

Retreat on Adhyaasa Bhashyam of Brahmasutra

From Jan 6 to Jan 12, 2019

The 7 day retreat was conducted by Swami Sadatmanandaji. The topic was adhyaasa bhashyam and the first sutra of brahma sutra. – *athato brahmajijnasa*. The camp was attended by 35 participants. In the orientation session on the 1st day, everyone introduced themselves. We were a very diverse group comprising of some already exposed to Vedanta and some campers for whom Vedanta was totally new.

A real challenge to the teacher!



In the first two classes, Swamiji deftly and patiently presented the entire spectrum of the vision of Vedanta by taking us step by step- from understanding the human problem to the vision of Vedanta about oneself. One can listen to this again and again!

Life is a series of experience and in every experience two factors are involved- subject (experiencer) and object (of experience). General trend is to improve the object of my experience quantitatively and qualitatively, thinking that by doing so my life will be good and happy. But we see that this works only upto a point and has many limitations. So we have to pay attention to the other factor- *experiencer*. In any situation, how your attitude is towards the objects and oneself decides the quality of experience. My attitude towards myself is based on my understanding. So a person understands this fact that more than quality of the object, what matters is my attitude and my understanding of myself and the world. Therefore he or she works in that direction then that person can be called a spiritual seeker. Such a person discerns the goal of life and understands that he is seeking freedom from the sense of limitation. Such a person is called *mumukshu*. One who further understands that only through self-knowledge one can get freedom and seeks knowledge is a *jijnasu*- a person desirous of knowledge.

In this context swamiji spoke about the different means of knowledge (pramanams). He also spoke about the three texts (prasthantraya) with the help of which one pursues self-knowledge- Upanishads (shrauta prasthana), bhagavadgita (smarta prasthana), brahmasutra (nyaya prasthana). Then swamiji gave a brief glimpse of the 12 darshanas (philosophies) and finally zeroed in on brahma sutra which is called Uttara mimamsa . The campers were all now ready for what was to come...

Brahma sutra is a book of analysis written by Maharshi Veda Vyaasacharya. It is generally studied after upanishad and bhagavadgita. It has several names- some of them are: *bhikshu sutras*, *bAdarAyana sutras*, *vedAnta darshanam*.... One important purpose of Brahma sutra is to clarify on any possible contradictions with regard to the statements in the Upanishads. It has 555 sutras analysing various statements in the Upanishads. It is divided into 4 chapters- *samanvaya adhyAya* (chapter on convergence), *avirodha adhyAya* (chapter on non-contradiction), *sAdhana adhyAya* (chapter dealing with means for self-knowledge), *phala adhyAya* (chapter dealing with result of upasana and self-knowledge).

There are numerous commentaries and sub-commentaries on this text. Most popular is the bhashyam written by Bhagavatpada Sankaracarya. The clarity and profoundness of Bhashyakara are very well revealed in this bhashyam. The shining gem of this bhashyam is the introduction called adhyaasa bhashyam (commentary on mistake) which addresses the crux of Vedantic understanding. Adhyaasa Bhashyam is the introduction to the first sutra and the 1st sutra is an introduction to the entire brahma sutra, Therefore adhyaasa bhashyam is an introduction to the entire brahma sutra.

The first sutra- *athato brahma jijnasa- For a seeker of freedom , thereafter therefore one should do enquiry into brahman.* (Without a teacher this sutra would not make much sense.). This implies that Knowledge is the means for the removal of bondage. Bondage is because of ignorance and ignorance-born-mistake. That mistake in the form of wrong understanding is presented in the adhyaasa bhashyam. What is implicit in the first sutra is made explicit in the adhyaasa bhashyam.

In the next few classes, swamiji took us patiently thro' the **adyaasa bhashyam**. Adhyaasa means superimposition due to ignorance. What made it very interesting was the innumerable examples swamiji kept giving at every step to help us see the mistakes in our life.

For the sake of showing the step by step logical presentation of Bhashyakara, adhyaasa bhashyam is divided into 6 parts. A brief presentation of these parts -

i) **akshepa bhashyam** – Bhashyakara first presents Purvapakshi (opponent view) that adhyasa of atma and anatma is not possible because conditions for adhyaasa are not there.

ii) **samadhana bhashyam or Siddhanta Bhashyam** – Answers the objection by presenting the right understanding. Yes , adhyaasa should not be there , but it is experienced by us all the time. Conditions required for adhyaasa are present. So there is a mutual mix-up of not only atma and anatma , but also of their qualities. Adhyaasa is very much there.

iii) **Lakshana Bhashyam** – presents the basic definition of adhyaasa – *paratra avabhAsah* – *Appearance of something somewhere else*. Then Bhashyakara mentions the various views on the false appearances (which they call *khyAti*) presented by other philosophers. Bhashyakara does not want to get side-tracked in refuting them and remains focussed on the main topic. He simply shows the consensus among all of them on the basic definition of – *anyasya anyAvabhAsatAm*- *something appearing as something else where it is not there*.

iv) **Sambhavana bhahsyam** – This part of the bhashyam presents the possibility of adhyaasa by raising an objection and answering it - how atma which is not an object can be the locus of adhyaasa? Bhashyakara shows how atma is the object of 'I thought' and is self-revealing.

v) **Pramana bhashyam** – It presents the basis (or the means of knowledge) for accepting adhyaasa. Mainly three pramanas are given by Bhashyakara- sakshi pratyaksha, anumanam and arthapatti . This is an important bhashyam which is an eye-opener to show how wide-spread adhyaasa is and the different levels of adhyaasa. All transactions (knower- knowing - known) are possible only because of adhyaasa. In other words , without adhyaasa there is no transaction.

Naturally a vehement objection is raised by opponent saying that all transactions (vyavahara) are not based on adhyaasa. Definitely satriya vyavahara (activities based on sastras injunctions) are not based on adhyaasa. But here Bhashyakara shows step by step how no transaction is possible without adhyaasa. Then makes a cryptic statement- *pashvAdibhiscAvisheshAt- all human transactions are not different from those of animals* and then follows it up with an example showing the similarity. Thus establishing that all our activities are based on mistake. A hard thing to digest! But there is some more harder truths to come... Bhashyakara goes further to show the series of levels of mutual adhyaasa of atma-anatma quoting various examples. Qualities of external objects, body and their qualities and sense organs and their qualities, ahankara... all superimposed on atma.

vi) **Upasamhara bhashyam** – Final conclusion of this analysis and the importance of this discussion is highlighted. This is Bhashyakaras style to never lose sight of the main subject matter. Adhyaasa (wrong understanding, mistake) is very much there. It is the cause for samsara. This bondage is due to ignorance. It can be removed only by self-knowledge.

This paves the way for the first sutra – *atha atah (moksha praptyartham) brahmajijnasa kartavya*. Each word of the sutra is analysed thoroughly to derive its meaning.

In brief it means - *Therefore , for the sake of getting moksha, after getting the necessary qualifications, one should do enquiry about brahman* . The pursuit of enquiry is presented as the means to attain final purushartha – moksha

It was a beautiful camp and one left the camp seeing the loftiness of the thinking of our sampradaya.

On the last day, many of the campers spoke. They thanked swamiji for patiently guiding them with ease through the bhashyam and expressed a desire to come back and know more.

Our thanks to Br Lakshmi Narayanji who taught the chanting of sadhana pancakam and also Sanskrit grammar to those who were interested. In the satsang at night, swamiji explained the meaning of sadhana pancakam and answered the questions asked. After satsang, at the request of some campers, swamiji asked us questions on what we understood that day. This helped bring clarity and precision in our thinking. It was a very enthusiastic and energetic group of campers keen to take home as much as they could. As one couple who are Vedanta students said- *"we come to the gurukulam camps for rejuvenation. We go back eager to study more and bring transformation in our life"*.

Our heart-felt thanks to all those at the *gurukulam* because of whose tireless efforts, we were able to make this self-enquiry

Writeup by- camper Ms Vibhuti Vivekar