

“Bhava-Sankara Desika Me Saranam” (Adi Sankara Jayanthi Message)

SWAMI BODHANANDA

4 MAY 2014



By celebrating his birthday and dedicating this day to teaching of Advaita Vedanta, we would not only be paying our collective debt to this great Guru, but also bring the spirit of toleration, accommodation and mutual respect to a divisive and conflicted world.

The fifth day (Panchami Tithi) of the Shukla Paksha (waxing phase of moon) of Vaisakhamonth – is a memorable day for Hindus and Indian philosophers. This was the day when the greatest Hindu philosopher and spiritual leader Srimad Bhagavad pada Sankaracharya was believed to have been born. And this year, Adi Sankara Jayanthi is celebrated on May 4, 2014.

Bhagavad Pada Sankaracharya (780–820 A.D) is considered one of the three pillars of the grand edifice of Hindu Dharma, along with Sage

Yajnavalkya (3000 B.C) and Sage Veda Vyasa (1200 B.C).

Yajnavalkya provided the central vision of Dharma in the pronouncement, "aham brahmasmi", that the universe is one integral web and that the 'I' consciousness is the unifying common factor. Later, Veda Vyasa expounded the same truth nuanced in the then socio-political context and laid the foundation for the Indian-Hindu culture and political economy, promoting individual freedom and social harmony.

Subsequently, as Hinduism became weak due to inflexible orthodoxy and mutually antagonistic and intolerant sectarianism, Buddhist atheism, Jain asceticism, Sankhyan dualism and Charvaka materialism shook up conventional beliefs and posed serious challenges to the integrity of thought and unity of purpose in the Indian society, the youthful south Indian Brahmin scholar and savant Sankaracharya was the definitive, resurgent and robust Hindu response to those rebels and detractors. He tidied up Indian-Hindu thought and practices.

Sankara was a great integrator of diverse thoughts and practices. The Advaita system of religio-philosophical thought that Sankara expounded based on the Vedic dictum of 'One Truth - Many Expositions' still remains as the pinnacle of seven thousand years of Indian-Hindu spiritual and cultural experience. Sankara's lasting intellectual contribution was the selection of 'prasthan trayi' texts - the Bhagavad Gita, the Brahmasutras and the ten Upanishads, as the ultimate holy reference books of Hindu Dharma along with the proposition of the four mahavakyas - "Pajnanam Brahma", "Tattvamasi", "Ayam Atma Brahma" and "Aham Brahmasmi", as the guiding principles of spiritual contemplation. Sankara's commentaries on the prasthan trayi texts are considered the last word on Hindu Dharma. Other commentators like Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya have only tinkered with Sankara's grand thoughts.

It is sad that there is not much awareness among the masses and even modern Indian leaders about the significance of Sankara and his contribution to Indian spirituality and culture. By celebrating his birthday and dedicating this day to teaching of Advaita Vedanta, we would not only be paying our collective debt to this great Guru, but also bring the spirit of toleration, accommodation and mutual respect to a divisive and conflicted world.

I have no doubt that Acharya Sankara would be the prophet of the future and Advaita Vedanta the dharma of the emerging multicultural global society.

Jai Jai Jai Sankara.



Swami Bodhananda

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