

E-retreat organised by AVG , Anaikatti from Dec 27th, 2020 to Jan 2nd, 2021.

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam is committed to impart the vision of rishis through long-term courses and retreats. Due to the pandemic in 2020, residential retreats were not possible. Therefore, it was decided to conduct e-retreats . The first one was in Aug 2020 conducted by Sw Shankaranandaji. Then the second e-retreat was conducted in December by Swami Viditatmanandaji . This was originally planned to be a regular residential retreat, but was converted into an e-retreat. It was made available through live-streaming on our YouTube channel –*Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti*. The response was overwhelming. About 340 participants from all over the world registered for the e-retreat. There were many more who directly viewed our public channel. The students of the 2 year on-going course at AVG, Anaikatti viewed the Upanishad talks live on screen and attended the other classes held at the gurukulam.



It was a unique retreat in many ways. The Upanishad was live-streamed from Ahmedabad and the rest of the classes were live-streamed from Anaikatti, Coimbatore. Also for the entire week, the participants had the opportunity to participate in all the activities live, as if they were at the gurukulam – from morning puja at temple, meditation, other classes, evening puja and satsang at night – about 7 videos a day for one week- total 49 live and re-

corded videos were made available to participants. The audio versions were also available. The New Year special puja and acharya Sw Sadatmanandaji's 2021 New Year message were also a part of the retreat experience. Daily Schedules, texts, bhashyam with translation, several reading materials and daily summaries of the classes were made available to the participants. At the end of this write-up, we share the thoughts of some retreat participants.

The Texts taken at the retreat were –

*Mandukya Upanisad - agama prakaranam with bhashyam by Sw Veditatmanandaji from Ahmedabad.

*Kaupina Pacakam and Ch 1 of Ramodanta by Sw Sadatmanandaji at Anaikatti, Coimbatore.

A brief summary of the Mandukya Upanishad-agama prakaranam - written by one of the retreaters is given below –

*** The Upanishad comprises of two sections:**

* 1st Section (mantra 1 to 7) is for Atmavichara - This is predominantly on abhidheya (that which is denoted), Atma.

* 2nd Section (mantra 8 to 12) is for Atmadhyanam –This is predominantly on meditation on abhidhana (name), Omkara.

*** Analysis of atma is done with Omkara in the following manner -**

* Om represents all this as the Vacharytha (direct meaning). Om is sarvam (everything), whatever is there, will be there, was there, including that unmanifest cause which is beyond time and called avyakta.

* This sarvam - all (equated with Om) is Brahman. What is this Brahman ? *Ayam Atma brahma* (mahavakya) – This Atma is Brahman. This Atma has got 4 quarters.

* Three of the quarters – are sadhana, the means; and the fourth is the sadhya, the end.

*** But Atma is partless, how can it have quarters ? – Subsequent mantras answers that query by giving the details of the quarters of atma :**

* Vaishvanarah, the waker is the 1st pada, which consists of 7 cosmic limbs and 19 mouths with which it enjoys the gross world. Waker is bahishprajnah, whose consciousness is outward.

* Taijasa, the dreamer is the 2nd pada, which again consists of 7 cosmic limbs and 19 mouths with which it enjoys the subtle world in the dream state. Dreamer is Antahprajnah, whose consciousness is inward.

* PrAjnah, the sleeper is the 3rd pada. The sleeper is the one who does not desire

(no waking state), and does not dream, This is the state of deep sleep in which all objects remain unified, undifferentiated. The sleeper is *prajna-ghanah*, of the nature of dense consciousness, and has predominance of *anandah* - happiness as there is no sorrow in this state. *PrAjna* is the one having the mouth of consciousness, *chetomukha*, and is said so because the dreamer and waker arise from *PrAjna*. *PrAjna* is the causal state, and dreamer and waker are effects.

* That *PrAjna* alone is *sarveshwarah*, the ruler of all and is described as *abhinna-nimitta-upAdana-kAraNam* – the intelligent cause which is non-different from the material cause. That *PrAjna* alone is *sarvajna*, knower of all, and that alone is *antaryAmi*, the one dwelling as inner controller. From this alone all beings arise, and in this alone all beings merge.

* The 4th Pada is described by negation of all 3 padas. The 4th pada is neither waker, nor dreamer, neither the state in between, nor the sleeper. It is not *prajna* – omniscient identified with the totality nor *aprajna* – insentient. It is not an object of perception or action, nor it is a matter of inference. Thus it is *adrsTam*: cannot be perceived, *avyavaharyam*: not transactable, *agrahyam*: cannot be grasped, it is *alakshanam*: unferrable, *achintayam*: not an object of thinking, *avyapadeshyam*: nor object of words, it is indescribable. When one sees the underlying consistent I, in all the roles, the entire world ceases, and what is left is the silence, the auspiciousness, non-dual: one without the second, that is the 4th, that is *turiya Atma*, that is I, the self, that should be known. I am the proof that *Turiya* is, there is the 4th. Only when I am the 4th, the first 3 and all its characteristics can be negated to leave 'I' alone as this 4th, the *Turiya*. So I should stop all the *vyavahaaras* of *hana-upadana* (taking and dropping), stop acquiring anything, just 'Be'. Finally subject is also not there, object is also not there. I should know *turiya Atma* as '*ekatma pratyayasAram*'. *Bhashyakara* explains this - *turiya* should be traced by the one invariable cognition that is the one self which exists in all the three states or it may mean that the invariable cognition is the means for knowing *turiya atma*.

* *uttama adhikAri* (fully qualified seeker) directly and intimately knows the *Turiya* as the self by *sravanam* and contemplation upon the *Turiya* not as an object, but as the very self.

* *madhyama adhikAri* (moderately qualified seeker) knows the *Turiya* as *Atma* through its appreciation as witness and as *adhishThanam* (the truth of all).

* For *manda adhikAri* (less qualified seeker), for those who do not gain knowledge through both these ways, *shruti* prescribes *Om kara dhyanam* (meditation on *Om kara*) which forms the subject matter of the second section.

Om has 4 matras which are equated to the 4 padas (quarters) of *Atma*, Each *matra* (letter) represents the corresponding pada. 1st *matra*, *A-kara* represents waker, 2nd *matra* *U-kara* represents dreamer, and 3rd *matra* *M-kara* represents sleeper. The 4th is *amAtra* which is

silence, which represents Turiya. Thus omkara is all-inclusive.

* So the entire Upanisad teaches these equations :

1. Om is Sarvam
2. Sarvam is Brahman
3. Brahman is Atma
4. Atma has 4 quarters: First 3 quarters are the means, 4th is the end and I am the 4th quarter.
5. That Atma is Om.
6. Om has 4 matras – A-kara, U-kara, M-kara representing waker, dreamer and sleeper respectively, 4th is silence, which represents the Turiya.

* In mantra 1 to 7, the prakriya of adhyAropa-apavAda (the model of superimposition and negation) was used, where one has to know the status of being waker, dreamer, sleeper as mithya. These have to be negated to know the Turiya as I. Waker, Dreamer, Sleeper fall in the category of cause-effect. I am Turiya, beyond cause-effect, there is no causality in me, the Turiya.

Sharing some write-ups by the participants to the E-retreat –

I would like to express my immense gratitude for this e-retreat. First of all I want to thank acharyaji for providing us such solid bases of vedantic teaching, without which I wouldn't have benefitted as much as I did from these classes. Mandukya Upanishad is one of the most profound Upanishads. It's like a strong medicine of reality taken in one shot. Therefore, I want to express my deep gratitude to Sw Vidadatmanandji, for giving his blessings in the form of these classes. It's inspiring to see how intimate swamiji is with shastra and the vision, and how effortless the teaching flows from him. My humble pranams to swamiji. My gratitude to Pujya Swamji, to the parampara and Isvara that this e-retreat could happen and bless us all. Thank you. **Maline, Brazil, 2yr course student.**

By the grace of Isvara, we were blessed with this opportunity of listening to the teaching of Mandukyopanishad from Sw Vidadatmanandaji presented with so much clarity. Initially, I had a little difficulty coping with the class due to my limited exposure to the subject matter, language, and the culture in general. But by the end of the retreat, by the grace of our archaryaji and kind support from fellow students, swamiji's teaching started sinking in and I started making connections with the teaching received. Among many precious teachings Swamiji imparted to us, the one which left an impression was swamiji words – *“Don't try to grasp, perceive, or experience Brahman. When these effort cease, Brahman becomes evident. When both words and word meanings are dropped, then one appreciates there is no division between knower and known.”* Thinking about this has led me to another level of understanding about the truth. Thank you swamiji, for guiding us to more and more profound and subtle thinking. My sincere gratitude to our acharyaji and all those who made the retreat experience possible. **Keiko, Japan, 2 yr course student.**

On behalf of all the students, I pay respects to our guru Sw Sadatmanandaji for giving us this great opportunity. The retreat reminded me of my swimming lessons early in life, After learning to swim confidently at the shallow end, my teacher threw me into the deep end and then I realized that I still need to learn more. The retreat text - Mandukya Upanishad is profound. Even though it felt like we were thrown into the deep end of Vedanta, we were thankful to have Sw Vidadatmanandaji guiding us. My biggest take-away from the retreat is how swamiji articulated the essence of the Upanishad into simple equations. Einstein solved equations to understand relativity. However, our attempt will be to “ resolve” the equations presented by Swamiji from the Upanishad and arrive at the absolute truth – “**I am Turiya**”. **Vinay Lakshman - Chennai, Guest student .**

My gratitude to Pujya Swami Vidadatmanandaji. I am a follower of Vishistadvaita but had many doubts in my mind as presently they preach many things unacceptable to my mind. Hence, I took up this e-retreat. Earlier I have listened to Swami Ramkrishnananda’s discourses on Chatusutri. The retreat helped me to get clarity on meditation and many of my doubts simply vanished by understanding advaita which is the base of Vishistadvaita. I am very much thankful to Swamiji for his efforts for guiding mumukshus like me to understand liberation through self-knowledge. I am also very much thankful to the organisers for conducting this e-retreat. Lastly, namaskaram from the depth of the heart of a jignasu for introducing me to advaita philosophy. Thanks a lot again to Swamiji. **Dhanji Thadoda, Gujarat, email received from e-retreater.**

Swamiji pranam! We have heard Pujya Swamiji say that, even a villager in this soil of Bharat knows “सब भगवान् है! (everything is Isvara).The Arsha Vidya Parampara conveys this so effortlessly to those battling minds and for those in eternal search of the infallible, completely unaware that “I am already free”. No matter how many times one hears this, the pangs of avidya (ignorance) and vasanas (impressions) are so consuming (thanks to one’s past karma), this ultimate reality doesn’t rest on this upadhi.

2020 ! The landmark year of the pandemic saw a lot of AVG Gurus’ “come to my home” and teach me personally online ! AVG, Annaikatti’s e-retreat announcement brought the divine combination of Sw Vidadatmanandaji and Mandukya Upanishad for a week 3 times a day. The minutest detail with which every mantra starting from the mangalakaranam was handled by Swamiji deftly and yet very simply, awed me! By knowing Omkara one can know the self, this connection between Omkara and Atma was well crystallized. That the Mandukya Upanishad with karika is called prakaranam took me by surprise. This very fine knowledge and the nuances touched on by Swami Vidadatanandaji has manifolded the respect for Bhashyakara and Tikkakara whose intellects were of such a lofty quality. Turiyam effortlessly blended with the three avasthas, bringing to awareness that nothing stands apart from me, turiyam. The search for the infallible ends for me with 2020. Sw Vidadatmanandaji has prepared me well for the grand opening of a brand new year, by ex-

posing the “seed - sprout” relationship. With the grace of Bhagavan and acharya, being able to appreciate the world to be really not there, moving away from being krpana (small-minded), and raising the quality of the intellect bhagavan has already bestowed, is the journey hereon! Thank you is a very small expression to the AVG teams in Annaikatti and Ahmedabad for such a meticulous planning, relay and backend work! I have no regrets or complaints on corona virus! **Radhika Srinivas, Coimbatore, e-retreater.**

Sri Gurubhyo Nama: Although the Vedanta retreats may not be a new concept, the recently concluded E-retreat on Mandkya Upanishad, is one of the best ways to address present day challenges and the way forward using technology in the current times that we live in. We remember one of the Brahmachari's in our class used to say, Pujya Swamiji used to spend about an hour each week during his visit to US during the 90's, on conference calls on answering questions and clarifying doubts of many aspirants, who were located various parts of the America, who couldn't be physically present at the Saylorburg ashram for the classes.

Taking advantage of the best of the technology, having a live class, that is being attended by at least over 350 participants who are situated in various parts of the globe is definitely a huge step towards taking/ bringing the teaching to as many people as possible from wonderful teachers like Swami Veditamandaji who could be delivering the teaching from his ashram. Live teaching is a very important element in the pramana vichara as the teacher is the one who employs or wields the pramana by careful handling of the words of the Sruti and uses different methods in the sampradaya to clearly unfold the vision of the Sruti. Since the communication is through lakshana vakyas, it's very important for the student to have the capacity to stay with/hold on to a particular topic and look at it from different standpoints. A live class is very effective to make the teaching come alive, which is key in effective sravanam. As Pujya Swamiji used to say, handling the words while teaching Vedanta, holds a great impact on students during the time of learning by students. This to a greater extent is achieved through the live streaming of the teaching including Satsang with Q&A on the topic that is being taught. This helps in mananam and nidhidyasana.

The necessity of live teaching is equally emphasized by Swami Bharathi Theertha, the Sringeri Acharya. When Acharya had visited the Gurukulam during 2012 and spoke in our class regarding the sampradaya methods in teaching and the need of the live Guru, which signifies the importance of learning the shastra from a live guru. Hence it certainly holds importance that livestreaming of classes of Acharyas like Swami Veditatmandaji that create such an appropriate environment for effective study of the Shastra.

Although one of the meaning of Upanishad does mean “Upa Sameepe” sitting near/close

to a Guru, through the live streaming of classes using the technology does adequately address the meaning of the word Upanishad. Personally, speaking the retreat literally has put us back on old discipline of life at gurukulam that we used to have during our long-term course at the Gurukulam with Pujya Swamiji, starting the day with the abishekhham, chanting and puja at the temple, followed by the meditation session, 3 Vedanta classes and the Satsang has really helped us to get back to the gurukulam life after almost 7 years. Hence we look forward for many more such E-retreats in future, that would actually help people to stay put where they are but still get the advantage and benefit of live teaching from best acharyas from the Parampara. **Sreekanth and Sarada, Kerala**

Om Tat Sat

Swami Dayananda Educational Trust offer to Students of Vedanta

Vedanta students recommended by Senior Arsha Vidya Acaryas are invited to use the archive material available at Jnana Pravaha, the memorial of Pujya Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Manjakkudi. Students are welcome to stay for a period of 2 weeks at a time. Suitable Accommodation and food facilities will be provided at Manjakkudi to enable the students to devote entirely listening to a particular text or texts or work on it.

Swami Dayananda Digital Archive:

The Swami Dayananda Digital Archive includes Pujya Swamiji's class room material of four three year courses - 1990, 1995, 2002 and 2010. In addition the archive has Swamiji's public talks, meditations, and more. It is a unique facility that allows for in-depth research and study of Pujya Swamiji's teaching and teaching methodology.

Study Centre:

The Archives are accessed through Desktop computers, four of them are installed. The study centre application is designed to guide students find the contents and gives options for study depending on their background, interest and the time available for their study. Hard copies of the books by Pujya Swamiji are also available for reference, along with other original Vedantic Sanskrit texts, Sanskrit-English dictionaries, and more.

The facility will be available for students from April 14, 2021. It is located in the centre of the village and is exclusive, quiet, secure and provides ambience for study, includes a Meditation Hall also. The village has a school, College and two temples around the facility for the student to go around during his/her leisure hours.

*This page is sponsored by **Sri Hariharan and Smt. Meena Hariharan,***

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