

12. Shankara's Adhwaitha

THE Ari-shadvargas (the six enemies of Man), get a foothold in his mind, because it is filled with the darkness of *Ajnaana*. They are nocturnal birds like bats and owls that cannot tolerate light. Darkness will not flee if you throw stones at it; nor will it disappear if you lay about it with a sword, or shoot it with a gun. It will be destroyed only when a lamp is lit. Shankara taught this simple truth to many who were ignorant of this simple fact. The people of this country were lost in the pursuit of many goals, because their vision was blurred by darkness. Shankara taught them that the *Vedhas*, *Upanishaths* and *Shaasthras* had but One in view, the One-without-a-second, *Adhwaitha*.

Shankara, when quite a young boy, was one day offering *puuja* to Dhevi, the household Deity, because his father was away and he had asked him to perform worship in his absence. He placed milk before the image and prayed pathetically that She should sip the milk, as he imagined She was wont to do, when his father did the *Puuja*. He wept so sincerely that Mother melted at his walling and drank the entire quantity) Shankara had seen his father distribute the milk that was offered to the Mother, a tiny spoonful, to every member of the family; but, since the cup was emptied in one quaff by Her, nothing remained; the boy feared that he would be blamed for drinking what was the share of the others. So, he wailed again. Dhevi felt great pity at the plight of Shankara, who had taken the Image to be alive, and who had compelled Her already to manifest Herself from it. But, she did not pour milk out of Her palm, as I do; she pressed Her Maternal Breasts and filled the cup. Shankara's *Avedhana*, his anguished yearning, had succeeded in matting Dhevi respond!

Beginners only need image worship

Similarly, the other day, Shri Raamamurthy, who is sitting among you here, shouted, "Swamee" in sincere faith and agony. His wife was writhing in pain, because her clothes had caught fire. She was too panic-stricken to call out My Name. But, this cry was heard by Me. I hurried to the spot, which is, as you say, 400 miles away; I crumpled the fire out, before it was too late.

Shankara worshipped images in childhood and he knew the value of *Saguna swaruupa* (God as endowed with qualities). He advised *Saguna Aaraadhana* (worship of Form) to the large majority of people, even later in his life. Little children must be taught with the help of slates and boards, on which illustrations are drawn. Temples, images and pictures are the slates and boards for the children in spiritual progress. But, if you play with a toy elephant, you cannot derive the experience of contacting the real one. The Formless can be conceived only when you have transcended Form.

Shankara's Adhwaitha is the Ultimate Truth

When Shankara thought of renouncing the world (in order to get the authority to educate it), he felt that his mother's consent had to be taken for the step. So, while bathing in the Poorna river near his house, he cried out one day that a crocodile had caught his leg. It was true, for the crocodile was, as in the Gajendhramoksha story, only *Samsaara* (wordly life) called by that name, Sensual Desire, to put it in other words. When the mother came rushing to the bank of the river, he told her that the crocodile would let him off, only if he took *Sanyaasa*, became a monk! This was also true, for, renunciation, detachment, giving up worldly ties, is the means of saving

oneself from bondage. The bewildered mother agreed and the boy left home to seek his *Guru*, and through him the secret of liberation.

Shankara lived only for thirty-two years, but, during that time, he purified and consolidated the various schools of worship and brought them under the over-all care of one philosophical principle, *Adhwaitha* (non-dualism).

The *Mahaavaakyas* (the great statements on Supreme Reality) of the *Vedhas* once again began ringing in the hearts of all, with their true meaning. *Aham Brahmaasmi; Thath-thwam-asi; Prajnaanam* Brahma (I am *Brahman*, Thou art That; consciousness is *Brahman*)--all were explained in simple, convincing logic, in sweet captivating poetry. Shankara's *Adhwaitha* is the ultimate Truth and so, it is only confirmed, not shaken, by the discoveries of science or the flights of intellect. It speaks of the unity of matter and energy; of time and space, of the Universe being but *Brahman* Seen through the veil of *Maayaa*, which too is but an activity of the Primordial.

Shankara knew that *Adhwaitha* requires intense *saadhana* (spiritual effort) which will remove all trace of ego, all idea of duality, from the mind of man. So, as a preparatory discipline to the dawn of the awareness of one's real unity with the substance of the Universe, he taught the rules of *yoga* and *bhakthi* and *karma*; these, according to him, will brighten the intellect, cleanse the emotions and purify the heart. *Adhwaitha* is the awareness of the Divine, in everything, everywhere, in full measure.

Shankara suggested *sath-sanga* (good company) as the very first step in *saadhana*; the company of the wise and the good will develop into detachment and love of silence and solitude. That will promote the disappearance of *moha* (delusion), which according to Arjuna, was the fruit of listening to the Geetha. When that happens, one is established steadily in the *Thath-thwam*, the reality of this and that, the identity of this with that. Well, the recognition of that identity is the attainment of *Mukthi* (liberation).

Prashanthi Nilayam, Shankara Jayanthi, 28-4-1963