

Knowledge of the Self is Real Knowledge Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Prasanthi Nilayam
7 September 1996

Editor's note. This discourse appears in the *Sathya Sai Speaks* series but was retranslated and appeared in *Sanathana Sarathi* in June 2015.

When the branches of a tree rub against each other incessantly, fire is produced.

When you churn curd continuously, butter comes out of it.

Similarly, continuous enquiry will lead to the realisation of Reality.

Listen to this, oh valiant sons of Bharat.

(Telugu poem)

Practice is necessary to perform any task in this world. Human effort is required for anything. Practice is required even for walking, talking, eating, writing, and reading. Likewise, proper effort is required if you want to attain Divinity.

Fundamental principle of Divinity is one

If the food served in the plate has to reach your stomach, don't you have to put your hand and mouth to work? On the other hand, if you go on repeating the names of the food items served in the plate even for a hundred times, your hunger will not be satiated.

Similarly, mere mechanical repetition of the divine names Rama, Krishna, Govinda is not enough unless you express your devotion to the Lord in the form of service. Any work that you do with the intention of serving others becomes God's work.

But people today want to have everything easily without putting any effort.

Divinity is immanent in every being just as is oil in sesame seeds, fragrance in flowers, juice in fruits, and fire in wood. Only with proper effort can you get butter out of milk, oil out of seeds, juice out of fruits, and fire out of wood. Similarly, due effort is required to experience Divinity, which is immanent in every person.

But in the present circumstances, students and youth have forgotten Divinity, which is true and eternal. Due to their misunderstanding, they consider truth as untruth and untruth as truth and waste their time, effort, and energy.

Forms may appear to be different, and you may give different names to these forms. The experiences arising out of the diversity of names and forms may also vary, but the fundamental principle of Divinity, which is the basis of all names and forms, is one and the same. This is the principle of nonduality (*adwaita*) propounded by Adi Sankara.

You sow a mango seed, and after some time it grows into a tree with branches and sub-branches. The tree may have thousands of leaves and flowers and hundreds of fruits. The fruits and flowers appear to be totally different from each other. Similarly, nothing appears to be common between branches and leaves.

Not only that, the leaves, flowers, and fruits may be put to many different uses. You may prepare pickles out of unripe fruits. Leaves may be used to make festoons to decorate houses. The dried branches can be used as firewood, and the ripe fruits may be eaten.

But the same seed is the basis for all the branches, sub-branches, leaves, unripe fruits, and ripe fruits. Without the seed, there can be no tree; without the tree, there can be no branches; and without branches, there can be no fruits.

Lord Krishna declared this truth in the *Bhagavad Gita* when He said, "I am the seed that is the origin of all living beings (*Beejam maam sarva bhutanam*). The principle of nonduality (*ad-*

waittha) demonstrates the underlying oneness of everything.

This visible world appears with varied names and forms, but when you enquire deeply, you will realise that the underlying principle of Divinity is the same for all diverse forms.

Knowledge is meant to attain wisdom

Yesterday, I told you the story of Adi Sankara, who took to renunciation (*sannyasa*) with the permission of his mother after the death of his father. After acquiring the knowledge of the *Vedas*, scriptures (*sastras*), epics (*itihisas*), and mythological texts (*puranas*), he approached Govindapada, who was a disciple of Gaudapada, for initiation into the order of Renunciation (*Sannyasa*).

One with steadfast faith attains wisdom (*Srad-dhavan labhate jnanam*). Since Sankara was endowed with great faith (*sraddha*), he could master the four *Vedas* and six scriptures at the young age of sixteen years. Age is not the criterion to learn something if one has the required faith.

For everything, time is important. It is with the passage of time that a child grows into an old person. A male child becomes a boy at the age of ten, a man at the age of thirty, and a grandfather at the age of seventy-five. But the child, boy, man, and grandfather are one and the same. These changes in names and forms occur as a result of change of time.

In order to test the skill and knowledge of Sankara, one day, Acharya Govindapada decided to engage him in a debate. Sankara, being one of humility and obedience, offered his salutations to his *guru* and sought his permission before entering into debate with him. This debate was a wonderful demonstration of Sankara's knowledge wherein he gave befitting replies to the questions raised by his Guru in consonance with the teachings of the *Vedas* and scriptures. He explained how one could follow the path of spirituality (*nivritti*) while leading a worldly life.

In those days, there were many eminent scholars, but they were using their knowledge to acquire wealth. They ignored the truth that knowledge was meant to acquire wisdom and not wealth. Even today, students think that all their education

is meant to earn money. It is a misconception. Agriculture is for food, and education is for knowledge. Therefore, Sankara strived to show the right path to scholars so that they would make proper use of their knowledge and not waste it in mundane pursuits. What is the use of worldly education?

Oh man! You struggle hard in life merely for the sake of filling your belly.

You acquire myriad types of knowledge from various fields.

Examine and enquire for yourself what great happiness have you achieved by spending all the time from dawn to dusk in acquiring worldly knowledge and earning wealth while forgetting God.

(Telugu poem)

Oh man! Do not feel proud of your education.

If you do not offer your salutations to God and do not think of Him with devotion, all your education will become useless.

(Telugu poem)

Sankara felt deeply distressed to see such a scenario. His preceptor, Govindapada, saw how sad Sankara was. Gaudapada also understood his feelings and observed that Sankara, being endowed with all knowledge and noble feelings at such a young age, was capable of driving away all the injustice, untruth, and impropriety prevailing in the world and firmly imprint the teachings of *Vedas* and scriptures in the hearts of people.

Both of them called Sankara and told him, "Dear one! You don't need to be here any longer. Tomorrow itself, embark on your journey to Kasi (Varanasi). Teach all those eminent scholars in Kasi the great truth of nondualism (*adwaita*) and propagate it to the entire world. No one is more capable than you to achieve this task." Likewise, students today should realise this truth that they are most capable of driving away injustice, impropriety, and other evils from society.

Sankara propounded the principle of nondualism

As per the command of his *guru*, Sankara set out on his journey to Kasi. In those days, there were no such modes of transport as planes, trains, and buses, and he traveled on foot along with his disciples. When he came near Kasi, he saw a person sitting under a tree, repeating the rules of Panini

grammar, “*Dukrun karane, dukrun karane ...*”. In order to put this person on the right path, it was here that Sankara recited the first verse of his famous composition, *Bhaja Govindam*:

Oh foolish man, chant the name of Govinda; the rules of grammar will not come to your rescue when the end approaches.

*Bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam,
Govindam bhaja moodha mathe,
Samprapthe sannihithe kale,
Nahi nahi rakshati dukrun karane.*

What do you achieve by learning the rules of grammar? Will this grammar come to your rescue when you are to depart from this world? Instead, sing the glory of God and contemplate on Him. When you leave this world, none of your friends, relatives, or wealth will come with you. Only the Name of God will be with you and will protect you always. Thus, Sankara taught the importance of reciting God’s Name.

Just as the light of moon goes on increasing day by day in the bright fortnight, the teachings of Sankara started spreading far and wide day by day, radiating light of knowledge.

Once there was a conference of scholars in Kasi. Many scholars came, donning thick gold bracelets, gorgeous shawls, and garlands of beads showing their high status. There was no dearth of pomp and show in the conference. Only Sankara came to attend the conference in all simplicity wearing only an ordinary *dhoti* and a small towel covering his shoulders.

Many scholars looked down upon him thinking, “What sort of a scholar is he? He doesn’t have even a single garland of beads. What can we expect from him”? However, some scholars knew the level of Sankara’s scholarship and started extolling him, “Sankara, we have heard so much about you. You have mastered the *Vedas, Sastras, Itihasas, Puranas, Brahma Sutras*, grammar, and logic. You are the one who propounded the principle of nondualism.”

When his turn came, Sankara smilingly ascended the stage and offered his salutations to the assembly of scholars and began his speech. Sankara said that knowledge of scriptures should not be used to earn money. He said to the scholars, “Why do you crave money? A *pandit* is one who is equal-

minded (*Pandita samadarshina*).” Though he was young in age, he declared this truth emphatically in the presence of scholars that they should yearn for God and not crave for money.

Oh people, give up your thirst for money.
Give up all your desires by proper discrimination.
The wealth you have is nothing but the result of
your past actions.
Therefore, be contented with whatever you have.

(Telugu song)

What you earn with hard labour is true wealth. When you work with both hands, you will certainly get food to sustain yourself. How compassionate God is! He has given you two hands and one stomach. Are two hands not enough to fill one belly? But today, you don’t work with both hands. That is why you are not able to fulfill all your needs. Do not give room to laziness. Give up thirst for money and develop thirst for God and righteousness.

Sankara gave a wonderful exposition of the doctrine of nondualism (*advaita*) and exhorted the august gathering of scholars to realise the divine principle of oneness of all creation. The scholars and their disciples were wonderstruck listening to Sankara’s profound words. Just as the saying goes, a small sparrow chirps loudly, the young Sankara started imparting great moral teachings to one and all.

Not only his teachings, his behaviour was also exemplary. This is the hallmark of noble souls. Those whose thoughts, words and deeds are in perfect harmony are noble ones (*Manasyekam vachasyekam, karmanyekam mahatmanam*).

People should develop purity of thought, word, and deed. First and foremost, purity of mind is essential. When the mind is pure, the speech will be pure. Pure thoughts and pure words will lead to sacred actions. This is described as the three instruments of purity (*thrikarana suddhi*), which were very much evident in Sankara. Many scholars started asking him questions, “What is the principle of nonduality”?

“It is nothing but the vision of oneness. The experience of nondualism is wisdom (*Advaita darshanam jnanam*).”

What is this knowledge? Is it physical knowledge, worldly knowledge, or secular knowledge? None

of these. It is the knowledge of the Self. That is the fundamental knowledge. But no scholar is making efforts today to recognise this fundamental principle. Understand this truth clearly.

Jewels are many, but gold is one. Likewise, the fundamental principle of the entire creation is only one, although it manifests in various names and forms. A gold ornament worn on the wrist is called a bracelet. When it adorns the ear, it is called an earring. When you wear it on your finger, it is called a ring. When it is worn around the neck, it is called a necklace. Though the names and forms of these ornaments are different, isn't the gold the same in all of them?

Sankara spoke about this principle of oneness in the assembly of scholars. Why do you observe differences based on name, form and use? Heart is the basis for everything. Therefore, follow the dictates of your heart. This is called conscience. In this manner, Sankara propounded great truths in simple words.

Jewels are many but gold is one.
Cows are many but milk is one.
Beings are many but breath is one.
Castes are many but humanity is one.
Flowers are many but worship is one.

(Telugu poem)

When you enquire deeply in this manner, you will visualise the underlying unity in everything. Yesterday, also I spoke about the fundamental principle of oneness. Pots are many, but clay is one (*Mritpindamekam bahubhandarupam*). The Vice Chancellor also mentioned this in his speech.

Pots have emerged from clay. There is clay in the pot but not pot in the clay. Many people are gathered here. Their names, forms and feelings may be different but the same five elements are present in all of them. This principle of five elements is the principle of Divinity. It is present in all. You, he, and I are all embodiments of *Atma*. You are all the embodiments of *Brahman*. That is why the Upanishads have declared: That thou Art (*Thatthwamasi*), and I am Brahman (*Aham Brahmasmi*). Who can deny this?

What does Brahman signify? It signifies expansiveness. That is why there is the quality of expansiveness in humanity. Though you are here, your mind travels to Chennai, Mumbai or Delhi

in an instant. This power of expansiveness is termed Brahman. This power is latent in every person, but they are unable to develop it because of their desires and greed for wealth and power.

Greed ruins people

A farmer had a small piece of land. He wanted to acquire more land so that he could be called a landlord. His friends told him, "You want to acquire vast land, but you don't have sufficient money for that. Therefore, we will give you an idea following which you can have as much land as you want."

A greedy person listens to evil talk not with two ears, but with twenty ears. People do not give ear to good talk but are all ears for evil talk.

Oh ears, you are interested in listening to vain gossip and tales about others, but you pay least attention when the wonderful stories of the Lord are narrated.

(Telugu song)

The farmer listened to the advice of his friends with great interest. They told him that in this region of Andhra Pradesh, one could not get a big piece of land with a small amount. They asked him to go to the Himalayan region where he could get as much land as he desired.

As per the advice of his friends, he went to meet the king of a Himalayan region and asked for a huge piece of land. The king told him, "My dear, since you have come from such a far off place like Andhra Pradesh, I will certainly fulfill your wish." The king promised to give him all the land that he could walk around from sunrise to sunset on a single day.

So, in his uncontrollable greed, he rose with the rise of the sun and, without wasting a minute for breakfast, he walked fast. Indeed, he ran very fast in order to cover as much land as he could. He never took a second's rest; he was happy that he could get a pretty vast area free when the sun was about to set. He was within a few paces of the point from where he had started. He was too exhausted to take even the few steps he needed; he fell down on the ground he coveted so much and breathed his last. His heart could not stand the strain of walking so fast, so long, with such hurry and tension.

The people gathered there told the king, “Alas, he breathed his last in his greed to acquire hundreds of acres of land. Now what he requires is only six feet of land.”

Acquire education to serve society

What a great misfortune the farmer met with because of his greed! The lesson is that there should be a limit to your desires. Limitless desires will lead to danger. That is why Sankara taught mankind, “Give up your thirst for money.” But students today make preparations to go to foreign lands to earn more money as soon as they get their degree.

Students!

Understand this clearly. What is not here in Bharat (India) cannot be found anywhere else (*Yanna Bharate, thanna Bharata*). Bharat is the master of all nations. That is why people from many foreign countries come to Bharat. Bharat is the land of righteous action, merit, spirituality, and sacrifice (*karma bhumi, punya bhumi, yoga bhumi, and thyaga bhumi*). Even with a small income, you can lead a peaceful life here.

What is the use of acquiring high education if one is found wanting in virtues?

What is the value of such education?

What is the use of ten acres of barren land?

Instead, a small piece of fertile land is good enough.

(Telugu poem)

Students are wasting their time, energy, and money in their craze to go to foreign lands. You are born and brought up in Bharat. You eat and drink the food and water of Bharat and call yourself a *Bharatiya* (Indian). What will you achieve by giving up this sacred land and going to foreign countries?

Give up this greed for money. Serve your motherland. Serve the poor and destitute in this land. Not only for your self-interest, work for the interest of others, too. Acquire your education with a view to serve and strengthen society. There is no point in acquiring merely high degrees.

Many educated people go abroad, and when they don't find proper employment, they do even menial jobs like cleaning of cups and plates in hotels. They think, nobody from here would know even if

they sweep the roads or clean plates in a hotel. But the same people don't want to wash their own tiffin plates in their house. Why should one be ashamed of doing work in one's own house?

The sacredness and glory of Bharat is diminishing because of such false sense of prestige of students.

Love is a divine quality

Develop love for the motherland, not attachment to the body. However, do not belittle or criticise other nations. May all the beings of all the worlds be happy (*Samasta lokah sukhino bhavantu*)! This is what the culture of Bharat teaches.

After slaying Ravana, Rama wanted to crown Vibhishana as king of Lanka. At that time, Sugriva, Jambavan, Angada, and other prominent warriors approached Rama and asked Him, “Swami, now that Ravana is killed, it would be better if You take over the reins of Lanka, which is full of affluence and riches”.

Lakshmana also said, “Brother, anyway, Bharata is ruling over Ayodhya. Therefore, it would only be proper if You became king of Lanka and sanctify this place.”

Rama replied, “The mother and the motherland are greater than heaven even (*Janani janma bhumishcha swargadapi gareeyasi*). Can we call some other beautiful woman our mother just because our own mother is not so beautiful? Even if she is not so beautiful, our mother is our mother.”

Students should develop such exalted feelings of love for motherland. They should work for the honour of their country.

Students!

One is verily a living corpse who does not declare with pride that this is my motherland, this is my mother tongue, and this is my religion.

(Telugu poem)

Sankara, who was born in Kerala, brought great name and fame not only to Kerala but to the entire country with his profound teachings of nonduality. It is goodness that brings good name. Goodness is godliness. Without goodness, one becomes godless.

First of all, understand that you yourselves are divine. There is nothing greater than divinity.

Your innate quality of love is a divine quality. That is the true human quality. Develop this human quality of love. You will be called a human being in the true sense of the term only when you have the qualities of compassion, love, tolerance, empathy, and forbearance.

People today are human in form only but not in practice. One appears as human but lacks human qualities. One can clearly say, that one is human only in form but not in practice.

Students!

Sankara was also a student like you, but, even at the young age of sixteen years, he earned such a great name and fame that it will continue to shine age after age like a precious jewel, whose splendour never diminishes. Every student should emulate his ideal and lead an exemplary life. Give happiness to your parents. Earn a good name in society, uphold the great name of motherland and thus sanctify your human birth. Do not think it otherwise.

Sankara tried to develop a sense of renunciation in everyone through his composition “*Bhaja Govindam*”.

Some people may say, “Sai Baba is teaching renunciation to students.” Let people say what they want. I am not afraid. Why should one be afraid to speak the truth? Is it so easy to attain renunciation? It is not possible for everyone. There has been no transformation even in those who have been listening to My discourses for a number of years. Such being the case, can we expect a sudden change in you by merely listening to this discourse? Only the most fortunate few can develop the sense of renunciation.

What great good fortune can there be other than developing the spirit of renunciation naturally? That is why I repeatedly tell you, “Immortality is not attained through action, progeny, or wealth but only by sacrifice (*Na karmana na prajaya dhanena thyagenaike amrutatthwamanasu*).” Only the spirit of sacrifice ensures your well-being.

What is meant by sacrifice?

If you don't exhale the air that you inhale, your lungs will get spoiled. Your stomach will be upset unless the food you eat is digested and excreted. Similarly, blood has to continuously flow in all

parts of the body. If it remains in one place, it develops into a boil.

The same can also be said of money. The money that you earn should be spent for righteous purposes. Only those who have such a spirit of sacrifice can really be called truly fortunate.

As long as you remain distant from God, you will not be able to understand the principle of Divinity. As you go closer to God, all the mysteries of life will be revealed to you. Not only that, you will develop a sense of detachment without any effort. Your heart will be filled with divine feelings and your life will be sanctified.

As the saying goes, The knower of Brahman becomes verily Brahman (*Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati*). You become one with God. Therefore, develop good qualities and the spirit of sacrifice.

Sage Vyasa has given the essence of eighteen *Puranas* in two sentences: One attains merit by serving others and commits sin by hurting them (*Paropakara punya, papaya parapeedanam*). Help Ever, Hurt Never. If you put this dictum into practice, you will have followed the teachings of *Vedanta* in the real sense.

(Bhagavan concluded His discourse with the *bhajan*, “*Hari Bhajan Bina Sukha Santhi Nahin...*”)

– From Bhagavan's discourse in Sai Kulwant Hall on 7 September 1996.