

The Perennial Philosophy,
otherwise known as The Eternal Way
(known by the Hindus as *Sanathana Dharma*)

An introduction to the eternal Philosophy of Truth,
as essentially contained in all religions.

Unrestricted Distribution



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Preface

We argue amongst ourselves as to whether he or she is an atheist or agnostic. Interestingly, Bhagwan Sathya Sai Baba has said:

I do not insist that a person should have faith in God. I refuse to call any person an atheist. Beings exist as a result of His will, in accordance with His plan; so no one is beyond His Grace. Besides, every one has love towards some one thing or the other, and that love is a spark of the Divine. Everyone has ultimately to base his life on some Truth; that Truth is God. No life can be lived out in complete defiance of the Truth. One has to pay heed to truth and speak the Truth to some one in order to make life worth living. Now, that moment is God's Moment and at that moment when he utters the Truth, or loves, or serves or bends, he is a theist (Believer in God).

The nature of Truth – what it is and where to find it – has been a tantalising question amongst philosophers for millennia. This simple booklet is intended to straight-forwardly introduce the true nature of philosophy (anciently meaning "the study of wisdom" (Sophia)) with the hope of uncovering something related to the matter of Truth.

The words are not mine, although I have in a few cases modified the text to improve the English, but without changing the meaning. The words are taken from a "Sai Vision Programme" produced in 1995 by the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation of Australia and Papua New Guinea, to whom all credit must be given for accurately extracting the essence of various Christmas Discourses made by Sri Sathya Sai Baba between 1972 and 1994. The words in this booklet are a précis of Bhagwan's words; not a transcript.

Bhagwan Sathya Sai Baba, in his discourses, explained in great detail the nature of Jesus' mission and how we should abide by the meaning of Jesus' teachings. The discourses relate clearly, however, to how Jesus' teachings are the essence of all religions, for do not all the great religions accept the great spirituality of Jesus?

Philosophy is not meant to be studied as a hard, academic and solely intellectual activity. The Greeks Socrates and Plato were inclined to discuss philosophy in its practical context, and Pythagoras is believed to have been in direct contact with Indian civilisation, from whom he gained the knowledge of Pi.

Bhagwan Sathya Sai Baba has often mentioned that great teachers have existed on earth from time immemorial to teach "according to time and place" – i.e. according to the understanding and culture of the people of the time and place. Bhagwan's teaching on this echoes that of the great Sufis. To this day, various Sufi *tariqas* exist in different forms, each teaching "according to time and place".

Bhagwan has stated that a list of the "great teachers" would include the names of Rama, Krishna, Socrates, Plato, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Mohammed, Nanak and, of course, Jesus (also known as Isa to Muslims and others). At first glance, the teachings of these incarnations might appear to have differences, but when taking into account the concept of "according to time and place", the essence of the teachings is surprisingly similar.

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Let there be Unity in Diversity!

John Lerwill

London
July, 2002

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Essential Truth

Differences in the approach towards identifying the nature of Truth by sincere and committed seekers has given rise to six principal schools of Indian Metaphysics (*Sad darsanas*). But their goal, the Ultimate and Essential Truth, is one and the same. However, all these schools of metaphysics are being neglected in favour of materialistic doctrine all over the world.

Materialism enunciates that consciousness (*Chaitanyam*) has evolved out of finite matter, while the spiritual view declares that matter is inert and finite, and cannot give rise to infinite Atma that animates all matter. The Vedas declare that consciousness constitutes three quarters of the universe while matter makes up only a quarter of the universe (*Tripaado yaam-ruti divi*). This view is expressed in the Bhagavad Gita as "The roots are high up, the branches are below" (*Oordhva moolam Adhah-saakha*). It is our everyday experience that behind all the machines is human intelligence, and matter by itself is inert.

Humans are the highest expression of creation, for in us consciousness can express itself fully. This means that our life is an opportunity of progressing from human nature (*nara*) to Divine (*Narayana*) by breaking our shackles of thoughts and attachment to the material. The Cosmos is permeated with Brahman (*Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat*). This means all we see is Divine. Every place is a shrine of the Divine; every tree is a wish-fulfilling tree (*Kalpavriksha*). What separates us from God is our own likes and dislikes. We cannot achieve God realization through spiritual exercises, rituals and offerings. These only purify our mind and eliminate our ego. But such purification enables us to grasp our goal, which is to become continuously aware of the Oneness Principle - the Omnipresent Divinity that is within all beings.

Both Christianity and Hinduism advocate the practice of confession and repentance. Instead, we should cultivate a spirit of enquiry and commitment to Truth as illustrated by Socrates and Jesus. Both of them set no value to property, possessions or their own lives relative to their commitment to Truth. Jesus' advice to the materialistic was to give up all wealth and to accumulate God's grace through love and service of fellow man.

This message is particularly relevant today. We pursue all sorts of wealth - of scholarship, recognition, money, power, physical health, but we do not seek the wealth of God's love. Jesus taught a new way of life based on faith in God and redemption - not through repentance, but through service and love. Jesus revealed to St. Paul "Every man is a spark of the Divine. When you hate Me, you are hating yourself and hating God", and turned him from an inveterate critic to an ardent disciple who was instrumental in turning Rome, the headquarter of Christian persecution, into the seat of the Catholic church.

Jesus taught that God can be realized only through love. When accused of wrong teachings and of claims of being King of the Jews, He asserted that the Kingdom of Heaven was within everyone. His courage to speak out came from His commitment to truth, which in turn arose from love and faith in God.

In the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Easwara is represented the All-Pervading Infinite Divine Love in the human heart. Easwara symbolises

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spiritual heart, the *Atmic* principle representing Divinity and the boundless love. Vishnu represents the mind, which arises from the heart and is all-pervading. Brahma represents *Aham* (' I ') which arises from the mind. When we regard our ego ' I ' as Brahma, then our thoughts and actions are sanctified and mind becomes an instrument of liberation. Only when the mind is pure can we experience Divinity.

We must establish the deep conviction that God is in us. By so doing - we shall progress from a state of separation through recognising the potential of God realization and finally become one with the Divine. Jesus progressed from "I am a Messenger of God" to "I am Son of God" and finally to "My Father and I are One".

If we want bliss we have to give up our pre-occupation with "mine" and "thine". We are all children of one God. One who has love of God, fears sin and leads a moral life. This triune principle promotes purity of thought, word and deed (*Thrikarana Suddhi*). It is imperative we cultivate universal love - no religion has spoken against love.

Summary:

Underlying the creation is God consciousness. This is the Truth which is inexpressible and has been developed into various philosophical systems. However, at present the world is in the grips of materialistic doctrine. Spirituality insists that all matter is activated by Divine Consciousness, that human beings are the highest form of creation because we have the capacity of evolving towards the Divine Consciousness and becoming one with It. Jesus set no store by material riches. He taught that the Kingdom of Heaven is within. The same concept is represented in Hinduism in the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Easwara (Maheswara). We are inseparable from the Divine. This conviction takes us along the path of inner evolution. External worship and rituals and ostentation of wealth, power and position do not give us any real benefit. It is through the love of God that we learn to fear sin and lead a moral life. This promotes purity of thought, word and deed and prepares us for God realisation. We must ever strengthen the love within arising from the conviction that Love is God.

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Self Knowledge

We are linked to the most distant planet in the whole of creation through our origins in Brahman. The five elements - space (*Akasa*), Air (*Vayu*) Fire (*Agni*), Water (*Aapa*) and earth (*Prithvi*) - are a series of progressively more and more gross manifestations of Brahman. We are made up of the food (*Anna maya Kosa*), Vital (*Prana mayaKosa*), Mind (*Mana mayaKosa*), discrimination (*Vignana maya Kosa*) and Bliss (*Ananda maya Kosa*) "sheaths". Bliss is our very core, and of all the beings humans are the only one who can make direct contact with the bliss sheath.

However, for this we need to make the right choices. If we do not exercise our *buddhi* (discriminatory reasoning) our consciousness remains at the level of the mind with its multiplying desires, and we spend our life in frustration rather than in bliss. This means we need to cultivate awareness of Divinity or the Bliss within. Our character has to be rooted in Faith and Truth. Jesus, in His divine teachings, emphasised the importance of Faith. Hindus and Muslims also subscribe to similar views. All the faiths embody elements of practice of Truth and this finds expression even in the form of our greetings. But practice of Truth means inner integrity. It must find expression in unity of thought, word and deed. It cannot be petty, divisive or small-minded.

Jesus proclaimed God to be all-powerful and Omnipresent. His message is universal and does not breakdown mankind into fragments living in friction and conflict. He progressed in His life from being a Messenger of God, to Son of God, and eventually He affirmed 'I and my Father are one'. Jesus advised Peter, his foremost apostle, to live in love, for love is God. We cannot experience God except when we become embodiment of Divine, unconditional love. Peter found immense joy within. "Joy" can be used to stand for "Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last". This path of love is highlighted in all religions and links God, Nature and Man. This means we must respect all creeds and faiths - they are all various paths to the Universal Absolute.

Karma, *Bhakti* and *Jnana* are three paths that lead to the discovery of One without a second (*Adwaita Darsanam*) - that of unity in diversity. The three paths represent our three duties to ourselves - disinterested service, dedication and devotion to God, so that we can achieve constant awareness of God. Jesus showed that we have to sanctify our body through service - this is our supreme purpose. We have not been given this body to cater to our own selfish vagaries. We have to develop the capacity to sacrifice all that we cling to - if necessary even our body while upholding Truth and right conduct. This was exemplified by Jesus and Rama. Faith in God is the bedrock on which our life should be based. Jesus exhorted His disciples to desist from hating His tormentors. He advised "All are one, my son! Be alike to everyone". Buddha, too, was able to turn a demoness into a dove with love.

God is Omnipresent - we do not have to go on pilgrimages to discover Him. He is everywhere. We have to develop the firm conviction of His Omnipresence. All our *Sadhana* - meditation and prayers - are to purify ourselves so that our mind becomes capable of grasping subtle truths. *Sadhana* does not lead to God realization - only unwavering faith does. So faith in the Truth, practise of inner integrity and unity in thought, word and deed is the pathway to God.

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Summary:

The emphasis is on the central role of faith in our inner evolution. The very first requisite is for us to look upon the universe as permeated by God. This endows us with the capacity to stand up both to the temptations within and forces of evil around us. Our *Sadhana* (spiritual practise) purifies us so we can become capable of grasping this Truth. Jesus demonstrated the power of faith by His life - He forgave even His tormentors who crucified Him because He saw God in them. He inspired St. Paul and Peter with His own faith and made them foremost apostles of love. His vision was universal and all encompassing. The Omnipresence of God links us to everything in the universe in deep and fundamental kinship. This is the message of all religions.

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Oneness in Multiplicity

The Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent God has been glorified with different names in different religions, which have been established to foster sacred qualities in us of unity, fellow feelings and devotion. These qualities are essential for us to develop our human personality and to bring out our humanness. These qualities connect us with our community with the human race, with the whole of creation and with God.

Love, Sacrifice, Service and Righteousness are four limbs of all religions. Through these the religions bring out the sublime in man and evoke goodness and bliss. The object of all religions is sacred and noble and religions are the undercurrents that sustain humanity. The founders of various religions laid down rules of conduct to propagate these subtle secrets.

Buddhism declares that we can eliminate delusions and secure purity only by adhering to Truth and Non-Violence. Christianity proclaims that we are all children of God and we should be "alike to everyone". We are all members of one family and our prayer is the best means of securing inner peace and security in the society we live, says Islam. Manu, in his *Dharma Sastra*, laid down that "One must be prepared to sacrifice his body for his community and his community for the sake of the nation" (*Thyajethdeham Kulasyaarthe; Kulum janapadaschaarthe*). The Upanishads emphasize oneness of humanity "All eyes are God's; all feet are His; all hands are His" (*Sahasrakshas - sahasrapaad*). All religions advocate that we have to cultivate a sense of community if we wish to live in peace and happiness. "*Sahanaa vavathu; sahanau bhunakthu; sahaviryam karavaavaha*" - Let us live together, let us struggle together, let us grow together in joy and harmony.

Truth is a fundamental principle in all religions. We should honour our pledges, regard our words as our life-breath and our promises are our greatest treasure - this was the primary teaching of Manu. Plato attached the greatest importance to Truth, Beauty and Goodness and this is described as Sathyam, Sivam Sundaram in the Vedas. "*Sarvam khalu idam Brahma*" - The cosmos is permeated by Vishnu ("*Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat*"). The Vedas declared that Divinity is not only the basis of human life but of entire creation. This universal, all-embracing sacred declaration embodies the concept of social justice for all beings.

All religions aim at the unity and well being of society. They show that our way of self-realization is through social involvement. All religions preach purity and adherence to Truth. They proclaim that good qualities are essential for us. They all teach oneness and equality (*Samathvam*). They have all the same goal - but the paths are different. Rules and regulations differ in different religions because the specific needs of the times and circumstances when the founders of the religions came with their missions were different. But this does not mean that one religion is superior or inferior to the other. However, over the years interpretation of teachings have become narrow. This has tended to promote strife and discord between followers of different religions.

We generally believe that those well-versed in the Scripture are holy ("*Pandita*"). But mere verbal skill does not entitle us to use this title. Pandits are those who have successfully cultivated universal vision ("*Pandithaah Samadarsinah*", declares Gita). We must look at all religions with this

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universal vision of equality and love. We must strive to inculcate in ourselves the sweetness of all of them.

The essence of all religions is Oneness, the fundamental principle of Love. Religion is often regarded as a cause of conflict, violence and bitterness. But on analysis we find it is not the religion (*matham*) but selfish minds (*mathulu*) that are the real cause of strife, which in fact is not confined to people professing different faiths - but can also affect people with the same faith. This we see in a great number of areas on globe. Thus religion is exploited for political ends by selfish people who may even incite conflict and violence. Even schisms and sects are not formed by the founders of the religions but by the followers who quarrel amongst themselves because of selfish interests. If we are seriously committed to securing peace, we should have no antipathy to any faith. We should hold the view that:

- (i) Virtue and morality (*neethi*) are above belongingness to any community (*faathi*)
- (ii) Good feelings are more important than religious beliefs
- (iii) Mutual regard (*mamatha*), equal mindedness (*samatha*) and forbearance (*kshamatha*) are basic qualities necessary ; for us to be able to express our humanity.

We must live harmoniously and learn to serve society without considering individuals or communal interests. The Vedas have emphatically declared that Immortality can only be won through sacrifice (*thyaga*) and no other means. We should learn to sacrifice our narrowness, our pettiness and our prejudices, and surrender ourselves to Love.

Christmas should not be celebrated with over-indulgence in eating, drinking, dancing and wasting time. It should be celebrated as it is in Prashanti Nilayam, where people gather from various countries with different faiths, different cultures and different religions to adore God in a holy atmosphere with love and understanding and sharing of bliss. The birthday of Christ, Krishna, Buddha, and Prophet Mohammed are universal days of celebration for all of mankind, not just a small segment of humanity who aspire to a particular religion. We should be happy and grateful to these Great Beings for uplifting humanity, to raising us to higher levels of awareness.

Gratitude is our very life-breath. Devotion and dedication are expressions of gratitude to the Lord who has given us this creation. This is the main message of all the Scriptures - but it is not enough merely to read the Scriptures, learn them by rote and preach. We have to put the teachings into practice. Both Socrates and Prophet Mohammed demonstrated the principles of right conduct by their lives of scrupulous honesty. They insisted that we have to honour our promises and our words. We should not leave undischarged debts when we leave this mortal body - both of them cleared up even small and relatively insignificant debts.

All religions emphasise the values of truth, sacrifice and unity. We should live in unity. Community prayers are preferable to individual prayers, and prayers from a group following different faiths, but joined in unison melt the heart of God. They are more effective and reach God, because in any large group there is bound to be at least one sincere devotee with a pure heart.

Of all the names of God, *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is to be cherished the most - it represents Truth, Wisdom, Bliss. We realize Him through Bliss, which we

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achieve through Wisdom and Love. We should follow the path of love, get rid of differences of religion - without giving up our faiths and traditions. Love is present in all - it is the unifier, the motivator, the bringer of joy. We have to develop love, for without love even our prayers are of no use.

Summary:

The basis of any religion is unity, devotion and fellow feelings. These qualities foster our humanness, connect us with others and with Divinity. Swami concentrates on the common goal of all religions which is to attain Oneness through elevating our consciousness to that of Omnipresent God. Oneness is the only genuine basis of social justice for all beings. We cannot attain this level of awareness by merely becoming well-versed in the scriptures but by cultivating a universal vision. This means that virtue and morality, good feelings, mutual regard, equal mindedness and forbearance are above any sectional interest advanced on the basis of quotations from the scriptures. Of all the qualities we have to foster for our spiritual advancement gratitude is the most important. Indeed devotion and dedication are merely expression of gratitude to the Lord for His beneficence. Swami emphasises that community prayers are preferable to individual prayers, and prayers from a multifaith group joined in unison are specially effective in reaching God. God is called by a variety of names in different religions. Of all the names, *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Truth, Wisdom, Bliss) is to be cherished the most because we realize Him through Bliss, which we achieve through Wisdom and Love.

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Spiritual Oneness

All religions are based on the truth of the oneness of Spirit (*Atmatathva*). They teach what is good for the whole of humanity and we should practice our religion (whichever it may be) with this awareness. They are all based equally on the fundamental doctrine of Truth - thus one religion is not superior to another. Messiahs and prophets have come to different parts of the world at different times bringing the same message in the context of contemporary problems. All religions promote love, sacrifice, compassion, morality and integrity. All are aspects of unity in Diversity. The undercurrent that sustains all religions is that the One Spirit dwells in all beings (*Eko vaasi Sarvabootha antharaatma*).

The Ultimate Reality is one but our mental equipment gives It apparent multiplicity. We have to develop spiritual oneness (*Ekaatma bhaava*) as this is the Ultimate Reality and the very core of all the religions. This Oneness is expressed in different religions in the rituals used in greetings. The Hindus greet (*Namaskar*) with folded palms. In the Muslim greeting of "Salaam", Sa refers to Seeing Divine (*Saalokyam*), having a vision of Divine (*Saaroopyam*) coming near Divine (*Saameepyam*) and merging in Divine (*Saayujyam*). Christians use the term *Esu*, which stands for seeing Divine in all beings.

The Jains use the term *Jina* (Victor) for one who has overcome the pull of his senses. Buddhism teaches radiation of love to all beings. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) is the natural outcome of Universal love. Thus all religions teach love and unity, all are spiritually one.

Religion teaches self-discipline
and promotes one's self-being;
It enhances one's spiritual power
and makes one effulgent;
if people live without knowing
Its inner secret
The community and its culture
decline and suffer.

This verse affirms that religion is a basic need for us - it teaches self-discipline, promotes well-being, enhances spiritual power, and without it community and culture decline and disintegrate. In the latter part of the Discourse Swami returns to this theme. He emphasises that lasting human happiness is not found in the pursuit of external conditions and experiences but in cultivating self-sufficiency. We are made up of five sheaths, two gross and three subtle. We are, in fact, a product of the mind because our thoughts (mind), lead to (bodily) action. The world is in a sorry state of affairs because our thoughts and actions are neither great nor noble. We have narrow attitudes, we have lost awareness of the basic goal of our religion and we poison our minds with our differences.

Messiahs and Avatars manifest themselves on earth for leading mankind to genuine humanness. Jesus came at a time of spiritual crisis amongst the Jews. He displayed divine qualities of compassion, love and sacrifice from His birth and early childhood. Three kings visited Him at the time of His birth and declared one by one that He would be a Messenger of God, that He will be Son of God and that He will become one with God. "Messenger of God" is one who

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comprehends His purpose in life, "Son of God" is one who appears Divine to others, and "One with God" is one who lives in consonance with his True nature, i.e. in deepest identity with God. Jesus promoted teachings of compassion, sympathy, love, sacrifice and fellowship. He was called Christ, which means "chosen" Messenger of God.

The message of Christ and the subsequent creation of and growth in Christianity resulted in Christianity becoming a State religion under Emperor Constantine. But with this growth also came schisms and then decline in spirituality. Because we have a human body does not automatically confer the title of human beings on us. Divinity, humanness, demonic and animal states are four possibilities of our conscious state:

- (i) When we are steadily immersed in the contemplation of God, are righteous, pure and have universal love, we are divine - "*Brahmanishtaratho devah*".
- (ii) When we are wedded to Truth - we adhere to righteous action and practice our Dharma we are genuinely human - "*Sathyanithyaratho marthyah*".
- (iii) When we drink alcohol, eat meat, are selfish, have evil motives and actions, lead a sensuous life, we are demonic - "*madhyapaanorathah daanavah*."
- (iv) When our life is devoted to eating, sleeping, and sexual indulgence with no understanding of our tremendous opportunities and possibilities, we are animals who enjoy only an organic living - "*Pasubhis samaanah*".

We should recognize that only animals are content with satisfaction arising solely from indulgence in sensual appetites. Pleasure from sensory experience is not enduring. As humans we have the capacity of enduring bliss. But this is derived from within our own self. There is no external source of this bliss. We experience this when we rise above the animal through steadily declaring "I am human, not an animal". We need this double conviction to assert our humanness and to ascend towards Divinity.

Where there is Love, there is Peace
Where there is Peace, there is Truth
Where there is Truth, there is Bliss
Where there is Bliss, there is God.

Faith and Love are fundamentally connected - we have to cultivate both of these. Without these all worship is useless. Everything grows out of love - it reveals to us our true nature, it confers bliss. Without love, wealth is of no avail, scholarship is of no value, and power is a burden.

A series of questions arise: How important is the organic life of eating only? What is the value of all the technological advances if we do not uplift our humanness? Is it an advance if we have not enhanced our peace?

Summary:

In this Discourse is emphasised the fundamental unity of all religions - indeed of all beings. We all arise out of the same Cosmic Source - *Sat Chit Ananda*: Being - Awareness - Bliss. We are a combination of body, mind and spirit. The body is an instrument of action and mind an instrument with which we distinguish right from wrong. But our body and mind have to act always in unison with our Spirit (or *Atma*) for us to become entitled to call ourselves humans. When we act with body consciousness alone, our conscious state is that of an animal (*Pasuthvam*) and when with mind consciousness alone, our conscious state is demonic (*danavathvam*). Only when we act in consonance with our true nature as *Atma*

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are we one with the Divine (*Daivatvam*). Only then are we entitled to call ourselves humans.