

Śaṅkara-Jayanti-2017

Talk by Swami Paramārthānanda at AVG, Anaikatti

I am very happy to be in the Gurukulam on the auspicious occasion of Śaṅkara-jayanti. All of you are aware that our primary scriptures are *Vedās*. And we look upon *Vedās*, as given by Lord himself, for the benefit of the entire humanity. And with the help of these *Vedās*, a human being can fulfil all his legitimate desires, both worldly, as well as the ultimate spiritual desires. This can be done while living in harmony with the creation. And this teaching of the *Vedās*, has been made available to us, because of the contribution of several ṛṣis and several ācāryās, whom we regularly remember through the well known śloka,

“nārāyaṇam padmabhuvam vaśiṣṭham śaktim ca tatputram parāśaram ca
vyāsam śukam gaudapadam mahāntam govindayogīndram athāsya śiṣyam
śrī śaṅkarācāryam athāsya padmapādam ca hastāmalakam ca śiṣyam
tam totakam vārttikakāramanyān asmad gurūn santatamānato'smi ”

So, starting from *Nārāyaṇam* up to our Guru, we offer our gratitude, we don't know when the origin of *Vedās* started. So, if we are able to get the benefit of Vedic teaching, it is because of all these ṛṣis and ācāryās. Therefore, in our culture, we show our gratitude to all these ṛṣis and ācāryās.

Even though all ṛṣis and ācāryās are great, we choose two of them for regular worship: *Vyāsācārya* and *Śaṅkarācārya*. *Vyāsācārya* contribution to our culture in general and for spiritual wisdom in particular is well known.

And every *gr̥hasthā*, in his *brahma-yajñā* ritual, remembers *Vyāsācārya*. In *brahma-yajñā*, ṛṣi *tarpaṇam* mantra, “*kr̥ṣṇadvaiṇāyādayo ye ṛṣayastān ṛṣīstarpayāmi* (कृष्णद्वैपायनादयो ये ऋषयस्तान् ऋषीस्तर्पयामि)”, the first ṛṣi *tarpaṇam*, is for *Vyāsācārya*.

Not only *gr̥hasthās*, even *sannyāsīs* remember *Vyāsācārya* on this special occasion, by starting the *cātur-māsya* ritual during *vyāsa-pūrnima*. *Vyāsācārya*'s contributions are great.

Next to that, the contribution of *ādi śaṅkarācārya* is also great. We remember him for his contributions to our culture in general and for spiritual wisdom in particular, during this *śaṅkara-jayanti* day. We look upon them as *avatāra* as Lord *Viṣṇu* and Lord *śiva*.

śaṅkaram śaṅkarācāryam keśavam bādarāyaṇam
sūtrabhāṣyakṛtau vande bhagavantau punaḥ punaḥ

I salute, again and again, the great teacher *Ādi Śaṅkarācārya*, who is Lord *Śiva*, and *Bādarāyaṇa* who is Lord *Viṣṇu*, the venerable ones who wrote the *bhāṣya* and the *Brahma-sūtras* respectively.

Śaṅkara's contribution to spiritual wisdom is well known in the form of *bhāṣyam* of *prasthana-trayam* as well as the *prakaraṇa granthās*. We are the beneficiary and can truly appreciate *Śaṅkarācārya*'s contribution in this field.

Today, I would like to remember few fundamental principles given by *Śaṅkarācārya*, to appreciate his glory, and how they are still relevant & valid.

All the goals that we have to accomplish (whether worldly goals or spiritual goals), are categorized into two:

- Those goals which can be attained through several methods or means, *aneka-sādhana-sādhyam*. Goals those are accomplishable through many methods. In English, multi-path-goals.
- Those goals which can be reached by only one goal, or method or path, *eka-sādhana-sādhyam*. Single-path-goal.

Śaṅkarācārya makes it clear through his various *bhāṣyams*, what are all the various multi-path-goals and single-path-goals.

I will talk about three things, which are either multi-path-goals OR single-path-goals.

The first one is *mokṣa*.

Śaṅkarācārya in all his *prasthana-trayam bhāṣyams* makes it clear that *mokṣa* comes under, *eka-sādhana-sādhyam*. He establishes this by *śruti*, *yukti*, and *anubhava*.

“*tamevaṁ vidvānamṛtaṁ iha bhavati | nānyaḥ panthā ayanāya vidyate* || “

It occurs twice in *puruṣa-suktam*. So *mokṣa* comes under *eka-sādhana-sādhyam*, single-path-goal.

This is very important because, during Śaṅkarācārya’s time, many people were claiming *mokṣa* can be gained by *karma* or *upāsanā*. They interpret “*brahmavit āpnoti param*”, as “*brahmanaḥ upāsakaḥ param āpnoti*” and present “*vit*” as *upāsanā*.

Śaṅkarācārya dismisses all of them and establishes “*jñāna mātrena mokṣaḥ*”. And between *jñānam* and *mokṣa* there is no gap, instantaneously *mokṣa* is gained.

Despite the fact, Śaṅkarācārya establishing this so clearly, even now, there are so many different opinions, like *mokṣa* can be gained by *karma* or *upāsanā* or *bhakti*. This is very unfortunate. If it is said that “*karma* or *upāsanā* or *bhakti* will give *citta-śuddhi*”, then it is wonderful. But that is not what is said.

So, it is very important to remember Śaṅkarācārya’s reasoning. Śaṅkarācārya says “nobody can get *mokṣa* and nobody can give *mokṣa*”, even omnipotent & omniscient *Bhagavān*. Because, *mokṣa* happens to be our very nature, *svarūpa* and therefore, it is with us all the time. And whatever that is already with us, we cannot get it. What is already with us, *Bhagavān* cannot give it to us.

So, we should remember, in our tradition, *mokṣa* cannot be given to us. This should be very well understood. Then the next big question is, if *mokṣa* is already my *svarūpa*, then how it is said, *mokṣa* is *eka-sādhana-sādhyam*? If *mokṣa* is already attained, then how can you say, *mokṣa* is gained by *jñānam*? Because *jñānam* also cannot give *mokṣa*.

We initially start with, *jñānena mokṣa sādhyam*. But once a person comes to *jñānam*, we teach, *mokṣa* is not gained through *jñānam* also. But through *jñānam* we come to know that *mokṣa* need not be gained. It is our *svarūpam* only.

So, the job done by *jñānam* is not *mokṣa prāptiḥ* (gain), but *adhyastha saṁsāra nivṛttiḥ* (removal of ignorance). So the whole effort is not in the attainment of *mokṣa*, but dropping the ignorance and the notion that I am a “*saṁsāri*”. *Mokṣa* (मुञ्च धातु - मोचने) itself is a significant word. It means dropping. *Mokṣa* is dropping the ignorance and the notion that I am a “*saṁsāri*”.

jñānena adhyastha saṁsāra nivṛttiḥ eva mokṣa praptiḥ iti upacharyate, through knowledge, dropping the misconception that I am bound and that dropping is figuratively called as attainment of *mokṣa*. We don't gain anything, we drop something.

That is indicated in “*tyāgenaike amṛtatvam ānaśuḥ*”. That is, “*ajñānasya tyāgaḥ, adhyāsasya tyāgaḥ*”. *Adhyāsā*, the ignorance can be removed only by *jñānam*. Therefore we say, *jñānāt eva mokṣaḥ*.

This is the great glory of Śaṅkarācārya. In his “*tattu samanvayāt (brahma-sūtra I.1.4)*” commentary, Śaṅkarācārya dismisses all the misconceptions. So, *mokṣaḥ eka-sādhana-sādhyah* (single-point-goal), is the one fundamental principle of traditional teaching. As Pujya Swamiji says, a traditional Guru should bring this point in all the discourses.

Now the second point. Having established, *jñānena mokṣaḥ*, the question is “*jñānam*“, *eka-sādhana-sādhyam* (single-path-goal) OR *aneka-sādhana-sādhyam* (multi-path-goal) ?

Some say, there are many methods for *jñānam*:

- *śāstra-vicāra*
- ‘Who Am I’ enquiry
- Meditation
- *Yoga*
- *Bhakti*
- *Nāma-saṁkīrtanam*
- ...

Śaṅkarācārya is very clear in all his *bhāṣyams*. *jñānam* can be gained only by one method, *pramāṇa-janyam pramā*. Any knowledge can be gained only by using relevant instrument of knowledge. *Pūjā* is not a *pramāṇam*, *yoga* is not a *pramāṇam*, *samādhi* is not a *pramāṇam*, ‘who am I’ enquiry is not a *pramāṇam*, *nāma-saṁkīrtanam* is not a *pramāṇam*; none of them will come under a *pramāṇam*.

With regard to a fact, we cannot be inclusive, we have to assert that *pramāṇam* alone will produce knowledge; and that *pramāṇam* has to be a relevant *pramāṇam*. Here, in knowing the nature of myself as *mokṣaḥ*, I require only one *pramāṇam*, *śāstra-pramāṇam - upaniṣad*.

Since it is in the form of words and sentences, *pramāṇa vicāra* alone is the *pramāṇa* operation, which we call as *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsanena ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ mantavyaḥ*.

Śaṅkarācārya very clearly establishes that *jñānam* is *eka-sādhana-sādhyam* (single point goal). And the only path for *jñānam* is - *tadvijñānārthaṁ sa gurumevābhigacchet...* (MUNDAKA 1.2.12), *tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ* (Gita 4.34)

So, *mokṣaḥ jñāna mātra sādhyah; jñānam śāstra-vicāra mātra sādhyam*, this is the second point. *Mokṣa* is single path goal and *jñānam* is also single path goal, *eka-sādhana-sādhyam*.

Then come the last one. For receiving the message of *śāstra*, the mind has to be fit receptacle, *pātram*. So, *jñāna-yogyatā* is important. If the mind does not have *jñāna-yogyatā*, then *pramāṇam* cannot work, *yogyatā* is required and *adhikāritvam* is required.

The first *yogyatā* is desire for *mokṣa (mumukṣā)*. The second *yogyatā* is desire for *jñānam (jijñāsā)*. The third *yogyatā* is desire for *śravaṇam (śuśrūṣā)*.

For the one who is desirous of studying the scriptures, these desires are important, this is, *jñāna-yogyatā*. If *yogyatā* is not there, then *śravaṇam* will not function. For that, in our tradition, they give a nice example. If I want to look at my face How to see it? I have to bring a mirror. Suppose I have a mirror but my eyes are not proper, then the mirror will not be of any use. Eyes are there, but mirror is not there, then also you cannot see. Eyes are also important and mirror is also important. When they join together, I see my face.

Similarly Guru's words are *śabda-darpaṇaḥ* (mirror). The Guru is continuously showing the mirror, asking you to see your glory. When the Guru is showing the *śāstra-darpaṇaḥ*, the *antaḥkaraṇas* are required. Otherwise, Guru's effort will not give any result.

*yasya nāsti svayaṁ prajñā śāstram tasya karoti kim |
locanābhyām vihinasya darpaṇaḥ kim kariṣyati ||*

That student who does not have the thinking and assimilating power, what can *śāstra-pramāṇam* do? If the eyes are not there, what is the use of *darpaṇaḥ*, (mirror)?

So *śāstra-pramāṇam* will function only if there is *yogya-antaḥkaraṇam*. And for that the *veda-pūrva* is useful. So, *veda-pūrva* gives the *yogyatā*; *veda-anthah* shows me *darpaṇam*. *Vedā* serves both purposes, preparing the person to see the mirror and showing the mirror. If we go through preparation, and then look at the mirror, the knowledge takes place. The knowledge is, "I am not a speck in the creation; but the whole creation is a speck in me". If I have to receive this wisdom and it has to be a fact for me, then I need a prepared mind, a *yogya-antaḥkaraṇam*.

This *yogyatā* is a multi path goal (*aneka-sādhana-sādhyah*). There are many methods:

- *Pañca-mahā-yajñā* (*pitṛ-yajñā, manuṣya-yajñā, bṛta-yajñā, deva-yajñā, brahma-yajñā*)
- *īśvara ārādhanam*
- *Yoga*
- *Prāṇāyāma*
- All kind of reaching out actions

Any of these methods or combination of these, can be used to gain the *jñāna-yogyatā*. *jñāna-yogyatā* is a multi-path-goal.

So *jñāna-yogyatā prāpti* is a Multiple path-goal; *jñāna prāpti*; is a Single-path-goal, and *mokṣaḥ prāptiḥ* is a single-path-goal, This is the traditional teaching.

Pujya Swamiji always advised, "Never compromise with the tradition of teaching for satisfying the type of students, never speak untruth". That will be a disservice to *Vedās*, disservice to *Vyāsācārya*, disservice to *Śaṅkarācārya*, and disservice to our Teaching. We can praise other *pramāṇas*, as they help to gain *citta-śuddhi*, but one should be very clear that the ultimate aim is *jñānam*, and *jñānam* alone can give "mokṣa".

"annapūrṇe sadāpūrṇe śaṅkaraprāṇavallabhe jñānavairāgyasiddhyartham bhikṣām dehi ca pārvati"

This wonderful tradition of, "*jñānena mokṣaḥ, pramaṇa vicareṇa jñānam, and yogena cittasya śuddhiḥ*", *Vyāsācārya* establishes it through *Brahma-sūtras* and *śaṅkarācārya* establishes through his *bhāṣyams* and our Pujya Swamiji made this available to all of us in such a way we can understand. Therefore, on this auspicious occasion of *Śaṅkara-jayanti*, we all should be grateful to *Vyāsācārya*, *Śaṅkarācārya* and to the entire teaching tradition.

Transcribed and Edited by Swamiji's disciple students