

Who Are You? I Am I Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Dasara, Prasanthi Nilayam
20 October 2010

Editor's note. This discourse does not appear in the *Sathya Sai Speaks* series. It is taken from the following website and edited slightly: http://sssbt.org/Pages/Archivals/Divine_Discourses.htm.

Peace has become extinct.
Truth has become scarce.
Mind is the cause for both.
Oh, aliant sons of Bharat! Listen!
(Telugu Poem)

Embodiments of Love!

Bharatiya (Indian) does not mean only a person born in the country of Bharat (India). The culture of Bharat is the mother. The country of Bharat is the father. A *Bharatiya* is one who has faith in and lives under the care of these parents.

Several noble souls have taken birth in Bharat, followed the great culture of this country, and set examples to others. Sri Sankaracharya is one such great personality who spread the culture of Bharat throughout the length and breadth of the country and earned eternal fame. Adi Sankara taught the philosophy of duality (*adwaita*). Three centuries after him came Sri Ramanujacharya, who advocated the qualified nondualism (*visishta-adwaita*) system of philosophy, which emphasised devotion (*bhakti*) and surrender (*prapatthi*) to God.

Two centuries after Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Madhwacharya arrived on the scene and propagated the dual (*dwaita*) system of philosophy, emphasising the devotional path to the people who were vacillating between several systems of philosophy. However, the fundamental principle underlying all three schools of philosophy is one and the same, that is, the *Atmic* principle (*Atma-thathwa*).

The non-dualistic philosophy of Sri Sankaracharya advocates the oneness of the individual soul (*jiva*) and the cosmic soul (Brahman). The qualified non-dualistic (*visishta-adwaita*) philosophy of Sri Ramanujacharya presupposes that the individual soul (*jiva*) and Brahman are different.

Sri Madhwacharya explained that there are, in fact, three concepts, namely,

body consciousness (*dehatma bhava*),
the individualised form of God, (*jivatma bhava*), and
the universalised soul or the Supreme Self
(*Paramatma Bhava*).

Nobody need hold on to a particular school of thought or deride the others. The question of adhering to a particular school of philosophy depends upon the mental frame work of the individual. Sri Sankaracharya emphasised that, though the cloth is of different varieties, the thread underlying the cloth is one and the same. "The cloth is made of a number of threads woven together", explained Sri Ramanujacharya. One has to recognise the underlying principle behind the three schools of philosophy, namely, the nonduality, the qualified nonduality, and duality.

Ornaments are many, gold is one;
Colours of the cows are many, milk is one;
Beings are many, the Indweller is one;
Nationalities are many, humanness is one.

Adi Sankara had a short life span of 32 years. Though the philosophy advocated by Sri Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, and Sri Madhwacharya acquired different names, namely, nonduality, qualified nonduality, and duality, the underlying nature of the three types is one, that is the *Atmic* Principal (*Atma Thatthwa*).

The same can be explained with the example of gold forming the base for ornaments with different names and forms. Not realising the fundamental unity between the three schools of philosophy, people adhering to the different schools of philosophy derided one another, which gave scope to a number of misconceptions in the world about

the country of Bharat. In order to explain the truth that one *Atma* dwells in all beings (*Ekatma sarva bhutantaratma*), Adi Sankara gave examples.

He took out an ornament and explained that the metal with which the ornament was made was gold, thus going into the fundamental principle. The same principle was explained in a different way by Sri Ramanujacharya, who emphasised that though gold forms the basis for the ornament, since it has assumed the form of a chain, it should be called a gold chain. Sri Sankaracharya, while advocating the nondualistic philosophy, quoted the *Vedic* dictum God is one without a second (*Ekameva adviteeyam Brahma*).

Sri Ramanujacharya, however, did not agree with this view. His viewpoint was: how could there be an image (*prathibimba*) without an object (*bimba*). He thus explained the oneness of the object and the image, which he called qualified non-dualism (*visishta-adwaitha*).

Another example given in this context was sugarcane juice. The juice is extracted from different varieties of sugarcane, and a number of sweetmeats are made out of the juice. Though the juice is one, it has now assumed different forms. While Sri Sankaracharya emphasised the oneness of the sweet juice and the sugarcane, Sri Ramanujacharya dwelt upon the different forms the juice has assumed.

Thus, ever since the times of the three great teachers (*acharyas*) till today, there are a number of arguments and counter arguments between the three schools of philosophy. But present-day students don't have faith in any of these schools of philosophy. They just brush aside these systems as a figment of imagination.

Sugar made out of the sugarcane juice is the main ingredient for making various sweets. The sugar is sweet. Similarly, Brahman is the source and sustenance for the entire universe. Wherever you look, you will find manifestation of the Divine (Brahman) in ever so many forms. The forms change and are illusory in nature. Brahman alone is the eternal, changeless principle. That is why declared, "Brahman alone is real, the world is illusory (*Brahma sathyam jagat mithya*).

All three great teachers, namely, Sri Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, and Sri Madhwa-

charya, propagated the same principle: the *Atmic* Principle (*Atma Thatthwa*). The *Upanishads* declare that the entire universe is permeated by the same *Atmic* principle. That truth is contained in the *Upanishadic* dicta:

One *Atma* dwells in all beings (*Ekatma sarva bhutantaratma*),
God is the Indweller of all beings (*Easwarah sarva bhutanam*), and
The entire universe is permeated by God (*Isa-vasyam idam sarvam*).

The rain, the water that flows into the river, and the sand in the river that sustains it—all are one and only one. Everything is Brahman. Since every object in this universe is Brahman, nothing can be disregarded or ignored. This principle of Brahman is called "Divine" in the English language. But many ignorant or cynical persons take it as "deep wine" and take to imbibing intoxicating substances.

Disregarding such perversion, we have to realise that the sweetness underlying Divinity is one only. This oneness in the great culture of Bharat has been propagated since ancient times. In keeping with this great tradition, consider everyone, whether an ant or an animal or a human being, as verily Brahman.

Some people may have a doubt in this context whether a human being and an animal can be equated. Yes, as far as the *Atmic* principle is concerned. However, the behavioural pattern of the animal is different from that of the human being. Considering this aspect, one may conclude that they are different, but the underlying individual principle (*jiva thatthwa*) is one and the same. On the basis of this individual principle, you cannot differentiate at all between living beings. Thus, the entire universe is permeated by Brahman (*Sarvam Brahmamayam jagat*).

This truth can be explained by a simple example. This is a white cloth and that a saffron cloth. Though the colours are different, the cloth is one. The cloth may be of different colours and put to different uses, but the cloth is only one and the same.

The cloth is the source. One has to recognise the oneness of the source. Once you recognise the source, all differences vanish in no time. Unfortu-

nately, today, we give importance to the names and forms, forgetting the basis and source for all names and forms. As a result, we undergo innumerable difficulties and sorrows.

Adi Sankara explained the nondual principle beautifully in his famous *Bhaja Govindam* song thus:

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.*

If the end approaches, nothing can save you except the Divine Name. Therefore, chant the Divine Name. Thus, Sri Sankaracharya awakened, exhorted, and taught the world.

Further explaining the sorrows and difficulties faced by one in life's sojourn in this objective world and the need to seek refuge in the divine grace, Sri Sankaracharya composed the following stanza:

Oh Lord! I am caught up in this cycle of birth and
death time and again;
I am experiencing the agony of staying in the
mother's womb.
It is very difficult to cross this ocean of worldly
life.
Please take me across this ocean and grant me
liberation.

*Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam
Punarapi Janani Jathare Sayanam
Iha Samsare Bahu Dustare
Kripayapare Pahi Murare.*

In this context, one has to analyse what it is that is subject of birth and death again and again. The body (*deha*) undergoes this cycle of birth and death, but the *Atma* is eternal. As long as the *Atma* remains in the body as the Indweller, there will be consciousness in the body. The moment the *Atma* leaves the body, it becomes inert (*jada*). This phenomenon is called death.

Unable to realise this truth, people subject themselves to sorrow. Birth and death are only for the outer form, not for the *Atma*. A short story in this context.

There was once a philosopher-son, who was learning *Vedas*. By the time he completed his *Vedic* learning, his mother completed forty years of life. She left her mortal body in her 40th year. The son was deeply immersed in sorrow.

His *guru* called him and tried to counsel him explaining, "Whom do you consider your mother? The body? No, this is not your mother. You are wailing over a dead body, which your mother has left. In fact, the body is right before you. Why should you have to weep? The power of consciousness (*chaitanya shakthi*) left the body. This means that the power of consciousness represents your father and mother, not the forms and attachments to those forms.

"No doubt, it is true that a relationship does exist with the physical form for some time. But thereafter the body ceases to exist. When you realise the truth, you will understand the futility of the relationship with the physical body."

The objects may be different, but the source and sustenance for the objects is only one. The same source assumes different names and forms. Do not develop dependence on the names and forms, which are subject to change.

This simple truth based on the fundamental principle (*muladhara thatthwa*) has been explained by different people in different ways as high sounding philosophy. This has given scope to some misconceptions to a certain extent. In fact, the underlying principle behind the nondualistic philosophy of Sri Sankaracharya and the qualified nondualistic philosophy of Sri Ramanujacharya is one and the same.

Embodiments of Love! Students!

Today, we are taking very lightly such a great and noble philosophy. Sri Sankaracharya's philosophy is profound in nature and explains the great truth in simple and beautiful poetry. Any amount of explanation will be insufficient to bring out the underlying philosophy in full measure.

Sri Sankaracharya also wrote a great commentary (*bhashya*) on the *Bhagavad Gita*. In his commentary, Adi Sankara explained that there is nondualism in dualism (*adwaita* in *dwaita*) and dualism in nondualism. Further, qualified nondualism (*visishtha-adwaita*) contains both the non-

dualism and dualism concepts as well. Therefore, all the three schools of philosophy lead to the same goal, and their underlying meaning is: Only Brahman is the truth and the world is illusory (*Brahma sathyam jaganmithya*).

The whole world appears as containing innumerable names and forms. One should not be enmeshed with these names and forms. It is only when the names and forms are set aside and the underlying source is identified that it is possible to recognise the truth. And that truth is:

That Thou Art (*Thath twam asi*).

That is,

Constant integrated awareness is Brahman (*Prajnanam Brahma*).

That awareness is,

This Self is Brahman (*Ayam Atma Brahma*).

Analysing the great aphorism “That Thou Art” will lead you to the awareness “I am That” and “That I am.” When you are able to realise this truth, you will find that the principle “I” underlies everything in the universe as the principle of unity. We have to recognise that “I” principle, which is universal.

It is a futile exercise to get into arguments over this matter and waste time. The only aspect you have to realise is “I am Brahman.”

When somebody asks you who you are, the proper answer would be “I am I,” “I am the word, I am the form, and I am the name”. This “I” represents and explains everything. When somebody asks who you are, do not reply by quoting your name. The name represents the name given to the body. You are not the body. Hence reply “I am I”. Everyone should strive to attain that state of unity.

The *Vedantic* concepts lead to endless arguments and counter arguments. Do not enter into them. Always be under the awareness “I am I.” This “I” principle is beyond names and forms. It represents the Brahma Principle (*Brahma Thath-twa*), which is one without a second entity.

When somebody asks who you are, reply, “I am I.” Similarly, when you ask somebody who they are, their reply would be “I am I.” Thus, all are “I am I.” It is only when you think “I am not I” that there will be several questions.

Dear students!

You have to finally make a firm resolve: “I am I.” Do not identify yourself with the body and say, “I am a child,” “I am a young woman,” “I am an old man,” etc. These differences relate to the age factor.

What is the stage after old age? No one knows. But the “I” principle exists in the child, in youth, and in old age. This is a fundamental and changeless principle. Therefore, when somebody asks who you are, reply, “I am I.” If the questioner is unable to understand this principle, do not bother; just hold on to your principle.

Only when you develop such firm conviction will you be able to achieve anything in life. The philosophical concepts can be explained in ever so many ways, since they contain several meanings.

On 20 October 1940, I made a declaration for the first time, revealing my true identity thus:

Know that I am Sai in reality,
Cast off your worldly relationships,
Give up your efforts to restrain Me,
The worldly attachments can no longer bind Me,
None, however great he may be, can hold Me.
(Telugu poem)

Since I made this declaration on 20 October, people celebrate this day in a big way. Do not give too much importance to the dates and try to celebrate them as birthday, *Avatar* Declaration Day, etc.

Once, Rukmini, the consort of Lord Krishna invited Him to her palace, saying, “Swami! Today is my birthday. Please come for dinner.”

Sathyabhama, another consort of Krishna, who was present on that occasion, was angry. She argued, “If today is your birthday, this is also the day on which I entered into the in-laws’ house. Krishna tied the nuptial knot round my neck on this day. Therefore, He should visit only my house on this day.”

Thus, the day turned out to be a day of quarrel between the two consorts. Lord Krishna, however, was prepared to visit both houses. He does not differentiate between them. Thus, one has to recognise the principle of unity in Divinity.