

Education Should Foster Virtues In Students

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Prasanthi Nilayam

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When iron keeps lying in dust, it gets rusted.

But when the same iron is put in fire, it gets rid of its rust.

Similar is the effect of company in this world.

(Telugu Poem)

Rain water gets absorbed in sand.

But it becomes sweet when it falls on clay

Similarly, devotion shines in a person depending on his deservedness.

(Telugu Poem)

Embodiments of Love!

Man is very sacred by nature, but due to the effect of good or bad company, he becomes good or bad. When a piece of iron is buried in dust, it gathers rust. But the same iron, when it is put in fire, gets rid of its rust and becomes bright and soft. Similarly, dust rises up in the sky with wind, but with water, it goes down into a pit.

Good company leads to sacredness and Divinity

The dust has no wings to fly up in the sky, nor does it have feet to step down into a pit. It is only due to the effect of its company that it rises in the sky or falls into the pit. Whatever bad or good occurs to you is due only to the influence of good or bad company. That is why Adi Sankara said,

*Satsangatwe Nissangatwam,
Nissangatwe Nirmohatwam,
Nirmohatwe Nischalatattwam,
Nischalatattwe Jivanmukti.*
(Sanskrit Sloka)

Good company leads to detachment;
Detachment makes one free from delusion;
Freedom from delusion leads to steadiness
of mind;
Steadiness of mind confers liberation.

When you join good company, you attain sacredness and Divinity. On the other hand, when you associate yourself with bad company, you develop bad thoughts, bad intentions, and bad behavior, which impel you to undertake bad actions. Therefore, it is very necessary for one to develop humanness by joining good company. One can even rise to the level of Divine if one associates with good company.

On the other hand, one can degenerate to the level of an animal by joining bad company. Divinity is superior to humanness, and animality is inferior to it. Humanness is in between these two. Therefore, you should make efforts to take humanness to higher level of Divinity rather than degenerate to lower level of animality. It is difficult to rise to a higher level but very easy to go down to a lower level. In fact, no special efforts are needed for downfall.

Nothing can be attained without hard work. Whatever hard work you may have to put in, you must try to rise to higher level. *Kashte phali* (Hard work yields rich rewards). People today are in a miserable condition because of association with bad company. Their evil thoughts are responsible for all their misery. Therefore, right from tender age, one should try to develop pure and sacred thoughts. But, unfortunately, students are wasting their precious years of youth by entertaining bad thoughts and bad intentions and by indulging in evil actions.

Choose your friends wisely

As has already been said, iron gets rusted in the company of dust, and, as a result, it loses its strength. But its strength is restored when it is put in fire.

First of all, you have to remove the dust from your mind. What is the dust? The dust is nothing but bad feelings that arise in one from bad company. It is only because of bad company that you get bad thoughts. Therefore, it is said, Tell me your company and I shall tell you what you are. Take time and enquire, but seek only the company of good people.

When you are in a good position, everybody will come to you, calling you a good boy. But when you suffer downfall, everybody will run away from you without even saying goodbye. This is not true friendship. What is true friendship? A true friend is one who follows you like a shadow even in times of difficulties and sufferings. When the tank is full of water, you will find thousands of frogs in it. But when the tank gets dried up, you will not find even a single frog there. Similarly, when you have a good position and high status, all will follow you. But that is not real friendship. He is a true friend who is your constant companion in the dualities of life like profit and loss, pleasure and pain.

Always take time and enquire to decide who your true friend is. It is a mistake to make

friendship with every Tom, Dick, and Harry who greets you saying, hello, hello. You should look into their habits, behaviour, discipline, and the company they associate with before making friendship with anyone.

If you find that one is associating with bad company, do not even look at their face. If such a one says, hello, hello to you, you should say, goodbye, goodbye to them. Friendship with such people can put even your life into danger.

Due to the influence of modern education, students today make friendship with all sorts of people. This cannot be called true friendship. They will desert you any moment. Such friendship should be limited to exchange of greetings like hello, hello, how are you, how are you, goodbye, goodbye.

Not merely this, character is most important for a student. One bereft of character is verily a living corpse. Do not make friendship with characterless persons. One who lacks individual character will not have social character. Then, how can such a person have national character? Therefore, first of all, one should develop individual character. It means students should develop steady vision and unwavering mind.

Do not even look at the face of those whose mind is unsteady like the pendulum of a clock. They are very bad boys. Never make friendship with them. Otherwise, you will also become a bad boy. Make friendship with only good people.

True education brings about refinement

How can you make your heart sacred? When you join good company, your heart becomes pure and sacred, just as iron becomes bright and soft in the company of fire. When the iron is put in fire, it gets rid of its dust and rust and becomes very soft, so that you can mould it to the shape you want. Similarly, when you join good company, you can mould your personal-

ity to face any ordeals in life. This is called the process of *samskara* (refinement), which everyone must undergo. What is *samskara*? To get rid of bad qualities and develop virtues is *samskara*.

Many things in this world are found in their natural state. We eat rice, pulses, and many other food items. However, we don't eat them in their raw form. Rice is harvested in the form of paddy. To get rice, we have to separate paddy from grass and remove its husk. The rice is to be put on fire and cooked. Only then it becomes fit for our consumption.

Similarly, whether it is gold or silver or diamond, we cannot use them in their natural state because they are mixed with dust and other metals. They have to be subjected to various processes of purification before they become pure metals. Only then can we make ornaments out of them.

Take, for example, this cloth. It was cotton in its natural state, which had seeds and various other impurities. Seeds have to be separated from cotton. Cotton has to be made into threads, which in turn are to be woven into cloth. In this manner, cotton has to undergo various types of refinement to ultimately take the form of cloth. In this way, everything has to undergo the process of refinement.

Today all your education is limited to bookish knowledge. Along with this education, *samskara* (refinement) is also essential. This type of education without refinement is no education at all.

In spite of their education and intelligence, a mean-minded person will not give up their evil qualities.

Modern education leads only to argumentation, not to total wisdoms
(Telugu Poem)

Modern education merely endows students with the power of vain argumentation. This is not the aim of education. Many students think education is meant only to earn a livelihood.

Education is not something that you acquire merely to fill your belly. Agriculture is for filling the belly, and education is for acquiring wisdom. But modern education is leading man on the evil path.

One's life has two determinants: one is *Jivanopadhi* (means of livelihood) and the other is *jivitaparamavadhi* (ultimate goal). Along with the means of livelihood, one should think of the goal of life also. We may live a number of years, but ultimately we have to die. This is not the purpose of human birth.

The purpose of human birth is to lead an ideal life and set an example for others to lead their life in an ideal way. Every human being should try to lead an ideal life. Ideals do not die with the death of a person. Ideals never perish; they are eternal. Every generation will emulate these ideals. It is therefore necessary that one lead an ideal life. But people today do not know what an ideal life is. Students should set high ideals to society.

Once you get a degree, you become egoistic, thinking that you have become highly educated. One who acquires the evil qualities of ego, ostentation, and jealousy is of no use to the world. Such a person will not have respect in society also.

A foolish person may be respected in their own house, a village head may be respected in their village, and a king in his kingdom. But the cultured person will be respected in the entire world. One should therefore acquire refinement and culture.

Students should make efforts to safeguard Indian culture. Similarly, people of other nations should protect the culture of their nation. This is the real purpose of education.

First of all, you should maintain proper relationship with everyone and should not hate anyone. Choose proper persons as your friends. It is better not to have friends at all rather than having a foolish person as your friend. Choose a good person as your friend.

Who is a good person? *Manasyekam vachasyekam, karmanyekam mahatmanam* (those whose thoughts, words, and deeds are in perfect harmony are noble ones). Choose as your friend only a person who has *trikarana suddhi* (unity of thought, word, and deed).

Manasyanyath vachasyanyath, karmanyanyath duratmanam (those who lack harmony of these are wicked). If a person thinks something, says something else, and acts in a totally different way, do not allow them to come near you. The proper study of mankind is man. A true human being is one whose thoughts, words, and deeds are in harmony with each other. You should become such an ideal human being.

Your mind is the repository of many thoughts, but you are not able to know the thoughts of others. Even a dog can know the thoughts of humans, but humans does not know the thoughts of their fellow humans.

Here is a small example. Suppose a dog is lying in a pit five metres from you. If you go that side without bothering about it, it will also not take any notice of you. It will not even get up. However, when you take a small stone in your hand with the intention of hitting it, it will run away the moment it sees you. It means it can read your thoughts. A dog is able to know the thoughts of a person but a person is not able to know the thoughts of person.

The word *dog* has three letters – DOG. If you reverse the order of letters, it becomes GOD. The letters are the same but their order is different. One should become God and not dog. This is the foremost quality that one should cultivate by *sadhana* (spiritual practice). What is meant by *sadhana*? It is not limited to *japa, tapa* (chanting, penance), etc.

Neither by penance nor by pilgrimage nor
by study of scriptures nor by *japa*
Can one cross the ocean of life.

One can achieve it only by serving the pious.

(Sanskrit Verse)

You should serve the pious. Respect and serve your parents, teachers, and elders. Attend to their needs whenever it is necessary.

On the other hand, if you disobey elders and do not pay heed to your parents, whatever may be the *sadhana* you do, it is of no use. It is not *sadhana* at all. God does not accept such *sadhana*. God is not pleased if you worship Him and at the same time harm other living beings.

First of all, love all. It amounts to loving God. *Easwara Sarva Bhutanam* (God is the indweller of all beings). You should recognise this truth and give respect to all.

Students should not develop unnecessary connections

No doubt, all are equal in society, but you should observe certain rules for your own good. *Na sreya niyamam vina* (without discipline, there can be no well-being). If you come across a person of bad character, do not have anything to do with them. However, offer your salutations to all, because *Sarva jiva namaskaram Kesavam pratigachchhati* (whoever you salute, it reaches God). Similarly, you should also recognise that *Sarva jiva tiraskaram Kesavam pratigachchhati* (whoever you criticise, it reaches God).

Students should not develop unnecessary contacts with all sorts of people. Since you are a student, behave like a student. Boys should not develop unnecessary connections with girls. Those who develop such evil connections are worse than dogs. Such students even deceive their parents. In fact, the life of such a person is useless.

If one does not worship the Lord wholeheartedly,

If one does not sing His glory till the mouth aches,

If one lacks truth and compassion in the heart,

One is a curse on the womb of one's mother.

(Telugu Poem)

Why should such a person be born at all? Is birth meant only to cause pain to the womb of one's mother?

Your education should foster virtues in you. That is the real meaning of education. There is enough knowledge in books, but what is the use if the head is full of dust and dirt? What is the use of all your education when there is no purity in your head? Can you call this education at all? No. no. First of all, get rid of the dirt from your head. That means, you should get rid of bad thoughts.

One can fill an empty head with anything,
But is it possible to put something in the head that is already full?

How can it be filled with sacred feelings unless it is emptied in the first instance?

(Telugu Poem)

This tumbler is full of water. How can you put milk in it when it is already full? The only way is to throw away the water from the tumbler and fill it with milk. However, if you pour milk into the tumbler full of water, both water and milk will be wasted.

Fill your heart with sacred feelings and feelings of gratitude toward your parents. On the other hand, if you deceive your parents and betray them by taking to evil path, there can be no sinner worse than you. If you do so, all your education is meaningless. If your education does not foster virtues in you, it is better to go begging from street to street instead of acquiring such useless education. First of all, you have to cultivate virtues.

A person without character, education without a goal, and human race without morality are worthless.

The life of an individual bereft of peace is no better than a night without moon.

Listen! Oh valiant sons of Bharat!

(Telugu Poem)

Therefore, students should become paragons of virtues. Their education should foster virtues in them.

Build the mansion of life on a strong foundation

Students are the future leaders and emancipators of a nation. The nation will come to grief if its youth are not on the right path. If there is a curve in the sapling, the tree also will be curved.

Brahmacharya, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha*, and *sanyasa* (celibate stage, householder stage, recluse stage, renunciant stage) are the four stages of human life. Student life is the stage of *brahmacharya*. *Brahmacharya* is the foundation of the mansion of life, on which the three stories of householder, recluse, and renunciant are built. Therefore, it is necessary to make the foundation of *brahmacharya* strong, on which the other three stories stand. If the foundation is not strong, all the stories built on it will collapse.

The period of youth is most important and sacred. It is, in fact, the golden age. Don't turn this golden age into dust. Therefore, students should imbibe virtues. Their vision, hearing, speech, and actions —all should be sacred.

First of all, fill your heart with love for God. Your heart is like a tank, and the senses are like taps. When you fill the tank of your heart with love, the sweet water of love will flow through the taps of senses. As are the feelings in your heart, so are the actions. When your heart is full of love, all your actions will be suffused with love.

If you throw a stone into a well, it will create ripples in the entire well. Likewise, when you throw a stone of a good or bad thought in the lake of your mind, its effect will spread to all the limbs of your body. When a bad thought

enters your mind, your eyes will see evil, your hands will do evil, your speech will become evil, your ears will hear evil, and your feet will walk to only evil places. The effect of thoughts will spread in the entire body right from top to toe.

Do not waste precious human birth

Heart is most important. When the heart is not pure, life becomes meaningless. But today students are interested only in art, not in heart.

Art is outside, heart is inside. Art is mundane, heart is divine. Art is related to *pravritti* (outward path), heart is related to *nivritti* (inward path).

The principle of *nivritti* is most sacred and pure. This is described in *Vedanta* as *nirgunam*, *niranjanam*, *sanathana nikanam*, *nitya*, *suddha*, *buddha*, *mukta*, *nirmala swarupinam* (It is attributeless, unsullied, final abode, eternal, pure, enlightened, free, and embodiment of sacredness).

Purity of heart is essential. *Chittasya sudhaye karmah* (good deeds give mental purity). All your actions are meant for the purification of heart.

Thiruthonda Alwar of Tamil Nadu also said, "Oh Lord, I worship You with the purity of my heart. It is not easy to obtain human birth. I have acquired this human life as a result of merits earned by me in many past lives. Let this opportunity not slip away from my hand."

The same was said by Mira also, "Oh Giridhari, I have dived deep into the ocean and acquired this pearl of human life with great difficulty. Let this pearl of human life not slip away from my hand and fall back into the ocean. If I lose this pearl, I will be nowhere."

You have earned this human life with the merits of many past lives. Therefore, take care that you do not go on the evil path.

One should live and die like a human being and not like an animal. This is what you are

supposed to do. If you cannot rise to the level of divine, at least live like a human being. This is what the students should learn today.

There are many types of people in the world. Do not bother about them, whether they are good or bad. Just preserve your goodness. If there is a small defect in you, you should think it as very big. Moreover, do not magnify the small defects of others. First of all, get rid of all defects in you and develop virtues. Only then will humanness blossom in you.

(Bhagavan concluded His Discourse with the *bhajan*, "*Madhura Madhura Murali Ghanashyama ...*")

– From Bhagavan's Discourse in Sai Kulwant Hall, Prasanthi Nilayam, on 23 July 1996.