

44. Vedha and Vedhaantha

One may have mastered the Vedhas

Or be a versatile writer;

But, without purity of mind,

He will take to bad ways.

Hearken, oh son of Bhaarath!

To this good counsel.

EMBODIMENTS of Love! Shankara propagated the view that the *Vedhas* uphold *Dhvaitha* (dualism) and *Vedhaantha* teaches *Adhvaitha* (non-dualism) on the basis of citations from the scriptural texts. The difference between the *Vedhas* and *Vedhaantha* is like the differences between various organs in the same body. The eyes, the ears, the nose, the arms and the feet are different parts of the body. The individual is a limb of society. Society is a limb of humanity. Humanity is a part of Nature or the phenomenal world. Nature is a limb of the *Paramaathma* (Supreme Self). In Kaasi (Vaaranaasi), at the assembly of scholars, debates raged over many philosophical issues. Amused at this spectacle, Shankara remarked: "*Vaadhe Vaadhe Vardhathe Vairam*" (Enmity grows with controversy). Continuous disputation only results in increasing bitterness among the disputants. Argumentation is not the proper method for setting spiritual issues.

Dualism of the *Vedhas*

Man is obliged to resolve problems in life. In daily existence man will never be free from worry. From birth to death man is confronted continuously with worries. The only way out of them is for people to develop love for God. Love is the sovereign remedy for all ills.

The Vedhas, however, have not given sufficient importance to this love. Their emphasis is more on *aasayam* (aspiration) than on *anubhavam* (experience). There are innumerable *Vedhik* scholars who ceaselessly chant the *Vedhas*. All this is verbal and not concerned with active practice. This attitude was described by Shankara as *Dhvaitha* (dualism). All the *Vedhik manthras* were in the form of prayers for favours. (I want this, I want that). Desire is at the root of dualism. Desire arises because of the feeling that there is the "other." The one who desires and the object that is desired are two things apart from each other. True non-dualism is the extinction of this separation by the unification of the subject and the object. Dualism exists when the object that is desired, for instance, a kerchief, is distinct from the person who desires it.

Non-dualism can only be experienced

Non-dualism is a state of consciousness which can only be experienced and not described in words. In this regard, the *Adhvaithin* is like a dumb man who has enjoyed a delightful dinner but cannot describe the taste of the dishes he has consumed. There are two kinds of proof for the existence of anything. Prath *yaksham* (direct perception) and *Paroksham* (indirect proof). The bliss derived from the *Adhvaithik* consciousness is beyond words. It can only be experienced, but cannot be described or explained. In this matter, if indirect proof did not exist, direct perception would be out of the question. Unfortunately, today people attach value to direct perception alone

and have scant regard for indirect evidence. This is not the right attitude. For instance, one sees a block of ice. It appears solid, but it is entirely made up of water, which is a liquid. Thus water, whose presence is inferred indirectly, is the basis for the solid block of ice that is seen by direct perception. Thus it can be realised that what is indirect is the basis for what is perceived directly.

Likewise, for this visible phenomenal universe, the invisible is the Divine. Not recognising this truth, men go by the *Vedhik* conception of dualism instead of recognising the truth of the *Vedhaanthik* doctrine of non-dualism.

Man spends his life immersed in worldly affairs. To point out to mankind the more vital inward path, Shankara dedicated his life. His preceptor, Gaudapaadha, gave Shankara all help and encouragement. Despite being young in years, Shankara showed great determination and strength of conviction. At the age of 16 he could convince the venerable *pandiths* of Kaasi about the validity of the *Adhvaitik* doctrine.

What is *Adhvaita*? The oneness of everything is *Adhvaita*. The scriptures have declared that the cosmos is permeated by the Divine. It is the desire of devotees to worship the Divine under different forms and names that is the reason for the various creeds and sects.

The form and the substance

An affluent devotee, filled with dualistic feelings, adored the form of Krishna. He wished to offer worship regularly to an idol of Krishna. He got a gold idol of Krishna made by a goldsmith out of 20 coins. He got a golden cow made to match the idol. He got made a peacock and a golden cup to perform the *abhishekam* for the idol, both of the same weight as the idol.

Everyday he used to perform the *abhishekam* and enjoy the worship of Krishna. But the tide of time brought in its wake a decline in his fortunes and he found himself nearly destitute. He collected all his golden articles of worship and took them to another rich man to sell them. Each of the four items was weighed and valued at Rs. 60,000 each. The old devotee could not bear to learn that his revered Krishna idol was valued at the same price as the cow, the peacock and the cup. He said that more should be paid for the Krishna idol. The intending purchaser said: "Sir, for you the Krishna form is more precious than the other. But for me only the weight matters, not the form."

What is happening in the world today is that men are attaching value to the external forms and not to the Divine substance which is common to all of them. The five elements constituting every being are Divine. Apart from the five elements there is no sixth element. People imagine that there is a sixth element and go after it.

This crazy desire is the cause of much of man's misery. Desires are inescapable. But there should be a limit for them. In the story of Midaas, he prayed and got a boon that whatever he touched should turn into gold. He soon found that he could not even eat his food as it turned into gold at his touch. He prayed again to the good fairy to take back the boon she had given to him.

It is evident from this story what will be the grave consequences of insatiable desires. Those who act upto Divine injunctions will be happy and prosperous.

Shankara, therefore, warned mankind against the mad pursuit of wealth and exhorted everyone to reduce one's desires. (Svaami sang a Thelugu song. "One gets wealth according to his Kanna. Therefore be content what you get.").

Control your desires

Control your desires. Cultivate love of God. That love will confer on you everything according to your needs. There is no need for you to ask for anything from God. "Did He not give to Shabari what she needed without her asking? Did He not bless Jataayu with His grace?" Dhasharatha had prayed for so long that his son should perform the last rites for him. But he did not get it, while the bird Jataayu had the privilege of getting his last rites done at Raama's hands. Jataayu got liberation after receiving the saving drops of water from Raama. Shabari was eagerly waiting for the arrival of Raama and made all the arrangements to welcome him and offer him the sweetest fruit. Shabari's intense devotion to Raama got its reward.

God confers His grace according to each one's deserts. The Divine is marked by *Anugraha* (Grace) and not *Aagraha* (anger). But devotees tend to judge the ways of God according to their own predilections. A man standing before a mirror will see his moods reflected in the mirror.

It is impossible to escape from *karma*

No one can escape from the consequences of his actions whatever efforts he may make to run away from them. (Svaami sang a song with the refrain, "*Karma-dhaatha vasamaa, naanaa*"--Is it possible to escape from Karma, oh man?) As are your actions, so are the reactions.

In the cosmic context, nature is the mirror. God is the viewer. All that is reflected in nature is Divine. The One alone exists. The object and the image appear because of the presence of the mirror. When there is no mirror there is no image. This is the mystery relating to nature and the wonders of the Lord. The glories of the Lord are multifarious and marvellous beyond words.

God's arithmetic is different from man's. For instance, when a mirror is placed before you, you have three entities. Yourself, the mirror and your image. When you take away the mirror, according to ordinary arithmetic, three minus one should be two. But when the mirror is removed only you remain. Three minus one becomes one!

Many people think and many people say: "Money makes many many things." But I say: "Money makes many wrongs."

Only when the distinction between the worldly point of view and the Divine point of view is understood that people will learn to make proper use of money.

"You and I are one"

This is the distinctive significance of Shankara's non-dualism. Shankara related the experiences of daily life to the doctrine of *Ekathvam* (spiritual oneness). The Divine is one, but is adored under different names and forms: Allah, Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster, Raama, Hari or Hara. All are the same. Shankara did not approve of God being described as mother, father, etc. The relationship between God and man is oneness. "You and I are one." This is the essence of the *Adhvaithik* doctrine. This awareness of oneness can give infinite joy, according to Shankara.

This experience does not come easily. One has to undertake intensive enquiry and also practise *samskaaras* (spiritual discipline). When the *samskaaras* lead to the refinement of the spirit, the experience of oneness with the Divine comes. How fortunate is the one who gets that experience! None can be more fortunate.

The one who gets this experience is the Lord of the universe. As the Master of the Self he is the Lord of the Cosmos. This *Aathma* is present in every cell of the human body. When this

nectarine truth is realised, man will not seek the ephemeral. Everyone should therefore seek the nectar, of enduring *Aathmik* bliss.

Shankara made all endeavours to propagate the *Adhvaithik message* to the entire country and to every person whether he was a king or a commoner, scholar or ignoramus.

Pledge to the mother

Shankara had given a pledge to his mother that he would, reach her in the last moments and perform the last rites for her. Being a pure and high-souled being, he was determined to keep his word. For the pure-hearted the plighted word is bound to be kept. Moreover, whatever they say will happen.

The Divine chooses the time and the situation for showering His grace and conveying His message. In the case of Arjuna, the Kurukshetra war was the right moment for Krishna to test Arjuna's total faith in Krishna and his deservedness for receiving the message of the Geetha.

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The true strength can be acquired only through Love. All other efforts are of no avail. Thus we should seek from God only the strength of LOVE.

Baba