

Vedic Wisdom festival in Mumbai 2019

In the second year of the Vedic Wisdom Festival eleven spiritual masters over two full days unlocked the transformative power of Vedic wisdom for about 300 people. Organised by the Aarsha Vidya Foundation, Mumbai, what was unique about the festival was that it coincided with the Gita Jayanti and had something for everyone from the Bhagavad Gita. There were both monks as well as householder Vedanta teachers who were disciples of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. The tradition of annual talks in Mumbai by Pujya Swamiji was carried forward by his direct disciples coming together to share their rich and glorious legacy inherited.

The chief guest Mr. Manoharan Chairman of Canara Bank inaugurated the festival and spoke about the value of sharing what you have with others. Br Vignesh Ghanapaathi, trustee of Vedadhara spoke on the 'The power of a havan', various types of chanting in ghanapaatha interspersed with powerful chants and the five types of yajna.



Swami Brahmanandananda, the founder of the festival and Aarsha Vidya Foundation spoke on 'What is real in your life?'. Stunning everyone he said that, 'Nobody lives in the world that is there. We all live in the world that we think is there. Our perceptions define our reality. What our emotional state depends upon how we interpret, what we see.'" He explained the nature of reality – the reality we experience as either praatibhasikam or

vyaavahaarikam and the abadhitam as paaramaarthikam as oneself. Whetting everyone's appetite to know more, he concluded "You are the only thing that is non-negatable. So the whole attempt in Vedanta is to know yourself."

Dr. Uma Ladiwala, scientific researcher in the field of Neuroimmunology, spoke about 'Meditation and the workings of the brain'. Contrary to popular understanding she clarified that our brain is not a fixed structure and it has an ability to change called neuro plasticity. What we do with the mind influences structure and function of the brain. Explaining the functions of sympathetic nervous system (for fight or flight mode) and parasympathetic nervous system which is activated during meditation, she shared that some of the important brain areas involved during meditation is the pre-frontal area linked to all higher functions like planning of goal and thinking, body awareness, emotional regulation, empathy.

She shared data from studies at Harvard by neuroscientists where which revealed that 8 weeks of meditating 30 minutes a day had a very beneficial effect on psychology, depression, anxiety, aggression and certain diseases like psoriasis. The study also observed that it brings in both internal changes like breaking or changing a habit and external changes like improved physical and immune function, lowered cortisol(stress hormone), improved psychological and emotional regulation. The purpose of the talk was to benefit those participants who are not exposed to Vedanta and were keen to see the scientific basis for some of the sadhanas.

A 10 minute video clip by Pujya Swamiji on prasada buddhi touched everyone to the core. Herga Ravindra Bhat an Astrologer and Vedanta Vidvana, educated the audience about Astrology as being a study of one's karmic patterns and explained ganit jyotish and phalit jyotish. In an interactive session Hergaji took questions from the audience. He showed how astrology can forewarn you about the manifestation of your karma in terms of negative experiences and how some of them can be minimized or neutralized through appropriate parihaarams. This would make life more manageable, freeing up time and energy for meaningful life pursuits like Vedanta.

Falguni Harkisandas a Vedanta teacher and former Yoga teacher spoke on 'Sadhana in Yoga and Vedanta'. Through various analytical and meditative exercises based on the Yoga sutras with reference to Vedanta she helped the participants see the Atman as independent of the panch-koshas.

Dr. Uma Shankar, Principal and Head of Department of Philosophy, SIES College of Arts, Science and commerce spoke on 'How to survive and thrive as a parent'. Peppered with stories she demonstrated that good intensions are not enough if the methods of parenting are problematic. Appreciation, undivided attention, sacrifices, openness, honesty are some qualities which are absolutely needed in bring up a child. Allowing the child to do things on their own, preparing them to handle unpredictability and pitfalls, being open to conversations/ideas, giving them space to do mistakes and standing by them like strong pillars goes a long way in gaining their trust. We are preparing them for the huge game of life.



Swami Shuddabodhananda, Vedanta teacher spoke on 'A thousand desires and a few priorities in the light of karma yoga'. He stumped the audience by asking whether a desire is desirable? Quoting elaborately from the Gita he showed how desires in harmony with dharma are acceptable, not the adharmic ones.

He further explained how the real aim is to be free from desires and how karma yoga can help one be free from the hold of desires and get a mind necessary for understanding Vedanta. Day two began with the whole auditorium reverberating with the chanting of select Bhagavad Gita verses by the students.



Swamini Brahmaprajnananda, the founder of the festival and a Vedanta teacher elaborated on 'How does meditation change my life?'. She clearly emphasized that shraavanam was the main sadhana in Vedanta and meditation can be considered as secondary sadhana clarifying many myths related to meditation. Defining meditation as mental activity centered on Saguna Brahman, she said that was no secular meditation in Hinduism. Our relationship with our mind goes through 3 stages.

The first stage being –My mind is a problem, I want peace of mind. Second stage – My mind is an instrument, I use it as and when required. Stage three – I illumine my mind and do not judge myself on the basis of the conditions of my mind. This is the journey an individual makes. The audience thoroughly basked in the different types of meditations beginning with relaxation to value based meditation to focused meditation to sakshi bhava meditation and a mention of vishvarupa dhyaanam as well as nididhyaasana.

Uday Acharya, a Vedanta teacher spoke on the 'Mahabharata – Shades of Grey'. He explained the compromises made by various heroes in the Mahabharata on the basis of their understanding of ethics. The reasons for compromise were conflicts, past decisions, weakness, greed, fear, habit or anger. No one policy works all the time. People adopt different types of ethics from text book ethics, convenient ethics, personalized ethics and enlightened ethics.

Sifu (Master) Christopher Fernandes spoke on 'Vedic wisdom and Taoist Yoga'. Taoist Yoga and Qi Gong is a discipline that includes elements of yoga, kalaripayattu, Shiva Aagama and a bit of Vedanta, interacting with sadhanas practiced by the monks in Tibet and China. One problem noticed among many monks was their health being ignored in the pursuit of moksha. Taoist Yoga explained by Sifu not only helps one to take care of the body and mind but also prepares one for the understanding of Vedanta. He made the audience do some deep breathing coupled with visualizing different colors, concentrating on different organs of the body and healing sounds based on Qi Gong.

Two Students of Vedanta, Swarnalatha Raghavan and Sagar Ambashankar spoke on 'Work - life balance : Myth or reality'. Both of them highlighted the fact that priority based living (vyavasaayatmika buddhi) helps to achieve what one wants in life. When one understands that roles cannot give us lasting fulfillment, then one is able to have certain objectivity towards people situations in life which eventually bring one to the study of Vedanta.



Swami Brahmabhutananda, a Vedanta teacher spoke on 'Bhagavad Gita in our daily life'. Highlighting Bhagavad Gita as a way of life, he emphasized that work and life were not two separate things. Life is a journey and work is a part of it, whether the work is for one's personal upkeep or it is a means to a dedicated life to a higher goal that is mukti. He encouraged everyone to think deeply of the purpose of every action. He spoke about the

importance of dharma and ahimsa to all forms of life and prasaadabuddhi in the pursuit of moksha as the ultimate goal of life.

The festival drew to a close with an exciting session on 'Hinduism matters – Difficult questions, simple answers' where the panelists were Swami Brahmavidananda and Swamini Brahmajnanananda. Handling innumerable questions from the audience, rape cases in India to status of women, and the apologetic Hindu both of them traced the source of the problem to be the disconnect of the modern English educated Hindus to their heritage and culture. Rape and the objectification of women is not a problem of our culture but more about the pornography available which normalizes sexual violence. With the westernization of education and the dismissal of our heritage as backward, in the name of secularism we are almost ashamed about our religion. The leftist propaganda is bordering on Hinduphobia. The teachers highlighted the need for Hindus to discover their own legacy. Responding to an article that Hindus bribe their Gods, they said. " We don't bribe Ishvara. We offer whatever we can. We offer ourselves to Ishvara. "



The programme ended with a vote of thanks to the enthusiastic and involved participants, dedicated organizers and volunteers and the sponsors – Canara Bank, Indic Academy, VRL logistics, LIC, Union Bank and Free press. Videos of the talks will be uploaded soon on the youtube channel – Vedic Wisdom festival. Watch out for the third edition next year. Om tat sat.