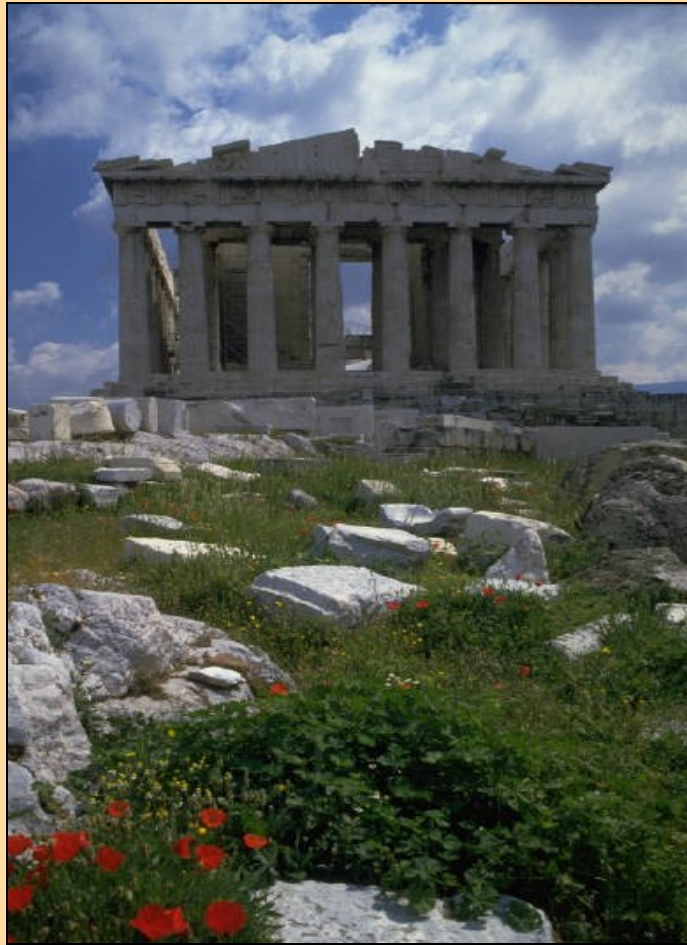


PLATO AND SATHYA SAI

Ideal Education And Human Values In Parallel



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The picture chosen for the cover of this paper shows the ancient temple of "Parthenon", located on the Acropolis of Athens. This temple was dedicated to Goddess Athena, protector of the city of Athens to which she gave her name. According to Greek mythology, Athena, having no known mother, sprang from Zeus's forehead. For this reason, Athena has always been worshipped as the Goddess of Wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation of society. Therefore, if our aim is to secure healthy and happy societies, we must necessarily turn to education, for it is an ineluctable fact that the students of today will be the leaders of tomorrow. In all times and places, great philosophers have spoken on the fundamental subject of education and have transmitted their valuable teachings to the generations that followed. One great philosopher, who shines in the firmament of ancient Greek philosophy, is Plato, who is inseparably bound to his beloved teacher Socrates. Socrates did not leave any written record of his teachings; these were conveyed to us through Plato's writings, uniquely conceived in the form of dialogues, where Socrates stands out as the teacher, while Plato makes no mention of himself. This shows how much devoted Plato was to Socrates and at the same time, it points to an essential aspect of education: respect and love for one's teacher. However, the deserving teacher earns this love, not only through the wisdom he imparts, but mostly through his personal example. Similarly, the most important qualification of a teacher, according to the Sathya Sai Educare program, is to be an inspiring example for the students. As Sathya Sai often says:

“FIRST BE, NEXT DO, THEN TELL”

Socrates was such a teacher: he sacrificed his own life so as to stay true to his word, and to his love for Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

From Righteousness to Happiness

This brief paper is a summary of the basic principles of Socrates/Plato on the crucial subject of education and proposes a parallel view with the philosophy of Sathya Sai Education in human values. Plato's famous dialogue, *The Republic*¹ (written around 375 B.C.), has been used as the primary source of this study. The basic principle which Plato wishes to demonstrate is that the real source of happiness is righteousness. The view most people adhere to, namely that the righteous man is unhappy because of the bad treatment he receives from others, is wrong.

“A moral person is happy, whereas an immoral person is unhappy.”

¹ 'Republic' is not an exact translation of the Greek word *Politeia* that Plato used in the title of his dialogue. 'Politeia' is a general term, which indicates the various forms of government that could be established and/or were established in an ancient Greek *polis* or city-state.

“Immorality never gives more happiness than morality.”

(*Republic*, 354a)²

To prove his thesis, Plato uses a figurative image: he considers the city as the extension of the individual and begins his inquiry from there, given the fact that the concept of justice is more easily detectable in a city. He then moves on to tackle the inner psychological and spiritual structure of the individual in order to give finally a definition of righteousness and prove his initial hypothesis.

“Let’s first try to see what righteousness is like in the cities and then we can examine it in the individuals too, seeing the reflection of the larger entity in the features of the smaller entity.”

(*Republic*, 369a)

Education for Social Leadership

This article deals mainly with that part of the dialogue, which designs the proper educational system for those who are going to be the governors of the ideal city. However, in presenting Plato’s thoughts with respect to the ideal rulers, we need to bear in mind that these principles apply to all students alike. Inevitably, the true meaning of philosophy will be revealed to them, for the aim of education is, after all, that of transforming the student into a philosopher, by turning his vision towards Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

Sathya Sai has often spoken about Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Here below is an extract from a discourse delivered to the faculty members and students of the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, at the Sri Sathya Sai University in Prashanti Nilayam, India:

“Socrates used to follow the path of “Pariprasna”, i.e. asking questions and giving the proper answers. What are the characteristics of an ideal ruler? What kind of qualities and habits should he have? What morals should he follow? He used to inquire into all these matters. He made youth ponder on these and encouraged them to be ideal citizens. The ideal ruler should have love for God and be ready to sacrifice

² The numbers and letters used to quote Plato, refer to the ‘Stephanus’ pagination, which is the system of reference and organization used in modern editions and translations of Plato.

even his own life for the sake of his country. However, the rulers of his time were very annoyed, because Socrates revealed their shortcomings. Good always faces obstacles like this. So, Socrates was brought to court to be tried and was sentenced to death. The decision was final. Nobody could change it. Socrates died in the presence of his disciples by drinking the poison in perfect equanimity.

The most eminent disciple of Socrates was Plato. Plato was a very mighty person; he spread the teachings of Socrates all over the world. He taught that for this world three things are important and necessary: Truth, Goodness and Beauty. What is Truth? Truth is that which is beyond time and space: beginningless, changeless, eternal and ever-existent. What is Goodness? Goodness is selflessness. How can one reach Goodness if he is selfish? Finally there is Beauty. Beauty is not related to the body but to the soul. Anything will be beautiful when there is no trace of egoism and attachment.

Plato taught that when a country is built on these foundations, then people can enjoy real peace and happiness. These three are also the teachings of Sathya Sai. In Sanskrit these are called Sathyam (Truth), Sivam (Goodness) and Sundaram (Beauty). The philosophy that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle followed is the same as Bharatiya³ philosophy.”

(From the book "Man Management", page 27)

³ The name of India in Sanskrit is Bharat and this is how it is often called by its citizens. Bharatiya is derived from this word and means Indian.

1. THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

At the very outset of his teachings on education, Plato defines its two basic components: gymnastics for the body and music for the soul (Rep. 376e). In ancient Greek literature the term ‘music’ refers to spiritual, moral and artistic education in general, not only to melody and rhythm, which is the meaning of music today. Musical (i.e. spiritual) education begins with the use of stories or myths:

“Don’t you know, that we start by telling children myths, which, though they are by and large untrue, they contain elements of truth?”

Thus the need to select the right stories is emphasized:

“Aren’t you aware of the fact that the most important stage of any enterprise is the beginning, especially when it has to do with something young and sensitive? Because, that’s when the character is shaped and it absorbs every impression that anyone wants to stamp upon it.

-You are absolutely right.

-Shall we then allow our children to listen to any stories and take into their souls values, which contradict those we want them to hear as adults?

-No, we won’t allow that at all.

-So our first job is to inspect the work of the storywriters and accept any good story they write, but reject the others. We’ll let nurses and mothers tell their children the acceptable stories and devote themselves using these stories to form their children’s souls, far more than using their hands to form their bodies...”

(See Rep. 377 a, b, c)

A careful analysis will show that many of the mythological stories contained in the works of writers and poets of the past, are actually unsuitable for children. In those stories, gods – who should be looked upon as ideal examples – fall prey to jealousy, sensual desires, hatred, greed, cowardice and lying, among other negative human passions. If gods themselves are presented in such a manner, what will the ideals of children be and what kind of values will similar stories teach them? This is why, in accordance with the views of Presocratic philosophers like Xenophanes and Heraclitus, Plato suggests that this kind of poetry, which is inexact and unsound, has to be rejected from the ideal city.

Fortifying Virtues and Values

He then specifies how the contents of the stories proposed should respect two basic principles in relation to God: The first is that “*God is not responsible for everything, but only for good*” (Rep. 380c). Faith in God’s grace should be unwavering and one should not blame Him for the hardships of daily life. The second is that “*God is entirely straight and truthful in words and deeds, and He does not delude men in any way.*” (Rep. 382e)

The first virtue that stories should impress upon the hearts of children is fearlessness of death. Death should not be seen or presented in the form of misfortune, and both distress and grieving are unfit for brave men.

A beautiful story from the tradition of the Far East shows the great importance of bravery and fearlessness of death:

“Tajima-no-kami was a great swordsman and teacher in the art to the Shogun of the time. One of the personal guards of the Shogun came one day to Tajima-no-kami, wishing to be trained in fencing. The master said, “As I observe, you seem to be a master of fencing yourself; pray, tell me to what school you belong, before we enter into the relationship of teacher and pupil.”

The guardsman said, “I am ashamed to confess that I have never learned the art.”

“Are you trying to fool me? I am a teacher to the honorable Shogun himself, and I know my judging eye never fails.”

“I am sorry to defy your honor, but I really know nothing.”

This resolute denial on the part of the visitor made the sword master think for a while and he finally said: “If you say so, it must be so; but still I am sure you are a master of something, though I do not know of what.”

“If you insist I can tell you. There is one thing of which I can say I am a complete master. When I was still a boy, the thought came upon me that as a Samurai I ought in no circumstances be afraid of death. I have grappled with the problem of death now for some years and finally the problem of death has ceased to worry me. May this be at what you hint?”

“Exactly!” exclaimed Tajima-no-kami. “That is what I mean. I am glad that I made no mistake in my judgment. For the ultimate secret of swordsmanship also lies in being released from the thought of death. I have trained ever so many hundreds of my pupils along this line, but so far none of them really deserve the final certificate for swordsmanship. You need no technical training, you are already a master.”

(From Eugen Herrigel's book, *"Zen in the Art of Archery"*)

Sathya Sai has indicated that there are three things we should never do:

*Never forget God
Never believe in the world
Never be afraid of death*

(Sathya Sai Baba - Discourses on the Bhagavad Gita, page 192)

In the same way that young men should not be carried away by the calamity of death, they should not be prone to laughter either, because *"the stronger the laughter, the stronger the consequent emotional agitation"* (Rep. 388e). Sathya Sai has always emphasized how important it is to be evenly balanced with respect to both joy and sorrow. Whoever steps onto the spiritual path should not be swayed by these two opposing emotions; his mind should always remain unaffected by both.

The tendency to lie is certainly objectionable. One should keep away from the temptation to utter a lie and fully avoid such behavior by practicing the prescribed virtues. Among these we find the virtue of self-discipline, the most important aspects of which are: respect for those having authority, the capacity to set one's own rules, and mastery over the allurements of drink, sex and food. The value of patience and the ability to resist all kinds of temptations, as well as greed and bribery, are attainable out of love for righteousness and devotion to the gods (Rep. 389b - 392c).

After defining in detail the content of the stories, Plato goes on to illustrate the style and form that the stories should have. He gives guidelines about the art of storytelling of which there are two basic techniques: the purely narrative and the representative (dramatization). Both are recommended, but as far as representation is concerned, he says:

"Any roles the young men take on must be appropriate ones. They should represent people who are courageous, self-disciplined, pious, just and generous; they should never play a role of anyone who is bad or unrighteous, in case the role becomes reality. Haven't you noticed how repeated representation becomes a habit and a second nature and has an effect on a person's body, voice and character?"

(Rep. 395c)

The part of education, which relates to stories, is followed by a description of the kind of melody and rhythm that should accompany the stories. The plaintive musical modes suitable for laments, as well as the soft and easygoing ones, which are suitable

for drinking parties, are both to be excluded. The only melodies to be taken into account are those which are perfectly representative of the great deeds of self-disciplined and courageous men, both in failure and success, in battle and in times of peace (*Rep.* 398e – 399c).

Along with the melodies, the right instruments are also to be selected. Plato welcomes and accepts Apollo's instruments, which are the lyre and the guitar, or even the windpipe used by the herdsmen in the countryside, but he excludes complicated instruments designed to produce a wide range of modes, remaining consistent with one of his basic principles: the need for simplicity and frugality and, by extension, limitation of luxury and pleasure. The selection of rhythms is made along the same lines, making sure that complex rhythms and a wide variety of tempos are avoided. The rhythm has to correspond to a well-regulated and valiant style of life, while the meter and the tune have to conform to the words, expressing a noble mode of life (*Rep.* 399c – 400c).

The Beauty of the Soul

“Rhythm and harmony are of primary importance because they sink deeply into the soul, and bring with them Beauty and Grace. He, who will be properly educated through music, will be able to discern beauty from ugliness, as well as appreciate and enjoy only fine things, accepting them into his soul as nourishment, and thus become perfect in values and truly good.”

(*Rep.* 401d – 402a)

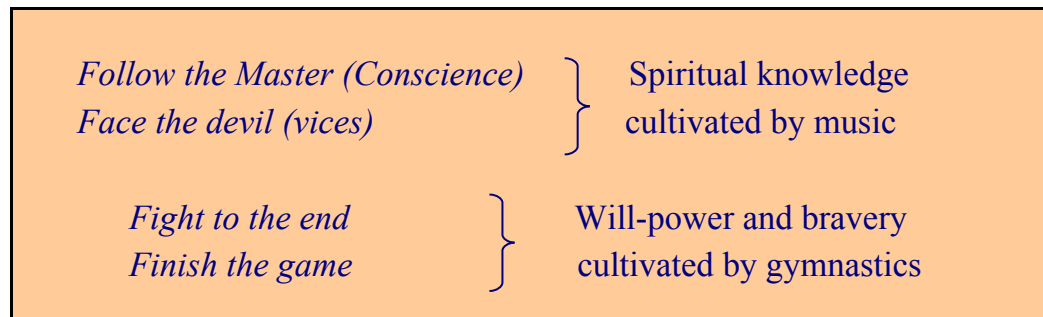
A well-educated man has profound understanding of the values of self-discipline, bravery, generosity, broadness of mind and of all relative virtues; he is also able to detect the opposite vices instantly, wherever and whenever they occur. Finally, since self-discipline and excessive pleasure cannot coexist, Plato affirms that authentic love should not involve the body or the senses in any way, because sexual pleasure is the strongest and most difficult to control. Lovers should therefore love each other like relatives and never give the impression that there is more to it, otherwise they will be blemished for lacking spiritual and moral sensitivity (*Rep.* 402c – 403c).

At this point, the discussion on music (i.e. education for the soul) ends, to give way to a description of physical education and to the importance of moderation in diet. Neglect of a simple and moderate diet is the cause of ill health, in the same way that lack of control of desires is the cause of corruption (*Rep.* 403d – 404e). Corruption and ill health result in the proliferation of both lawyers and doctors. Therefore, the

increase of the need for doctors and lawyers is an unfailing sign of the deficiency of the educational system!

Plato concludes by repeating that proper education is a balanced combination of spiritual learning (i.e. music) and physical exercise (i.e. gymnastics). These two will secure the harmonious cultivation of the basic elements of the soul, which are will-power and spiritual knowledge. When these are awakened and refined, man becomes both virtuous and brave (*Rep.* 411e).

Sathya Sai's wordplay, in which four important F's (Follow, Face, Fight, Finish) are highlighted, can well be seen in connection with the above two basic soul features:



(Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 31 - Discourse of 4-9-98)

2. OUTER AND INNER RIGHTEOUSNESS

What counts most within any community is not the size of its population, but the integrity and unity of its members. To achieve such a unified social structure, education should be built on a firm and sound basis remaining true to itself and unaltered. Change and innovation may give rise to uncertain and hazardous results, which are to be avoided on all accounts, because any change in the spiritual education affects the most important laws of the community (*Rep.* 424c).

Children should engage in lawful games right from the beginning, because when the games become lawless, it is impossible for them to grow into exemplary, law-abiding adults. Instead, when they play in a proper manner, and their upbringing instills regulation and order into their souls, an attitude of justice, fairness and lawfulness accompanies them in whatever they do; like a guiding light, it illumines and fortifies their growing process. This is how children pick up good manners and a consequential array of good habits, such as being quiet in the presence of elders, giving their seat to older people, standing up when elders enter the room, looking after their parents, and caring for their own grooming and clothing. Such a behavior does not need to be legislated, because it follows as a natural result of primary spiritual and moral education. In the same way, it is not necessary to make special rules and regulations to uphold commercial agreements and arrangements among people. If the citizens are pure and have cultivated mutual love, bureaucratic laws become totally useless (*Rep.* 424e - 425e). A genuine legislator should not deal with laws of this kind in either a badly-governed or in a well-governed city. In the first case, trivial laws of this kind cannot accomplish anything lasting, while in the second, they are simply unnecessary, since lawful conduct is a natural consequence of the ideal education (*Rep.* 427a).

The most important and valuable laws are those which state how to build temples, how to conduct sacrifices, how to worship gods, deities and heroes, how to conduct the burial of the dead and how to carry out the functions needed to propitiate those who have gone to the other world. All of these laws – which were decreed by Apollo, God of Light and Music, who has his seat at the earth's navel and is the supreme paternal guide – are designated as fundamental (*Rep.* 427 a-c).

Organization and Order

Plato divides society into three classes: a) philosophers / rulers, b) warriors, and c) the working class, (i.e. traders, land-workers, craftsmen, builders, employees and servants). This division matches the principle of *Varna Dharma* of Hinduism (i.e. the four classes of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras). The class of philosophers corresponds to Brahmanas, the class of warriors to Kshatriyas, and the working class to Vaisyas and Sudras. Choosing a vocation in accordance with one's desire and aptitude, is a common phenomenon found in all civilized societies. The hymn Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda describes Varna Dharma in a highly poetic and symbolic way:

Brahmanas came out of the face of the Purusha, kshatriyas from His arms, vaisyas from His thighs and sudras from His feet.

In this verse, the different class divisions are seen as the limbs of God's own body. The hands and feet are as important as the thighs and the head. If there is ever a quarrel between the different classes as to which is superior, then the entire social fabric will suffer. There will be disharmony, rupture and discord. This means that every individual has a major talent to bring forth and manifest, as well as a unique way to contribute towards the welfare of the overall community. Each one is to carry out his particular function without interfering with the domains of others. If all people conform to this leading principle and co-operate with their fellow citizens in a spirit of love and mutual understanding, harmony and happiness will be secured. The social edifice is erected on the principle of the right allocation of responsibilities and discharge of one's duty.

For this to be achieved, each class should be endowed with a fundamental virtue, appropriate to its nature. The class of philosophers, whose duty is that of guiding the rulers or of being rulers themselves, should be endowed with **wisdom**. The class of warriors, which supports the rulers and guards society, should be endowed with **bravery** or **will-power**, the ability to retain a true and lawful notion of what is right and what is wrong under all circumstances. No pleasure, pain, fear or desire can change the principles that are deeply rooted in the soul of ideal warriors, thanks to their proper spiritual and physical education. The working class should be endowed with **self-discipline**, the ability to set limits and to control the pull of the senses, distractions and desires in general. Finally, **righteousness** or **justice** is defined as the

state in which each of the three classes performs its proper function and discharge its own duty. (*Rep.* 430b – 434c, fig. 1)

The same idea is found in the Bhagavad Gita, where it is said:

“One’s duty, though imperfect, is better than another’s duty well discharged. Better death in one’s own duty; the duty of another is full of fear.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, 3-35)



Figure 1: The three classes of the community (see *Rep.* 430b – 434c)

After the analysis of the three classes has been made and the definition of righteousness in society has been given, Plato shifts his attention to the individual so as to answer his initial inquiry about individual righteousness. As formerly said, the community is to be seen as an enlargement of the individual, and by defining righteousness in the community, individual righteousness may equally be defined.

In this light, we can see how the three classes of the community correspond to the three parts of the soul. The first is the *spiritual part*, the higher intellect (*buddhi* in Sanskrit), which has the capacity to discriminate between right and wrong, truth and untruth, permanent and transient. The second is the *assertive part*, which manifests as the will-power of one’s personality. It is an ally of the spiritual part, unless it has been

harmful by inadequate education. The third is the *desirous part*, which is driven by feelings of lust, hunger and thirst, and is stirred by desire and pleasure. The evident congruence between the three parts of the soul and the three classes within the community is such, that Plato describes individual righteousness in parallel with his analysis of the community. The *spiritual part* has the right to rule, because it is wise and looks after the whole of the soul. The *assertive part* is its assistant and partner. When these two parts have been properly cultivated through an ideal system of education, they will then be in charge of the *desirous part* which is, by nature, insatiable and greedy (*Rep.* 441a – 442a). And when the three parts carry out their respective duties, there is harmony and righteousness in the individual (fig. 2).

“Righteousness is not related to the external activities of man, but its sphere is a person's inner activity. This means that one should not let the parts of his soul do any job which is not their own or to become involved in another's work. He has to set them in order, according to their own function, and to become his own master and his own friend. He has to unite the three parts of his soul, as if they were the three basic keys of an octave – low, high and middle – and create a harmony out of them, making himself one out of many, self-disciplined and internally attuned.”

(*Rep.* 443 c9-e2)

As Sathya Sai says:

***“Body is like a water
bubble***

***Mind is like a mad
monkey***

So, don't follow the body

Don't follow the mind

Follow the Conscience”

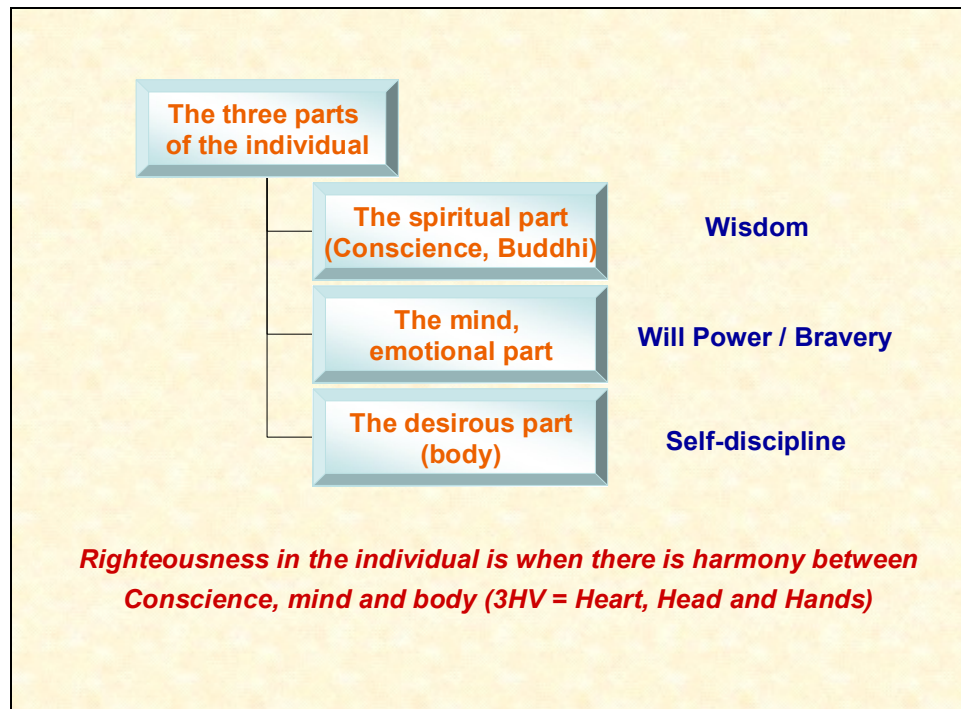


Figure 2: The three aspects of the individual (see Rep. 441a – 443e)

3. THE TRUE PHILOSOPHER, A LOVER OF GOODNESS

Plato goes on to affirm that the only solution to personal and political upheaval is for true philosophers to become rulers, or for the rulers to become true philosophers. But who is worthy of being called a true philosopher?

Philosopher is he who perceives the One which is permanent and changeless, and being centered in That, he is never carried away by plurality and diversity. Beauty itself is grasped behind the multiplicity of beautiful things, the One behind the many, the Unity in diversity. True Knowledge is the knowledge of the Being itself, while the perceptible knowledge of the senses is considered false and illusory. Those, whose learning is rooted in this false kind of knowledge, cannot be called philosophers. The true philosopher is focused on the study that reveals the eternal Reality, which has no beginning or end and knows no change. He yearns for lasting happiness and has cast aside the pleasures of the body and the senses. His broad and open mind is gifted with a sharp intellect, with which he can grasp the eternity of time. He is thus detached from human life and is not afraid of death. A true philosopher is virtuous, kind and well-mannered, endowed with an inherent sense of balance, nobility and elegance.

“The true philosopher is a genuine lover of wisdom and he is born to aspire to the True Being⁴, without being attached to the multiplicity of external things that are assumed to be real. He moves on with his love ever intense and steady, until he is united with the Being Itself, with that part of his soul which is akin to It. And when he has been united with it, intellect and truth are born; he earns the real knowledge and lives a true life, ever free from the pains of birth.”
(Republic, 490 a-b)

⁴ The original Greek word for being is "ON", which is the neutral of the present participle of the root verb **es-**, which means "to be". It corresponds to the Sanskrit word "SAT", which is derived from the relative root verb **as-**, which also means "to be". In both Indian and Greek philosophy this word has been used to describe the Ultimate Changeless Reality, because this is what really IS, what really exists.

4. GOODNESS

Once the virtues of the true philosopher have been introduced, Plato leads us towards the summit of spiritual evolution, which he depicts as the knowledge of Goodness or the Good (*Agathon*). Righteousness, bravery, self-control and all the other virtues are indeed very important, but there is still something higher. This is the idea of Goodness, which is the source of all virtues, as the sun is the source of its abounding rays.

“There is absolutely no point in having expert knowledge of everything else, but lacking knowledge of Goodness. There is absolutely no advantage in owning everything else in the world, but not Goodness.” (Rep. 505a-b)

Knowledge of Goodness is what every soul yearns for, and for which every effort is made. Though the majority of people are in the dark about this, we should not allow the biggest asset of our community – our youth, to whom we are going to entrust the administration of the city one day – to remain in the dark as well.

The Allegory of the Cave

What is Goodness? Socrates professes to be incapable of defining Goodness and proposes a simile of the Sun to do so. Just as the Sun is the source of light and growth, and is responsible for sight and seeing in the visible realm, Goodness is the source of Truth and is responsible for the knowledge of all ideas of the invisible world of the spirit. At this point, to give a clear image of Goodness, Plato introduces the famous allegory of the cave (*Rep.* 514a – 517c):

“Imagine people living in a cave down under the ground; at the far end of the cave there’s an entrance open to the outside world. They have been there since childhood, with their legs and neck tied up in a way that keeps them in one place and allows them to look only straight ahead, but not to turn their head. There is a firelight burning a long way further up the cave behind them, and up the slope between the fire and the prisoners there is a road and beside it a low wall. Imagine also that there are people on the other side of this wall, who are carrying all sorts of objects that stick out over the wall; and some of these people talk and others are silent. Do you think these prisoners would see anything of themselves, of one another or of the objects except the shadows cast by the fire onto the cave wall directly opposite them, since they are forced to live without moving their heads? And if they were able to talk to

one another, don't you think they would assume that their words applied to what they saw passing by in front of them? And if sound echoed off the prison wall opposite them, when any of the passers-by spoke, they would assume that the sound came from a passing shadow. All in all then, the shadows of the objects would constitute the only reality people in the cave would recognize.

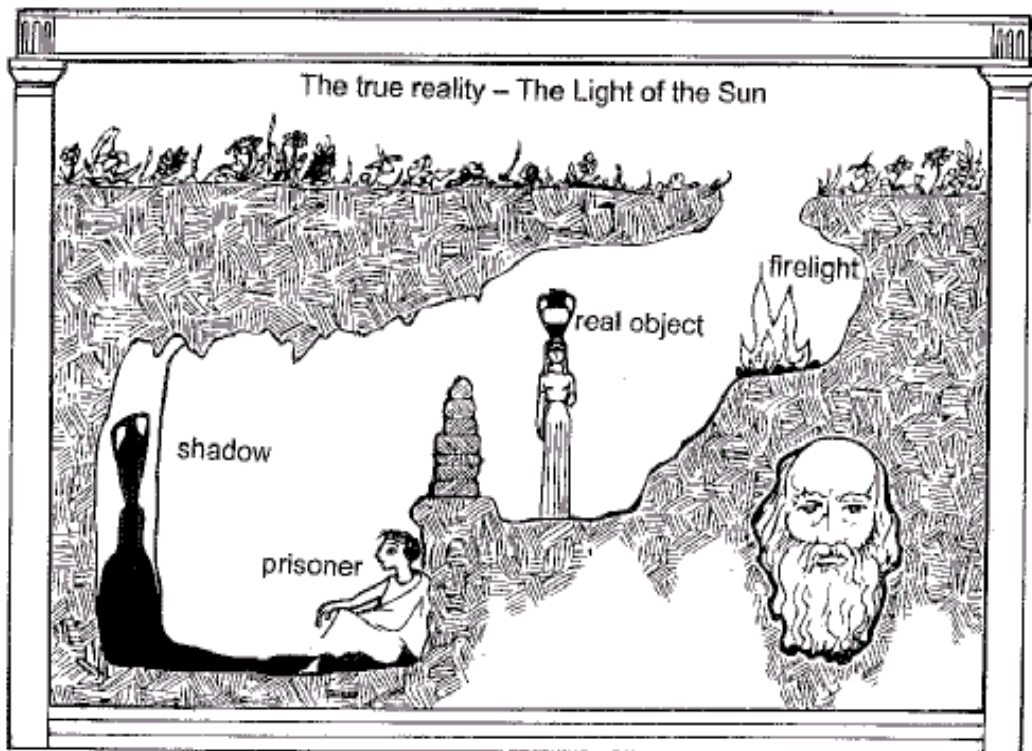


Figure 3: The allegory of the cave (see Rep. 514a – 517c)

What would happen if they were set free from their bonds and cured of their ignorance? Imagine that one of them is suddenly made to stand up, to turn his head and walk, and to look towards the firelight. It hurts him to do so and he is too dazzled to be able to make out the objects whose shadows he had formerly been looking at. And if someone tells him that what he's been seeing all this time has no real substance and now he is seeing more accurately, what do you think his reaction would be? And if he were shown any of the passing objects and he were asked what it was, he would be bewildered. He would think that there was more reality in what he had been seeing before than in what he is seeing now. And if he were forced to look at the firelight, it would hurt his eyes and he would turn away and run back to the shadows. He would think that the shadows are clearer than the real objects. And if someone drugged him forcibly and pulled him out into the sunlight, he would not be able to see a single one of the real things, because his eyes would be overwhelmed by

the sun's beams. He would not be able to see things up on the surface of the earth until he had got used to the sunlight. At first, it would be shadows that he could most easily make out, then he would move on to the reflections in water and later, he would be able to see the actual things themselves. Next, he would turn his eyes on the heavens – easier at night – and he would look at the light of the stars and the moon. And at last, he would be able to discern and turn his eyes on the sun during daytime. After that, he would realize that the sun is the source of the seasons and the yearly cycle; that the whole of the visible realm is its domain and that everything that he used to see is caused by the Sun. And if he recalled the cave where he and his former fellow prisoners had originally lived, he would feel happy about his new situation and sorry for them. And if he went back underground and sat down again in the same spot, his eyes would be overwhelmed by darkness, because of the sudden transition from the sunlight. And if he had to compete against those same old prisoners at identifying those shadows, they would make a fool of him. They would say that he had come back from his upward journey with his eyes ruined and that it was not even worth trying to go up there. And if anyone tried to set them free and take them up there, they would grab hold of him – if they could – and kill him.

You should apply this allegory, to what we were talking about before. The region that is accessible to sight should be equated with the prison cave and the firelight with the light of the sun. You should think of the upward journey and the sight of things up on the surface of the earth as the mind's ascent to the spiritual realm. The last thing to be seen in the spiritual realm is Goodness; and the sight of Goodness leads one to realize that this is responsible for everything that is right and fine. In the visible realm, Goodness is the progenitor of light and of the source of light, and in the spiritual realm, Goodness is the source and provider of Truth and Knowledge. The sight of it is a prerequisite for righteousness either in one's private affairs or in public business."

(Rep. 514a – 517c)

5. EDUCATION : THE TURNING OF THE SOUL TOWARDS THE LIGHT OF GOODNESS

The powerful allegory of the cave and its description of the upward journey of the soul towards Goodness, leads us towards what Plato defines as the very goal of education:

“Education is not putting knowledge into a soul which doesn’t have it, just as giving sight into eyes that are blind. The capacity of knowledge is present in everyone’s soul. And just as an eye turns from darkness to light, the soul has to turn away from the world of becoming towards the Being Itself, until it becomes capable of seeing the Brightest Reality, which we call Goodness. That is what Education should be: the art of orientation. Educators should devise the simplest and most effective methods to turn the mind towards the Light; not to implant sight into it, because it already has the capacity, but to correct its orientation, because it is now improperly aligned and is not facing the right direction.”

(Rep. 518 c – d)

Whereas Sathya Sai states:

***“Education should not be information
Education should be transformation”***

Higher Education and the Art of Dialectic

The ascent of the soul towards Being starts with music and gymnastics, but for the consummation of this ascent – to reach the idea of Goodness – a higher form of education is required: arithmetic, geometry, solid geometry, astronomy and harmony should all be taken up. However, the study of these subjects should not be done in the commonly considered way, i.e. just to impart knowledge of this world. Plato says:

“The study of these subjects purifies the organ of higher intellect that everyone has, while other occupations ruin it and blind it. This organ is a thousand times more precious than any eye, since this is the only organ that can see Truth.” (Rep. 527e)

The legitimate and authentic body of knowledge should not be confined to erudition pertaining to the mundane world but it should bestow spiritual wisdom that leads to the knowledge of the Pure Being, beyond time and space. In what way can the above mentioned subjects secure this spiritual knowledge? Plato explains:

“There is nothing in the visible realm that is more beautiful than these decorations in the sky. But since they are within the visible realm, they should be regarded as considerably inferior to true decorations, to true Beauty... Therefore, we should use the heavenly decorations merely as illustrations to help us study the invisible realm of the true beings... If we don’t see beyond the heavenly bodies, we’ll never be engaged in true astronomy and we’ll not make proper use of our soul’s innate wisdom.”

(Rep. 529c – 530b)

For Plato, the benefit one receives from the study of the material world can be found in the enhancement of one’s inward vision, which alone allows man to see the Divine Reality that lies beyond all worldly phenomena. The intellect, sharpened through academic study, becomes fit and ready to devote itself to its highest subject, which is Dialectic. Plato says:

“He, who uses dialectic with absolutely no use of the senses, reaches the summit of the spiritual realm. He grasps with his intellect the Idea of Goodness Itself, just as the prisoner of the cave ends up at the supreme point of the visible realm, which is the Sun.”

(Rep. 532a – b)

“Dialectic uproots the things that now are taken for granted and leads towards the Origin itself. It gently extracts the mind’s eye from the mud in which it is now buried and guides it upwards.”

(Rep. 533d)

“Dialectic occupies the highest position and is the capstone of the curriculum. There is no subject higher than this and therefore dialectic completes our educational program.”

(Rep. 534e)

EPILOGUE

In this paper we have briefly covered the educational program that Plato incorporates in an ideal community. His vision is upheld by the same principles that constitute the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values program, known also as Educare.

The foundation of this program is "**Self-confidence**", meaning the firm belief that one's genuine Self is the immortal soul, which is by nature the master and ruler of the body-mind complex. The aim of an ideal educational system is to enable man to know his true nature. To emphasize this goal, Sathya Sai oftentimes quotes the well-known saying of Alexander Pope, "*The proper study of mankind is man*"⁵.

To realize this sublime goal we need to erect the walls of "**Self-satisfaction**" upon the foundation of **Self-confidence**, by learning to draw happiness from one's inner self. We can then build the roof of "**Self-sacrifice**" by selflessly serving our fellow men and women for the sole purpose of uplifting society. This is when we can live in the mansion of **Self-realization**, which will irradiate permanent Peace and Happiness, for it will be illuminated by the sun of the Idea of Goodness.

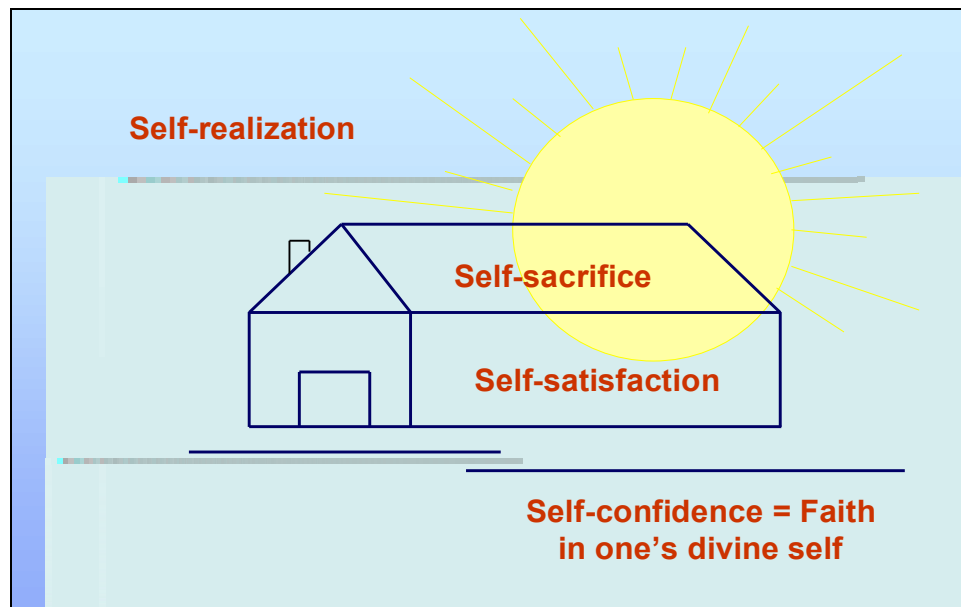


Figure 4: The mansion of a man's life

⁵ Alexander Pope, "An essay on man: Epistle II".

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Note 1: Some quotes by Sathya Sai do not bear the exact reference. This has been a deliberate choice because his teachings are recurrently reiterated in his discourses, and can be found in abundance in many of those contained in the series of Sathya Sai Speaks, indicated in the bibliography.

Note 2: Readers who may not be familiar with Plato may wonder about the numbers and letters used in reference to his work. This praxis, which is almost universally adopted when quoting Plato, is based on a complete edition of his work, which dates back to the Renaissance (Geneva 1578). This was published by Henri Estienne, a famed printer and humanist of the time (1528-1598), who is known by the Latinized version of his name, Stephanus. The publication was divided into three volumes, each page of which was continuously numbered from the beginning to the end. The pages were furthermore split into two separate columns, the right column providing the Greek text and the left one a Latin translation (by Jean de Serres). In between the two columns, the letters from 'a to e' divide the column into five sections.

When quoting Plato, reference is usually made to both the beginning and the end of the selected quote. If the quote begins and ends on the same page, reference is made only to the letter which corresponds to the end of the quote, as in the case of: "*Sophist*, 247d-e". If the quote ends on a different page, the number at the end of the page and the section letter are also provided, as in the case of: "*Apology*, 29e-30a". Most editions of Plato's works, in Greek or in translated versions, provide the *Stephanus* references, either on the margin or within the text itself, sometimes in running titles. Obviously, when dealing with a translation, the changes of sections will only be approximate, since it is unlikely for a translation to be a perfect match with the original words and text.

In some instances (e.g. when referring to a single word or a short sequence of words), a line number is added after the section letter. Accurate line numbering for such references is much harder to obtain and is rarely reproduced in modern editions of the Greek text. The reference edition used for line numbering is usually the Oxford Classical Texts edition of Plato's works in five volumes.