

The 2009 Six-Week Vedanta Camp At AVG, Saylorsburg

The glorious tradition of studying major Upanishadic texts and Bhagavad Gītā with the support of Śaṅkara Bhāṣya reached yet another milestone this fall at our Gurukulam in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. On November 21, Svāmi Tatvavidānandāji concluded the six-week Vedanta camp where he enlightened the students on Gauḍapādācārya's Kārikā (Advaita Prakaraṇa) on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and on the Dhyāna Yoga from Chapter 6 of the Bhagavat Gītā.

The third chapter of Kārikā, the Advaita Prakaraṇa, presents a lucid account of the Eternal Reality of Non-Dual Self. It proclaims that Ātman/Brahman is the One, the whole and the only reality and that the world is an illusion. The Ācārya systematically develops one of the declarations made at the beginning of this Upaniṣad – Advaitam Satyam – which is both deep-rooted in our scripture and supported by reason. Our perception of the diversity of the material world occurs because of incorrect knowledge of Brahman. The ākaśa (space) dṛṣṭānta (illustration) is used in the Kārikā to negate the multiplicity and to establish the non-difference of a Jīva and Brahman. Ātman or Brahman can be imagined as infinite space and the jivas are the same space enclosed in various pots. When the pot is smashed, the pot-space merges into the open space. Similarly, when the knowledge of the self destroys

ignorance, the different jivas merge into one Ātman.

Gauḍapādā has put forward Ajātavāda - the doctrine of non-creation or non-origination - in this Prakaraṇa. This principle rejects the various theories of creation described in the scripture. It states that the creation that we see has never been created at all. The world appears overwhelmingly real to us only because we think of it all the time. The world is simply an illusion and is not really there. Even an attempt to find out how this creation has taken place becomes pointless and reveals the lack of true knowledge. Śrī Ramaṇa Maharīṣi also agrees that the world never happened at all and has stated that Ajātavāda is a part of the highest form of Consciousness that one can attain. Whenever scripture speaks of creation or plurality, its purpose has been to help the beginners' understanding. The well-ripened aspirants (like the students of Māṇḍūkya!) realize that plurality could rise only from some cause; but nothing exist other than the highest Truth; therefore, nothing has ever been born. "No jīva ever comes into existence. There exists no cause that can produce it. The supreme truth is that nothing ever is born." (III. 48.)

Swamiji also taught the sixth chapter of the Bhagavat Gītā – the Yoga of meditation. This is one of the most practical parts in

Gītā. Although the primary emphasis is on describing all aspects of meditation, subjects such as renunciation, samadṛṣṭi or samatvam sarvātma bhāva, and the rebirth of a devotee are all discussed. The discourse begins by Lord Kṛṣṇa challenging every meditator to become a yogārūḍhaḥ, or attain equanimity by throwing away all desires and psychological dependencies. The Lord provides instructions to remove every possible obstacle in taking control of a restless mind, and to practise and increase the power of true meditation. The prime objective is to silence the wavering mind, and turn total attention to one's own Self, which ultimately helps to resolve the mind in the timeless reality of one's inner silence. There is also an assurance given to a sincere seeker that if he should die before attaining the cherished state, any spiritual progress made by him will not be in vain. The Lord reveals various kinds of superior births possible for such a person that will allow him to easily continue on the path from where he left off. *Krishna extols the glory of the Dhyāna Yoga so much so as to conclude that a man of meditation is superior to a man of penance, a man of learning and a man of action, as the latter have not been able to control their desires and remove their ignorance. 'Failure in meditation is any time more valuable than success in the material world' thundered Swamiji.*

The Advaita Prakaraṇa and the chapter on the Dhyāna Yoga perfectly complemented each other. The clear message from both texts was that we have to set ourselves free from kārpaṇyam – constant seeking and constant fear. To put an end to this kārpaṇyam or to achieve a kārpaṇyam – fearlessness or the absence of helplessness

-, we need to conquer the mind and eliminate the ignorance about our Self. Having the mind at my command means that I am not the mind's slave and therefore it becomes easy to cultivate serenity within and without. The entire effort in the Dhyāna yoga is to silence our mind or to reach a 'thoughtless' state so as to allow the truth to reveal itself. Such an ideal state of quiet mind has been described as 'Amani-Bhava' by Gauḍapādācārya. It is only when silencing of mind is brought about by the conviction & knowledge that 'I am Brahman' and 'All that is objectifiable is Mithya' that we attain a state of 'Amani-Bhava'. To realize this non-dual absolute, Gauḍapāda asks us to practice 'Asparśa yoga', which is a practice to live without touch or without attachments or identification to any things of the world. The allusion is that one cannot understand the world by being deeply involved in it. Only by withdrawing or dissociating from it, one begins to understand its dream-like unreality. The Asparśa Yoga, also called 'Brahma samsparśa, could be looked at as a practical application of Ajātavāda or the theory of non-causality.

In addition to Swamiji's talks, the students also benefited from expert training in other important areas. Sri Suddhatmaji taught us Vedic chanting and Bhāṣya paṭhanam with his melodic and riveting voice; Br. Shankar earnestly tutored us in Saṁskṛt and made even the Vyākaraṇa seem within reach; Sri. Lance Daniel kept us in perfect shape with regular yoga lessons. There were over 70 students attending this camp from across the U. S. as well as from around the world. The Gurukulam staff had their days full

attending to our needs and making every attendee feel at home. Each day began with a guided meditation in which Swamiji carefully brought out the principles discussed in the class. The day concluded with an hour-long satsang with Svāmiji. Each satsang included Swamiji’s commentary on selected verses from Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamśa and concluded with Śrī Rām bhajan.

As usual, Svāmi Tatvavidānandāji surpassed the very high expectations of the students. Every one of his classes, from the beginning to the very end, was both engaging and instructive. He inspired us to practise constant meditations and abide in the bliss of inner silence. His exposition of Vairāgya and Viveka was always fresh as ever and his assertion that we need not learn anything new but only unlearn

everything we have learned was clear and helpful. As Svāmīni Vidyānandā remarked during the concluding ceremony: “Svāmiji took us hand-in-hand and with unending patience, on the wings of Mandukya and Bhagavad Gītā, a quantum leap to another dimension, to the very frontiers of stillness and silence. That realm of silence is not an experience. The experiencer and the experienced are absent. Words have no role there. To attempt to applaud that silence, that serenity, that sanctity with mere words would be like lighting a lantern under a blazing sun. So perhaps it would be better to leave the indescribable undescribed.” Svāmīni’s words resonated with each and every one of us!

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