

## Guru-Poornima celebrations at AVG Anaikatti, Coimbatore

Talk by Swami Sadatmanandaji, chief acharya

Today we are celebrating Vyaasa Purnima which is otherwise called Gurupurnima. Today is supposed to be the birthday of Ved Vyaasa who is a well-known guru in our tradition. His contribution to our tradition is unparalleled. As his name itself suggest, Ved Vyaasa is the compiler of vedas. He did not compose the vedas, but with the help of his 4 disciples- Paila, Vaishampayana, Jaimini and Sumanthu he compiled the vedas. Vedas include Upanishads, so he has contributed in our getting the Upanishads. He has compiled Bhagavad Gita dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. He has written the Brahma sutra . These 3- are considered to be prasthanatraya for getting self-knowledge. He also wrote the Mahabharata with 100,000 verses and he wrote the yoga sutra bhashyam and composed the 18 puranas, a huge literature with thousands of verses. . Therefore we celebrate his birthday today. Infact Veda Vyaasa is so great that in our tradition, he is considered to be an avatara of Maha Vishnu himself and he represents the guruparampara. Therefore Vyaasa Purnima is also known as Gurupurnima . On this day, we express our gratitude to the entire tradition of gurus by kayika, vacika and manasa. We today in all these 3 ways remember the contribution and grace of the gurus we had in our life and express our gratitude to them.

**There are certain misconceptions regarding guru-bhakti or grace of guru.**

In our tradition so much glory is sung of the guru. The person who has devotion to guru and the Lord, to him alone sastra will be revealed. Infact Bhashyakara himself says , without guru, vidya is not at all possible. Brahma vidya is received only by the grace of the guru. We have so many verses in our scriptures which are praising the place of guru in our life. Based on that , there are some misconceptions about guru which I thought I will clarify.

Some say guru bhakti is gurudom. Really if you analyse the 2 words – guru dom, it means being a guru. Like being free is called freedom, being wise is called wisdom. But the word gurudom is used in the sense of exaggerated importance given to guru. Guru is presented as a super-human being who cannot be questioned and whom you cannot afford to displease in any manner. There is a cult around that person. That is called gurudom. This is a misconception many people have about guru. We clarify that guru bhakti which sastra talks about is devotion to guru who is a representative of the tradition or Parampara of teachers. Guru does not claim this vision or teaching methodology to be his or her own creation. Guru does not claim any super-human status.

Our Pujya Swamiji was an ordinary person with ordinary upbringing and in his videos he says – I am a normal person. In fact too normal. So we are talking about guru as one who is representing the tradition of teachers and there is no cult around the person. One looks upon one's guru as the last link because of which I connected to the Parampara.

Second thing is , some people think by doing devotional activities of chanting, gurupaduka puja and do morning and evening guru puja and serving guru, by that itself one gets moksha. No other separate sadhana is required . That is not correct. The devotional activities and serving guru are all useful , but that itself will not give you moksha. Another thing is that some think that by effort of study of sastra, etc. , one does not get vidya, so no point in making effort. Just by mere grace of guru, vidya will get transmitted . We expect some mystical happening that one day guru will put his hand on my head and I will be enlightened. We do not encourage or endorse such thinking . One has to make effort to study sastra . Gurus's blessing is not a replacement for that. A real guru will never encourage that.

### **Then what is the grace of the guru?**

Grace of the guru is in the form of the teaching given to us. His availability to guide us is his grace. Of course his blessings will help in removing any obstacles in the pursuit. We should not expect any miraculous power which will get us moksha.

Some people think that : *atmanah guruh atma* – the self alone is the guru for oneself. One does not need external guru. You become your own guru and some sentences in Bhagavatam which encourage this sentiment. But that particular thinking is not accepted by our tradition. Mundaka Upanishad clearly mentions- *tad vijnanartham gurumevabhi gacchet-* to know that (brahman) one should go to a guru only. Bhashyakara says – *evam (only) means sAstrajnopi svAtantrena brahmajnAna-anveshanam na kuryAt-* Even if you are a scholar in sastra , mimamsa, etc. don't attempt to get this vision by yourself. So guru is a must for every student.

Question is asked- what about Ramana Maharshi who did not go to guru.

To this we say- Ramana Maharshi did not ask this question. You are asking this question means you are not Ramana Maharshi. He did not require a guru, but you require. So better take the help of a guru. Thus guru is a must. But the role of the grace of guru should be placed properly in our pursuit. This spiritual pursuit is full of obstacles and at every juncture, we require the blessing and guidance of the guru. It makes somuch difference . Those who have a guru knowhow much difference it makes in their pursuit.

That is why we express our gratitude to our guru. That is the significance of gurupurnima because when we express our gratitude , we have more and more value for the

knowledge we receive and it will have more impact on our life.

### **Caturmasa vratam-**

Another significance of this special day is that it is the beginning of caturmasa when sanyasis take vratam. Caturmasa means four months . But nowadays that is too much, so they made it two months. These two months sanyasis don't go out. But it is not so much relevant to us.

Another significance is that it is mentioned in puranas and other sastras that we take some vratam during this period . vratam means vow or some commitment. Vratam is of two types- pravrttyAtmaka and nivrttyAtmaka. PravrttAtmaka means we positively do something extra. Like we take a vratam to chant purusuktam everyday which is very good for buddhi. Or you decide to chant Vishnu sahasranam or do pradaksina which you were not doing before. If your life is already disciplined and full of spiritual activities , then you do not require any vratam. But for those who want to stabilize their commitment, vratams help to discipline you and keep you in track.

Another type of vratam is *nivrttyAtmaka vratam*. Where we drop something. I take a vow that I will not take sweet or watch TV , or get up early (forgoing sleep is nivrtty) and do sandhyavandanam, etc. for 2 or 4 mths. It is said in sastra that what you drop like sweets, you give it to others.

So this particular day helps you to come back to the track to start something new or resume what you have missed, so that you have more commitment to the pursuit of Paramatma which is called moksha. We pray to the Parampara of gurus starting with Lord Dakshinamurti. We are all blessed to be exposed this tradition of teachers directly or indirectly. We invoke the grace of all the gurus so that we succeed in our pursuit of discovery of inner freedom.

*Om tat sat*

### Talk by Swamini Brahmaleenanandaji

I share some thoughts and reminiscences on this special day of Gurupurnima. Veda Vyasa has contributed to this tradition in so many ways. Two important things I would like to mention today is-Veda Vyasa was a contemporary of Lord Krishna. Krishna's time is said to be about 5000 years ago when he gave the Bhagavad Gita to us and Vyasa wrote the Mahabharat with the Bhagavad Gita in it. So for atleast 5000 yrs or more it has been coming to us generation after generations from guru to shishya. So how many teachers should have been there from that time?

Again we have the Brahma sutra which Veda Vyasa has written to establish the meaning

of some conflicting sentences in the Upanishad . That means the Upanishad teachers were there even before Vyaasa. After that we have Sankaracarya who even if we take him to be in the 7th century AD , has witten Bhashyam on the prasthanatraya and also taught them to his disciples. Moreover imagine how many people have written commen- tary, sub-commentaries and sub-sub commentaries on his bhashyam analysing every as- pect in minute detail. They have dedicated their whole life to this. After so many centu- ries, even now the teaching is there in an unbroken tradition of guru-shishya Parampara. There is a story of how Vacaspati Mishra wrote a commentary on the Brahmasutra bhashyam after his marriage to Bhamatidevi.. He was so absorbed in his writing that he did not remember that he had a young wife. His wife was also so committed that she served him without complaining. Later after he finished his work, he is surprised to see an older looking lady with white hair . He realized how he had neglected her , but she had served him so well. So he gave her the highest complement by naming his commentary on brahmasutra as Bhamati. This is how people spent their life and now today we have an unbroken tradition of student-teacher lineage.

In a text called Satasloki, written by Sankaracarya , in the very first sloka he pays a comple- ment to his guru. Gist of sloka- In all the three worlds if you were to search for an upama to compare to sadguru. After searching a lot, you think this sparsha stone is a good comparison which converts anything it is rubbed with ,into gold . But even here the Sparsha stone does not transfer its property to another stone of converting things into gold. Even that Sparsha stone falls short as a comparison for guru.

A sadguru is one who can teach and give the vision to his students and in turn create a teacher out of his students who becomes a guru and can in turn teach and create stu- dents. Such is the mahima of a guru who is nirupamah, alaukikah ie, no comparison to anything else , extra-ordinary and one commentators says it means he is equal to Bhaga- van only!

Thus we have the whole unbroken chain of teachers starting with Bhagavan . This lineage is mentioned in the sloka-*sadashiva samaramba, sankaracarya madhyamam* and also the rishi-son/student lineage is mentioned in the beginning of Mundaka Upanishad to glorify the guru parampara.

Out of his many students, four students of Sankaracarya are well-known who became mathadipati and through their guru-shishya parampara propagate the teaching to this day. Present day, in our own Arsha Vidya tradition, we have Swami Shivananda who was a guru to Swami Chinmayananda who was guru to Pujya Swamiji who also learned from other teachers like Sri Pranavananda and Sw Tarananda. Pujya Swamiji in turn created so

many teachers all over the world.

The uniqueness of Pujya Swamiji was that he was always interested in giving the Advaita vision in all his courses and public talks. He wanted the vision to reach the hearts of all people and even children. He would clearly say that this is not my vision, but I am only a link passing on the vision which has come down from the rishis. That is why he created centers of learning- Arsha Vidya - to impart these teachings , especially the teachings of Sankaracarya. The Sringeri matha conferred on him the Shankara award for his commitment to teaching Sankara- bhashyam to so many students always keeping the vision and nuances of Shankaras bhashyam in his talks. He always taught his students to be true to the sastra and bhashyam and teach with a sense of responsibility and respect for the student. He never quoted unnecessarily and taught with great awareness to the students levels.

In the whole Parampara one considers guru as equal to Isvara. Isvara bhakti is very important to gain right guru and get knowledge . In the same way gurukrpa is equally important without which teaching will not bless us. It is very important for the student to have faith that Isvara has come to me in form of my guru.

There is another sloka which says – Ignorant people have fallen into the deep pit of ignorance and are being scorched by the samsara fire. In order to protect them, Dakshina-murti who always resides at the foot of a banyan tree moved away from there and gave up his maunam and took the form of Sankaracarya and travelled all over by the country, spreading atma vidya to remove ignorance which is the cause for samsara fire.

Similarly Pujya Swamiji out of compassion, has gone all over the world and untiringly taught so many people and made a difference in their life. He has imparted these values to all his students . That Parampara continues even today through his students who have become teachers and teach with the same commitment in different places. The Parampara thus flows unabated . We are indeed blessed on this particular day that we can also be one link in this parampara. We have the blessings of gurus who have passed on this knowledge for centuries, which comes to us even today. My heartfelt gratefulness to all gurus of this tradition.

*Om tat sat*

**- Report by Mr. Venkatasubramanian and Ms. Padma**