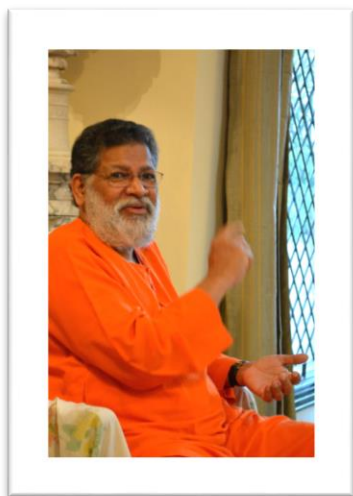


Guru Purnima Message - 2006

SWAMI BODHANANDA

(On the occasion of Vyasa Purnima on 10th July, 2006)



The birth anniversary of Sri Veda Vyasa falls on the 10th of July. He was born 5000 years ago to a fisher woman, in an island. His father was a Brahmin scholar called Parasara. From such humble origins Vyasa grew up to become the greatest spiritual

and ethical preceptor of India. He is the founder of Hinduism as we practice it today. Hindus call him Adi Guru, the ancient teacher. The birthday of Sri Vyasa is hence celebrated as the day of fullness of Guru.

Veda Vyasa systematised and edited the four Vedas that became the foundation stones of Hinduism. The cardinal principles of Vedas are:

- (1) There are many paths to the One God.
- (2) The world is a dynamic expression of God, hence Divine.
- (3) God is to be realised in the hearts of individuals who cultivate compassion for fellow creatures.

Vyasa further developed these ideas into a system of ethics and social conduct in his famous composition, the Mahabharata. The Gita, the core sacred book of Hindus, is set in the Mahabharata in the midst of a battlefield. It gives the message of detached engagement in the performance of ones worldly duties as a path to spiritual growth. Ever since down to this day Hindus have followed the light shown by Vyasa.

Guru is the vehicle of knowledge transference. It is true with any branch of knowledge, be it material science or spiritual wisdom. We stand on the shoulders of our forefathers. Without words and writing and teachers, civilization will come to a grinding halt. Guru's role is as important today as it was during the ages of oral tradition. It is Guru who transforms data into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom. He interprets symbols for day-to-day living. He welds the transcendental and the terrestrial into a happy harmony in human awareness. He is the Shiva who brings down the Ganga of knowledge from Heaven to earth. Guru is Acharya who teaches by practice, who walks his talk. The syllable 'Gu' in the word GURU represents darkness and 'Ru' in the sense of remover. Etymologically GURU means remover of spiritual darkness or ignorance.

Guru is inspired by his inner energy and motivated by compassion for the suffering world. His words or actions have no tinge of self-aggrandising greed or ambition. Vyasa lived in the forest of Badarikaranya, away from the city, away from power and pomp. But he was there when the nation faced a crisis, with his ethical compass and spiritual torchlight. The whole community listened to him in abated breath. He set standards for kings, philosophers and businessmen to follow. A Guru is a RAJARSHI, that is, an involved spiritual beacon, contributing to the well being of people. Vyasa advised the Kuru dynasty, Vasishta, the solar kings; and in modern times we have the glorious example of Mahatma Gandhi. A Guru never turns his face from the problems of the world. According to Sankaracharya, Guru is "ahetuka dayasindhu"-an ocean of motiveless compassion.

The Katha Upanishad says: "uttishtata jagrata praapya varaan nibodhata" - Arise! Awake! Seek company of great souls and gain enlightenment.

The Mundaka Upanishad says: "tat vijnaanaartham gurumevabhi gachet, samitpanih srotriyam bramhma nishtam" - to know the truth may the seeker approach a scholar well established in wisdom.

The Gita says: "tat vidhi pranipaatena, pariprasnena, sevaya" - may you know the truth through surrender, enquiry and service.

The Veda cautions: "acharyavaan purusho veda" - blessed by a guru one comes to know the truth.

In all these scriptures the importance of Guru is highlighted.

Sant Tulsi Das dares to say: If God and Guru appear together, first prostrate to Guru and then to God, for it was Guru who opened our eyes to God.

Shiva Purana says: Guru saves from God's anger, but not even God can save when Guru is angry.

Such is the reverence in which Hindus hold for Guru and the Guru Parampara, the succession of teachers. It is all the legacy of Veda Vyasa. His full name was Krishna-Dvaipayana-Badarayana-Paarasara - Veda Vyasa. Salutations to this Loka Guru/world teacher of India who taught us 'ahimsa paramo dharma' - 'coexistence is supreme virtue'. This is the message the modern world, torn in several factions, urgently needs.

Swami Bodhananda
Kalamazoo, Michigan
30th June 2006

Swami Bodhananda is Chairman, Sambodh Foundation, India; The Sambodh Society Inc. USA; and Bodhananda Research Foundation for Management & Leadership Studies. He is the Inspiration and Guiding Force for all Sambodh institutions.