which has its origin in the *Vedas*. It is this knowledge of the *Vedas* that the Vedic scholar Griffith¹

¹ Prof. Ralph T.H. Griffith (1826-1906), a great Sanskrit scholar, who became the Principal of Benares

taught in many ways and declared, "*Veda* is the first word spoken by man."

Similarly, the German Sanskrit scholar Max Muller held the *Vedas* in high esteem. He translated the *Vedas* into English and imparted the sublime knowledge of the *Vedas* and Indian culture to the students of Oxford University and to the candidates of Indian Civil Service (ICS) in England. His book, "India — What Can it Teach us?"² describes the profound teachings of the *Vedas* and pristine glory of Indian culture. What does India teach to the world?

It teaches us to speak truth, practise righteousness (*Sathyam vada, dharmam chara*), to revere your mother and father as God (*Matru Devo bhava, pitru Devo bhava*). He said, "These are the four main pillars of the edifice of the Indian culture."

All the codes of conduct that originated from the *Vedas* are also a part of the Indian (*Bharatiya*) culture. Greatly influenced as he was by the greatness of the Indian culture, Wilson³ described

College. He translated the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana*, and works of Kalidasa into English.

² "India – What Can it Teach us?" is a compilation of seven Cambridge lectures delivered by Prof. Max Muller in 1882 to the candidates for Indian Civil Service. These lectures were brought out in book form in 1883. Prof. Max Muller (1823-1900) was a great Sanskrit scholar at Oxford University, where he worked as Professor of Comparative Philology for many years. He translated the *Rig Veda* and exposed the West to the Aryan culture and other ancient cultures of the East through a set of 50-volume series of scriptures titled "Sacred Books of the East." which were translated into English and brought out under his direction.

³ Prof. H. Hayman Wilson (1786-1860), Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University. He was a great orientalist who stayed in India from 1808-1832 in the service

its pristine glory. He translated into English *Vishnu Purana*, written by Sage Parasara, and other Sanskrit scriptures. During the course of his translations, he came across many prophecies described in them including the prophecies about Sai Avatar in this *Kali Yuga* (the age we are in), which stated that His name would be Truth (*Sathya*); He would be the biggest magnet and would attract the whole world. Many similar prophecies are mentioned in the *Nadi* books written by Indian sages (*rishis*).

Another great Sanskrit scholar William Jones translated emperor Manu's "*Manusmriti*" into English under the title "*The Laws of Manu*".

Indian (*Bharatiya*) culture attracts the entire world by its teachings pertaining to various fields of knowledge. It is said, what is not there in India (Bharat) cannot be found anywhere else. The bounty that is in this country cannot be found elsewhere. Everything is there in Bharat. Unfortunately, the *Bharatiyas* themselves today are ignoring the principles of such a great culture.

Your thoughts make your destiny

Whatever fortune and misfortune that you experience depends upon the type of thoughts you have. Yesterday, I talked about *adrishta*. *A-drishta* means that which cannot be seen by the eyes. It also means destiny or fortune, both good and bad.

When we sow a thought, we reap a action (*karma*). When we sow an action, we reap a tendency. When we sow a tendency, we reap character. When we sow character, we reap destiny. Therefore, destiny depends upon character, character depends upon tendency, tendency depends upon action and action depends upon thoughts. Hence, good thoughts are the fundamental basis of our good fortune.

What is the cause of misfortune? When we sow a bad thought, we reap a bad action (*karma*). When we sow a bad action, we reap a bad tendency. When we sow a bad tendency, we reap bad character. When we sow bad character, we reap misfortune.

Hence, both good fortune and misfortune depend

only upon our thoughts. Therefore, we should always have noble thoughts.

Here, we have said that a foolish man is respected only in his house. But who is a foolish person? One who knows what is good, and is also made aware of it by many people, but neglects what is good and takes to the wrong path is a foolish person. In spite of being told what is good repeatedly, he does not leave his bad qualities even a bit. He doggedly sticks to his evil nature. He knows what truth (*sathya*) is and what right conduct (*dharma*) is. Still he does not follow them.

Duryodhana and Dussasana knew very well what Dharma was, but they never put it into practice. They were also aware what truth was, yet they followed the path of untruth.

It is sheer foolishness to forget all that is divine and follow all that is worldly. This type of foolishness is on the rise these days. Therefore, man today should develop divine feelings.

A true devotee follows God's command implicitly

Divinity is beyond all attributes. What is God? The love that is immanent in everyone is God. Love is God. It is present in everyone. The way God gives His love to one and all, people should also love everyone in the same manner. Love deserves highest worship. Love is limitless and immeasurable (*Ananto vai prema*). It should be considered as divine.

Nobody can buy love like a commodity, howsoever wealthy and intelligent/powerful they may be. Love cannot be given or taken on rent or loan. It is present everywhere in its totality. But today people are treating love as business. We should attain love only through love. This is the primary goal of man.

Today, people are acquiring many types of education and power. They occupy many positions of authority. But this is not important. We should attain the deservedness to earn this sacred love. It is to teach this supreme principle of love that the *Vedas* developed into many branches and sub-branches.

What is the form of the principle of love? It has no form. Yet, it can be experienced in all forms. It

of East India Company. His best known works are English translations of *Vishnu Purana* and *Rig Veda*.

acquires the form to which it is projected.

If someone asks, what the form of air is, we can say it has no form. But air exists. Without air we cannot live. How can we determine its form? When it is pumped into a football, it acquires the form of the football. When you fill a balloon with air, it acquires the form of balloon. Similarly, love acquires the form of the person in whom it is projected.

Similar is the case with water. It has no form of its own. It acquires the form of the container in which it is put. Hence, love can be manifested only through a form.

Today, people see only the outer form and don't see the inner feelings. They follow only the path of worldliness (*pravritti marg*) and do not understand the path of spirituality (*nivritti marg*) at all.

What is the meaning of devotion? People think that doing meditation, quiet recitation of the name of God, and chanting the name of God is devotion. However, there are nine paths of devotion.

listening (*sravanam*),
singing (*kirtanam*),
contemplating on Vishnu (*Vishnusmaranam*),
serving His Lotus Feet (*Padasevanam*),
salutation (*vandanam*),
worship (*archanam*),
servitude (*dasyam*),
friendship (*sneham*),
Self-surrender (*Atmanivedanam*).

What comes before Self-surrender in these nine paths of devotion? Friendship. Total surrender comes only after friendship. Until then, total surrender is not possible.

What is the meaning of surrender? It is not giving something. It is to offer oneself.

First, we should develop friendship. What does friendship mean? Is it merely to say 'hello, hello'? No, no. In true friendship, bodies may be different but life principle is one. There should be the same feelings in both. Friendship is also termed as '*maitri*' or '*mai - tri*'. '*Mai*' means I; '*tri*' means three, viz. body, mind, and spirit. There should be total unity of body, mind, and spirit. That is true friendship.

The same is to be said about surrender. Total sur-

render means the surrender of body, mind, and spirit. Then only can we attain divinity.

As long as we maintain the difference of I and you, we cannot attain divinity. That is why Lord Krishna said in the *Gita*, "The eternal *Atma* in all beings is a part of My Being (*Mamaivamsho jivaloke jivabhuta Sanathana*)." He declared, "Everyone is an aspect of My Divinity, and every being is a part of My Self." Hence, you are not a separate entity. You consider yourself separate only due to your body attachment.

We should follow the command of God in order to develop friendship with Him. The type of devotion the devotees have today is such that their selfishness is uppermost in their mind. They do not follow the command of God.

Then, what is the meaning of your

Bhakti? Why should God talk to you and give command? When you do not put into practice what God tells you to do, where is your devotion? You should lead your life according to the command of God and follow it in everything you do in life. This is the true path.

That is why Purandaradasa said, "Oh God! I am born again in this world because I forgot You. If only I had installed You in my heart, I would not have been born again."

There is only one cause of all doubts, that is body attachment. Doubts do not leave you till you give up body attachment. Think for a while.

Who provides food to sustain the tadpole in the crevices of a rock?

Who waters a growing plant on the top of a cliff?

Who painted the several colours on the plumes of a peacock, and who made the parrot look so attractive with its multihued feathers?

(Kannada Poem)

Trees grow on stones in mountainous regions. Who provides water and manure and looks after their growth? Only God does all this.

Who gave such beautiful colours to the peacock? Howsoever great painter one may be, one cannot give such natural colours to one's paintings. What a great artist God is!

How beautiful is the red beak of a green parrot! Who created it? Can scientists understand this?

They think this is only some sort of natural phenomenon. It is not so. You can understand this truth only when you follow the path of spirituality (*nivritti marg*).

Everything happens by the Will of God. Nothing happens without His Will in this world. We should develop such firm faith.

Many people consider themselves poor and inferior but this is not true. That is why Purandaradasa said, "Oh God! How can I be poor when You are there? How can I be a stranger? No, no. You are the only doer. It is only You who imparts knowledge to me, who shows me the right path, who protects me, and who punishes me. There is nothing that is not there in Your hands. You have every right over me. Then how can I be an orphan? If I am an orphan, You will not exercise Your right on me. I am Yours. That is why You exercise Your right on me."

Fill your heart with divine feelings

All are the embodiments of God. Know this truth and make efforts to attain God. Otherwise, what is the use of all types of education and high positions you acquire? You will have respect as far as you hold the position. Once the position goes, who will give you respect?

Only those who attain the proximity of God will be respected wherever they may be.

God is your sole refuge wherever you maybe,
In a forest, in the sky, in a city or a village, on
the top of a mountain or in the middle of
deep sea.

(Telugu poem)

If He fulfills all your desires, you consider Him as God (*Daivamu*). Otherwise, you call Him a demon (*dayyamu*). In fact, one who considers God as a demon is himself a demon.

Do not make your heart the house of demon (*dayyam*) of worldly desires; fill it with compassion (*daya*). When you fill a tank with pure water, only pure water will flow from the taps connected to it. But when you fill it with dirty water, dirty water will come out of the taps.

As are the feelings, so is the result (*Yad bhavam tad bhavathi*). God manifests before you according to the feelings of your heart. The same thing is

said in the *Ramayana* also. Who is Rama? Who is Yama (God of death)? In fact, Yama is Rama, Rama is Yama. They are not different from each other.

Vibhishana who took refuge at the feet of Rama saw Him as God. But for Ravana, who took to evil path, He was Yama.

Similarly, Prahlada, who constantly chanted "*Om Namo Narayanaya*", saw Narayana as God. But the same Narayana became Yama for Hiranyakasipu, who observed differences on the basis of name and form.

For Kamsa, who harboured evil qualities and tortured his own sister in a most heartless manner, Krishna appeared as Yama. But Kamsa's father, Ugrasena, saw Krishna as God. Therefore, Rama and Yama are not different from each other.

Everything happens according to the feelings of your heart. Good and bad feelings are the main cause of your good fortune and misfortune. You should become fortunate. To become fortunate, you should cultivate good qualities, which build your character. When you cultivate good qualities, you develop good tendencies. Only such a virtuous person will undertake good deeds.

How should one perform actions? Do all actions to please God (*Sarva karma bhagavad preetyartham*). Then whatever work one undertakes, one will consider it as the work of God. Such a person will have only good thoughts. Bad thoughts will not come near them. We should perform all our worldly duties with our heart filled with divine feelings.

The same type of lesson was taught by Max Muller to all those who went to study ICS in England. After completing his studies, an ICS officer, went to meet Max Muller. At that time Max Muller was translating the *Vedas*. There was no such great Sanskrit scholar like him, even in India (Bharat). He translated many *Vedic* texts into English. He aspired that if he was to be born again, he should be born in Bharat! He considered himself most fortunate if he could put the dust of Bharat on his forehead.

The ICS officer went to see Max Muller, who was filled with such feelings of love and enthusiasm for Bharat. The officer sent in his visiting card. At

that time, Max Muller was trying to understand the meaning of the *Gita* verse:

One who contemplates on the all-wise, ageless
Being, the ruler of all, subtler than the subtle,
the universal sustainer, beyond human concep-
tion of all forms, refulgent like the sun
and far beyond the darkness of ignorance,
That one reaches verily that supreme divine
Purusha or God.

*Kavim puranamanushasitaram anoraniyansa-
manusmarenya,
Sarvasya dhatarachintyarupam adityavar-
nam tamasa parastat.*

He was thinking about the meaning of this verse. Then he saw the visiting card. What was written on the card? The name of the ICS officer given on the card was, Chaturvedi Amareswara Sastri. Seeing this, Max Muller was filled with happiness and asked his servant to prepare two cups of tea. He thought, "I don't know even one *Veda* properly. But here is Chaturvedi Sastri, whose very name indicates that he is the master of four *Vedas*. How fortunate I am to meet such a great person!"

That very moment, Max Muller went out and escorted the ICS officer to his room, saying, "I am very fortunate to meet you." He offered him a seat and served him tea.

When Max Muller asked where the officer had come from, he replied that he had come from India. Then Max Muller said, "I am translating the *Vedas*. Since you are Chaturvedi Sastri (master of the *Vedas*), kindly tell me the meaning of this verse."

The ICS officer replied that he did not know anything about the *Vedas* and that he considered them to be of no use.

Max Muller was shocked to hear this. "What is this? Having come from India (Bharat) and bearing the name Chaturvedi Sastri, he is criticising the *Vedas*. How unfortunate! It is my bad luck that I have met such a person."

Associate with good people and keep good things with you

You can see that the faith and sacred feelings the overseas people have are lacking in many Indians (*Bharatiyas*), who drink Bharat's sacred water, eat

its food, and breathe its air. From that day, Max Muller thought to himself, "There is no need for me to go to Bharat. Now my mind is sacred, pure and steady. I do not know what will be the condition of my mind when I associate with such people of Bharat."

Tell me your company, I shall tell you what you are. By associating with bad company, a person becomes bad, and by keeping company with good people, the person acquires virtues. Therefore, we should have good company and good things around us.

You think that Swami gives rings, watches, and talismans for the satisfaction of your worldly desires. This is a great mistake. Don't think like that. When you wear these sacred objects, you will develop sacred feelings. These are the steps that lead you to noble and virtuous life in future.

That is why Sita told Rama during their sojourn in the forest, "Rama! You are dressed like a hermit and are living in a forest after giving up all royal comforts and luxuries. You had every right to enjoy these royal comforts but You sacrificed them on Your own. You have come to the forest to lead a noble life. Then, why are You carrying bow and arrows with You? If You keep them with You, You will develop a tendency to commit violence."

Whatever type of things we carry with us, our feelings develop accordingly. Children know it very well. If they have a pen in their hand, they will start writing something or the other, either on their hand or on the wall. Writing like this is their habit. If they have a knife in their hand, they will start cutting their nails or poke it into a wooden stick. They will do something or the other like that. This is the tendency of their previous life of a monkey. Hence, never keep such things with you.

Truth is the true necklace (*Sathyam kanthasya bhushanam*). We should speak only the truth, which is the form of God.

Charity is the ornament of the hand (*Hastasya bhushanam danam*). In addition to performing charity with your hand, you should also wear the rings or other articles given to you by God out of His grace. Many people think that they need not wear them. Only those who do not know the reality think like that. There are many such sacred teachings in the Indian (*Bharatiya*) culture.

You should know the real meaning of culture. Culture is that which brings about refinement. How? When the paddy crop becomes ripe, do we eat it along with the husk that covers it? No. First, we remove the paddy from grass, then we remove the husk and obtain rice, which we cook. Then only does it become our food.

Refinement includes separating paddy from grass, removing the husk that covers it, and cooking the rice on fire. Refinement consists of removing all that is unnecessary and unwanted.

The price of a bag of paddy may be two hundred rupees. But a bag of rice after refinement may be valued at one thousand rupees. With refinement, the value of a thing increases manifold.

Then, what is the meaning of refinement? Refinement means to throw away all that is bad and cultivate all that is good. This is what is called 'way of life'.

Without going through these processes of refinement, paddy has little value. There are many things like that. This is a silver plate. If the silver remains silver, we cannot make any use of it. When it is burnt in fire, beaten with hammer, and moulded into a plate, it becomes useful to us.

This is a cloth. How did it acquire this form of cloth? First we have cotton. From cotton, we make threads and weave the threads to make cloth. Only then can we make use of it. This is what we call 'way of life'. Refinement means converting things from their raw form into useful items. For everything, refinement is essential.

When we come from outside, we wash our feet before entering the house. Why do we do it? While moving outside, many harmful bacteria may stick to our feet. That is why we should wash our feet.

Purification is necessary for everything. Before eating their food, Brahmins perform "aaposhanam". They take water in their hand and sprinkle it around the plate of food while chanting,

*Pranaya Namah,
Apanaya Namah,
Vyanaya Namah,
Udanaya Namah,
Samanaya Namah.*

I pay homage to the five vital airs:

The vitalizing force,
The descending force,
The distributive force,
The ascending force, and
The equalizing force.

In this way, they worship the five life principles. Why do they sprinkle water all around their plate? This is also a form of purification. During the process of serving the food and eating it, ants and other small insects may try to enter the plate of food. When you put water around the plate, they cannot enter the plate.

You can see that, even for such small matters, the culture of India (Bharat) has appropriate solutions. You cannot find even a single meaningless word in this culture. Bharat is the birthplace of such a great culture. Only those who do not know the meaning of these practices consider them useless.

Students should understand the greatness of Indian culture

People who do not know do not accept that they do not know. They pose as if they know everything. That is sheer foolishness.

One should make efforts to know what one does not know. All powers and potentialities are enshrined in the principle of divinity. The *Vedic mantras* are also suffused with divine powers.

The entire world consists of matter (*padartha*). For example, this is a rose flower. The word 'rose' denotes this particular flower. Similarly, the word 'handkerchief' denotes this particular cloth. In this way, all objects in this world denote the meaning of words.

But there are words that have another meaning behind their common meaning. Take, for example, the word 'akshara'. The word 'akshara' contains in it a great spiritual principle. What is the real meaning of the word 'akshara'? People think that 'akshara' means a letter of the alphabet.

But in the language of the *Vedanta*, 'akshara' denotes that which is eternal. God is described as 'Akshara Swarupa' (eternal divine principle).

The word 'akshara' contains two syllables – "A-kshara". 'Kshara' means that which is perishable, i.e. the individual soul (*jivatma*).

‘*Akshara*’ means imperishable, i.e. God (*Paramatma*).

The former is a temporary entity while the latter is the eternal divine principle. The word ‘*akshara*’ denotes the union of the individual soul (*jivatma*) and God (*Paramatma*). There is eternal principle in the ephemeral and the ephemeral entity in the eternal.

There is an inner meaning in many such words of the *Vedas*. This is what we have to understand from our culture.

Students! There is so much for you to know about Indian culture. It gives you guidance in the performance of all your functions. Every word of the *Vedas* and mythological texts (*Puranas*) has a charm and attraction of its own.

Once, Gajendra (king of elephants) was caught by a crocodile and was unable to escape from its clutches. It prayed loudly and prayed hard, “Oh Easwara! Oh bestower of boons! Come and protect me.” God responded to its prayer immediately and saved it.

On the basis of this incident, some people questioned, “How far is God?” Some foolish intellectuals said, “God is as far away as He can hear the cry of an elephant.” What a great foolishness! God does not need to go from one place to another.

God assumes whatever form of God you pray to. Some people pray to God, “Oh God! Be with me and protect me.” They can hear only the steps of God behind them.

Those who pray, “Oh God! Can’t You see my difficulties and my crying?” see only the eyes of God. Those who pray, “Can’t You hear my cry and prayers?” can see only His ears, because God has His ears and eyes everywhere.

A similar incident happened in Shirdi. Once, Shirdi Sai Baba told a devotee, “Oh madcap! I am always with you and I am always present at your back.”

After walking some distance, that devotee turned back and looked, but he did not find Baba there. Then he thought that Baba had told him a lie, “He told me that he would be behind my back. But he is not to be seen.” He went back to Baba and said,

“Oh Baba! You are such a great person. How could you tell a lie? You promised that you would be at my back. But when I looked behind me, I did not find you.”

Baba replied, “Oh *Saitan* (devil)! Is this your intelligence? When you looked behind, you turned your back also. Hence, I also turned to be at your back.” See! When the devotee looked behind, his back also turned. That is why he could not see Baba, who was at his back all the time.

The words of God are mysterious and wonderful, and they have a deeper meaning. Not all can understand God. So, do not try to understand God. Follow His command. That is your duty.

You have to know so much about God. Nobody can completely understand God. Outwardly, God may appear to be an ordinary person, but He can reveal His transcendental powers at any time, which is not possible for ordinary mortals.

Therefore, perform your duty. Offer your heart to God. That is your foremost duty. Then all your doubts will be removed.

(Bhagavan brought His divine discourse to a close with the *bhajan*, “*Prema Mudita Manase Kaho Rama Rama Ram ...*”)

— From Bhagavan’s divine discourse in Sai Kulwant Hall, Prasanthi Nilayam, on 17 June 1996.