

## 45. Shankara's call to youth

*What does it matter*

*If the petty-minded*

*Slight noble souls?*

*Does mighty elephant lose*

*Its grandeur when dogs bark?*

*EMBODIMENTS of the Divine Aathma!* All objects in the world which you see display some kind of colour. We think that these colours are natural to those objects. It is not so. The colours are really a reflection of our own vision. The sky appears blue when we look at it. The ocean appears dark blue in colour. We say that the sky is blue, the ocean is blue. This is incorrect. Neither the sky nor the ocean is blue in colour. It is the vastness of space and the depths of the ocean which produce this impression of bluishness. When you take a handful of seawater and look at it you will find that it is colourless. It will not show the colour that you fancy.

Likewise, good and evil depend on one's thoughts and feelings. The true colour of any object is not perceivable. Equally, the true form is not apparent.

Electrical energy is generated from a hydroelectric power station. The electric current is not visible to us, though the different uses to which the energy is put are obvious. Likewise, all beings, all living creatures, emerge from the *Aathmik* Principle. But this Principle is not apparent. We can see the beings arising from this Principle and their behaviour, good and bad.

### **A promise fulfilled**

After Shankara propagated his *Adhvaithik* doctrine from Kaasi, there was an assembly of great scholars in the holy city. Shankara, who was in that assembly, closed his eyes for a moment and experienced the vision of his mother in great distress. Immediately he dispersed the assembly and left for Kaaladi. He reached his mother in her last moments, as promised, administered *thulasi* water to her lips and discharged his duties to the mother.

At that time, the people of Kaaladi did not view with approval the actions of Shankara, because in their view, one who had taken to *sanyaasa*, should not revert to the activities of a householder and perform rituals. *Sanyaasa* means giving up all desires. The view of the *orthodox.pandiths* was that once a person had taken to *sanyaasa* he should not perform the last rites for a mother or a father which are the obligations of a householder.

To enable the students to understand the implications of this incident, I shall explain what *sanyaasa* means. Before one takes to *sanyaasa*, the *Viraja Homa* is performed which signifies that the person dies as it were and gives up all his previous worldly commitments and enters on a new life, assuming a new form and wearing a new robe. The old form is cast away and the former name is also given up. He gets a new name related to the ascetic order. The suffix *Aanandha* is tacked on the name, though few of them, experience *Aanandha!* After going through this ceremony, where is the place for mother or father?

### **Svaami's visit to Hrishikesh**

In this context, I should like to recall an incident which happened when I was travelling with Burugula Raamakrishna Rao, the then Governor of Utthar Pradhesh. He was a good devotee and

was proficient in a number of languages. He was a very intelligent person. He resolved to make the trip to Badhrinaath and Kedhaarnaath "in the company of the Lord Himself (Bhagavaan Baba)." On learning that Svaami was going to Badhrinaath, nearly 200 devotees joined Bhagavaan's group. The Raamakrishna Rao couple were very pure and pious people and every day they would take their food only after the 200 devotees with Svaami had taken their food. Such was their devotion! When the devotees sat for the meals, Raamakrishna Rao himself would serve water for all of them. He would not allow his A.D.C. or others to do this service. He used to declare-"I am a servant of Svaami, not a Governor."

Raamakrishna Rao was previously Chief Minister of Aandhra Pradesh at Hyderabad. When Svaami went there during that period, thousands of persons were lined up in a queue for dharshan of Svaami at Malakpet. The volunteers were hustling the devotees in the queue to save time.

I should like the students to realise what a tender heart Raamakrishna Rao had. He joined the queue. The Inspector General of Police approached Raamakrishna Rao and appealed to him to come separately and not join in the queue. Raamakrishna Rao told him: "Politically I may be Chief Minister. Spiritually I am a cheap devotee! I am not such a great devotee." Such was the devotional spirit of Raamakrishna Rao!

### **Svaami and Shivaanandha**

All of us reached Hrishikesh. Raamakrishna Rao had arranged for the stay of the entire party in a big guest house and nearby cottages. At that time, Shivaanandha and a group of his devotees came to the guest house and requested Svaami to visit Svaami Shivaanandha's *aashram* the next day, which happened to be Shivaanandha's seventieth birthday. Svaami remarked: "It is not Shivaanandha's birthday but Kuppusvaami's birthday. Before he assumed the name. Shivaanandha, as a renunciant, his name was Kuppusvaami. He was a doctor. That Kuppusvaami ceased to exist with the taking of *Sanyaasa*. He then adopted the name Shivaanandha. That was 26 years ago. Hence the Svaami is only 26 years old as Shivaanandha. It is the 70th Birthday for Kuppusvaami and only the 26th Birthday for Shivaanandha!" Shivaanandha said: "Svaami! No one has told me this truth so far in this forceful manner."

This body is 70 years old. People recognise the physical, but do not recognise the basis that sustains it. This truth can be understood only by Divine personalities like *avathaars* and not by others. From the moment of birth till the end of this body it will bear one form and one name.

People who profess *Adhvaitha*, often remember their *pre-sanyaasa* life and continue to think of it while carrying on their life as renunciants.

### **Practice of cremation in the backyard in Kerala**

Shankara was confronted with a difficult situation. No one in his village was willing to help him. He had to perform the obsequies for his mother. The local Nambuudhiri Brahmins declared that they could not touch the body. They felt that Shankara was going against scriptural injunctions.

Utterly helpless, Shankara carried the body himself to the backyard of the house and cremated it. What Shankara did then is practised even today in Kaaladi. When any elders pass away, their bodies are cremated in the backyard of their houses. There is no separate cremation ground for them.

When you go to Kerala you will find houses facing the street but the backyard will be open space. Anyone who goes there will have to take a purifactory bath. In this manner Shankara fulfilled the promise he gave to his mother.

Shankara then left for Kaasi. He was deeply pained at the attitude displayed towards him by the people of Kaaladi. Shankara was walking all the way to Kaasi, with just a stick in his hand and an oil torch to light his way at night.

### **Advice to the young**

Looking at young men and women going about on his way, Shankara remarked to his disciples that young people were more keen about sensuous pleasures than to enquire about the *Aathma*. It is a pity that people are attached to the body which is a container of many filthy objects. They are carried away by the external physical attractions of the body. It is a crying shame! What a pity that people should be so attached to this impermanent body! How long can youthhood last? Shankara then and there taught the people about the transitoriness of carnal pleasures.

His message was a warning to youth to be very careful in the life they led. They should give up attachment to the body. In this context I would relate the story of a prince who wanted to marry a merchant's daughter for her beauty. The girl who was devoted to God and wished to remain single, devised a plan to rid the prince of his infatuations. She sent word that she would agree to marry the prince if he approved of her after a week. Meanwhile she took a series of purgatives, collected all the purgings in vessels and went to meet the prince. By that time she was so emaciated that all her youthful charm had gone. She told the prince that the beauty he saw in her was all contained in the vessels. The prince learnt the lesson and decided also to remain single and devote himself to serve God.

Shankara sought in this manner to turn the minds of the people away from sensual pleasures to thoughts of God. Shankara did not call upon all young men to take to sanyaasa. He exhorted them to do their duty and dedicate the body to the service of the Divine. He preached the truth, practised it and broadcast it to the world.

Young people today have become slaves of the senses and are behaving like the lower animals.

Shankara pointed out how worldly life is like the scenes on a screen. They come and go, but the screen remains. He declared: "*Brahma Sathyam. Jagath mithya*" (The Self is real. The world is illusory). Shankara also declared: "*Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagath*" (The Universe is permeated by God). When scholars pointed out the contradiction between the two statements, Shankara said: "Worldly life is illusory because it is continually coming and going." At the same time, this worldly life is lived like the moving scenes on a permanent screen. In this process the world and the Divine become one as it were like the oneness of the screen and the pictures on it. This is the basis for the statement: "*Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagath.*" Hence, the Upanishathik declaration that the whole cosmos is dwelt in by God.

### **Adhvaitha and worldly duties**

This was the non-dualism preached by Shankara. Consider the Divine as the fundamental basis and lead your worldly life recognising its impermanence. Without the Divine the cosmos has no existence. Hence man must recognise the one Divine *Aathmik* Principle that is present in all beings. It may be called by different names. The Eternal Divine is birthless and nameless.

(Svaami described Shankara's successful debates with Mandana Mishra and his wife, Ubhaya-bhaarathi, both of whom took to *sanyaasa* thereafter. Shankara then went to Kashmir.)

### **Shankara's atonement in Kashmir**

The ruler of Kashmir was a great patron of scholars. Shankara wanted to defeat them in debates. The moment Shankara entered Kashmir, the gates of the temple of Kanaka-dhurga closed. All the efforts to open them proved fruitless. All the *pandiths* went to the temple and prayed to the goddess. In answer to their prayers the Goddess spoke in an ethereal voice: "Shankara is a great Achaarya (preceptor). But he suffers from one taint. Only when the taint is removed will these doors open." Shankara then sang hymns in praise of Shiva. Shankara realised that he had committed a mistake in entering the dead body of the king of Kaasi to acquire the experience-of a householder for carrying on the debate with Ubhayabhaarathi, the wife of Mandana Mishra. To atone for this lapse he decided on a eleven days fast, without food or water, to perform a *thapas*. On the twelfth day, the doors of the temple opened of their own accord. This showed the power of Shankara's determination and penance.

Krishnamurthy and Sandipan Chatterjee (who had spoken earlier) referred to *Prema* and called upon the students to cultivate love. What is the kind of love they should develop? Shankara has given the answer. The love should arise from the *Aathma*. True prayer should stem from the soul and not the body. That love is God. Live in love.

### **Develop detachment**

Shankara continuously preached the doctrine of detachment to young people because he realised that attachments developed over many lives cannot be shed by listening to one or two speeches. There was a businessman who feared that his son might develop aversion to the world if he listened to the discourse of a *pandith* who was expounding the greatness of renunciation. The *pandith* assured the merchant that one day's talk was not going to reform his son, when a series of talks had no effect on the father. When there was need for constant purity in daily life, the efforts at spiritual cleansing should be continuous. This was the way Shankara was preaching to the young the philosophy of renunciation and detachment. Students should hold fast to God as the only true friend and supporter. When you have firm faith, the Divine will manifest Himself to you. This is the truth, the truth and nothing but the Truth.

Today several *pandiths* expounded *Adhvaitha*, but few practise it. *Adhvaitha* should be lived, not merely repeated in words! Realise the truth: "*Sathyam, Jnaanam, Anantham Brahma!*"

*Discourse in Sai Kulwant Mandap on 9-9-1996.*