

Anugraha bhashanam by Sw Sadatmanandaji

on the 28th anniversary celebration of AVG, Anaikatti on 4th November 2018

yasya krpA prayatnAbhyam sthAnametata sunirmitam

tameva pujiyam vandeham sAdaram mudA.

With gratitude and reverence, I offer my namaskara to Pujya Swamiji by whose grace and effort alone this wonderful place called Arsha Vidya Gurukulam was created and by whose blessings alone it is continuing. My namaskaram to all of you.

We are celebrating the 28th anniversary of this place called Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. Gurukulam means *guroh kulam*. Literally it means the residence of guru, the teacher who is the source of knowledge. Therefore, gurukulam means a place of learning. Learning what? Arsha vidya. Arsha vidya essentially means the knowledge of Vedas. So Arsha Vidya Gurukulam means a place of learning the wisdom of the Vedas.

How do you understand this word - arsha vidya?

Vidya as I said, means knowledge and arsha means that which has come from rishis - *risheh idam Arsham*. What is the meaning of rishi? There is a technical definition. *rishayah mantra drshtArah*- rishis are those who have seen the mantras of the vedas. This definition is based on our understanding that the Vedas, the body of knowledge are not created by any human intellect. It is given by the Lord through some people who had the purity because of their tapas. Those people through whom we have received the mantras from the Lord are called rishis. So rishis are not the authors of veda mantras. Even though many people think, even after having studied Vedanta for several years, that rishis did some spiritual experiments and based on those inner experiments they came out with these mantras which are called vedas. That is not the traditional understanding of the Vedas. In our tradition, the Vedas are considered to be apaurusheya. Means they are not the creation of any human intellect. They are revealed by the Lord through rishis for the entire humanity.

Thus, arsha vidya means the wisdom of Vedas which is received through the rishis from the lord.

These vedas from one angle, are four in number- Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.

From another angle, veda mantras are considered to be of three types- Rigmantra, yajurmantra and samamantra. This entire body of knowledge called Vedas is divided into two parts from the standpoint of its subject matter. The first part is called vedapurvabhaga, otherwise called karma kAnda which is dealing with the rituals and meditations. It is occupying a big volume in the entire body of the Vedas. The second part of the vedas is called Vedanta - Vedasya antah vedantah. It is a positional name. This Vedanta otherwise called jnana kAnda is dealing with the knowledge of the truth of the individual, the world and the cause of this world called Isvara. Thus vedas have got two parts called - karma kAnda and jnana kAnda otherwise known as vedantah. So arsha vidya is in the form of karma kAnda and also it is in the form of jnana kAnda called Vedanta, otherwise called Upanishad. In this gurukulam, we are learning and teaching the second part of arsha vidya called Vedanta.

Regarding Vedanta there are so many misconceptions.

I would like to deal with this topic as to what are the misconceptions about Vedanta.

- 1) The first misconception about Vedanta is that **Vedanta is a theory which has to be followed by practice** for some special experience called self-realisation. This misconception has some basis. Many people study Vedanta and there seems to be no transformation and they continue to remain the same good old people. Therefore they think that Vedanta is only a theory. It has to be followed by some special mystic sadhana because of which there will be some very special mystic experience. This is a very, very popular belief, very prevalent in the spiritual world.

Pujya swamiji would dismiss this belief very strongly. Infact, he is known for that. Really, Vedanta is neither theory nor practise. Then what is Vedanta? Vedanta is a means of knowledge. Like your eyes are a means of knowledge. Your eyes and the operation of your eyes is neither theory nor practice. So Vedanta is neither theory nor practice. Vedanta is a means of knowledge and it should be treated as such. Because of not having this clarity, many people do not have a proper approach towards Vedanta and therefore they are not benefited by it. Pujya Swamiji would highlight this point very much that Vedanta is a pramanam. In the text Vedantasara the opening statement is : *vedanto nama Upanishat pramanam*. Just as the eyes are the means of knowing form and colour and ears are the means for knowing sound. Similarly Vedanta is a means of knowledge for knowing the truth about the self, world and the Lord.

Thus the first misconception is that Vedanta is a theory to be followed by a practice. This statement has some basis. If taken in right spirit it would mean that after studying Vedanta if you do not get the benefit of Vedanta, then perhaps you require some sadhana .That sadhana will prepare the mind to receive the benefit of Vedanta. If understood in this manner it is acceptable. It means that some correction or some refinement is required in the instrument called antahkarana.

- 2) The second misconception is that Vedanta and even the **vedas in general are scientific**. This is a very popular misconception. If we take the tight definition of science, Vedas are not scientific, need not be scientific and should not be scientific. If we take a very loose definition of science that science means systematic knowledge, then perhaps we can call vedas as science. But that is not the tight, regular, conventional definition of science. Science is a systematic enterprise for building and organising the knowledge in the form of testable explanation of this natural world and the things happening there. This is done with the help of observation, measurement and experiment. Then only it is called science. For something to be called scientific, it has to be based on methods and principles of science. One important principle of science is that there is an external reality and it can be discovered by observation, measurement, analysis and experimentation. The scientific methods are involving formation of hypothesis, testing of hypothesis and falsifying or confirmation of hypothesis. The subject matter of Vedas are not available for such observation, measurement and confirmation by any other means of knowledge. Therefore, Vedas are not scientific.

If we further analyse this particular statement as to which part of Vedas is scientific?

Is Vedapurvabhaga scientific or vedanta- scientific?

Vedapurvabhaga (karmakanda) is talking about karma-karmaphala sambandha. If you do this particular yaga called *kariri yaga*, you will get rain. If you do *putra-kameshti yaga*, you will get a son. This is the type of subject matter presented in karma kanda. Now how will you scrutinise this particular statement of vedas? It is not available for scientific analysis. You cannot ask scientifically, how did this *kariri yaga* create rain ? Many people try to explain this by saying the yaga creates smoke, which creates clouds and from which rain comes, etc. If this is true, then we can burn a tire also and get smoke. That will not be accepted by scientists nor by vedic people. Those who are struggling to prove vedas to be scientific , perhaps they do not know science or they do not know vedas or both. In malayalam there is a saying –if someone says i know anjanam(collyrium) ,it is white exactly like turmeric powder. It means this person does not know what white is, what turmeric is nor what anjanam is. Similarly those who are trying to prove that vedas are scientific, they do not have correct understanding of vedas nor correct understanding of science. So let us not have the pressure to prove vedas to be scientific. Everything need not be scientific. In fact , science itself has accepted that certain areas are beyond the field of science. Science has accepted that singularity can never be explained by science because the density is so high. And they say that if we go further deeper, then there will be religious implications. Therefore everything need not be scientific. Vedas are not against science. When we say Vedas are not scientific what we mean is , the subject matter of Vedas are not available for scientific experimentation. Yes we do accept that yogashastra is available for science because it deals with the body and function of the mind which is available for scientific experimentation. But punya/papa and paraloka are not available for such experimentation. Therefore we need not have the pressure to prove it to be scientific. Nor do we have to be apologetic about Vedas not being scientific. But this does not mean Vedas are unscientific. That which is dismissed by science is called unscientific. Karmakanda is not dismissed by science. Thus karmakanda portion is not unscientific nor scientific.. Similarly the Vedanta portion is talking about the true nature of the self which is *asabdam, asparsham, arupam* – free of sound, touch, form and color i.e, not available for perception.Thus both the sections of Vedas are not available for objectification. But at the same time the subject matter of Vedas is not irrational, illogical. The subject matter of Vedas is neither logical nor illogical. It is trans-logical. What do we mean by that ? That which is proved by logic is called logical and that which is disproved by logic is called illogical. The subject matter of Vedas cannot be decisively proved by logic , nor decisively disproved by logic Therefore Vedas are neither logical nor illogical, they are trans-logical or alogical.

3) Another misconception about Vedanta is that Vedanta is only an **intellectual exercise** . It does not do anything. If it is only intellectual exercise doing nothing, then the transformation you are seeing in the disciples of Pujya swamiji who gave up everything and took up sanyasa life will not happen. Swamiji initiated more than 200 sanyasis in his lifetime. They would not give up everything, if there was no transformation by Vedanta. So Vedanta is not a mere intellectual gymnasium or exercise. It is in the form of the means of knowledge revealing the vision about myself which transforms one's life if it is handled and received properly

4) Another misconception is that Vedanta gives **intellectual knowledge**. Pujya swamiji says this statement is absurd because we can say that only if there is another variety of knowledge available. Like we say green apple and it has meaning because other types of apples like red apple are available. But we cannot say 'white milk' because milk is always white. So one need not and can not say: *"Today I brought white milk"* - because there is only white milk.

Similarly what do we mean when we say Vedanta is only intellectual knowledge?

Is there nasal knowledge or dental knowledge or any other type of knowledge other than intellectual knowledge ? Knowledge is always taking place in the intellect. Therefore every form of knowledge is intellectual knowledge only. It has to be intellectual because ignorance is in the intellect. Where the problem is, there the solution should be. Therefore this knowledge has to come in the intellect alone. So Vedanta gives intellectual knowledge is not a right statement. But the spirit behind the statement can be validated. A person who makes this statement means that Vedanta has been understood according to him, but Vedanta has not been assimilated in his life, it has not brought any transformation in his life. In that sense it is acceptable, if you say vedanta gives intellectual knowledge. But if you mean that there is a different type of knowledge required which is not occurring in the intellect , then that is not right understanding according to our sampradaya, tradition

5) Another misconception is that takes away our **devotion to Isvara**. Means before coming to Vedanta people have devotion and after coming to Vedanta, this devotion will go away. That is not correct. In fact, Vedanta makes your devotion highly refined, highly mature. The sentimentalist attitude of crying for the lord, etc. may reduce or go away because the person discovers that in reality the lord is not different from me. But at the level of upadhi, I am an individual and Isvara is the total and the individual surrenders to totality, that appreciation does not go away. That is why devotion to the lord does not go away.

The best example to substantiate this statement is Pujya Swamiji who was one of the greatest teachers of Vedanta and in whose life you could also see devotion . Infact, when he was concluding his last speech in the USA, the last words he uttered were :grace, grace, grace.

So you cannot say that Vedanta is taking away devotion. If Vedanta seems to take away devotion means that Vedanta is not digested properly.

6) Another misconception is that Vedanta makes **the person very dry, heartless, emotionless**. That is not true. Pujya Swamiji is an example. He was full of compassion. He was not dry at all. Whoever has met him knows that he was full of love and compassion. If Vedanta makes you dry then he must be the driest because Pujya Swamiji was the embodiment of Vedanta. But we did not see that. Therefore this particular misconception that Vedanta makes the person dry is not correct. Yes, if vedanta is not digested properly, not taken correctly, misunderstood then this can be an adverse effect. But Vedanta is not meant for making a person dry.

These are some of the misconceptions about Vedanta.

The main point to be emphasized is :Vedanta is a means of knowledge revealing the true nature of myself. Somebody may ask –“ *what is the use of this self-knowledge?*” We have some forms of knowledge and we don't have some other forms of knowledge. Physics I know, chemistry I know, computer I don't know. So many things I know and so many things I don't know, but my life does not seem to change. This question will be answered when I understand the human struggle.

Human struggle is to be free from self non-acceptance. Whatever a person does, there is continuity of this self non-acceptance. Whatever I do or achieve, I am not completely acceptable to myself. I always want to be different, so that I can be acceptable to myself. First I was a clerk and then I want to be an officer, then manager, then director so that I am acceptable. Self non-acceptance is the bondage and from that bondage one wants to be free. One struggles a lot to be free from this problem of self non-acceptance. Many things he achieves, but still the problem of non-acceptance continues. Then I seek acceptance in vicarious manner. Let me have acceptance from others, so that I will be free from this problem of self non-acceptance. So we keep struggling to get approval from others.

I want to keep my spouse happy, children happy, my boss happy so that they will accept me. And there is no such thing as a free lunch. The world will extract its price to give approval. We have to struggle a lot to get the approval and in spite of the struggle, we don't get complete approval from others. Not even from one person. Today this person is happy with me , but tomorrow not happy. So I cannot get approval from a single person. Even if one person gives me approval, that is not enough because I feel that only one person is accepting me, not others. I want acceptance from all. That is not possible because in a group of people, some want me to be in one way and others want me to be different. There is conflict. So I cannot make everybody happy. Infact, in my struggle to make everybody happy, I make everybody unhappy. That is what happens. Therefore, getting acceptance from the world is not going to work.

Only possibility is that in reality I am acceptable, but I do not know how. Therefore my problem of non-acceptance may be due to ignorance of not knowing what I really am. Not knowing that I am really acceptable. Because of that ignorance, there is a problem of self non-acceptance. When ignorance is removed, the problem of self non-acceptance goes away. Ignorance goes by knowledge and knowledge is received only from pramanam. Pramanam for self-knowledge is Vedanta. But Vedanta cannot be studied by oneself. One has to study Vedanta from a guru. *Tad vijnanartham gurumevabhi gachet.... (Mundaka U)*. Therefore we require a gurukulam. Pujya Swamiji beautifully said in some place that the study of Vedanta is a serious study about oneself.

It entails personal attention and care on the part of the teachers. This Arsha Vidya Gurukulam is an honest attempt to provide the students with such an environment. This is the spirit of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam where a person learns about himself, the world and Isvara and discovers that the truth behind all three is one and the same. In this discovery, the sense of limitation, the self non-acceptance goes away.

One is in harmony with totality. Everything is a luxury for that person. If something happens alright, if it does not happen alright. That person will be doing whatever is to be done. We have seen this in Pujya Swamiji's life .He kept doing what was needed to be done for totality but if something did not happen, it did not affect him. That is the result of wisdom ...That wisdom is given in this gurukulam. With this vision Pujya Swamiji started this Arsha Vidya Gurukulam and we pray to Lord Dakshinamurti that may we continue this vision and may we get blessed by arsha vidya which will transform our life ,from self non acceptance to self acceptance.

Om tat sat.

Upcoming Retreats at AVG Anaikatti – including a first retreat on Astrology

The following are the upcoming retreats. Every Vedanta retreat will include temple puja, meditation, classes on vedanta, satsanga (Question and answer sessions). Chanting, yoga and sanskrit classes may also be included. Participation in Gurukula seva during the camp as needed will be appreciated. You may register for these retreats at <http://arshavidya.in/camps-retreats>

Retreat Id	Retreat Dates	Retreat Description
R18-11	8:00PM Saturday, 1st Dec to 12:30PM Saturday, 15th Dec	14 day Vedanta retreat with Swami Shankarananda on Mundakopanisad covering the third Mundaka in detail and summarizing the teaching of the complete Upanisad.
R18-12	8:00PM Saturday, 22nd Dec to 12:30PM Monday, 31st Dec	9 day Christmas Family retreat on Self Inquiry with Swami Shankarananda. This will be based on the text Svarupa-anusandhana-ashtakam . The retreat will conclude at Lunch time on 31 st . Dec. You are welcome opt to stay an extra day and participate in the New-year day program which will conclude by Lunch on 1 st Jan. Family retreat means children are also welcome. Children aged between 6 and 15 accompanied by a parent or guardian may also be registered for the camp. Children should understand English. There will be separate classes and activities for children. The exact program for children will depend on registrations received. Seva from parents to make the children's camp better welcome.
VE19-01	8:00PM Saturday, 5th Jan 19 to 12:30PM Saturday, 12th Jan	7 day retreat with Swami Sadatmananda. This will be based on first brahma sutra- "athato brahma jijnasa" along with Adhyasa bhashya