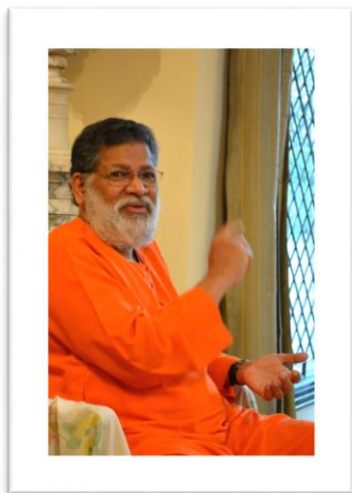


Guru Purnima Message - 2008

SWAMI BODHANANDA



This year the anniversary of Lord Veda Vyasa's birth falls on 18 July. He was born to the old and wrinkled Brahmin Sage Parasara in the young and beautiful fisher woman Matsyagandhi. The union took place in a rickety boat, on a misty morning, over the mighty Ganga.

It was an unbelievably mysterious and

unique conception. The son of the ocean of knowledge meeting in rapture the daughter of the ocean of waters. A rare meeting of wisdom and adventure; of masculine passion and feminine curiosity; a union of experience and youth. That set the ground for the finest flowering of Hindu spirituality, culture and letters.

Krishna (Vyasa's given name) grew up with his mother amidst the fishermen folk in a sandy island caressed by the swirling Ganga waters. He mastered swimming and fishing in the young age itself. Everybody in the fishermen community loved the dark thin boy with large eyes, thick lips, wide forehead and curly hair. Krishna was a pre cautious child.

Since he grew up in an island Vyasa was also known as Dvaipayana, the islander. When Krishna Dvaipayana was seven years old, his father, as per a previous agreement, appeared and took him away and enrolled him in a Gurukula for Vedic studies. The Gurukula was established and run by Parasara himself. Parasara was not married, was lame in one leg and was the greatest living scholar in Vedic interpretations. The young Vyasa instantly became his father's personal assistant and constant companion.

Parasara taught only one branch of the Vedas, other branches were held and taught by other Rishis like Bharadvaja, Atri, Visvamitra, Kasyapa, Aghora, et al. People belonging to different tribes clashed frequently in the name of their gods to gain territory, cows and gold. As Vyasa grew up to full manhood, he set out

uniting these quarrelling tribes with his famous slogan: 'Truth is One, though interpretations are many.' He went around the entire Aryavarta, from Kabul to Kolkota, the landmass between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas, and met with different Rishis, collected their branch of the Vedas and then compiled those hymns into four volumes- The Rik, the Yajus, the Saman and the Atharva Vedas.

The central practice of our Vedic ancestors was the Yagna and they believed in many gods and in the concept of Rhythm. Yajna is the subtle exchange between gods and humans through fire sacrifice and Rhythm is the balance and harmony that exist in the universe. Vyasa emphasized the idea of pluralistic toleration and since then it has been the highest ideal of Hinduism. Krishna Dvaipayana got the honorary title Veda Vyasa because of his yeomen service to the cause of Veda- collecting, editing, publishing and propagating.

Vyasa's mother Matsyagandhi alias Satyavati eventually married the reigning king Santanu of the Kuru dynasty. That brought Vyasa into the whirlpool of politics, which gave him an opportunity to test the practicality of his theories of rhythm, atma, brahma, yajna and dharma. Vyasa has already come to the understanding that the individual is part of a cosmic network and that his essential nature is pure consciousness.

To present these ideas in a contemporary framework Vyasa wrote his magnum opus- the Mahabharata. In this epic Vyasa depicted human spirit caught in an inescapable web of networks and relationships; the tragedy of human follies and the eventual triumph of the human spirit. Vyasa's characterization of Bhishma, Dharmaputra, Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana, Karna and Draupadi captured fully the complexity and contradictions of human nature. Vyasa's objective was to describe the nature and the operation of dharma in human interactions.

Vyasa wrote the Brahma Sutras to explain the logic of his theory that the individual is the ultimate source of all values. The individual is the source of existence, knowledge and happiness. The consciousness that functions in the individual is the ground of every phenomenon. Vyasa was a thorough going spiritualist-

that spirit is the source of matter, that evolution is the process of manifesting what is hidden and latent in consciousness.

The Bhagavad Gita, a part of Mahabharata, is the crest jewel of Vyasa's philosophical thought. Krishna, the warrior hero, teaches his confused cousin, Arjuna, the foremost archer of his times. That one has to perform his/her duty to the best of one's ability and conscience regardless of the consequences. If there has to be a choice between one's well being and the collective well being the hero chooses the latter. The actor is responsible for his actions performed as a call of duty, but has no control over the denouement of outcome; the action, not the actor, is measured by outcome, the actor is free of the action outcome chain.

The Bhagavad Gita is a masterly exposition on the relationship between actor, action and outcomes. An action done out of duty is free from the taint of sin even if it hurts a few. A sense of duty gives clarity for choice making. A warrior is right when he kills out of duty. Vyasa impregnating his half brothers' wives is right because he did it out of a sense of duty. A middle-aged man raping a minor girl is an abomination for no duty is involved in that despicable act. The impulsive act of a rapist or murderer is diametrically opposed to the deliberative performance of duty. Detached performance of one's duty, as an offering to one's creator, is the central teaching of the Gita.

Vyasa spent months together in the Badarika forest, his retreat centre in the Himalayas. He penned most of his works there. He acquired another epithet as a result - the dweller of Badarika forest, Badarayana.

The eighteen Puranas that Vyasa authored show him in his imaginative best. Puranas depict human affairs as a tangled interaction between gods, humans, angels, rakshasas, asuras, gandharvas, kinneras, yakshas, animals, birds, reptiles and even trees. They could communicate and knew each other's language. Instead of explaining every human experience in terms of the procrustean bed of logic, Vyasa took imagination as a tool for interpreting experience and causal connections.

Thus if a young unmarried girl become pregnant, it is not her immoral behaviour, but the result of her

promise to a Gandharva in the past life, or the infatuation of a powerful kinnara or god. If newborn children die one after another, the couple had an agreement to that effect in a previous life and the tragedy is only expected as a result of a predetermined plan. What is experienced in the theatre of human life is only a shadow of what happened, happens and will happen in other theatres of life. Human life gains an unfathomable depth - several players at several levels are involved in the playing out of even a single episode. The puranas depict life as a pullulating web of intricate patterns with dizzying depths, each strand showing a will, character and individuality of its own. Reading Vyasa's puranas is a therapeutic experience.

Krishna Dvaipayana Badarayana Veda Vyasa is the founder of Hinduism, as we know it today. He lived a long productive life. He was a thinker, organizer, teacher, interpreter, writer, counsellor, troubleshooter, consultant, political strategist, institution builder, tireless traveller and above all an enlightened master. There is no field of human activity that he has not set his mind and enriched. He is tallest and the greatest prophet or Guru of India. He is Adi Guru. The quintessential teacher.

By offering prostrations at his hallowed image we are honouring all Gurus who have come and blessed humanity. When we remember Bhagavan Veda Vyasa we realize the meaning of the paean: Guru is creator Brahmaa; Guru is sustainer Vishnu; Guru is redeemer Shiva; Guru is indeed the supreme Truth; Unto that Guru our prostrations!

Love,
Swami Bodhananda

Sambodh Centre for Human Excellence
Kalamazoo, Michigan
10.00am; 5 June 2008

Swami Bodhananda is Chairman, Sambodh Foundation, India; The Sambodh Society Inc. USA; and Bodhananda Research Foundation for Management & Leadership Studies