

Atma is the Fundamental Basis of Everything **Sri Sathya Sai Baba**

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The tongue moves in between the teeth without getting harmed.

Likewise, it is good for people to conduct themselves with care and caution while leading a life in society. Never forget these words of wisdom.

(Telugu Poem)

Adi Sankara taught that world is like a drama stage on which man plays his role, experiences pleasure and pain, and ultimately gives up his life.

Human life is as unstable as a drop of water on a lotus leaf.

This body is a den of diseases and attachment. The entire world is riddled with sorrow and misery.

Therefore, oh foolish people, chant the name of Govinda.

(Telugu poem)

Human life is filled with sorrow, disappointment and dejection. Every moment is filled with fear, uncertainty and doubts. There is nothing certain in life, and there is fear everywhere. How can one be free from fear?

This life is full of fear.

The world is like a *padmavyuha* (lotus-shaped military formation) from which one is unable to find a way out.

Are trials and tribulations the only companions of people who have no refuge?

Are tears of sorrow the only reward for families that are already ruined?

(Telugu song)

Take refuge in the Atmic principle

How can one get happiness in this human life, which is filled with fear, doubt, agitation, and ego? Even the happiness you get is associated with fear. Fearlessness is nowhere to be seen in life.

Then how can one be free from fear? Fearlessness is where detachment is. How can one develop detachment? It is possible only in the proximity of God. That is why Sankara taught "Oh man, in order to be free from fear and attain a state of fearlessness, take refuge in the principle of the *Atma*. It is only then can you understand the reality."

Happiness, merit, profit, and light are nothing but the absence of sorrow, sin, loss, and darkness, respectively. In fact, they are not separate from each other. The *Atma* is the fundamental basis and source of all these.

Here is a flower with a number of petals. These petals appear to be different from each other, but all of them originate from the same source. Flower is one but petals are many. Similarly, innumerable waves originate from the infinite ocean. No wave appears to be identical with the other.

Waves are many but their source of origin, that is the ocean, is one. You find in the waves the same wetness, coolness, and salinity as you find in the ocean.

Out of the waves emerges froth. Waves are the basis of froth, and ocean is the basis of waves. The water in the ocean assumes the form of waves and the water in the waves manifests as froth. But, in fact, all the three are one. That is nondualism (*adwaita*).

Similarly, a person is the combination of body, mind, and *Atma*. Mind is the basis of body, and the *Atma* is the basis of mind. In fact, the *Atma* is the fundamental basis of everything. That is the principle of nondualism taught by Sankara. People who do not realise this truth take to the physical, ephemeral, and worldly path and undergo many difficulties and hardships before they are able to realise the *Atmic* principle.

Siddhartha's detachment

King Suddhodana was blessed with a son after a long wait. He named him Siddhartha. One day a noble sage came to the palace of King Suddhodana. On seeing child Siddhartha, he made a prophetic statement, "Oh king! Your son will become a renunciant."

On hearing his words, the king was gripped with fear. From that day onward, he took care that Siddhartha would not go out of the palace so that he would not see the suffering, sickness, and misery that are present in the world. He got him married at the age of 16 and provided all comforts and conveniences to him in the palace.

However, one day, Siddhartha went out of the palace to see the outside world. As he was going in the chariot, he saw a decrepit old man walking with difficulty with the help of a stick. Siddhartha asked his charioteer, "What type of animal is this? It appears to be a rather strange animal."

The charioteer replied, "Oh prince, he is also a human being like us. As the age advances, the body becomes weak and misshaped."

Siddhartha was surprised, "He asked, will everyone come to this stage as the age advances?"

"No one is an exception to this. It is the law of nature," replied the charioteer.

After going some distance, Siddhartha came across a sick person coughing, gasping for breath, and undergoing a lot of suffering. Siddhartha asked, "What is this? Why is he suffering so much?"

The charioteer replied, "Oh prince, this man is sick. This body is a den of diseases. Nobody can say when and how a person will be afflicted with a disease."

This caused disturbance in the mind of Siddhartha. After going further, he found a dead body being carried by four people. He asked the charioteer, "What is this? What are they carrying?"

"They are carrying a dead body," replied the charioteer.

"What do you mean by dead body?" asked Siddhartha.

The charioteer said, "It is a body without life. When there is life principle in the body, it is *sivam* (auspicious) and when the life principle leaves the body, it becomes *savam* (corpse)".

Siddhartha asked him, "Does everyone die one day?"

"No one can escape death," said the charioteer.

After hearing all this, Siddhartha returned to the palace. All that he saw deeply affected his mind. After returning home, he could neither eat nor sleep. He cast a look of detachment at his wife Yashodhara and son Rahula, who were in deep sleep. He concluded that the world is full of sorrow and fear. Realising that everything was ephemeral and unreal, he developed intense feeling of renunciation.

All of you come across many sick persons, old people, and dead bodies, but you do not develop the sense of detachment like Siddhartha. It is only by the grace of God that one develops such an intense feeling of detachment.

Qualities of a true renunciant

Here is a small story. Once, a prince went to a forest for hunting. After roaming in the forest for a long time, he felt very tired and thirsty. He came across an Aashram and went inside in search of water. The sage residing in the ashram asked him, "Who are you? Where have you come from?"

The prince replied, "My name is Jitendriya, and I have come from the Jitendriya kingdom. Please give me some water to quench my thirst."

The sage offered him a seat and gave him water to drink. The sage thought, "There are people in this world whose name is Dharmaraja, but they conduct themselves in a most unrighteous way. He comes from Jitendriya kingdom and his name is also Jitendriya (one who has conquered his senses). Does he conduct himself in accordance with his name? Let me find out."

The sage asked the prince to hand over his royal clothes to him and wear an ascetic's dress himself. He took the prince's clothes, sprinkled some red liquid on them, and set out for the kingdom of Jitendriya. At the palace gate, the sentry greeted the sage with reverence and asked him the object of his visit. The sage told him that the prince had

been killed by a wild animal in the forest and that he had brought the prince's clothes. He asked him to convey this message to the king.

The gatekeeper smiled and asked, "Who is free from death? Everyone who is born is bound to die. Birth and death go together."

There is a practice in the railways to stamp on every railway wagon the date on which it has to be returned to the workshop for repair and repainting. Likewise, everybody has a return date, though it is not visible.

After hearing the sentry's words, the sage went to meet the king himself. He told the king that his son had died and pretended like crying. While the renunciant was wailing, the king was having a laugh. The king said to him, "You are wearing an ochre robe, but your words are unbecoming of a renunciant. Why do you cry? This is no matter for grief or worry. At dusk, hundreds of birds return to a tree for rest. The next morning they fly away. What is the relationship between the different birds? Likewise, on the tree of my family, birds like wife and children rest for a while and depart. No one can tell when and where any of them will leave. There is no cause for grief over their departure. It is a law of nature."

The sage then went to the queen, thinking that as a mother she would grieve over the death of her son. He told her, "Mother! Your son is dead. Here are his clothes."

She too laughed. "Oh *Sadhu!* You are one who has renounced everything in the world. How can you entertain any concern for the ephemeral? Life is like an inn where wayfarers stay for a while and then pass on. Each has their own time of departure. There is no need to grieve when anyone leaves the world."

The sage went to the prince's wife to find out whether she at least reacted differently. He broke the news about the death of her husband. She remarked, "When it rains, leaves and branches fall away from a tree. When there is a flood, two pieces of wood come together for a while and separate again. In this ocean of life, I am one such piece; the prince was another. We came together and we have gone apart. Why be surprised or lament over this? For all these, the cause is either attachment or possessiveness. The events themselves are not

to be blamed. They are bound to happen. Why worry about them?"

The sage realised that what the prince had said about the kingdom was all true. Yet, he wanted to test the prince himself. He returned to the hermitage and exclaimed before the prince, "Oh prince! Your kingdom has been over run by invaders, and your father and mother have been made prisoners. You must leave immediately to recover the kingdom and release your parents. Get ready for war."

The prince replied, "All that has happened is according to the Will of God. I did not bring that kingdom with me when I was born. Can I take it with me when I die? Why should I wage war to recover it? It is not my kingdom. My kingdom is the kingdom of the *Atma*. I am striving to realise it. That is the kingdom of heaven. That is what I seek to secure. It cannot be got by waging war. It has to be won through love alone. I have no interest in other kingdoms."

Then, the renunciant prostrated before the prince and confessed, "We don ochre robes, but we have none of the qualities of true renunciants. How many householders are leading lives free from worldly attachments!"

A human should manifest human qualities

I would relate another story to show that whatever role one has to play in life, one should be true to it. Once, an actor came to the court of a king in the costume of Sankara, declaring forcefully the unreality of all human relationships and the impermanence of worldly possessions. He quoted the verses of Sankara:

Relationships like mother, father, brothers, sisters
and friends are not real.
House and wealth are also illusory.
Hence, beware! beware!

*Mata nasti, pita nasti,
Nasti bandhu sahodara,
Artham nasti, griham nasti,
Thasmath jagrata jagrata.*

(Sanskrit verse)

Birth is a misery, old age is a misery, family is a misery, and death is a terrible misery
So, beware! beware!

*Janma dukham jara dukham,
Jaya dukham punah punah,
Antya kale maha dukham,
Thasmat jagratha jagratha.*

(Sanskrit verse)

The actor gave a powerful exposition of nondualism (*adwaita*), *Atmic* principle, and unity of mankind for one hour.

Pleased with his performance, the king directed his minister to present the actor with a plate of gold coins. But the actor firmly refused to accept the present, saying that it would be unworthy of him to receive it in his role as Sankara. He said, “I have adopted the form of a renunciant (*sannyasi*) and am donning ochre robes. It is not the quality of a renunciant to receive gold coins as present. I have not come here to receive any reward. In fact, you are dishonouring me by offering reward.”

Saying this, the actor left the palace.

The next day, the same actor appeared in the role of a beautiful dancer and performed an excellent dance before the king. The king was so much impressed with the dance that he directed the minister to present a plate of gold coins to the dancer. This time, the dancer declined to accept what was offered because he considered it too small a reward for his performance.

The minister, who realised that the dancer was the same person who had come as Sankara the previous day, asked the actor the reason for his refusal to accept the plate of gold coins the previous day and to ask for more this day. The actor explained that he declined the previous offer in keeping with his role as a renunciant. But, in the role of a dancer, he was free to ask for more because it was natural for dancers to make as much money as they could.

You are born as a human being. Therefore, conduct yourself befitting your stature as a human being. This is the teaching of Sankara. Your conduct should be in accordance with the role you are playing. Oh people! You are human in form. Therefore, your conduct and behaviour should manifest human qualities. Otherwise, you are a disgrace to humanness itself.

It is said: *The proper study of mankind is man.* What is mankind? What does it signify? It signifies the unity of thoughts, words, and deeds. This is called *trikarana suddhi* in *Vedantic* parlance. Where there is unity, there is love. When love manifests in you, the lotus of your heart blooms. You develop the spirit of detachment when your heart blooms with love. If a person has not developed detachment, it only means that their heart has not bloomed with love. Devoid of love, one leads the life of an animal.

The same was taught by child Prahlada to his father Hiranyakasipu when he said, “Oh father! You have acquired all types of knowledge, and you have studied the scriptures and *Vedanta*. But you have not understood the essence of all this.”

Even wild beasts have some kindness and compassion, but Hiranyakasipu subjected his son to all types of ordeals without a trace of compassion. In fact, he was worse than an animal. One who derives pleasure in torturing others is verily an animal. Therefore, be good and do good. Then you will have everything good in your life. If you want your life to be good, develop good qualities.

Sankara toured the length and breadth of the country, taught the principle of nondualism (*adwaita*), instilled courage in people to relieve them of their sufferings, and inculcated human values in them.

Sankara’s immortal verse “*Bhaja Govindam*” gives the essence of his teachings. When Sankara recited the first 12 verses of this poem, each of his disciples contributed a stanza of his own to impart the knowledge of nondualism to people. In those days, the principle of nondualism was firmly established in Bharat (India). But, due to the influence of modern age, people are not putting it into practice in their daily life today.

Reduce the luggage of your desires

Embodiments of Love!

I am not asking all of you to become renunciants. Do your duty and keep your focus on God. Realise that there is one fundamental basis for everything. Once you recognise this truth, you will develop detachment automatically. It is not possible to develop a sense of detachment by force. As you develop love for God more and more, detachment will go on increasing in you.

The secret lies in turning your mind toward God. Here is a lock, and here is the key. Turn the key to the right, and the lock opens. Turn it to the left, and it closes. Your heart is the lock and mind is the key. Turn the mind toward God, and you get liberation. Turn it toward the world, and you get bondage.

That is why it is said, “Mind is the cause of bondage and liberation (*Manah eva manushyanam karanam bandhamokshayo*).”

You may doubt how you would develop attachment when you turn your mind toward the world. Here is an example. Now you have two legs. But after you finish your education and get a job, your parents will get you married to a girl. Your parents may arrange your marriage or you yourself may marry a girl. Whatever may be the case, after marriage, you will have four legs. As you beget children, you will go on adding to the number of legs. As the number of legs increases, your movement will be hampered. That is bondage. This bondage does not come from anywhere else; it comes from your own desires.

Less luggage more comfort makes travel a pleasure. Life is a long journey. Reduce the luggage of your desires to experience happiness and comfort in this journey of life. As much as you reduce your worldly desires, so much happiness will you experience. Discharge your duties earnestly, focusing your mind on the goal of life.

(Bhagavan concluded His Discourse with the *bhajan*, “*Bhaja Govindam, Bhaja Govindam...*”)

—From Bhagavan’s discourse in Sai Kulwant Hall, Prasanthi Nilayam, on 10 September 1996.