

Gurupurnima talk of Swami Shankaranandaji

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Swami Shankaranandaji on 27th July 2018

Kāmādi-sarpa-vraja-gāruḍābhyām
viveka-vairāgya-nidhi-pradābhyām |
Bodha-pradābhyām druta-mokṣa-dābhyām
namo namaḥ śrī-guru-pādukābhyām ||
(last verse of guru-pādukā-stotram)

Namo namaḥ – my salutation, namaḥ, namaḥ again! To what? To the guru’s pādukās. Why? Because we want protection from the kāmādi-sarpa-vraja-gāruḍa – snakes and other creepy crawlies which bother us, and Garuda is supposed to take care of all these. That’s true of snakes outside. What about the snakes inside that bother me, which don’t let me grow? The one which subdues them is the guru – kāmādi-sarpa-vraja-gāruḍābhyām. How does he do so?

Viveka-vairāgya-nidhi-pradābhyām. He bestows on me a wealth – nidhi that which should be protected, kept well, kept carefully. Here the nidhi is vairāgyam. When I see things in the right perspective, when I understand the true value of a given thing, I don’t run after a thing just because I have a fancy for it. I understand what is the value of every pursuit, value of every object I seek. The only thing that makes me distinct as a human being is my free-will, my choice. How I exercise my choice makes the difference between how I live and how I can live.

We call ourselves sādhakas. The word sādhaba means one who accomplishes. But the fact is, what is to be accomplished is already accomplished. Saying I am a sādhaba is really a misnomer in some ways. How do I go from being a sādhaba, a person who is seeking to a person who recognizes there is nothing to be sought? That journey begins with viveka. Viveka means the ability to discriminate, ability to separate two things which are very tightly coupled. How do I separate this bar from the steel in the bar (the microphone stand) that’s in front of me? Can you separate the steel from the bar physically? What remains if I take away the steel? Nothing remains, but yet, do you see only a bar or do you recognize the steel independent of the bar? That’s called “raising the bar!” we have to raise the bar! This is called viveka. Not when there are two things like a pink flower and a green leaf – that’s no big deal to separate them. Anybody can separate them. Separation here is with reference to what is seemingly inseparable. I don’t see myself as anything but this body-mind-sense-complex. I don’t see anything else. This is where my identity lies. Am I this body? Yes. This body I am, I cannot deny that. But am I just this body? So we say “anyo’ntara ātmā prāṇamayaḥ” There is something else which indwells this body, which fills this body and makes it functional. That is prāṇa. Is that the last word? Is there something else? Yes. Behind it is the mind, the manas, manomayaḥ. Is the mind alone me? No! No! there is a kartā behind it; an agent of action, a doer behind it, the one who objectifies and uses the mind as an instrument. Is that the last word? No! No!. there is an experiencer, a bhoktā behind it. Our lives are bhoga-pradhāna. We are looking for one more experience in life. How many experiences have we had in life? How many more do we need, to be able to see there is something, there is a truth beyond the experiencer-doer-enjoyer. This is true viveka and one who gives this, viveka-vairāgya-nidhi-pradābhyām, to such a Guru, I say namaḥ.

How does he give that treasure?. Bodha-pradābhyām – he awakens me to my true nature. Bodha means knowledge of the truth. The truth is very much there, like the steel in the bar is very much available for reckoning, but I miss it, because my buddhi is hooked on to a name and a form, and to utility. I am always a utilitarian. If I look for utility, then there is never going to be a freedom from vyavahāra, because utility means I have to transact. Here bodhaḥ is tat-tvam-asi. You are what you are seeking. There is nothing more to be done. That knowledge is freedom, mokṣa - freedom from being a person who is wanting, freedom from being a sādḥaka. You recognize – I am what I want to be, I have arrived! Guru is the one who gives me such a knowledge, who makes it possible to know. When I understand who a Guru is, then alone respect wells up out of me for the Guru. Otherwise it will be one more word.

Who is a Guru? How do you translate Guru? Teacher? Gururbrahmā gururviṣṇuḥ

... I never understood why we chanted this until I heard Pujya Swamiji. Then you really understand why gurur-brahmā - because when all that is here is īśvara, is the one who teaches going to say “īśvara is different and I am different”? He knows very well that he is not separate from īśvara. The one who has the same devotion to the Guru as he has to īśvara, that person alone is blessed by the Guru’s knowledge fully. That is the śāstra.

Okay. If knowledge alone is needed, then let us have one more class. Why this Guru- pūja? Why maṇḍala pūja? Why something other than knowledge? Even if you look at our pūjas what is important? We have a 16-step pūja, we have a 5-step pūja etc. But what are the important steps in a pūja? We start with a saṅkalpa, we make an affirmation - this is what I am going to do for this purpose; which means you have a clarity towards what you are seeking. Then the other step in a pūja, when people like to be in a pūja, is when the āraṭi happens. Everybody wants to crane their neck and see the āraṭi. Haven’t we seen dakṣiṇāmūrti before? Haven’t we seen any of the forms before? What happens when the light comes? Why this going after the light? Because that light is the light that’s supposed to show us what is the true nature of Bhagavān. The pūja begins with the understanding “īśvaraḥ asti”. There is a small lamp burning in whose light the ornaments of the deities shine and therefore I know there is Bhagavān. And the person who does the pūja is also called “gurukkal”. He is also like a Guru. What is his job? He is doing a few things. And finally what does he do? He lights this camphor and in that light of the camphor he shows what is īśvara. And for that one glimpse, one is waiting. How long is the āraṭi and how long is the pūja? What’s the proportion? āraṭi seems very small. This is true of life. Pūja actually reflects, in a way, our life, as we grow from doers and enjoyers to the ones who recognize the reality. The whole life is a pursuit of that one alone. You start with a saṅkalpa, you have a clarity of what you are looking for. Then you want to know the truth of īśvara, which is the truth of you. Like in Pūja, you can’t just say “I will do saṅkalpa and then do āraṭi”. Pūja doesn’t work that way. It works through a whole bunch of steps. Karma dominates life because that’s how life is and that’s what takes our time. Therefore, we have to learn to do whatever we do, recognizing the presence of īśvara. And for that, we need an attitude called Bhakti. Bhakti calls for śraddhā. To accept adṛṣṭa phalam we need śraddhā. Kaivalyopanisad says, “śraddhā, bhakti, dhyānayogā avehi”. And all this culminates in one knowledge.

The whole teaching of Vedanta is said wonderfully in a brief composition of Pujya Swamiji – Dakṣināmūrte amūrte. Dakṣināmūrte amūrte sanakādi munijana hrnmūrte. This formless reality manifesting as all the forms is recognized in the hearts of sages like Sanaka. What did Sanakādi go to Dakṣiṇāmūrte for? adhīhi brahma! Dakṣiṇāmūrte taught to Sanakādi. They taught others. That’s the whole guru- paramparā coming up to Pujya Swamiji and from Pujya Swamiji to us.

So one goes and says “adhīhi brahma”. Dakṣiṇāmūrte is not physically available. But Pujya Swamiji was available for us to say “tvaccharanāgatam mām adhīhi”! The kṛti says “āgama-sāra-paripūrṇa ātma jijṇāsu-manogata mūrte”. The entire veda including the karma-kāṇḍa, have only one purport, one thing to reveal and that is pari-pūrṇaḥ, the whole. Is it away from me? No! it is ātmā, it is myself. āgamasāra is that you have no other way of knowing except through veda. adhīhi – you please teach me, recall for my sake (how you were taught), because there is no other way to gain this knowledge except from a teacher. If that’s the role of a teacher, what’s my attitude to the teacher going to be?

It cannot be anything but gratitude. This is an expression of that gratitude. No emotion, no relationship stays unless we build up relationships, and for building up a relationship one has to act. If I love you and don’t tell, you may never know. You may wonder whether I love you. Expression is important for building up a relationship with the whole paramparā. This is the day to remember our teacher, and the whole lineage of teachers and to see what the teachers have brought to my life, and how grateful I am to my teacher. And how do I express it? - by keeping what he taught me in my mind, by emulating my own teacher, by living my life as guided by my teacher and to make my choices based on the way my teacher taught me. To live my life as my teacher told me. The teacher needs nothing from me. If I throw light on a mirror the mirror doesn’t absorb it. It reflects the light back. If you give something to the teacher it doesn’t stay, because he doesn’t need anything. It comes back to you. Pujya Swamiji was a living example of that – whatever we gave, it came back redoubled to us with so much love for us. That’s a teacher. We all take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the teaching tradition – as Swamiji used to say it is not the individual, not the persona, but the Guru as an institution who is remembered on Guru Purnima. I will end with a prayer. May we all be able to keep what our Guru has taught & the way he has guided us in view, and make our lives successful, meaningful, and gain that one knowledge which alone matters!

Om tat sat.