

PODCAST 91: ONE TO THREE

Om Sri Sairam

Prashanti Sandesh 91st Episode.

Thank you very much for your time.

Right from our childhood we start learning. Perhaps mother's lap is the first school of learning. Later the tiny tots start attending pre-schools, the primary schools, later the high school, and grownups attend colleges and universities. Life is a continuous process of learning, and one remains as a student in all these stages, be that primary or secondary or higher education, whatever it is.

As a student, his main responsibility is to learn from his teacher, to acquire knowledge to the extent possible. And at the college level and the university level, one acquires knowledge for one's own self. So, this knowledge is not only gained from a teacher; it is also gained by one's own effort - by reading, writing. So, knowledge is all accumulated information. Rather we can say that all that is heard and read constitute this knowledge. With this knowledge we become knowledgeable, and this knowledgeability brings respectability in the community. This is what happens.

And I would like to draw your attention to one important factor: who a teacher is? A teacher teaches as per the prescribed syllabus. A teacher has a time frame, course content, and prepares students for examinations. Once the course is over, the teacher has nothing to do with the student. After primary school, the student has got nothing to do with the primary school teachers. When he goes to the college, he is totally disconnected with the high school teachers.

Like that, after completing our studies, we are disconnected from our teachers at various levels. This is quite natural. In other words, a teacher teaches for a particular period of time, a particular course, with a particular purpose and objective. And a teacher has got a teaching time also: the first period, second period, third period. If we have five periods a day, we are exposed to five teachers. So, when the time is over, when once the bell is given, the teacher leaves the class. That's what we know about a teacher.

And this knowledge is acquired and is not based on our experience. And the teacher deals with a particular aspect, that is to pass on the information to his students, and we the students are taught in front of a teacher. So, this is the stage of a student. Learning, acquiring and becoming knowledgeable with a lot of information, to the extent possible, and that's the student life.

So, one becomes a student in front of a Divine Master also. As long as I begin to hear the talks and discourses of a Divine Master, I am just a student. I am learning what the Divine Master wants to teach or preach. So we are interested in information. We are very much interested to learn from him. This is all the student job, the first stage.

And then comes the next stage, which is the stage of a Master. While a teacher has got a prescribed syllabus, Master has no syllabus. While a teacher has got a time-bound program, Master is beyond time. A teacher goes to the next batch of students and the former batch has got nothing to do with the teacher. But the Master is not like that. He continues to be a Master till the end of our life.

Master is a master who continues, who identifies himself with you, with your career, with your development, with your progress, so and so forth. A teacher just gets into the classroom and teaches; but a Master is not only outside but is also within me. Master knows what all I am thinking, Master knows my feelings, Master knows my actions, impulses, sentiments and reactions.

So, teacher is one step, next step is that of a Master. In front of a teacher we are just students, but in front of a Master we are disciples. Disciple is the second stage and here what happens is you are caught by the Master. While we remain as 'taught' in front of teacher, but we are 'caught' by the Master. The teacher is interested to pass on the information, while the Master is interested in transforming us - transformation, not merely information.

And not only that. The Master tries to clean, clean you of all the information that you collected because the Master emphasizes on the experience, not merely accumulation. In other words, he washes your brain so that you are innocent once again, as you were in your childhood.

So, the Master is not interested in information, but he is very particular about transformation. All that you learn, all that you accumulated is not important in front of the Master. He wants you to become empty, empty. Emptiness - in the emptiness you find the wisdom, the Divinity, filling that emptiness.

So, there is wide gulf of difference between a teacher and a Master. Master follows you throughout your life. He resides in your heart. This is the stage of a disciple. And as a disciple you will not simply learn, but you want to follow your Master. You want to follow your Master in every respect.

I know some of our friends who are the disciples of their *gurus*. Some of them are dressed like their *gurus*, some of them speak like their *gurus*, and if we just keep a curtain and watch, try to listen to him behind this curtain, you will not find any difference between his Master and the disciple over here. In other words, disciple wants to emulate his example, he wants to copy his Master. He wants to follow him scrupulously, completely, unconditionally. This is the second stage.

So, a student and a teacher relationship is different from a disciple and a Master. So, a student gradually evolves into a disciple. He learns from the Divine Master in the beginning. Later he wants to follow him. "Follow the Master", that's what Bhagavan said. That is the quality of a disciple.

And then what happens is this disciple who is in the second stage, by and by, evolves into a third stage. That is a devotee. He begins as a student, then gets into the stage of disciple, and finally ends up his journey as a devotee.

Devotee is the climax of our travel, of our pilgrimage, in this process of learning or what you call training. A devotee is full of devotion, and as the disciple, flowers into a devotee. Yes! A disciple slowly, slowly, evolves into that stage of a devotee. Such that the devotee is one with the Master, is one with the Master. He is not simply following the Master. He becomes one with the Master.

Apart from that, he finds, a devotee finds his Master everywhere, in everyone. Wherever he goes, he finds his Master. Whatever he reads, he find his Master's gospel, his Master's voice. So he sees every form as his Master, as a reflection of his Master. All that he has been receiving, he thinks that is from the Divine Master himself. This is the stage of a devotee.

To give you one example, all gopis of Brindavan during Krishna Avatar could see Krishna in every form, in every form. They could see Krishna in an herb, in a shrub, in flowers, what not. In other words, that is the quality of a devotee where they find their deity, their chosen God in every form. That is the climax of our life. And then we know many of the devotees like that in the past who could see the Grace of their Master in all situations, sometimes even in odd circumstances. Therefore, this is the third step.

The first step is career as a student, as a learner. The second step is that of a disciple, a follower, and third step is that of a devotee, when he is one with the Master. He finds Master in him and he finds no difference between him and his Master. That is what we call the non-dual relationship.

In other words, I can put it this way: as a student you are separate from your teacher. This is what you call 'dualism', *Dvaita*. Then as a disciple, you follow your Master and come close to him closer and closer. You are following him; you watch his gestures in close proximity. You just observe all his gestures and all his movements, and you follow all the instructions given to you. So more than a student, a disciple is closer to the Master. This is what you call 'qualified non-dualism' or *Vishista Advaita*. And then comes the third stage of a devotee when he finds he is one with the Master. He is not separate from his Master, and Master is not separate from him. Both are one. That is 'non-dualism' or *Advaita*.

Therefore, these are three steps in spiritual learning or in the spiritual journey or spiritual travel. Begin with the student, reach the stage of a disciple, and finally end up with the career as a devotee.

What a wonderful evolution it is! What an excellent progress it is! Well, let's think of our own Sathya Sai Organizations. We have in our Sathya Sai Organization the Education Wing. The education wing aims to teach you. Education wing will make you a student. Through the education wing you will be learning, acquiring so much of knowledge. That's what education in human values meant. That's what Educare is. That's what Balvikas is. These are all the branches of the Education wing. They all

try to inculcate values in you. They disseminate that knowledge. They want you to learn and pick up. So, this is the stage of a student. Education wing makes you a student and you are the taught. We have got the experts, specially trained teachers to teach you. Yes! This is the first stage.

It doesn't end up there. You have to follow what all we have learnt. We have to put into practice all that has been taught to us. The essence of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba is service. Without service, mere learning is useless. Acquisition of knowledge is mechanical. All the knowledge has got to be put into practice by way of service, serving the poor and the needy. That's the reason why Service wing is the second step. That is the step or a stage of a disciple. The disciple follows what the Master said. "You serve," Master said. Yes! We will serve. That's all *sevadal* does. *Sevadal* follows scrupulously what all Swami directed them to do - *sevadal* training camps, *sevadal* activities, and the service activities all over the world. There they are completely implementing what all Baba said, following the instructions of Bhagavan Baba. So, this service wing will make you a good disciple.

Education wing will find in you the best of students, and the service wing will evolve you into the stage of disciple, so as to follow what all that has been instructed, what all that has been taught to you about the service activity. Service is nothing but all education in action. Education-in-action is service, or else life is just a robot, life is just a routine. So, the service wing will make you a good disciple, following instructions of Swami. And by associating ourselves with all the service activities, we are disciples.

And slowly, by and by, as we serve more and more, there comes the third stage of the Spiritual wing. The spiritual wing will take you to the third step, that is a devotee. The spiritual wing will see in you an evolution, the climax of your life, and see that you are a devotee. You can really be a devotee when you are acquainted with that spiritual wing. The spiritual wing has got so many activities, say study circle. Study circle wants you to study yourself first. As we study together, we naturally share our thoughts, share our experiences. Thus, we become more practical than theoretical.

And we do have *bhajans* in the spiritual wing that naturally makes our heart dance. Let the mind dance in joy; let me be in bliss as we sing His glory, *namasankirtan* or *bhajans*. And we also have got special camps, *sadhana* camps, where we have chances to practice meditation, where we repeat the holy *mantra*, *japa*, "Sairam Sairam" *japa*, and where we are also trained in *Jyoti Dhyana*. How to meditate? What is the procedure? So these are all taught, these are all shared with us in the spiritual wing.

The benefit is the disciple now becomes a devotee. He finds all forms are His, Baba's forms. All names are His, Baba's names. And he finds Baba in every form that he comes across. He finds Him within himself. 'Where is Sai? He resides in the altar of my heart.' That is the stage of a devotee. He feels joyful as he sings. He forgets himself in *bhajans*. And in the study circle as he begins to learn the art of self-enquiry, he gets merged in the process. Ultimately, he is totally dissolved in the process. Therefore, the step of a devotee is realized by the spiritual wing.

Thus, these three wings of Sathya Sai Organization have got a definite direction, a definite purpose: a student, educational wing; a disciple, service wing; a devotee, spiritual wing. Learning - student - educational wing. Following - disciple - service wing. Third: be one with the Master, non-identity, that "You and I are one." That is the spiritual wing. That makes us an ideal devotee.

Thus, I want to bring to your attention of all our Sai devotees, the three wings of our organization are not any way different from each other. They are not opposed to each other. One leads to the other, one is the corollary to the other; one is the stepping stone to the next. You cannot stop at one stage. If you stop by merely learning, well, you may be a good bread winner, you may be good employee with a fat pay. That's not life.

Then you should become a disciple, a follower so that once you follow, you really experience what you read. That's experimentation. You begin to experiment and experience all that you have learnt. And then as a devotee, the spiritual wing takes you to the climax of life where you find oneness with God, oneness with Bhagavan Baba.

These are the three stages which are essential in the spiritual field and that has been put into these three categories by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. What a kind of spiritual evolutionary process it is! Fantastic! Fantastic!

I only pray and beg all of you to follow these spiritual implications, the depth and the profundity behind all these three wings of our organization, and be benefited by these three wings so that we can be an ideal devotee of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Sairam, we'll meet again.