

## Vedanta in the winter 1

2014 winter was considered a severe one with record snow fall and low temperatures across many states in the North Eastern USA. Swami Pratyagbodhananda, 'Swami P' as he is fondly called, was the resident *acharya* at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam (AVG), Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania during the winter months from Dec 2014 to April 2015. Notwithstanding the weather, *Swamiji* conducted the weekend Bhagavad Gita classes, two successful weekend courses, extensive outreach programs and many *satsangs* in and around Pennsylvania and New Jersey. *Swamiji* makes himself easily accessible and combined with his engaging personality, his *satsangs* make learning even the subtlest of the *Vedantic* tenets enjoyable.

Weekend classes: *Swamiji* started teaching the Bhagavad Gita weekend classes on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month at AVG from Dec 21, 2014 till he left for India on April 21, 2015. *Swamiji* started with verse 46 in Chapter 18 and covered 9 verses up to verse 55. The content of the verses were thoroughly discussed with appropriate and frequent references to Pujya Swamiji's Gita Home Study, the *Sankara bhasyam* and *Anandagiri tika*.

Pujya Swamiji often points out that verse 46 is one of the important verses in the

Bhagavad Gita. Accordingly, Swami P's teaching of the verse was extensive with nearly three classes devoted to it.

यतः प्रवृत्तिभूतानां येन सर्वमिदम् ततम् ।  
स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिम् विन्दति मानवः ॥

Yatah pravrttibhutanam yena sarvamidam  
tatam

Svakarmana tamabhyarcya siddhim vindati  
manavah

*Swamiji* made an insightful observation to the fact that v.46 while drawing attention to *karma yoga* by the use of the word '*siddhim*,' brings in the connection between *Ishvara* and *karma yoga* explicitly (via the 1st line of the verse). The word, *abhyarcya*, meaning *pujayitva* or *araadhya*, is given a totally fresh outlook in this verse. *Swamiji* pointed out that we restrain the word *puja* to simply worshipping a form, albeit traditionally handed down according to *upacara vidhi*. We make the division as 'secular' and 'religious.' This division is not acceptable to the Lord! The viewpoint expressed in the verse is to let every act, which is done in the spirit of duty, right and appropriate to the occasion, be looked upon as worship of the Lord - *yat yat karma karoti tat tat tava aradhanam* . Doing a *puja* in one's home, in a room dedicated for the purpose, may be easy. However, if one's

interactions with the world are as per the norm, 'right and appropriate' as dictated by the occasion, then they also become a *puja*. The world becomes the *puja* room and performance of the acts in this fashion, without getting one's buttons pushed and without pushing the buttons of others, one gains success, *siddhi*, in the form of mastery over one's binding desires. Once this is accomplished, then it is only a matter of time, with consistent *sravana*, one gains the second *siddhi*, namely *naiskarmya* which is the nature of *atma*.

*Swamiji's* simple definition of *karma yoga* is, 'be ready for surprises.' One should be ready to change one's plans since what actions fructify in what form and in which time are largely unknown. Since there are so many slips between the cup and the lip, one should be ready for surprises and be prepared to change one's plans as dictated by the occasion. Surprises come at three levels – *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidaivika*. Albeit the surprises, one has to act appropriately to mature. A *karma yogi* matures in this manner and the metric of maturity is cheerfulness. *Swamiji* further stressed that life unfolds choices constantly. One has to choose and the choice has to be governed by what is appropriate and right for the situation, place and time.

*Swamiji's* talks are interspersed with relevant anecdotes and stories from the

*puranas* to drive home the point. This makes it easy for the aspirant to assimilate the subtle and complex ideas. *Swamiji* brings out close connections between Bhagavan's *charitra* (*Srimadbhagavatam*) and Bhagavan's teachings (*Bhagavatgita*). For instance, relating the story of Gajendra, *Swamiji* points out as an example of "*para dharmo bhayavahaa*" the king who did not follow his *svadharma* in offering respectful worship and who was cursed by sage Agastya to be born as Gajendra. He remembers his prior birth and offers a lotus flower upon seeing the Lord. The *gajah* (*gacchati jayati iti gajah*), the elephant, represents the *jivah* who is happily moving around attached to the family. Entering, drinking and enjoying the water which represents *rasa*, *vishaya-asakti*, he gets caught by the crocodile (*grahah* is nothing but *mohah*, delusion). Friends and relatives cannot help one to get out of it. Upon praying, the Veda comes to help, Bhagavan comes to help mounted on the Garuda (representing the Vedas). With the *sudarsanam* (*sustu darsanam yasmat*), a clear vision about oneself and *Ishvara*, the Lord cuts asunder the *mohah* and *jivatvam* (individuality), and gives *mukti*. Inspiring the audience to pursue the study of the Gita, *Swamiji* emphasizes that this knowledge in the Bhagavad Gita comes in the form of *garudaroodah* Bhagavan.

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