

Seven Week Vedanta Retreat 2013 with Swami Tattvavidanandaji at Saylorsburg Gurukulam



The Fall Vedanta Retreat was held at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg PA from October 8 to November 25. This was essentially an adult camp. Approximately 70

students attended the camp. Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati taught Chhandogya Upanishad Chapter VI and and Gīta Chapter 10 with Sankara Bhashyam. Swamiji also taught part of Gīta Chapter 11 (This chapter will be completed next year) and conducted guided meditations. Additionally Swamiji held satsangs every day. Suddhatmaji conducted the chanting classes. Lance Daniels teaches Yoga at the Gurukulam regularly. He conducted the Yoga classes during the camp. Divya Devi also conducted Yoga classes. Kalpesh Jasapara and Terry taught Sanskrit classes. Savithri Maniji taught Bhajans.

Week 1

Chhandogya Upanisad Chapter VI

This is the beginning of Swamiji's class. The Upanishad belongs to Sama Veda as part of Chhandogya Brahmana. Svetaketu, the son of Sage Uddalaka was sent to Gurukulam to study the real knowledge that a Brahmin has to acquire so that he can be called a Brahmin. Svetaketu studied at the Gurukulam for twelve years. When he





returned he was a proud young man who thought he knew everything. His father noticed it. He asked his son if he had studied everything. Svetaketu said he has. His father then asked him “Do you know That by knowing which everything is known?” Svetaketu did not know it. His father gave him an example of the clay and the pot. They are perceived as being apart but they contain the same element namely the clay. Similarly the gold and a chain. So also there is one reality and no varieties. At the request of his son, Uddalaka continued the teaching and this is the content of Chapter VI of this Upanishad.



Swamiji’s teaching begins here. The theme is: ‘the Samsara is Nama and Rupa. It is an idea of mind. There is no Jagat. Nothing exists outside your consciousness’.

Gita Chapter 10



Swamiji read experts from what some famous people have said in praise of Gīta.

Bhagawan Sri Krishna says to Arjuna that this knowledge will illuminate the supreme reality. Devatas and Rishis do not know this. It is: “Atma is that by which you know who you are”. You see God in ocean, in mountains and all the big objects. Eventually you will see God in a drop of water. God is in Lord Rama but understand this that God is in all of us also.



Week 2

Upanisad

There are discussions on the objections raised by various Purvapakshis (opponents). Swamiji expounded on the various objections raised. Sat is pure Real. Jiva is Abhas (reflection). It is a shadow. The human beings may appear different due to Svagata Bheda (difference within itself), the sajatiya Bheda (difference in the same species) and Vijatiya Bheda (difference in different species) but the Reality is free from the differences.



Gita

Vibhutis are powers of God. Arjuna insists on knowing all the Vibhutis. Bhagawan Sri Krishna tells him that the Vibhutis are infinite but He will tell Arjuna about some of them briefly. Those who know this and my attributes will appreciate me. I grant the wisdom by which they reach me. I am the source of everything. Of me are born the seven Rishis and the four Manus. To them who know this I give lamp of knowledge(Dnyana Deepa). It is the knowledge gained by meditation on the Self.





The Dnyana Deepa illuminates the darkness created by ignorance.

Week 3

Upanisad

Swamiji illustrated the place of Jiva as the center of everything by a diagram of circles that open in infinite tangential straight line.

Cause and the effect are the same. The Vedanta acknowledges that the Supreme Being is the cause of creation. Fire Water and Earth are the subtle elements. Everything is a product of these elements. Food gets converted in three forms, namely the gross, the middling and the subtle. So does the liquid. So also the Energy. The fire, water and the earth enter the system and they become mind, prana and speech. The mind is formed of food, prana of water and the speech of the fire.

Svetaketu requires more clarification. His father says there are sixteen digits of mind. As an experiment he asked Svetaketu to fast for fifteen days. Svetaketu fasted and came back. He had lost his capacity to chant the Vedas. He was asked to eat food. His mind became alert again. This proved the fact that mind is dependent on food. Another illustration was given that of a blade of grass which when burnt creates a spark. When fuel is added to the flame it burns in a full flame. In fact mind is the essence of food, prana of water and the speech of fire.

Gita

In continuing the teaching of Gita Swamiji explained in details the Dyana Deepa. Karya drusti Binds, Karan drusti liberates. So Bahirmukha drusti binds, Antarmukha drusti liberates. The Dynana Deepa removes the ignorance that binds. Looking for happiness outside is cognitive mistake. It is a delusion. Wisdom is the oil of Dynana Deepa. Desires and fears are winds of Raga and Dwesha. Protect the Dyana Deepa from the winds by meditation and contemplation of Iswara. Practice silence to protect the Dynana Deepa.

Week 4

Upanisad

Svetaketu wanted to know more. Uddalaka tells him about Svapti meaning 'one sleeps'. A person is drawn out from all external connections. He is his Being. A bird tied to a post by thread flies all over but returns to where it is tied. It may or may not know what and where it is tied to. It has searched freedom all over. It is tired and returns to where it belongs. So does the mind. It cannot find the freedom outside. It gets exhausted and it returns to where it belongs. That is deep sleep, his Being.

Swamiji continued the teaching of Upanishad. What is the being? Is everything being or all is ultimately united in the being? The answer was everything resolves in being. Being is identified with Atman.

Being is the background of all that exists. Svetaketu asks another question. "How is it that everything becomes Being and how all merge into one?" Uddalaka gives an example of honey bees that merge in an essence of the flower in which all distinctions are lost and one essence emerges. Similarly I am this and I am that is all lost. When this occurs there is liberation. It is like the rivers flowing into the ocean. The rivers lose their identity when they merge with the ocean. The rivers are not destroyed, they are absorbed. So do the individuals lose their identity when they merge with the Supreme Being.

Gīta

Bhagawan Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that he can meditate on any of the Vibhūtis. Bhagawan then begins to tell Arjuna what God is. He has selected some vibhūtis. Swamiji described in details all these Vibhūtis and why Sri Krishna has identified with them.

WEEK 5

Upanisad

Swamiji provided a detailed explanation of what is life. Life is what one is living. There is no specific definition. A form dies when the Reality is withdrawn. A person in deep sleep or a person who died and has entered another body does not remember anything. Reality or the being is manifested in different proportion in different objects but it is the same Reality. From a tiny seed a huge tree is formed, from the essence of the being everything has emerged and that essence is you.

Gīta

Swamiji continued describing the various Vibhūtis and the reason Sri Krishna identified with them. Sri Krishna says to Arjuna that there are infinite Vibhūtis. You do not have to know all of them. You need

to remember that I am present in everything that is there. I am the seed of the Universe. With one part of mine I support the whole of this Universe. Nothing can exist without me

The Chapter 10 ends here.

Week 6

Upanisad

Swamiji continued the teaching of Upanishad. Svetaketu asked for more explanation about the being. His Father gave him an example of salt dissolved in water. It is invisible but is still present in water in the form of taste. Similarly Being has entered into everything of the creation. It is not easy to perceive it. One is like a blindfolded person who has been taken to wilderness and left there. How can he find his way back? The answer is by the help of one who has sight to find the way back. We are spiritually blindfolded, we are in darkness, we have lost our way and we are trying to find the way back.

Gīta

As there was still some time left for the course to complete, Swamiji decided to continue his teaching of Gīta. Chapter 11 is scheduled to be taught next year. However, Swamiji started teaching this chapter now. This week Swamiji started teaching Chapter 11, the Vishvarupadarshan (The Cosmic Form Devine) from Srimad Bhagawad Gīta.

Week 7

Upanisad

Swamiji continued the teaching further this week. For the person lost in wilderness a wise man who has the sight can indicate the guideposts that he has to follow to get back home. Similarly a Guru who has experienced the life can show the path to Reality. It is a long way. The way is

Acharya, the Guru. Swamiji explained what is meant by Kramas. The Prarabdha Karma has to be completely removed, so also the Sanchita and Agami Karmas will have to be resolved in knowledge. Then there is no bondage. The truth is attained. What is the difference between the knowledge of one who is in deep sleep or died and the one who has no bondage? For all the senses, the mind, the prana and the breathe are withdrawn. Soul is withdrawn but the desire to come back lingers in those that are in sleep or died. In the case of a liberated person, he has transcended all desires, there is no coming back. Jivanmukti is liberation while living. It is Self-discovery. The Jivanmukta knows what he is; the others do not know it.

Gīta

Swamiji continued teaching Chapter 11 this week. Arjuna urges Bhagwan Sri Krishna to show his Cosmic Devine Form. Bhagawan grants him this wish. Bhagawan shows Arjuna how He has already destroyed all enemies of Arjuna. All Arjuna has to do is to fight the war. He has to be a Nimittamatra.

This is consistent with Sri Krishna's advice to Arjuna throughout the Gīta, to stand up and fight. It was also the purpose of Sri Krishna's Avatara to destroy the evil on this earth. It brings out one of the most profound messages of Gīta that a person is not the doer; it is Iswara who does everything.

There are 55 verses in this chapter. Swamiji completed 33 verses. The remaining of Chapter 11 is scheduled for the next year's course.

This is the end of Swamiji's teaching of the Seven Week Vedanta course for the year 2013.

Deepawali was celebrated at the Gurukulam. Approximately 300 adults and children of all ages took part in the function. Swami Tattvavidanandji addressed the gathering. Priests Sri Ravichandran and Sri Ganesan performed the Lakshmi and Kubera Puja. Delicious Deepavali dinner was served at the Gurukulam dining hall. Fireworks followed. The children especially enjoyed the occasion.

Summary of Swamiji's Deepavali address:

The Universe is a display of Energy and the Energy is a symbol of God. Fire is the most visible symbol of God. The Rishis visualized this. We chant the five verses from Devi Mahapurana. Ambika is the mother. Seek her blessing. The all auspicious will happen in your life. All Devatas and Rishis worship Ambika. She is the power of Parmatma. Devata is the Natural force. The prayer is to the mother to protect the Universe from fear. Mother is wealth. Mother appears on one side as wealth of rich people and on the other side as poverty. She is the wisdom and scholarship of wise and shradha of Bhaktas. Laxmi and Gauri are praised in these verses.

The verses help to open up things. People are in need, fear, and are insecure. These mantras dispose of fear. You are the one who removes fear and poverty. So help us.

Swamini Srividyanandaji comments on the play presented by the students:

Swamini Srividyanandaji directed the play based on Swami Vidittatvanandaji's teaching in the class. Following are her comments:

"We have heard that once upon a time, long time ago, when the study of the Vedas was the watch word, great discussions would

have taken place among the learned from different schools of thoughts and each one would try to establish his or her theory as the truth. On those lines, a group of students, of the 7-Week Vedanta Course conducted by Sri Swami Tattvavidanandaji at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Saylorsburg, enacted rishi Uddhalaka's elucidation of the mahavakya tattvamasi to Svetaketu. Class room Material from Chhandogyopanisad (6:2:1, 12) consisting of the purvapaksa-siddhanta vada was scripted in a dialog form and the students, dressed in costumes of yester years as Rishi Uddhalaka, Svetaketu and the three schools of thought, presented the discussion. The Vaisesikas thesis that name and form alone are real, Sunyavadis hypothesis that everything is sunyam and Mimamsakas sabda sakti and vakya pramana issues were taken up for deliberation. With the help of various illustrations and metaphors the Adaivatis negated each one of the conjectures of the purvapaksis as untenable. The acharyas and the audience appreciated the lively one hour debate."

Swami Aksharananda from Guyana once visited Swami Tattvavidanandaji's class in progress. He told the students about his work in Guyana and expressed a hope to start some classes in collaboration with Arsh Vidya Gurukulam.

Events during the course:

October 12,
Saraswati Puja

October 13,
Vijayadasami

October 15
Mandala Puja

October 16, November 1 and 14
Pradosa Pujas

October 18 and November 15
Revati Star Ritual

November 2
Deepavali. Mahalaksmi and Kubera Puja.

Suddhatmaji conducted the chanting classes during the camp. Mantras were taken from Sri Rudraprasnah, Ayushyasuktam, Shanti Mantras and the Purusottamayoga. Priests Sri Ravichandran and Sri Ganesan performed several Pujas during the camp as well as the regular Pujas at the temple. Lance Daniels provided rides to airports and other destinations for the incoming and outgoing students during the seven weeks.

The Teachers, Suddhatmaji, the Gurukulam staff and the volunteers worked hard during the camp.

This course was attended by the students who attend these courses year after year after year. They are serious students of Vedanta. Their expectations are high. In Swami Tattvavidanandaji we have a scholar and a teacher whose knowledge of Vedanta and love for teaching is a blessing for the students. He is compassionate and understanding teacher. "Are you with me?", "Do you get it?" are his frequent questions to us the students. Occasional appropriate stories and some jokes make his teaching more interesting. The students have great respect and love for him. Many have expressed this by saying "One like him comes rarely in a lifetime." It is so. Indeed this Swamiji lives what he teaches.

Reported by Aroind Bagal