

## Fall Vedanta Retreat 2012 with Swami Tattvavidananda

The Fall Vedanta Retreat was held at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg PA from October 10 to November 17. This was essentially an adult camp. Approximately 80 students attended the camp. Swami Tattvavidananda Sarswati taught Taittiriyaopanisad and Gita Chapter 9 with Sankara Bhashyam. Swamiji conducted guided meditations and satsangs during the camp. Suddhatmaji conducted the chanting classes. Mark Hertel and Natalie Tuijelaars conducted the Yoga classes. Natalie is visiting Yoga Teacher trained in Sama Yoga and works at 'Yoga One Heart Be'. Kalpesh Jasapara taught Senior Sanskrit classes and Terry Coe taught Junior Sanskrit classes

Taittiriya Upanisad belongs to the Krishna Yajur Veda and is part of the Taittiriya Aranyaka. There are three Vallis (Chapters) in the Upanisad namely, the Siksha Valli, the Brahmananda Valli and the Bhrgu Valli. Each Valli has several sections (Anuvakas). The course covered the Siksa Valli and the Brahmananad Valli.

### Week One

Swamiji started the teaching by invoking the shanti mantra. The Siksa Valli contains the pronunciations and instructions on mantra chanting as well as the different types of Upasanas. The Karmas such as Prarabdha Karma, Shesh Karma, and Nitya

Karma were explained in details. The accumulated karmas cannot be completely emptied as new karmas are continuously added to it. Then the various Devatas namely; the Mitra, the Varuna, the Aryam, the Indra, the Brahaspati and the Vishnu as well as their effect on our lives were explained. The Vayu or is evident expression of life and represents the visible Brahman. Swamiji explained the concept of Vayu. Then swamiji described the Science of Phonetics which includes Varna (the letter), Svara (the intonation), matra (the duration), balam (the effort), Sama (the same pitch), and the samtana (the continuity).

Chapter 9 of the Srimad Bhagavada Gita is the discourse on 'Sovereign Knowledge and Secret'. It is Raj Vidya. Swamiji described it as, the most sacred, most valuable and supreme purifier. Gita is the guiding light which leads to Moksha. Swamiji stressed the importance of Maunam (silence) for looking into oneself without obstructions. Bhagwan says, the secrete is given to the one who is worthy of receiving it and deserves it. Any action performed as an offering to Iswara is Dharma. The Nastikas (non believers) do not believe in this. They are caught in the cycle of birth and death. They are reborn in lower species and suffer in misery. The Bhakti sadhana is the easiest of all Sadhanas. Other sadhanas are Viveka, Dharma, and Pranayama.



## Week Two

Swamiji continued teaching the Upanisad. There are five important Samhitas; namely Adhilokam, Adhijyotisam, adhividyam, Adhiprajam and Adhyatma. Swamiji explained the significance of these Samhitas. Swamiji presented charts for these Samhitas as well as for the Vyahrtis and explained in details the interactions of these entities. The Vyahrtis are used in connection with various rituals.



Continuing the Bhagavad Gita, Swamiji stated a rule of Vedanta which is, all change is superimposed on changeless background. You have to understand the changeless, which is the sense of I AM. It is 'changeless presence. 'I am the presence says the Lord,' the Atma is the presence and I am the Atma of everything. But I do not get attached to anything'. Iswara is present everywhere. The imperishable is the unmanifest, it is pure consciousness , the Atma. Swamiji elaborated on the meaning of Atma being the supreme self.



## Week Three

This week Swamiji dwelt on the significance of Om. Om is uttered in rituals in various situations. It has significance in sacrifices. It is used in the beginning of auspicious rituals and in reciting Mantras as. It is commonly used in Agnihotra and other Homas. Additionally, Swamiji explained the meaning of Svadhyaya and Pravachana and the relationship between the Vedanta student and the teacher.



In the study of Gita this week Swamiji continued the teaching by explaining the meaning of Iswara being present in

everything in the Universe. The Lord pervades the whole Cosmos. But the Lord is not in it. Bhagwan Krishna says. "Neither am I contained inside anything, nor am I the container of anything. In explaining the creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe Bhagwan says, "Nor do those actions bind Me as I am unconcerned and unattached to those actions. Swamiji provided various illustrations to thoroughly explained the meaning of this statement.

#### **Week Four**

This week the study of Upanisad continued in enquiry about the nature of Brahman and Brahmvidya. The Upanisad is part of Brahmvidya. The Upanisad involves superimposing the superior over the inferior thus uplifting the inferior. Swamiji explained the meaning of Vidya, Avidya, and Lakshana. Vidya is knowledge, Avidya is ignorance and Lakshana is something that is presented so that the Brahman can be understood. The meaning is, You are the atma and atma is by which you know what you are. Later, Swamiji dwelt on the five elements, space, air, fire, water and earth. Swamiji then introduced the concept of Koshas and Tapas. Koshas enhance the knowledge of Brahman. The tapas literally means heat but it has several meanings in Vedanta. Swamiji explained the various modes in which this term is used.

In Gita study, Swamiji emphasized the advantages of being Sakshi. Sakshi is one who is not involved and simply observes. Atma is not a Karta or a Bhokta. Silence is an important part of inner peace. He advised the students to be silent as far as possible and talk only when necessary or

useful. Swamiji said that to be silent is a great service to Iswara. Kama and Karma (desire and action) lead to a chain of actions. In a long run it will make you unhappy and unsure. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are not separate. They are one and the reality is far beyond that. You are that reality.

#### **Week Five**

Swamiji continued further teaching of Taittiriya Upanisad this week in Brahmanand Valli. The significance of five sheaths namely; the Annamaya, the Pranamaya, the Manomaya, the Vijyanamaya and the Anandamaya and their meaning was explained. Then Swamiji described the Purusa as one with head, left and right wing, a trunk and tail. Purusa is produced by the essence of food. The Annamaya is like gross sheath. The Prana sheath is life of living beings. The Manomaya is the mental sheath. The Vijyanamaya is the inner mental sheath. Finally the Anandmaya is the bliss. The Upanisad also dwells on the theory of creation. A detailed description of the concept of Devatas followed.

In the study of Bhagwad Gita, Swamiji said that there should be a balance of papa and punya for the rebirth. Many follow the karma phala as their goal because they have desires. These desires will take them to where they can fulfill their desires. They get into the Vasana Chakra and get caught in the cycle of gata agata (the cycles of birth and death). They have no freedom. Those who are desireless get Atmadarshana and with Chintanam and Nishta they achieve Moksha.

## Week Six

Study continued in Upanisad this week with an elaborate discussion Sankara presented about the existence and nature of Brahman. Various objections have been raised on Sankara's assertion about existence of Brahman. It is a topic by itself. Swamiji explained every aspect of this discussion and how Sankara's arguments negate these objections. This discussion involves the differences between the duality and the nonduality philosophies in Vedanta. Another assumption of Sankara on Jiwa and Iswara as being the same required attention. Objections were raised to this Philosophy and Sankara defended his position. Swamiji then dwelt on the subject of 'fear'. Fear results because the individual does not know its cause. Once the cause is known the fear disappears.

The Upanisad ended stating that the knowledge we discussed is the supreme knowledge, it is the knowledge of self.

In the study of Gita Swamiji talked about the types of Karmas. These are the Shastriya Karma, Sharir Karma, Vyavaharik Karma, Samajik Karma and the Paramarth Karma. Any Karma performed should be an offering to Iswara only if is worthy of such offering. Charity should be done with Shradha. Danam done with improper understanding of Dharma is ineffective. So also the Artha, Kama, Harsha, and Bhayam are ineffective if these are not understood properly. Swamiji then described the Sanyasa Yoga as doing all activities as offerings to Iswara. Iswara treats all equally. So says Bhagwan "Those who devote me spontaneously without expectations, they are in me and I am in them". But Iswara

is not Pakshpati (Partial towards any one). Absolute Sharanagati is an essential step to achieve Moksha. Sharanagati is complete surrendering to Iswara. It is important to practice Ahimsa, moderation in enjoyment, compassion for all, forgiveness to all (Kshama), Peace (Shanti), eating Nutritious food, Charity (Danam), truthfulness (Satyam) and Worship (Bhakti).

The Gita study ends with the firm understanding that one should worship Ishwara always, especially in prosperity as well as in adversity.

On November 29<sup>th</sup> Hurricane Sandy passed by the Gurukulam. Several trees were knocked off by the torrential rain and high winds. The Hurricane caused damage to some buildings on the campus but the classes were conducted regularly with a minimum inconvenience to the students.

On November 13<sup>th</sup> , Deepawali was celebrated at the Gurukulam. Approximately 200 people, including visitors and children took part in the function. Swami Tattvavidanandji addressed the gathering. Swamiji talked about the coronation of Lord Rama in Ayodhya. Swamiji's rendering of the occasion was taken from the Valmiki Ramayana and it depicted the grand occasion in such details with the beauty and pageantry that the listener felt as being right in the middle of this auspicious event. It was a blessing to be at this function. The priests performed the Lakshmi and Kuber Puja. Delicious Deepawali dinner was served at the Gurukulam dining hall. Fireworks followed. The children especially enjoyed the occasion.

On November 11<sup>th</sup>, Samskritam Workshop for Beginners was conducted by Lalitha Chittapragade and Subrahmanam of Samskritabharati of San Jose California. Classes were held at the temple. The purpose of the course was to teach the students the art of conversation in Samskrit. It was a good preliminary course and many students attended.

On October 11<sup>th</sup>, Navaratri Puja was performed at the temple.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Saraswati Puja was performed at the temple.

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, Vijayadashami Puja was performed at the temple.

Suddhatmaji conducted the chanting classes during the camp. Mantras were taken from the Taittiriya Upanisad, and the Bhaawad Gita with long sequences which the students liked very much.

Pujaris Sri Ravichandran and Sri Ganesa performed several Pujas during the camp as well as the regular Pujas at the temple. Lance Daniels and Anil Nagapal relentlessly worked to provide rides to airports and other destinations for the incoming and outgoing students during the six weeks.

The Teachers, Suddhatmaji, the Gurkulam the staff and the volunteers worked hard during the camp and helped it running smoothly, especially during the storm

All six weeks courses are unique. This camp was not an exception. For the Swamiji and the students this camp was one of the busiest. It was also the most rewarding camp. Swamiji was concerned about not being able to finish the teaching undertaken in this course for the reason that the material in the Upanisad was extensive and the time was short. With the blessing of Lord Dashinamurty swamiji completed the course on November 18. It was an intense course. Most of the students in this course have been attending the six week courses for last so many years. They had good understanding of Vedanta. The expectations were high. Swami Tattvavidanandaji is a edicated and scholarly teacher. He is an example of an ideal teacher. Swamiji lives what he teaches. The students have profound respect for this Swamiji. This year it was a blessing to be in Swamiji, s class. Students were looking forward to the next year for Gita chapter X and Chapter 4 of Chhandogya Upanisad with Swami Tattvavidnanda Sarswati.

Officially, The camp ended on November 17<sup>th</sup>. However, the last and very important portion of the Upanisad was still not dealt with. Swamiji continued teaching the Upanisad another day to complete that part of the study. So unofficially the course ended on Sunday November 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Reported by Arvind Bagal**

***Removal of desires is neither possible nor necessary. That I desire is not a problem. The desire becomes a problem when I come under its spell.***

***Pujya Swamiji***