

Book Review:

‘Self-Realization Through *self* - Knowing’, by Sankara Bhagavadpada

The literature related to Vedas and Upanishads, including the Bhagavad Geetha and all epics, the Itihasas; is truly enormous dating back to at least five to nine millenniums. Many famous classic works such as commentaries (Bhashyams) are in the Sanskrit language and hence not accessible to many average persons, not well versed in Sanskrit. Thus, the true Vedic heritage is not within the reach of many Indians, let alone the persons living outside India.

In the last fifty years, there has been many a revival and many successful attempts by many Acharyas have been made, to change this situation and bring back the Vedic heritage and knowledge and make it accessible to average Indians and persons across the globe. These include the mission started by the late, Pujya Swami Chinmayananda (Chinmaya mission) and the late, Pujya Swamy Dayananda Sarasvati (Arsha Vidya Gurukulam) and the world-wide mission of the late master, Sri. Jiddu Krishnamurti (his teachings and the Krishnamurti Foundation Schools in India, England and America), to name a few. Indeed, all these continue to promote our Vedic heritage and no doubt they have enriched many lives.

However, the average person (Indian or non-Indian, child or adult) does not have the motivation nor the inclination to comprehend the contents of these great translations and commentaries as the upbringing (cultural and educational) has no elements to raise the interest level and curiosity for knowledge beyond making all of us into ‘wealth seeking’ robots (‘happiness seeking’, a word often used, but which is a misnomer). This situation is unfortunate as the Vedic heritage and the contents thereof are truly universal and beneficial to all human beings as the embedded teachings truly transcend any religion.

The retreat conducted by Dr. Sankara Bhagavadpada accompanied by a text containing the presentation of slides (with audio files of the talks) is one of the few attempts and works in print, that indeed fills this gap. Some points worth noting are: (1) The style of the presentation is in the form of a question-answer format which is very elegant. In fact, this follows the methods adopted by our sages in the Gurukulas during the Vedic times; (2) The style is simple and is easy to follow; (3) Majority of the questions are of the type that many of us have asked ourselves at some time or other and hence they are in sync with the curiosity and enquiries of an average individual; (4) The discussion and responses under each of these questions gives the basics needed for a student to go on the path of one’s life

enrichment. It triggers the inquisitive mind, and also the person who is kind of lost and looking desperately for having a change in life, spiritually speaking or otherwise, and to go on the path needed for him or her, to find their own destiny and resolutions; (5) References to the master J. Krishnamurti's teachings, Upanishads, Ramana Maharshi's teachings, Bhagavad Geetha, gives a chance for the reader to delve further into the ideas being espoused by the teacher (Sankara).

The only mild criticism I have, or better still, a disagreement, with a concept discussed by Sankara is the following: The book advocates at many places that a sorrowful or tragic event in one's life is necessary for a person to turn to a spiritual path, seeking answers to questions that suddenly arise in one's mind. While this seems to be true in most lives; I feel this reflects the fact that our parents or the schools we have attended have no emphasis anywhere in the schooling on ethics, ethical values, spiritual aspects of life and concepts that would lay the foundation for a human to have a chance to enrich one's life through a spiritual enquiry rather than a 'happiness seeking' enquiry alone. In a sense our upbringing makes us, sooner or later into lost human beings, whether we admit or not. It is this helplessness that drives a strong person to seek answers to some questions thereby getting on a path he or she never tried before. This book certainly helps an individual to follow that alternative in a very welcoming fashion and makes it easy.

It may be an innovative idea to seek additional questions from persons who have attended the retreats and provide responses and adding them in the book.

It may also be a good idea, to add an extensive synopsis (summary and guide) of the author's viewpoints, messages and recommendations.

In summary, Sankara has succeeded (where few have in my opinion) in providing a valuable, easy to follow, methodology for all beginning seekers of spiritual knowledge. The author is to be commended in this achievement and service to humanity at large.

Dr. Ramarao Inguva, Prof. of Theoretical Physics (Retd),

No: 102 Gadwall Ct, Harvest, AL 35749, USA