The Last Question

BY SADHGURU

Shankara was born in what is today the state of Kerala. He was a prodigious child and an extraordinary scholar with almost super-human capabilities. At the age of two, he could fluently speak and write Sanskrit. At age four, he could recite all the Vedas, and at age twelve he took sannyas and left home. Even at that age, he gathered disciples and traveled across the country to re-establish the spiritual sciences.

Adi Shankara did many incredible things but he received his guidance from his guru Gowdapada, who was a very different kind of person altogether. An extraordinary guru, his teachings were never written. Instead, he produced a handful of extraordinary people who quietly re-established the spiritual science in a different way, in the nation. They worked to establish the spiritual sciences without writing anything or creating a new scripture, but rather as a way of life — as an incuculation.

Although Shankara was a scholar, who knew all the Upanishads and Vedas, realisation eluded him. He had intellectual realisation but lacked the realisation in terms of experience. Shankara was brought up in the Brahmin culture, and in some ways he still thought like a Brahmin.

On a certain day, when he was about thirty-two years of age, he happened to be at a temple in Kashi. As he was about to enter the temple after taking a dip in the Ganga a Chandala — somebody who maintained the graveyard, and was considered the lowest of the low castes — came his way. Shankara got agitated because he was a Brahmin and as he was entering the temple, he did not want to set eyes on somebody like this. So he said, “I was just about to go into the temple and you crossed my path and spoiled my day. Move away.”

But that Chandala was a realised being. The man asked, “What should move? Me or my body?” This question struck Shankara very hard. After that he never gave any teachings. He had gone around the whole country and taught everybody what to do, but he realised that he did not know anything. In that moment he found realisation.

He walked to Kedarnath and disappeared. At the age of thirty-two, he left. There is a monument in Kedarnath in his honour. There is a hand and staff carved in marble jutting out of a wall. That is the last point where he was seen. Nobody knows where he went.

(Sadhguru is a prominent spiritual leader)