

## Prasna Upanishad and Narayanashtakam camp conducted by Swami Sadatmananda

(Sept 1<sup>st</sup> to Sept 8<sup>th</sup> 2018 at AVG Gurukulam, Anaikatti.)

We were about 18 sadhakas registered for this camp. At the satsang on the first day, everyone introduced themselves. We were a mixed lot - with several newcomers, some with exposure to Vedanta and some who had been studying for a long time. I wondered how swamiji would be able to address us all. But swamiji with his vast teaching experience and clarity of subject matter, easily enveloped all of us into the fold. Each one feeling he understood what was taught!



Prasna upanishad is less studied as compared to katha, kena, mundaka and taittiriya Upanishad because there is a misconception that this upanishad only talks about apara vidya -lower knowledge dealing only with karma and upasana. This misconception was fortunately removed with this camp.

All the Upanishads have the same lofty vision of revealing limitless brahman as oneself by removing our ignorance. Each one does it in their own unique way presenting the subject matter differently and emphasising different aspects, but leading one finally to para vidya- higher knowledge.

Prasna Upanishad like Mundaka Upanishad is a part of Atharvana veda. The former is in the brahmana portion of that veda and the latter is in the Samhita (mantra) portion. Prasna upanishad is an elaboration on some topics of Mundaka Upanishad. As the name suggests, it uses the method of question and answer to reveal the tattvam. Upanishad mentions the names and lineage of the six students who having studied for a length of time and who having done upasana on saguna brahman- *brahmaparah*, (saguna) *brahmanishtah* - approach Rishi Pippalada to enquire further about nirguna brahman. The rishi asks them to stay there for one year and then ask him the questions. If he knows, he will answer it. What amount of shraddha on the part of the student and humility on the part of the teacher! Through the 6 questions and answers which get subtler, the students are led to the understanding of nirguna tattvam. Finally, Piplanda rishi ends the dialogue with a statement – “*there is nothing to know beyond this.*”

Prasna Upanishad has 6 chapters with 67 mantras. Each chapter addresses each student's question.

A gist of this upanishad –

The first chapter talks about the creation of living beings from Prajapati. It has the tatparyam in giving the details of shukla gati and krishna gati. The destination of the path, the path themselves and the means to attain those paths were talked about. Karma and upasana lead one to achieve these gatis which take them finally to svarga and to brahma loka.

There is a beautiful description of the sun rising and enveloping everything in all directions in its myriad rays. This surya devata is none other than Hiranyagarbha .

***Visvarupam, harinam, jatavedasam ,parayanam, jyotirekam, tapantam,sahasrarashmih, shatadha vartamanah, pranam prajanam udayetyesha suryah.1-8*** (rig mantra quoted)

A great take-home prayer to chant in the morning facing the rising sun.

Second and third chapter talks about prana upasana answering the questions posed by the second and third student. While talking about prana upasana, values such as - shraddha, tapas satyam, brahmacharya- were also highlighted. The result of karma and upasana are possible only when values are followed.

The details of prana are useful for doing prana upasana. We may have lost the traditional method of doing prana upasana, but as swamiji nicely said that we can appreciate the beauty of the mind of the prana upasaka who identifies with the totality of all minds. Listening to the topic of prana upasana expands our mind considerably. Swamiji made us familiar with the spirit of prana upasana in the morning meditation.

In the fourth chapter, avastha traya viveka was done. All avasthas belong to anatma and atma is sakshi, the adhishtanam of all of them. Thus turiya atma was revealed with the help of avastha-traya viveka .The fifth chapter talks about omkara upasana and the result of 3-fold omkara upasana in the form of lower and higher lokas was told.

The sixth chapter addresses the question of the sixth student on shodasa-kala-purusha who is partless by itself, but appearing to have sixteen parts because of the upadhi in the form of creation. Parmatma is creator,sustainer and resolver of this world and also available as 'I'. That particular vision was given in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter. Just as the rivers flow into the ocean and lose their name and form. Just as the spokes are supported by the hub of a wheel. Similarly when these 16 parts are seen as mithya name and form, what is there is only one attributeless, partless brahman .

There is nothing higher than this brahman.

**The take home from this Upanishad was given by swamiji in the last class -**

a) Following values is important for getting the result of karma, upasana and also for getting knowledge.

b)One requires to go to a teacher to receive this vidya and one should have readiness to sacrifice anything for this vidya.

c)Once the person is ready with chitta shuddhi and chitta naiscalyam by karma and upasana, then the teaching given is that parmatma alone is the truth behind this world and that parmatma is available as 'I'. *I am limitless purushah* - This is the message of this upanishad.

d) Therefore in our life, we follow the duties based on the direction of sastra. We also include

in our routine as much meditation as possible besides puja and parayana. Keep studying sastra till this vision becomes our own. We may have understood the vision, but this understanding can become more and more firm by listening to sastra in whatever way possible, remaining prayerful and following values. Two values are specially highlighted in this Upanishad - satyam and tapas in the form of discipline in bhogas – which we should bring into our life.

We thank swamiji for his clarity, patience, consistency in helping us see the flow from the first mantra to the last mantra of this Upanishad. In the satsang, swamiji took up Narayanashtakam consisting of 8 verses highlighting bhakti and written by a disciple of Ramanujacarya. The very first verse catches our attention as it presents the subject in a systematic format.

- The proposition is- Narayana is the only one worth surrendering to.
- 6 hetus or reasons are given and 6 examples to correspond to each hetu is given.
- The next 6 verses elaborate on each example connecting with each hetu.
- The last verse which is chanted with vishnu sahasranam establishes the proposition-

***aartha vishanna shithilasca bhita ghoreshu ca yad vyadishu vartamanah.  
sankirtanarayana sabda matram vimukta dukham sukhino bhavantu.***

The first and last verse are take-home mantras to invoke bhakti in one's mind. Our thanks to Br Lakshmi Narayana for teaching us to chant it correctly in chanting class. The campers had the opportunity to setup and decorate the altar and participate in the Krishna Janmashtami puja on Sept 2nd conducted by the asram priest under the able guidance of Swamini Shardananda and Swamini Vedarthananda.

Camps give you the leisure and the material to discover yourself. We are indeed fortunate to have a conducive environment thanks to pujya swamiji, teachers who are committed and compassionate to teach and dedicated resident sadhakas and staff at the asram who through their seva done with an attitude of karma yoga, create an ideal atmosphere for learning. A big thanks to you all !! *dhanya vayam* we are blessed indeed!