

Attachment to the Self is True Love Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Prasanthi Nilayam
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Noble souls are least affected when wicked
people criticise and ridicule them.
Does the elephant lose its might and majesty
just because dogs bark at it?
(Telugu poem)

Embodiments of divine Atma!

Every object in this creation appears to have a colour. You think that these colours are natural to these objects, but this is not so. They only appear to have a particular colour. For example, sky appears to be blue in colour and so is the ocean, and you say that the sky is blue, the ocean is blue. But that is not correct. Neither the sky nor the ocean is blue in colour. Since the sky is far away, it appears to be blue to our eyes. Similarly, the ocean appears to be blue because of its infinite depth. When you go near the ocean and take its water in your hand, you will see it has no colour.

The good and bad that you experience in this world depend on your feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. You cannot see the true form and colour. Electricity is produced from water and is put to many uses, but it cannot be seen with the naked eye. Likewise, all living beings originate from the divine principle of *Atma*. But the principle of *Atma* cannot be seen. You can only visualise the behaviour, good or bad, of the living beings that originates from it.

Sankara fulfilled his promise to his mother

Sankara's philosophy of nondualism (*adwaita*) became popular among the scholars. Once, he was presiding over a large congregation of scholars. As he closed his eyes, he saw his mother in distress. The heart of a noble soul is like a mirror. He at once stopped the proceedings of the assembly and went to Kalady. He came to his mother and

poured sanctified tulsi (a medicinal plant) water in her mouth before she breathed her last. In this way, he kept up the promise he gave to his mother.

In the prevailing circumstances those days, people of Kalady were opposed to any renunciant (*sannyasi*) performing the funeral rites of his near and dear ones, since they believed it was against the tradition. One who takes to renunciation is supposed to have given up all worldly relationships. But Sankara, in spite of being a renunciant, came to perform his mother's final rites to fulfill his promise.

No one in the village came forward to help him performance his mother's funeral rites. Nambudiri Brahmins (Hindu Brahmins from the state of Kerala) strongly objected to this. According to them, Sankara was acting contrary to Dharma. Since he had no other option, Sankara carried the body of his mother on his shoulder and cremated it in the backyard of his house.

The same practice is followed even to this day in Kerala. If some person in the family dies, they cremate the body in the backyard of their house. If you go to Kerala, you will find houses having spacious back yards.

I am explaining this in a little more detail in order to make the students understand this. Before taking up renunciations (*sannyasa*), one is supposed to perform *viraja homa* (a fire-sacrifice). What is *Viraja homa*? In *viraja homa*, one performs one's own final rites, giving up all worldly relationships and one's name. From that moment onward, one takes a new name and dons ochre robes.

All those who take to the path of renunciation assume names such as Satchidananda, Nityananda,

etc. However, we don't see even a trace of bliss (*ananda*) in many of them.

When one performs one's own final rites in *viraja homa*, one starts a new life. Then where is the question of having worldly relations? Therefore, it is prescribed that a renunciant should not take part in ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites (*karma kanda*).

Here, I would like to give you a small example. When we went to Rishikesh, Burgula Ramakrishna Rao made arrangements for the accommodation of devotees in guest houses and in the houses of a few individuals. That day, Swami Sivananda and his disciples came and asked Me to preside over the 75th Birthday celebrations of Swami Sivananda. I told them it was the 75th Birthday of Kuppuswami and not Sivananda. Kuppuswami was his name prior to taking to renunciation. After taking to renunciation, Kuppuswami ceased to exist. His name and status changed. Sivananda was the name given to him at the time of taking to renunciation. By then, thirty-seven years had passed. Therefore, I told them it was the 37th birthday of Sivananda and not 75th.

Sivananda said that he had not met anyone in his life who imparted a spiritual lesson in such a forceful manner.

People today rely only on physical name and status, but they don't recognise the fundamental basis. It is possible only for the divine incarnations to have the same name and stage in life right from birth till the end. Many make the mistake of associating and identifying themselves with their earlier name and status even after taking to renunciation.

Devotion of Burgula Ramakrishna Rao

Burgula Ramakrishna Rao was a great devotee. He was also a great linguist, knowing twelve languages. He was highly intelligent. He had the desire to perform a pilgrimage to Badrinath, Kedarnath with the *Avatar* Himself. When he was the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, he wanted to undertake this sacred pilgrimage with Swami. Having come to know about this trip, nearly 200 devotees from all parts of India joined us and became part of our entourage.

Burgula Ramakrishna Rao and his wife had a sacred heart. They used to partake of food only after feeding those devotees. Such was their spirit of sacrifice. They used to personally serve water to all the devotees. When his ADCs requested him, "Sir, you also have your food, and we will serve water to devotees", he told them, "I am not the Governor now, I am the servant of Swami."

On another occasion, when Burgula Ramakrishna Rao was the Chief Minister of erstwhile Hyderabad State, Swami went to Malakpet in Hyderabad. Thousands of devotees were standing in the queue to have Swami's *darshan*. The devotees were supposed to have Swami's *darshan* one after the other without wasting a moment. The volunteers were nudging the devotees, as is the practice in the sanctum sanctorum of Tirupati. Here students should understand how pure-hearted Ramakrishna Rao was. He also stood in the queue to have Swami's *darshan*.

The Inspector General of Police came and asked him, "Sir, you are the Chief Minister; therefore, you should not stand in the queue. Please come in the front."

Ramakrishna Rao replied, "I may be the Chief Minister from a political point of view, but I am an ordinary devotee from the spiritual point of view. I am not such a great devotee to have *darshan* of the Lord straightaway". Such was his nobility.

Physical beauty is perishable

After fulfilling the promise given to his mother, Sankara went to Kasi, accompanied by his disciples. On the way, he saw some young men and women moving together. He cautioned his disciples to beware of physical attractions. He told them, "These days, young men and women are attracted by the physical body, which is filled with all sorts of filth and gives out a foul smell. They are carried away by the physical beauty, but they don't see the beauty of the indwelling *Atma*. This does not behoove a human being. Why so much infatuation for the body, which changes from moment to moment?"

The physical body is bound to disintegrate and get reduced to ashes. In this human birth, youth is like passing clouds that come and go.

Describing the ephemeral nature of the body, Sankara tried to develop a sense of detachment in the hearts of people. In this regard, young men and women should behave with great caution. They should not have attraction for the physical body, which is made up of flesh, blood, and bones and emits foul smell. Where is the question of beauty in such a body? It is only an illusion and not the reality.

(In this context, Swami related the story of a prince who wanted to marry a merchant's daughter for her beauty. The girl, who was devoted to God and wished to remain single, devised a plan to rid the prince of his infatuation. She sent word that she would agree to marry the prince if he approved of her after a week. Meanwhile, she took a series of purgatives, collected all the purgings in vessels and went to meet the prince. By that time, she was so emaciated that all her youthful charm had gone. She told the prince that the beauty he saw in her was all contained in the vessels. The prince learnt the lesson and decided also to remain single and devote himself to serve God.)

The body is like a water bubble, the mind is like a mad monkey. The body follows the mind. Adi Sankara taught young people not to have attraction for sensual pleasures.

The body, which is made up of five elements, is weak and is bound to disintegrate.
Though hundred years of life-span is prescribed, one cannot take it for granted.
One may leave one's mortal coil at any time, be it in childhood, youth, or old age.
Death is certain.
Hence, before the body perishes, make efforts to know your true nature.

(Telugu poem)

At the same time, Sankara never advocated that all young people should become renunciants (*sannyasis*). He advised them to discharge their duties earnestly and spend their time in contemplation of God. He taught what he himself practised. Young men and women today have become slaves to their senses and are leading their lives like animals. That is why Adi Sankara taught youth the philosophy of nondualism (*advaita*) in a way they could understand.

Brahman is the fundamental principle of creation

Children – boys and girls!

You would have watched movies in a cinema hall. You can learn nondualism even from cinema. When you enter the cinema hall, initially you find only the white screen. You will not be satisfied just by watching the white screen all the time. You eagerly wait for the pictures to be projected on the screen. When the pictures appear on the screen, you are happy to watch. Does the same picture permanently appear on the screen? No. It comes and goes. But the screen neither comes nor goes. It is always there. The screen is permanent, but the picture is temporary.

Similarly, the world (*jagath*), which comes and goes, is temporary. Brahman, who neither comes nor goes, is eternal. That is why Adi Sankara declared, "Brahman alone is real; the world is unreal (*Brahma sathyam jagan-mithya*)."

In the word *jagath*, 'ja' means 'to come' and 'gat' means 'to go'. Just as pictures appear and disappear on the screen, likewise the world comes and goes on the screen of Brahman. Brahman is the truth; it is like the white screen. But nobody likes to see only the screen all the time. People will look the screen only when pictures appear on it.

Sankara also declared, "Vishnu pervades the entire universe (*Sarvam Vishnumayam jagat*)."
Hearing this, the scholars were confused because earlier Sankara had declared that the world is unreal. Later he said, the entire world is permeated by Vishnu. The scholars wondered which of these statements was true. But Sankara said, both are true. Pictures come and go.

Oh Lord! I am caught up in this cycle of birth and death; time and again, I experience 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.*

Everything is unreal except Brahman. Here is an example. On the cinema screen, you see the pic-

tures. You see only the pictures but not the screen. But where is the screen when pictures are projected on it? It becomes a part of the pictures. Without the screen, you cannot see the pictures. Therefore, the screen is in the background. Similarly, the eternal principle of Divinity permeates the entire universe.

It is on this basis that it is said, “Vishnu pervades the entire universe (*Sarvam Vishnumayam jagat*).” The same truth is declared by the *Vedic* statement, “the entire world is permeated by God (*Isavasyam idam jagat*).”

The same *Atma* is present in all names and forms. Without the screen of *Atma*, you cannot see the picture of the world. This is how Sankara propagated the principle of nondualism (*advaita*) to the world.

What is the essential teaching of nondualism? One should take the fundamental principle as the basis while carrying on life in this physical and ephemeral world. This fundamental principle is the screen of Brahman. This unreal world is projected on the screen of Brahman.

The entire creation is based on this fundamental principle. You can experience the principle of oneness only when you realise the fundamental basis of the creation. This oneness is denoted by the *Atma*, which is present in everyone in the form of consciousness.

This *Atmic* principle is given various names such as Rama, Krishna, Buddha Jesus, Nanak, etc. All these names and forms are attributed by people to Divinity. They have birth and death but not Divinity. Divinity is all-pervasive.

Sankara taught this principle of nondualism to all the scholars in an elaborate way. However, it is not easy for all to understand this nondualistic philosophy because every individual appears to be different from the other. But the fundamental power is the same in all. That is the life force, which is also called I (*Aham*).

What is this life force? The process of our inhalation and exhalation is denoted by the *soham* principle. This is our life force. It is due to the presence of the *soham* principle that the body exists. ‘So’ means ‘That’, ‘ham’ means ‘I’. That Thou

Art is the teaching of the *soham* principle, which is also called the *Hamsa Gayatri*.

There are three subtle channels in the human body — *ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna* (the nerve currents to the left, right and middle of the spinal column) — which are associated with the life force.

Inhalation is denoted by *puraka*, exhalation by *rechaka*, and retention by *kumbhaka*. These three form the essential aspects of breath control (*pranayama*). Breath control is one of the steps of *yoga* propounded by Sage Patanjali, which consists of eight steps, namely,

control of the inner senses (*yama*),
control of the outer senses (*niyama*),
sitting postures (*asana*),
breath control (*pranayama*),
control of the mind (*pratyahara*),
concentration (*dharana*),
meditation (*dhyana*),
superconscious state (*samadhi*)

The process of inhalation is denoted by ‘so’ and exhalation by ‘ham’. Between inhalation and exhalation, there is retention of breath at the centre of eyebrows. This is the place where *yogis* focus while performing meditation. This is the source of *Atmic* knowledge. Ancient *yogis* have exhorted man to focus on the fundamental basis of everything, i.e. *Atma*.

The confluence of *Ganga*, *Yamuna*, and *Saraswati* rivers is called *Prayag* in the worldly sense. But the real meeting place (*prayag*) is where the nerve channels *ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna* meet. That is the place of the centre of the eyebrows (*bhrumadhya*).

Adi Sankara compared the path of sacred and selfless work to the *Ganga*, the path of worship to the *Yamuna*. and the path of wisdom to the *Saraswati*. *Saraswati* is unseen (*antar vahini*). Similarly, wisdom is the unseen (*antar vahini*) of work and worship.

We travel either by train or car to reach *Prayag*. But the real confluence (*prayag*) cannot be reached by these modes of transport.

The same truth was declared by Mira when she was forced to leave her house. Then she sang,

Oh mind! Go to the banks of the Ganga and Yamuna; the water of Ganga and Yamuna is pure; it will make the body cool and serene

Chalo re mana Ganga Yamuna teer, Ganga Yamuna nirmal pani sheetal hota sarir

Lord Krishna resides at the confluence of sacred Ganga and Yamuna in the form of *Atma*. How does Krishna appear to be?

He is wearing yellow silk robe and is adorned with a crown of peacock feathers and glittering ear rings.

Mora mukata pitambara shobhe kundala rajata sarir

Such are the sacred feelings of pure-hearted devotees. Mira experienced oneness with Krishna by her deep devotion.

Such a principle of oneness was taught by Sankara to young and old alike. In this manner, gradually, the philosophy of nondualism (*advaita*) was accepted by everyone.

Sankara's atonement

When Mandana Misra was defeated in the debate, Sankara insisted that he should take to renunciation (*sannyasa*) as per the condition of the debate. Ubhayabharati, the wife of Mandana Misra, was a great scholar. She told Sankara, "You have full knowledge of all scriptures. I am the better half (*ardhangini*) of my husband, which means I am half of his body. Therefore, only when you defeat me also in the debate can you ask him to take to renunciation."

Sankara agreed to her proposal and entered into a debate with her. During the course of the debate, she asked him a question relating to the *dharma* of a householder as stated in the *Kama Sastra* (a treatise on marital love). Sankara had no knowledge of this. Therefore, he asked her for one month's time to find out an answer to this.

At that time, a king named Amaruka died, and his dead body was lying in the palace. Seizing the opportunity, Sankara entered his body through the power of *yoga*. Seeing their king coming back to life, the people of the kingdom were overjoyed and took him to the palace. But it was not the king but Sankara, who had entered the king's body.

He started leading the life of a householder just like the king. But very soon he realised that he had done an unsacred act, and his conscience did not accept this. At once he left the king's body, went to Ubhayabharati, and answered her question.

Afterward, Sankara set out on his journey to Kashmir. In those days, Srinagar in Kashmir was also a place of great scholars and intellectuals. The king of Kashmir patronised them.

The moment Sankara entered Srinagar, the doors of the temple of the divine mother got closed at once. People tried in vain to open the doors. Many *Vedic* scholars went to the temple and started singing hymns in praise of the deity and praying to her to open the doors.

The goddess was moved by their devotion. An ethereal voice was heard, saying, "Sankara is a great scholar and one who practises what he preaches (an *acharya*). However, he has acquired a blemish. Only when he atones for the mistake he committed that caused this blemish will the temple doors be opened."

Sankara started praying to the divine mother intensely. He admitted that it was his mistake to have entered the body of the king and led the life of a householder in the royal palace. In order to atone for the sin he committed, he undertook deep penance for eleven days, foregoing food and sleep. On the twelfth day, the temple doors opened on their own. Such was the determination of Sankara.

The earlier speaker said, "Everyone should love Swami, and only through love will life be sanctified". But what type of love you should have? It is not worldly love. Sankara acquired a blemish because of such worldly love. But even that he did not do with any bad intention. His intention was only to give an answer to Ubhayabharati.

If your love is associated with *Atmic* feeling, you will not acquire any blemish. True love is related to the *Atma* and not to the body. Attachment to the Self is true love. *Love is God. Live in Love*. Such love will confer purity of heart. I said yesterday,

One may have mastered the *Vedas* and *Vedangas*,
One may have the expertise to compose prose and
poetry,
But if one lacks purity of heart, one will ruin one-
self.

Never forget these words of wisdom.

(Telugu poem)

It is not the knowledge of the *Vedas*, the scrip-
tures, and the *Puranas* that is important. Whatever
you do with purity of heart is good, pure, sacred,
and divine. Do not perform any action with the
desire for fruits. Love everyone with the feeling
that the same *Atma* is present in you and them.
That is the principle of true love.

Taking such love as the basis of his teachings,
Sankara propagated the philosophy of nondualism
to the entire world. He paid special attention to
youth and children while imparting his teachings.

However, you should be aware that one cannot
develop the spirit of detachment by merely listen-
ing to spiritual discourses.

A big businessman used to go every day to listen
to lectures on mythological texts delivered by a
learned holy man. The holy man once announced
publicly, “All of you must listen to these talks on
all seven days of the week. This will bestow full
merit on you.”

The businessman attended the talks regularly on
five days. On the 6th day, he had to go out for
urgent work, so he called his son and said to him,
“The holy man told me that I would earn great
merit if I attend his talk sessions on all seven
days. But it is urgent for me to go out tomorrow.
Therefore, you go and listen to the talk of the holy
man in my place because I don’t want to lose the
merit by my absence.”

Soon after, the businessman went to his room and
started thinking, “The holy man is imparting *Ve-
dic* teachings that one should renounce the world
and focus only on God. He is exhorting everyone
not to develop body attachment and get trapped in
this objective world (*samsara*). What will happen
if my son becomes a renunciant after listening to
the teachings of the holy man?”

Immediately, he went to the holy man and said to
him respectfully, “Tomorrow I am sending my
son to listen to your talk. Kindly do not emphasise
the value of renunciation in your talk. Rather,

speaking about the significance of love for the
world.”

The holy man remarked, “You have attended my
talks for five days. Tell me how much detachment
and renunciation have you developed? Then, how
is it possible for your son to develop the spirit of
renunciation by listening to my talk for only one
day? That is out of question.”

True meaning of renunciation

It is not easy to get rid of mountainous sins that
one has acquired over a number of births. There-
fore, Sankara was determined to develop a sense
of detachment in children, thereby cleaning their
hearts by exposing them to his teachings repeated-
ly.

The vessels that are used for marriages may be
cleaned once in a while. But the tumbler that is
used everyday has to be cleaned daily. Likewise,
youth should undergo this cleaning process re-
peatedly to develop detachment.

In this way, Sankara developed the spirit of de-
tachment (*vairagya*) in the youth. What is meant
by *vairagya*? I have told you earlier. Will anyone
want to eat the food they have vomited? You
should develop as much aversion to worldly
pleasures as you have to the vomited food.

Don’t say, “I shall try.” “Try is dry.” You must
do, you must do. It is only for your good.

There is no happiness in worldly things and rela-
tions. Whatever may be your earnings, whatever
may be the happiness you experience in this
world, you have to leave all that and go from this
world. Therefore, hold on to God firmly. He is
your true and eternal saviour. Develop strong de-
termination to hold on to Him. Only then will
your life be redeemed.

There is no point in developing detachment for
some time and getting attached to worldly things
again. Having given up worldly desires once, give
them up forever. Divinity will manifest in you
when you have such a supreme sense of detach-
ment. This is the truth, and nothing but the truth.

The teachings of Sankara on detachment have
done great good to humanity. Today many schol-
ars propagate the principle of nondualism, but

they themselves do not practise it. It is not enough to merely teach, you should practise.

Your mind should be immerse in the feelings of nondualism and your body should translate it into action. That is the true sense of detachment. Then only can you attain Brahman, who is truth, wisdom, and infinity (*sathyam, jnanam, and anantam*). Only God is real, all else is unreal.

(Bhagavan concluded His discourse with the *bhajan* “*Sathyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma...*”)

—Bhagavan’s discourse in Sai Kulwant Hall, Prasanthi Nilayam, on 9 September 1996.