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Dedicated with love and reverence
to
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba





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Twenty Virtues Essential for Wisdom

Preface

During His sojourn on Earth, Sri Sathya Sai Baba delivered more than 2,000 discourses, most of which were subsequently compiled in *Sri Sathya Sai Speaks* and *Summer Showers*. In addition, He wrote 16 books in the *Vahini* series. You can find these at this website: <http://sssbpt.info/>.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba was born in a small village in India on November 23, 1926. He left His body on April 24, 2011, having become one of the most revered spiritual teachers in the world. He exhibited love, wisdom, and knowledge beyond our comprehension. His devotees regard Him as an incarnation of God in human form (an *Avatar*).

Sri Sathya Sai Baba did not come to establish a new religion. Instead He exhorted people to practice their own religion and to respect the differences among faiths. His mission is best described in His own words:

I have come to light the lamp of love in your hearts, to see that it shines day by day with added luster. . . . I have not come on any mission of publicity for any sect or creed or cause; nor have I come to collect followers for any doctrine. I have no plan to attract disciples or devotees into My fold or any fold. I have come to tell you of this universal unitary faith. . . . this path of love, . . . this duty of love, this obligation to love.

All religions teach one basic discipline: the removal from the mind of the blemish of egoism, of running after little joy. Every religion teaches man to fill his being with the glory of God and evict the pettiness of conceit. It trains him in the methods of detachment and discrimination so that he may aim high and attain liberation. Believe that all hearts are motivated by the One and Only God; that all faiths glorify the One and Only God; that all names in all languages and all forms man can conceive, denote the One and Only God; His adoration is best done by means of love. Cultivate that attitude of Oneness, between men of all creeds, all countries, and all continents. That is the message of love I bring. That is the message I wish you to take to heart.

His discourses and writings focused on what He had come to give us: a path toward realizing our own Selves, toward realizing and experiencing the oneness of all creation. His discourses and writings are filled with simple explanations of how we should live and how we should treat our fellow humans in order to further ourselves along the path to enlightenment.

We are pleased to offer our readers *Divine Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba*, Volume 7. It includes the topic, “Twenty Virtues Essential for Wisdom.” The discourse is selected from *Geetha Vahini* and the reference is provided.

In one of His Divine discourses Sri Sathya Sai Baba said: “Practice what I teach. That is enough. That is all I ask.” Let us imbibe His words, apply them in daily practice, and find fulfillment in life.



Twenty Virtues Essential for Wisdom

The following are highlights of the full quotations that begin on page 10.

- (1) *Humility—the Absence of Pride: As long as you have pride, you cannot earn wisdom.*
- (2) *Absence of Vanity: It means the absence of pretense, pompousness, boasting that one is great when one is not, claiming that one has power when one has nothing, that one has authority when one has no such title.*
- (3) *Non-violence: Violence is not simply physical; it means even more.*
- (4) *Patience, Fortitude: You should consider as unreal the evil others do unto you, the loss you suffer through them, the hatred they evince toward you.*
- (5) *Integrity: It means the agreement of action, speech, and thought and applies to secular and spiritual activity.*
- (6) *Reverential Service Rendered to the Spiritual Teacher: This virtue will promote affection for the pupil, so one will benefit a great deal.*
- (7) *Cleanliness: Not merely outer cleanliness but inner cleanliness. And what is inner cleanliness? The absence of affection and hatred, of desire and discontent, of lust and anger; and the presence of good, i.e., godly, qualities.*
- (8) *Steadfastness: Fixity of faith, the absence of fickleness or waywardness. Aspirants must hold fast to what they have once fixed their faith upon as conducive to their spiritual progress. They should not flit from one ideal to another, changing their goal from day to day.*
- (9) *Control of the Senses: Be convinced that the senses have to subserve your best interests, not that you should subserve the interests of the senses.*
- (10) *Detachment: Detachment or renunciation—the loss of appetite for sound, touch, form, taste, smell, etc. The senses run after these things because they titillate and give them temporary joy.*
- (11) *Absence of Egotism: Egotism is the breeding ground for all vices and faults. The ego-centric individual pays no regard to right and wrong, good and bad, godly and wicked. That person doesn't care for them, doesn't even know about them.*

(12) Awareness of Birth-Death-Senility-Illness-Grief: It means the awareness of the inevitable cycle of birth and death, of senility and disease, of grief and evil, and of other signs of the temporariness of this created world and life in it.

(13) Withdrawal of Desire from Objects: Withdraw the mind and treat all as manifestations of the Lord's glory. Love all things as expressions of His glory, but do not delude yourself into the belief that possessing them will make you happy. That is an illusion.

(14) Absence of Clinging to Family and Home: Before birth, one has no relationship with this world and its material objects. After death, they and all kith and kin disappear. This sojourn is just a game played in the interval. Getting fascinated with this three-day fair is foolish indeed.

(15) Equanimity: It means undisturbed peace during joy and grief, prosperity and adversity, happiness and misery. Being elevated or depressed by success and defeat, profit and loss, honor and dishonor is a futile activity. Accept all equally as the grace of God.

(16) Devotion: It is the unbroken contemplation of God without any other interposing thought or feeling. Whatever the activity, recreation, or talk, it must be saturated with the love of God. That is undivided, undistracted devotion.

(17) Dwelling in Solitude: One must be fond of being alone. This does not mean keeping the body in some solitary place, far from the haunts of humanity. There must be solitude and silence in the mind; all its occupants must be forced or persuaded to quit.

(18) Absence of Interest in the Company of Others: This means the absence of interest in the company of people, that is to say, absence of the desire to mix with people engrossed in affairs that concern the objective world. Spiritual discipline will be affected by the company you keep. Good people keep you good; bad people drag you away into badness.

(19) Awareness of the Distinction between Atma and Anatma: Fix your consciousness always on the Atmic Reality and discard the body and senses as unreal and impermanent. Atma is the Eternal, so establish yourself only in that and not in the transient non-Atmic illusions or objects.

(20) Vision of the True Nature of That: The twentieth and last qualification one has to earn is "vision of the true nature of 'That (Thath)' (Thathwa-jnana-darsanam),"

the Universal Principle of which the particular is but a shadow. It means that the spiritual aspirant should have a keen desire to visualize the universal.



Twenty Virtues Essential for Wisdom

Arjuna asked, “Oh Lord! You said that twenty virtues are essential for becoming entitled to wisdom. What are they? Please describe them to me in some detail.”

“Arjuna! I am delighted at your earnestness,” said Krishna. “Listen.”

(1) Humility—the Absence of Pride

“The first virtue is humility, the absence of pride. As long as you have pride, you cannot earn wisdom. A person’s behavior should be like the behavior of water; whatever color you pour into water, it absorbs it and never asserts its own color. It is humble without conceit. But now the behavior of people is quite contrary. When they do the smallest service or donate the slightest amount, they are anxious for people to know about it. For this, they go about prattling or arranging to get it published. The absence of such pride and ambition is what is recommended as humility.”

(2) Absence of Vanity

“The second is absence of vanity. This is a very great virtue in people. It means the absence of pretense, pompousness, boasting that one is great when one is not, claiming that one has power when one has nothing, that one has authority when one has no such title.”

Here, readers will note one point. The world today is full of this false pretense, this hypocrisy. Whichever field of activity you watch, whomever you observe, you discover this dire defect. The governments of nations are in the hands of people who are pretenders to power, authority, and capacity. Those with no knowledge claim to know everything. Those with no one even to help them at home claim that they have a huge following.

In every activity, this hypocrisy is the very first step. It ruins people in every field, like a pest that destroys the crop. If this hypocrisy is wiped away, the world will be saved from disaster. Pretense will make you lose this world and the next. It is harmful at all times and places. It does not suit ordinary people; how can it then be beneficial to the spiritual aspirant?

(3) Non-violence

“The third virtue is non-violence (*ahimsa*). This also is an important virtue. Violence is not simply physical; it means even more: the mental pain that is inflicted, the anxiety and worry that are caused to others by your actions and words. If you desist from causing physical pain to others, you cannot claim to have non-violence. Your activities must not cause pain and must be unselfish. Your thoughts, words, and deeds must all be free from any motive to cause such pain.”

(4) Patience, Fortitude

“The fourth is *kshama* (forbearance). This is called *kshanthi*, as well as *sahana* (putting up with something). It means that you should consider as unreal the evil others do unto you, the loss you suffer through them, the hatred they evince toward you. Treat these as you treat a mirage. That is to say, you must develop that degree of patience or fortitude. It is not the helpless putting up with the evil that others do because you are powerless to retaliate. It is the expression of the peace that reigns in the heart, this outer behavior.” It is true that many people put up with the injury that others inflict because they lack physical, economic, or popular support; this suffering cannot be honored as real *kshama*.

(5) Straightforwardness, Integrity, Sincerity

“Next, let us consider the fifth: straightforwardness, integrity, sincerity. It means the agreement of action, speech, and thought; this applies to secular and spiritual activity. This is a facet of the second virtue, absence of vanity.”

(6) Reverential Service Rendered to the Spiritual Teacher

“The sixth is reverential service rendered to the spiritual teacher. This virtue will promote affection for the pupil, so one will benefit a great deal. But the *guru* who has no goal will only mislead the disciple into perdition. The *guru* must shower grace on the disciple as freely and as spontaneously as the mother cow feeds the young calf with milk. The teaching of the *guru* is the source and sustenance for attaining God and acquiring liberation.”

(7) Cleanliness

“The seventh virtue is cleanliness (*soucham*)—not merely outer cleanliness but inner cleanliness. And what is inner cleanliness? The absence of affection and hatred, of desire and discontent, of lust and anger; and the presence of good, i.e.,

godly, qualities. Water cleans the body; truth cleans the mind. Knowledge cleans the reasoning faculty; penance and discipline clean the individual.”

(8) Steadfastness

“The eighth virtue is called steadfastness (*sthairyam*), fixity of faith, the absence of fickleness or waywardness. Aspirants must hold fast to what they have once fixed their faith upon as conducive to their spiritual progress. They should not flit from one ideal to another, changing their goal from day to day. This is also referred to as dedication. Fickleness, the product of weakness, has to be scrupulously avoided.”

(9) Control of the Senses

“The ninth is control of the senses. Be convinced that the senses have to subserve your best interests, not that you should subserve the interests of the senses. Do not be the slave of the senses; rather make them your slaves.”

(10) Detachment

“Next, the tenth virtue: detachment or renunciation (*vairagya*),—the loss of appetite for sound, touch, form, taste, smell, etc. The senses run after these things because they titillate and give them temporary joy. However, the senses are not interested in the goals—virtue-wealth-desire-liberation of the sublime type. The *Atma* (Divine Self) can be discovered only through pursuit of the sublime.”

(11) Absence of Egotism

“The eleventh virtue is absence of egotism—the breeding ground of all vices and faults. The ego-centric individual pays no regard to right and wrong, good and bad, godly and wicked. That person doesn’t care for them, doesn’t even know about them. That person is completely ignorant of *dharma* (righteousness) and morals and will not conform to justice. To be devoid of this poisonous quality is to be endowed with absence of egotism. Egotism is a foe in the guise of a friend.”

(12) Awareness of Birth-Death-Senility-Illness-Grief

“The next virtue is called *janma-mrithyu-jaraa-vyadhi-dukha-dhosha-anudarsanam*, meaning only this: awareness of the inevitable cycle of birth and death, of senility and disease, of grief and evil, and of other signs of the temporariness of this created world and life in it. Although people see these things

happening to them as well as others, they do not investigate the reasons for them and the methods of escaping from them. That is the greatest mystery, the wonder.

“If only you go to the root of the problem, you will realize that whatever else you may escape, you cannot escape death. What people conceive as happiness now is, in reality, only misery in the guise of happiness. So understand the truth of these things; reflect upon the flaws in the reasoning that delude you. Then, as a result, detachment is strengthened, and through that, you attain wisdom. Therefore, Oh Arjuna! Liberate yourself from birth, death, senility, illness, and grief (*janma, mrithyu, jaraa, vyadhi, dukha*).” Thus spoke Krishna, exhorting Arjuna with a great deal of affection.

(13) Withdrawal of Desire from Objects

Then He spoke of the withdrawal of desire from objects, the absence of yearning. The greed to possess things that you see is caused by egotism. “I must have this,” “I must be the proud owner of this valuable thing,” this is how egotism prompts. It is a strong cord that binds you to objects. Withdraw the mind and treat all as manifestations of the Lord’s glory.

Love all things as expressions of His glory, but do not delude yourself into the belief that possessing them will make you happy. That is an illusion. Do not dedicate your life for their sake; use them for your needs, as and when necessary, that is all. That kind of impulse activating you will be a great handicap in your progress toward liberation. Whatever you may acquire as property will have to be given up some day. On that last journey, you cannot take with you even a blade of grass or a pinch of dust. Keep this fact ever before the mind’s eye and then you can realize Reality.

(14) Absence of Clinging to Family and Home

Before birth, one has no relationship with this world and its material objects. After death, they and all kith and kin disappear. This sojourn is just a game played in the interval. Getting fascinated with this three-day fair is foolish indeed. Desire tarnishes the mind and makes people unfit for higher pursuits. Aspirants who seek liberation and realization must rid themselves of desire, for, like grease, once contacted it sticks and is difficult to remove.

(15) Equanimity

After this, attention has to be paid also to another virtue, *samathwasthithi*, the state of equanimity, of undisturbed peace during joy and grief, prosperity and adversity, happiness and misery. This is the fifteenth virtue of a wise one (*jnani*). Being elevated or depressed by success and defeat, profit and loss, honor and dishonor is a futile activity. Accept all equally as the grace of God, His *prasada* (sacrament or Divine gift). Just as you wear shoes to tread over thorny places, or hold an umbrella to escape getting wet in rain, or sleep inside a mosquito curtain to escape the stings of insects, so too, arm yourself with an unshaken mind that is confident of the Lord's grace and bear praise or blame, defeat or victory, pleasure or pain with equanimity. To live bravely through life, this equanimity under all circumstances is declared essential.

(16) Devotion

Next is *bhakthi* (devotion) without any other thought or feeling, *ananya bhakthi*. When grief overtakes you, you run to God. When trouble overpowers, you take refuge in the Lord of Venkata. When joy is restored, you throw Him overboard. When you are down with fever and your taste is ruined and your tongue is bitter, you crave for some hot pickle; but when the fever subsides and you are normal again, you do not relish the same pickle. Devotion is not a temporary salve. It is the unbroken contemplation of God without any other interposing thought or feeling. Whatever the activity, recreation, or talk, it must be saturated with the love of God. That is *ananya bhakthi*.

(17) Dwelling in Solitude

Thereafter comes dwelling in solitude (*ekantha-vasam*). One must be fond of being alone. This does not mean keeping the body in some solitary place, far from the haunts of humanity. There must be solitude and silence in the mind; all its occupants must be forced or persuaded to quit. The mind should be contentless (*nir-vishaya*), turned away from the objective world.

(18) Absence of Interest in the Company of People

The eighteenth virtue that helps to promote wisdom is mentioned as absence of interest in the company of people, that is to say, absence of the desire to mix with people engrossed in affairs that concern the objective world. One can attain equanimity even in the midst of wild animals, but it is difficult to win it while

among worldly minded ones. Spiritual discipline will be affected by the company you keep. Good people keep you good; bad people drag you away into badness.

Of course, it is hard to find out who are good and who are bad and then settle among the good. So, it is advisable to avoid people and concentrate on spiritual discipline. The human mind is like iron; if it falls into mud, it rusts and disintegrates; if it falls into fire, it loses dross and becomes pure. Therefore, joining the company of wise people is better than being in solitude.

Note how Narada, who was the son of a housemaid, became a sage because he fell in the company of good people; Ratnakara, who was a cruel hunter, got the company of the seven sages, so he was transformed into the first among poets, the *adi-kavi*. Evil company is highly detrimental. A red-hot iron ball is capable of causing more damage than a flame of fire; a sinful one is more to be avoided than sin itself. Aspirants have to be vigilant about the company they keep.

(19) Awareness of the Distinction between *Atma* and *Anatma*

The nineteenth virtue is “awareness of the distinction between *Atma* and *Anatma*. Fix your consciousness always on the Atmic Reality, and discard the body and senses as unreal and impermanent. *Atma* is the Eternal, so establish yourself only in that and not in the transient non-Atmic illusions or objects. Life is a struggle to achieve victory over the illusion that haunts: I am the eternal *Atma* in you and in all. So fix the mind on Me and engage yourself in the struggle, confident of victory.”

(20) Vision of the True Nature of That

The twentieth and last qualification one has to earn is “vision of the true nature of ‘That (*Thath*)’ (*Thathwa-jnana-darsanam*),” the Universal Principle of which the particular is but a shadow. It means that the spiritual aspirant should have a keen desire to visualize the universal.

Of the above-mentioned twenty virtues, if honest efforts are made to earn even two or three, the rest will come naturally to the seeker. No special effort is needed to earn them. As progress is made on the path, one acquires not only the twenty, but even a larger number of virtues. The twenty are mentioned here because they are the outstanding ones, that is all. Spiritual discipline based on these virtues takes one easily to the goal. That is why Krishna emphasized these.

Equipped with these, one can realize the Self; there need be no doubt on that, for they lead to the knowledge that the body, the senses, the intelligence, the inner consciousness—all are affiliated with the *prakriti* aspect. And one who is distinct from all this is the *Purusha*. *Purusha* is the one who is aware of the body (*kshetra*), the knower of the body (*kshetrajna*). When one is able to distinguish between *purusha* and *prakriti* or, which is the same thing, between *kshetra* and *kshetrajna*, one becomes the witness and is free from all touch of want or wish.

Geetha Vahini, Chapter XXIII.



Glossary

For a comprehensive translation of Sanskrit words into English, please go to the following website: <http://sssbt.info/vahiniglossary/entries.htm>





Twenty Virtues Essential for Wisdom

Sri Sathya Sai Baba, one of the most revered spiritual leaders in the world and regarded as an incarnation of God in human form by His devotees, delivered more than 2,000 discourses, most of which are compiled in *Sri Sathya Sai Speaks* and *Summer Showers*. He also wrote articles for His devotees in the spiritual monthly *Sanathana Sarathi*, which were later published in 16 books under the *Vahini* series. This compilation of Divine Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Volume 7, contains the topic “Twenty Virtues Essential for Wisdom” selected from *Geetha Vahini*. Sri Sathya Sai says: “The twenty virtues are the outstanding ones... Spiritual discipline based on these virtues takes one easily to the goal. That is why Krishna emphasized these.”

