

One-week-long Vedanta retreat **Sept. 18-25, 2010 at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam,** **Saylorsburg, PA¹**

The one-week-long retreat in mid-September (September 18-25, 2010) featured Pujya Swamiji talking on Nididhyasanam and Swami Tattvavidanandaji continuing his discussion of the Narada Bhakti Sutras.

Here I summarize some of the key take-aways from Pujya Swamiji's superb presentation of the core ideas of Nididhyasanam. Swamiji provided us with a clear vision of the entire Sastra leading up to Nididhyasana, and then focused more on Nididhyasana. In the latter half of the retreat, Swamiji alternated lectures with guided meditation sessions.

Atma as the pleased self: First, Swamiji started with the famous quote from Bri. U. "Atmanastu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati." While wealth (Vittam) can give you some security, your love is in fact for the secure (pleased) Self. Thus, love for all objects is because the objects evoke the pleased Self. In fact, we love the pleased Self, not the disgruntled Self and the real nature of the Self is pleased. Therefore, you have to know the Self. Swamiji emphasizes, "Don't take yourself for granted." We assume we know Atma, or rather, we take our understanding of Atma as foregone. You have to make a choice to know Atma,

because Atma is you. You can't stumble upon Atma. In fact, Sastra says, "Atma Dristavyaha Srotavyaha..." which means that Atma should not be taken for granted.

Knowing Atma through the Sastra (Sruti):

Next Swamiji discussed the nature of knowing versus doing. While doing needs Will, knowing does not. Ego's presence vitiates knowing. In other words, knowing is "vastu tantram" or "pramana tantram". *Sruti is a pramana or means of knowledge to know the atma. It has to prove itself as a means of knowledge.* Each pramana is independent. One pramana doesn't need corroboration or support from another pramana.

To check the validity of a means of knowledge, you have to use that means of knowledge. Here Swamiji gave examples of how we use other pramanas such as eyes, ears, etc.

Atma is Asti, Bhati, Priyam: Next, Swamiji talked about Atma as "Asti, Bhati, Priyam", expounding on each term. The world (jagat) is Word and Meaning or Nama-Rupa, popularly known as Name and Form, and never separate from Brahman. Asti-Bhati-Priyam is the substantive, and is Brahman. Therefore, our perception is of name and form; substance is not reckoned with.

¹ Reported by Dr. K. Anand, Salt Lake City, Utah

Nature of our Ignorance: Ignorance is either (a) unknown (E.g. the constituents of water before the discovery that water is H₂O), or (b) known but confused, which is the case with Atma. The Self—"I AM"—is known, but mistakenly understood. The problem is confusion, and we are correcting that confusion.

The teachings of the sruti are:

- 1) I am connected to Iswara, who is 'All-Knowledge' or Sachidananda Brahman. All that is here is *given*; it's all organized; all-knowledge.
- 2) I am the content and the truth of this jagat (world or empirical reality).

There is no 'substance'. If you break it down, there is only knowledge, because word and meaning are all there is. Between the word (vak) and its meaning, there is inseparability. This inseparable connection is in my mind. *That jnanam is Iswara.*

Iswara: Swamiji emphasized the importance of Iswara. Iswara is needed "all the way". Iswara was the focus of his discussion during the entire later half of his talk, as well as during the guided meditation sessions.

The goal of life is to find and connect to the infallible, to solve our alienation, which is to trust 100% (as a child does her mother, but without knowledge).

The infallible is Iswara. The key is to recognize Iswara as order. All knowledge is Iswara. Therefore, reduce Iswara to orders: Physical, Biological, Chemical, Physiological, Psychological, Dharma (Moral), Emotional, etc. Every experience is Brahman, and any thought is Iswara's order. Anger, Pain, etc. are part of the (emotional) Order. Distance from Iswara is always zero. You are always connected to the Whole / Iswara. After Sravanam, there is no moving away from Iswara (even to other lokas). This implies that no alienation is possible.

Sravanam, Mananam, Nididhyasanam:

Like the eyes and ears, Sruti is also given by Iswara, through the medium of Rishis. Once the view becomes clear (through Sravanam and Mananam), any points of view become obvious.

'I am limitless' knowledge, born of Sravanam-Mananam, can never be eclipsed.

- Self-Knowledge is by Sravanam only. This is non-negotiable. The focus is within the Sastra.

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- Doubts are removed by Mananam, which addresses issues outside the Sastra.
- Finally, negation of Viparita Bhavana is by Nididhyasanam, which addresses issues from the unconscious (Kashaayam).

Thus, Sravanam-Mananam will take care of all epistemological problems. Nididhyasanam will take care of orientation, which arises from your own samskaras, predispositions, habitual conclusions, habitual fears, unconscious, etc.

Contemplation or Nididhyasanam: What we understand through Sravanam-Mananam, we highlight in contemplation. Nididhyasanam / contemplation will work only after Sravanam-Mananam. The key is that the unconscious can coexist with self-knowledge, denying you the fruits of knowledge.

Nididhyasanam is to be done after sravanam-mananam, after gaining jnanam. The topic of Nididhyasanam is "Tat pada vachya" (Tat = Jagat karanam Brahman—Brahman or Iswara which is the cause of this world / Jagat. "Tat pada vachya" is the

most important thing for a seeker. We need more and more Iswara. Nididhyasanam should be done nirantaram, i.e., without a break.

Swami Tattvavidanandaji on Narada Bhakti Sutras

Swami Tattvavidanandaji's talks on Narada Bhakti Sutras are ongoing. In this retreat, he began at Verse 34 and completed several verses (until Verse 40). The verses themselves are terse; we found Swamiji's exposition on the verses both valuable and riveting.

During the retreat, we had two classes by Pujya Swamiji on Nididhyasana every day, and also a satsang in the evening. Swami Tattvavidanandaji typically taught one class every day. He was extremely kind in conducting extra satsangs on several days of the retreat, after lunch, to answer any questions we had on his talks. He also led the morning meditations. With three daily talks, two additional satsangs, the morning meditation and the other usual activities (such as abhisekam / puja, music and Vedic chanting), the days were wonderfully packed with meaning and learning.

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