# Seven-Week Vedanta Retreat at AVG – Oct to Nov 2014

The 7 week Vedanta retreat of 2014 began with its characteristic thoroughness on October 7, 2014 at ArshaVidyaGurukulam - Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania. About 60+ students arrived from many parts of USA and the world to be immersed in the teaching of Swami TattvavidanandaSaraswathi (known with affectionate respect as Swami TV to his students).

There are two main topic areas being taught by Swami TV in this camp, which include Bhagavad Gita Chapter 13 with Sri SankaraBhashya and selected verses from MumuksuPrakaranam of the scripture Yogavasishta.

Swami TV is known to start all his classes on time with legendary precision within few seconds of the scheduled time. Sharply at 7 am, Swami TV begins his guided meditation class with methods derived from the course topics to ensure students are able to directly begin the practical application of the concepts and ensure their effort is supported by purification and quieting of the mind. The guided meditation is focused on abiding in your own self and also seeing/ experiencing the knowledge within your self.

Gurukulam serves a generous, sumptuous and Satvic breakfast, lunch dinner. Breakfast begins after the meditation class at 7:30 am. This is followed on most days with students learning to chant Mantras with precision from Sri Suddhatma who taught the Shanti Mantras and other verses as requested by students. The class ends shortly after 8:45 am

Swami TV teaching begins sharply at 9 am with his own Sampradaya of developing the subject matter with rigor and clarity supported by enormous number of well-chosen metaphors and anecdotes. At 10 am

sharply he ends while students continue to be spell bound wanting to hear more.

At 10:15 Sri KalpeshJaspara begins his advanced Sanskrit class for better appreciation of material taught in the Vedanta classes. Though the topic areas like Samasa are advanced, Kalpesh makes the class very interesting and teaches with enthusiasm, clarity and consideration for the beginners. Most beginners are able to enjoy the classes and are simply amazed at the inherent beauty and precision of Sanskrit while being enthralled by the command of the language by Kalpesh who is able to bring this to the student's level regardless of their background. Incidentally Kalpesh continues to have a full time job and the student are grateful that he is able to find time to come to the Gurukulam without fail to teach every day.

At 11:20 am Swami TV conducts his second lecture of the day on the topic of Bhagavad Gita which goes till 12:20 PM at which time the Noon Aarati begins for Lord Dakshinamurthi. This is followed by Satvic and tasty lunch.

At 1:15 pm Terry Coe teaches Sanskrit class for beginners and makes the topic interesting for both beginners and advanced students. Many have chosen to attend both Sanskrit classes since Terry's class reinforces many concepts assumed in Kalpesh's class. Terry's class finishes at 2 pm.

Some students go for a nice walk on this 1 mile trail within the Ashram's campus which is a special treat. Others may choose to visit the Gym or visit the one-of-a-kind bookstore.

On most days the Yoga class with Lance Davis starts at 3 pm and goes till 4:15 pm. This is followed by afternoon tea time before the 5 PM class by Swami TV on Yogavasishtam verses. The class ends at 6 pm when the evening Aarati for Lord Dakshninamourthi begins. It concludes at 6:30 pm with widespread audience participation chanting tribute to Ganga Mata.

Once again students are treated to a tasty and satvic dinner from 6:30 pm. Students try to finish their dinner as soon as possible so that they can write their questions for Swamiji. The Q&A session and Satsang with Swami TV begins promptly at 7:30 pm who answers not just the questions but goes the extra mile to remove the confusion that gave rise to the question. The day ends at 8:30 pm with melodious rendering of Nirvana Shatakam by MrsBharathiBadrinath.

The Bhagavad Gita Chapter 13 began with detailed unfolding of the concepts of Kshetra and Kshetragnya during the first week. Every line of the Bhashyakara's commentary is analyzed by Swami TV in depth. The first two verses alone consumed over 16 hours of class time. This illustrates the depth of the material covered.

While Valmiki Ramayanam has about 24000 verses, Yogavasishtam which is now presented as a separate scriptures has about 30000 verses and represents teaching of Sage Vasishta to Sri Rama. The topic area is broken into sections (called Prakaranam) which includes many stories within stories to illustrate Vedantic concepts.

In the MumukshuPrakaranam Swami TV has personally gone through the entire section of over 4000 verses and has provided a rigorous abbreviation as part of the text for the class.

### **Retreat Summary**

The retret has concluded after 7 weeks as planned. Here are a few sample highlights from the retreat presented in a Question and Answer format to facilitate easier reading.

## 1. What was the main focus of the retreat from a student's perspective?

The Focus of the retreat is to remove any mystery surrounding the idea of Moksha

and provide students with clear and implementable steps in their daily lives for one to prepare for this realization here and now and in this birth. In some sense, there has never been a program of this kind that not only dispels the myths of Moksha but provides concrete actions for students as part of preparation for this knowledge.

While there is no substitute to actually attending the retreat, fortunately a serious student who missed the retreat can still benefit from \*all\* the classes since they are fully recorded in both mp3 and video formats (and available from the Ashram book store).

The verses of both B.Gita Chapter 13 and select verses from Yogavasishtam provided for a synergistic learning experience supported by daily meditation sessions and Q&A sessions to reinforce the material taught.

### 2 What makes this learning experience unique?

One of the students (Arun) best described the learning experience as multidimensional, multidisciplinary, integrated, original and ever fresh. This is best illustrated by few high lights.

- Teaching of self-knowledge through negation – much like Sri Sankara would teach. The Bhashya came alive with examples from today's lifestyle while the teaching content from the Bhashya remained ever fresh.
- Teaching of Sanskrit grammar in interpreting the Bhashya- much like Panini would teach.
- Teaching of Science when it is very relevant to teach vision of Vedanta and included a through treatment while maintaining the vision in focus. Swamiji readily explained concepts of entropy or space/time fabric or Organic Chemistry in depth when needed. In other instances he made a mention which is a key piece of

knowledge in enabling the understanding. For example, in passing he pointed out how a little known logical formulation in mathematics such as Peano axioms can explain how dualistic worldview can lead to a worldview of many realities at the same time.

- Teaching of philosophy from great philosophers when it was relevant to explain a point - much like Emanuel Kant and Bishop Berkley would teach. For example, in explaining the human consciousness of reality, Swamiji referred to Berkley's "esseestpercipi" assertions.
- Teaching of psychology when relevant came from Swamiji's deep wisdom. For example Swamiji identified every means by which the learnings from the retreat becoming simply ideational and come in the way of growth as one gets back to one's world after the retreat is over.
- Teaching of world history, literature and many other fields from his limitless memory bank – Shakespeare and Kalidasa being his favorite literary giants
- Teaching from actual anecdotes from lives of great Mahatmas such as Ramana Maharishi, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Rama Tirtha to name a few
- Use of simple but powerful electronic gadgets to illustrate complex topic areas like Adhyasa (superimposition) and how the mind spins a world that masks true reality
- It is mind boggling a program can cover so many fields with such a great depth. The examples above do not do justice to the full range of topics covered but they provide only a few highlights. The classes occasionally broke into contagious laughter when Swamij shared certain personal anecdotes from his life at Hyderabad.

### 3. Are there a few in depth examples?

Swamiji provided the deepest and most profound level of understanding in

several areas. Some of these include crystal like clarity in the understanding of various vedantic messages, specifically on upadhis, sakshi or kshetrajna and upachara.

The word upacharaas explained put many student in a state of awe. In the context of Kshetrajna, it kind of represents "the power of witnessing, or, more accurately, the power of the presence".

The mere presence of the sun makes the clouds rise, creates rivers and ocean currents, and supports the entire life on this earth. The mere presence of spacetime, also known as gravity, binds the entire physical universe together. It is like glue; the mere presence of love creates oneness in all conscious beings; the mere presence of a mahatma in an ashram spreads calmness in the entire ashram and beyond. And, finally, the mere presence of atman, which is your own swaroopa, makes the entire universe to go into a perpetual motion. No doubt it is a wonder among wonders. Can we stop the motion of this universe? Yes, we can; as told by swamiji, simply by stopping the motion in our mind.

#### 4. Any final thoughts to share?

Swamiji explained that Acharya is one who teaches Shastra and is not to be taken as another person with Isvara being yet another person. The teacher is in some sense teaching personified in a role and best way to show Acharya-Upasana is to simply abide by the teaching.

Swamiji taught how there is universal Love (one without opposite) is nothing but our Swarupa which is freedom. It is Love without a center.

Swamiji taught 4 and half hours of class time every day. This kind of extraordinary work can only rise from true Love without a center of a Mahatma.