

Swamini Svatmavidyananda's Address to Students after Pujya Swamiji's Mahasamdhi



At the very outset, one feels like saying “What are we going to do now?” This transition is going to be very difficult for all of us. It is never easy to experience the loss of anyone, what to talk of a shining sun like Pujya Swamiji. However, Pujya Swamiji is not lost - there is no coming or going.

I'm reminded of the verse in the Bhagavad Gītā where Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, for that which is born, death is certain, and for that which has come to an end, birth is certain. When we talk of certainty, it means we are talking about a law. What dies is meant to die. We are not talking about the “I,” the *ātman*, but about the perishable body, mind, and senses. This is the law of the universe.

Even though we know, this, it does not stop us from trying to make the finite infinite. We saw this clearly in Pujya Swamiji's life. Each time he went to the hospital we chanted and prayed: “please Bhagavan, not this time.” What we tried to preserve was was not Pujya Swamiji's body, but that which was housed in the body --it is not the body; it is *Īśvara*. Ironically, what we tried to preserve does not need any preservation because it is never subject to deterioration.

Whenever we are confronted with a loss of this magnitude, we are forced to return to the truth of the *śāstra*. The *śāstra* says that while the body-mind-complex is very much finite and subject to end, there is no birth and no death, because the “I” is just using the body as a casing. It is just like the house in which one lives --when the house deteriorates, and develops cracks in the foundation it is time to move on, time to go to a new house.

Another verse in the Gita that attests to the perishability of the body and the immortality of the ātman likens the body to a piece of cloth - *vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yatha vihāya, navāni grhṇāti naro ‘parāṇi, tathā śarīrāni samyāti navāni dehī*. The body is like a cloth, and just like the old cloth, like the torn t-shirt. No one mourns the frayed t-shirt, and in fact, one can’t wait to go shopping to get a new one because this one is not serving the purpose any longer.

When the person departs from the body - we don’t say there is just the physical body, there is a *sūkṣma śarīra* and *kāraṇa śarīra*, subtle body and the causal body. The causal body is self-ignorance. The subtle body comprises the mind, desires, the subtle elements etc. Here all the *rāga-dveṣā* are held tightly - there is no leakage at all. We don’t see the subtle body when *prāṇa* departs, but it is there. The causal body finances the travel of this subtle body in this and other worlds --the ignorance of not knowing oneself as limitless make one an inter-terrestrial and weary traveler.

The one embellished with *ātma-jñānam*, self-knowledge, is spared of this inglorious trajectory, forever on the move in circuits of the finite . What happens to the *jñāni* when the body drops away is not called death, it is called *mahāsamādhi*. The word is formed by the root verb *dhā*, to place with the prefix *sam*. *Dhā* means to place, and *samyak+dhā* means to place properly all the priorities. The “I” is placed where it belongs, it is not mixed up with the “not-I”, or martyred at the altar of distractions in the form of wants. One can school oneself to have this state --but it is not the same as *ātma-jñānam*. It is a state where the mind is trained so the placement of the “I” is not disturbed for a time being. After a period of doing this, you are familiar with that “I” so much

that even when not in meditation you are generally undisturbed. *Samādhi* means you are in a state of non-disturbance.

What is the difference between *samādhi* and *mahāsamādhi*? *Samādhi* means you come back. I can visualize Swamiji sitting quietly with himself and someone calls him and he “comes back,” so to speak. Even when he comes back, so to speak, the “returning” is from the point of view of the one seeking his attention. For the *jñāni* there is no coming and going. The idea is that for a *jñāni*, who is one with everything, objects of concentration or disturbance are not there. When all there is, is the self, what will it concentrate upon, and by what will it be distracted? Therefore we have to say “as though.” The phrase “as though” was coined by Pujya Swamiji.

Mahāsamādhi means there is no coming back. One can call, but from this time onwards Pujya Swamiji is not going to come back and answer the call, and that is the cause of mourning. But this is not the whole story. I should say that Pujya Swamiji is not going to come back in the same way as we are used to. Therefore in order to communicate with him, we have to learn a new language.

When the *mahāsamādhi* of a *mahātma* takes place, the body is left behind for everybody to see. The gross body disintegrates and joins the gross elements. The subtle body joins the subtle elements because there is no one to finance the trip. The causal body just means the cause because of which the body is incarnated. The causal body of the *mahātma* is destroyed through the study and assimilation of the knowledge of Vedānta, which teaches that one is whole and limitless. Therefore, the financier of the trip --the causal body-- is not there. The *rāga dveṣas* have pacifiers, they are not exerting any pressure. Those that are there are embellishments, like the feather in Kṛṣṇa's cap. Kṛṣṇa will not cry or need a therapist, if you take away the peacock feather or the flute, or if there is no butter to eat.

How do we learn to communicate with Pujya Swamiji now? That which was there for us to communicate with was "Bhagavān plus" --Bhagavān plus the body, plus the mind, plus the senses, plus the humor, plus the kindness — a compassionately infinite plus, with a wonderful voice and an incredible mind. While he was alive, Pujya Swamiji was venerated everywhere, and what is there after *mahasamādhi*? There is a graduation that has to take place. In every loss there is a gain. I can take the leap and now I communicate with Bhagavān. Recently I was looking at Pujya Swamiji's photo and asked him for a confirmation about something, and immediately flowers adorning the frame dropped from the photo.

Pujya Swamiji is a *mūrti* of Bhagavān, *upāsya-mūrti* --a beloved incarnation. One may now sense a physical distance, but there is no distance from the standpoint of the heart, from the standpoint of oneself. This is one of the gains. It's like learning a new language. Let us say that suddenly someone you adored, revered, and communicated with daily has moved to another country. Pujya Swamiji has moved to another realm of being where the language of communication is prayer.

This is what Pujya Swamiji talked about all his life, how to relate to Bhagavān. He has shown us how we can know Bhagavān. The most beautiful thing about assimilating this teaching is that now we have Swamiji himself to relate to. Even though he's not physically here he continues to urge us to see this Bhagavān as something to relate to. In this way, the loss is sublimated into an enacted relationship with Pujya Swamiji — a personal relationship, which is what Swamiji gave everybody when he was alive. Everyone thought "I am the best, he loves me the most." So now we can continue to feel alienated and abandoned, with chips on our shoulders, or we can see how to put into practice the teachings and use them to bridge the gaps that we have in our relationship with Bhagavān. Pujya Swamiji is one form of Bhagavān that we can fully relate to, we have seen him walk, we have heard him talk, we know him, and we adore him, so that is something we can maintain. Difficult as it is to deal with Pujya Swamiji's departure from this world, we cannot overlook the blessing of being able to assimilate the teachings in a deeper way and grow in our *niṣṭhā*.

Simultaneously, one also has to take care of the grief that is there. Grief has to be processed. One can write it out, talk it out, paint it out. One can learn how to "pray it out. Prayer is the language of communication, where there is no fear of being rejected. Bhagavān is not going to say "no," just like Pujya Swamiji could never say "no."

The first gain is that one is learning to relate to Bhagavān, and in the process, one is also assimilating the teachings. Another point to consider is spiritual growth. Because of being prayerful in this way, one is growing spiritually. One can grow into becoming more accommodative, less reactive, more compassionate and more secure. Pujya Swamiji was a very big crutch, and now that it is gone --one has to grow into being a crutch-less person. We have been dealt an opportunity to let go of the crutches and to forge within ourselves that security and identity that we seek.

Yet another potential gain is a special way of being close to Swamiji by being close to the *śāstra*. I would suggest that everyone who can teach should catch some people and sit them down and teach them. To all seekers and students, I would say, catch hold of the teacher --you can catch hold of any teacher in the lineage because they will all be teaching the same thing that Pujya Swamiji taught --perhaps not in the same way, but it will definitely be the same thing.

You have to step-up, and enter the *śāstra*. One cannot say, “I will come when I get the call.” Give *Vedānta* a try and see what it may have for you. It is a committed pursuit. As the *kāthopaniṣad* says, *yamaiveṣa vṛnute tena labhyaḥ; tasyaiṣa ātma vivṛnute tanūm svām*. The *ātman* is gained only by the one who seeks it. For such a seeker alone, the *ātman* reveals itself. You have to embrace the *śāstra* and allow yourself to be hugged by the *śāstra*. It is here for you. The *upaniṣad* compassionately acknowledges the difficulties in one’s commitment due to deep-rooted feelings of alienation and unworthiness. Therefore, we have the *sāmaveda-śānti-mantra*, which says, let me not turn away from Brahman, let Brahman never be away from me. This is the glory of our tradition is that we have the privilege of “īsvarizing” our discontent and alienation. Once this is done, nothing can stand in the way of the seeker.

In every loss there is gain — and this is one of the many paradoxes of *Vedānta*. We have to grow to be the Pujya Swamiji that we wish to see. The seeds are already there. We do not have to wonder: What is that journey that makes a person grow? That path has been already been shown to us, charted by Pujya Swamiji. When you see the life of any saint, you see that it has not been a picnic. You will see that lives of saints are often fraught with early difficulties. The saintly person has “īsvarized” the pain and, in the process, has outgrown its power over his or her life. The saint has become bigger than the problems he or she faces. This is what we clearly see and admire in

Pujya Swamiji’s life. When we embrace difficulties, we see them as opportunities for growth and the way reveals itself.

The *Vivekacūḍāmiṇi* says that there are people in this world who bless without a purpose; like the spring which blesses us with flowers, fragrance, and a riot of colors, all without any reason. Saints, who have decoded this teaching and taught it, are like the spring, who teach without exacting anything in return. They have crossed over the life of becoming called *saṃsāra*, and they teach others how to teach. It is not a mystery, it is very attainable. Each time there are difficulties it is an opportunity to grow. How fortunate are we to have had the glorious privilege of having a great *mahātma* such as Pujya Swamiji, who is a constant source of inspiration, as our guru. *Om tat sat*.