

13 June, 2013 - Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti.

From Pujya Swamiji's *kutir* to the lecture hall the path is strung with dozens of tender coconut leaves, each traditionally cut and folded. The temple entrance is an arch of palm leaves, *malas* and more tender coconut leaves. Rangolis decorate the paths and walkways and even the golf cart used to transport Pujya Swamiji around the ashram is dressed up in banana leaves and *malas*.

A bower of *malas* is hung in sweeping loops across the path leading to the lecture hall, at the entrance of which banana palms stand like sentinels, their fruit and flowers weighing down the branches in a natural namaskar. Inside the lecture hall the scent of jasmine purifies the air from the *malas* strung like the spokes of a bicycle wheel - the hub, of course, being where Pujya Swamiji is seated to take class. The scent soothes the the mind and helps prepare one for the momentous step that is to be taken by the current batch of residential three-year students. Today the study of the Brahma Sutras will begin - the concluding text of the three-year residential course at the ashram.

Why such an elaborate celebration before starting Brahma Sutras? So many *Upanishads* have already been studied, none of which began with such celebration. What makes this special? Is there

something extraordinarily special about the Brahma Sutras that makes it more important than the *Upanishads*? Or is it that it is the final major text of the course? It is neither. Even if it is said that the studying Brahma Sutras assists in the assimilation of the knowledge that has been unfolded in the *Upanishads* studied up till this point, it does not capture why such celebration marks the beginning of the study here in Anaikatti. *Tarhi*, what then?

To study even one Upanishad, Pujya Swamiji says, takes a lot of *purva punya*. All the requirements such as human birth, having a desire to know, finding a qualified teacher, indicate that the one studying has great wealth in terms of *punya*. What to say then of the opportunity to study as many *Upanishads* as the residential students have during the last three years or so, and that too, sitting at the feet of Pujya Swamiji? One can only imagine the abundance of *punya* it must take to be blessed in this way. However, having the grace to bring one to the teacher and the study is not the end. If one is to be blessed by the knowledge itself, then *shraddha* is also required. What is *shraddha*? Not faith, much less belief, *shraddha* is the understanding that *shastra* is a *pramana*, a means for knowledge, indeed, the only *pramana* for what one is seeking - freedom from a life of becoming.

How does one gain *shraddha*? Unlike the internal *pramanas*, eyes, ears, etc., *shastra pramana* being external is not going to have the same spontaneous support that our eyes, for instance, enjoy. Instead, the attitude towards *shastra* as a *pramana* will evolve. One's recognizing *shastra's* status as a *pramana* will increase concomitantly with understanding and clarity gained from listening and inquiring into *shastra* as taught by the teacher. The more that understanding and clarity grow, the more *shastra* gains validity for the one studying. This change in attitude towards *shastra pramana* reflects an increase in *shraddha*. Doubts with regards to *shastra's* status of being a *pramana* decrease and one stands behind *shastra pramana* as one stands behind other *pramanas*, such as eyes etc.

In this way, every *Upanishad* that is studied, or more accurately, every Vedanta class, that is attended, has the potential to increase *shraddha* in the *pramana*. The more *shraddha* there is, the more reverence there is for the *pramana*. Thus, the celebration marking the beginning of the study of Brahma Sutras is an expression of reverence. Thus it was that the resident *acarya*, Swami Sakshatkrtanandaji provided the support necessary to arrange for the special events of the day and the decorating, which continued late into the night prior.

By 7:30 in the morning, a special altar had been set up for the students' Brahma Sutra books in front of Lord Daksinamurthy. After a short *puja* the students walked

around the ashram road, each carrying his or her Brahma Sutra book on the head, chanting *Medha Suktam*, *anuvakas* from *Taittiriya Upanishad* and *Sri Rudram*. The priest, Sitaram, led the procession, followed by the Swamis and Swaminis and students. Once the perambulation was complete, the students lined the pathway to the lecture hall, placing handfuls of flowers at the feet of Pujya Swamiji as he entered the hall. After Pujya Swamiji had taken his seat, *pada puja* was performed by Swami Shankarananda before the class began.

Brahma Sutras consists of four chapters with each chapter having four sections. Analysis of the vision of Vedanta is covered in the first four *sutras*, and it is these *sutras* that will be studied over the upcoming months. The vision of Vedanta, *Veda shastra*, and *karma* are thoroughly analyzed through *mimamsa*, inquiry. How it is all connected to *moksha*, how the bondage that one takes to be real is purely *adhyasa*, superimposition, how this can be resolved by knowledge, how that knowledge is gained and what is that knowledge, are all addressed. As Pujya Swamiji pointed out, all that has been studied by the students thus far will be analyzed and assimilated. In the process of assimilation one learns how to deal with topics, and how to discuss the topics that are covered so that no stone is left unturned.

So it was that the study of Brahma Sutras was begun at Anaikatti on 13 June, 2013.

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