

VEDIC WISDOM FESTIVAL



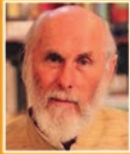
Swami
Brahmadevananda Saraswati
Festival Founder



Swamini
Brahmaprajnananda
Festival Founder



Pujyasri
Omkarananda
Mahaswamingal



Pandit
Vamadeva Shastri
(David Frawley)



Acharya
Vishvanatha
(Jonas Masetti)



Ishwarya
Chaitanya



Dr. Parthasarathy. R

In the third year of the Vedic Wisdom Festival held on 5th and 6th December 2020, organized by the Arsha Vidya Foundation, Mumbai, spiritual masters from across the world shared the richness of Vedic Wisdom and allied knowledge for our well-being for an audience of over 300. The festival being virtual this year had both monks as well as householder Vedanta teachers who were disciples of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

sharing insights on principles of dharma for a successful life, health and healing through Ayurveda, recognizing our sacredness and interconnectedness, why we should seek Vedic wisdom, how dance is devotion, how Hinduism can pave the way forward and much more. The festival was inaugurated by the founders, Swami Brahmadevananda Saraswati by lighting of the lamp and Swamini Brahmaprajnanada Saraswati by chanting the inaugural prayer.

Pujyasri Omkarananda Mahaswamingal speaking on “the timeless framework of dharma for lasting happiness” said that according to Advaita Vedanta everlasting happiness is our own nature but because of self ignorance we fail to know this and we search it outside through *artha* and *kāma*. But without dharma we cannot enjoy material or sense pleasures. Quoting the Mahā Nārāyana Upanishad, Swamigal said dharma will give peace of mind and remove all our wrong deeds. Further he gave a comprehensive framework on dharma which includes rituals, responsibilities, reverential attitudes towards everything around us, the six important values we need to counter the tendencies which are against our own peace and happiness.

Dr Parthasarathy R, practicing Ayurveda Vaidya presented the AyurVedic Wisdom that we can practise to enjoy a healthy life and enhance our state of our wellbeing. He masterfully wove the themes of how Ayurveda for wellbeing helps us to live a dharma so as to pursue moksha, in time. Ayurveda, a discipline of knowledge for longevity says that every single disease starts with a manodoṣa like rāga dvesa ādi, whatever be the disease it first has impairment at the level of the mind and then affects the body. When it comes to the disturbances at the level of the mind, the solution given is *ātmajñānam*; self-knowledge

which is gained by studying Vedanta. In the treatment at the level of body the vaidya uses his logic to prescribe medicines or suggestions, to improve the *sattva* of the individual and treatment using mantras, homas etc. We need to have arogyam to attain the four puruṣārthas, human goals. He walked the participants through the *dinacharya*, the different things to be done during the entire day and dispelled many myths about modern lifestyle and eating habits.

Swamini Brahmaprajnananda, the founder of the festival unfolded the need for breaking unhealthy patterns by thinking clearly and feeling deeply. Quoting from the Amritabindu Upanishad, Swaminiji said, ‘*manah eva manushyanaam bandhamokśakāranayoh*’, the mind alone is the cause of bondage or liberation.” If we have clarity then we make right decisions and choices irrespective of how life unfolds. So if we have to travel this journey then our relationship with the mind undergoes these 3 stages. Stage-1) My mind is a problem and I want to master it. Stage-2) Mind is the inner instrument, it is a glory of Īśvara. If I can use my mind as an instrument then, Stage-3) I am free from the conditions of my mind and able to see clearly what the śāstra reveals – *Sarvam khalu idam Brahman*. We first align our pratibhasika satta to vyaavaharika satta by moving from subjectivity to objectivity and aligning *jiva srsti* to *Isvara srsti*. Swaminiji spoke of ten ways of thinking which cause anxiety, sadness, helplessness and how easy it is to move to functional reality to bring about a lot of gratitude, peace, satisfaction and contentment. Swaminiji then led the participants to a quick meditation and later with the help of Zoom breakout rooms participants got to share their understanding.

Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley), Director of American Institute of Vedic studies was not able to personally address the gathering online, but was kind enough to share 3 videos on his subject “Wisdom of the Hindu tradition (and clash of Hindu civilizations).” Post this Swami Brahmanandananda presented his thoughts by briefly explaining how the environment influences a civilization. When an aggressive civilization clashed with an open, tolerant civilization in India, people were too shocked to react because it is a culture of ‘*atithi devo bhava*’. The insiders more than the outsiders really betrayed and broke India. These are historical facts and attempts to break India is continuing even today. So what do we do about this? Individually we can learn and be proud of our own heritage. We can read books by Pandit Vamadeva Shastri, Rajiv Malhotra, listen to videos by J Sai Deepak and others. Study the śāstra in depth from traditional Gurus so that we command the authority of knowledge. Let us become strong and knowledgeable enough to know what it really means to be a Hindu.

Swami Brahmanandananda, the founder of the festival spoke on the purpose of Vedic Wisdom. Universally, the human being is self conscious and self aware. We are not happy and acceptable of the self we are aware of. There is an attempt from the part of the human being irrespective of the culture and civilization for two main pursuits which is classified in the Vedic wisdom as *artha* and *kāma*. But unless there is the base of dharma we are not able to fulfill our *artha* and *kāma*. When we have achieved certain degree of success then the question comes up, “What is the purpose of life?” The Upanishad makes a statement,

“*ātmanastu kamāya sarvam priyam bhavati*”; everything I want is just so that I am happy and free from lack and insecurities. But the pursuits - dharma, artha and kāma do not free us from the sense of limitation nor can we be comfortable with the sense of limitation. The solution for this is presented in the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gītā as mokṣa, freedom from the sense of limitation, the ultimate puruṣārtha in life and that is the purpose of Vedic Wisdom.

Ishwarya Chaitanya, Bharatnatyam dancer and Yoga teacher took all the participants on a journey through the wonderful dance form of Bharatnatyam to devotion. Speaking to the participants she said, dance has all aspects of sādhana. This world is bhava-sāgara with tumultuous emotions and the dance joins all the emotions into one. The dance has two aspects of devotion, one is devotion to the art form and second is you see the lord as the art. Ishwarya then beautifully presented “*Hanumanta Deva Namō*” written by Saint Purandaradasa glorifying the unique devotion of Hanuman to Lord Rama. The second “*Jagadodhārana*” also a Purandaradasa kriti, which described the love between Yashoda and Krishna depicting the contrast of Lord Narayana and baby Krishna very beautifully. The last piece was “*Bho Shambo*” composed by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati ji, which is a delight to every dancer to manifest various forms of Shiva.

Acharya Vishvanatha (Jonas Masetti) a traditional Vedanta teacher from Brazil enlightened us on an interesting topic, Mokṣa and Success – Can the twain meet? Often a *grahastha* wonders how this Vedic wisdom fits in his life since s/he has family responsibilities, a job, so many needs to be addressed and it seems like this knowledge needs time and effort. If we want to be on this spiritual path and at the same time cope with worldly pursuits we need to have an open mind because what is said in the śāstra can be challenging and definitely needs to be studied under a competent guru. We need to be passionate and have devotion towards what we do, be skillful and objective and use time wisely depending on our priorities and see ourselves as accomplished by imbibing the values mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā which is the secret behind a successful worldly life.

The last session was a discussion on “Hinduism and the Idea of India” with the panelists Swami Brahmanidananda and Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan, Ex-editor of the Hindu and the moderator being Mr. Suresh Balakrishnan. The discussion kicked off by the opening remarks of Mukundji about the Idea of India - we are a modern-nation state superimposed on an ancient and a great civilization, while no one can deny that this land was one time a cradle of Hinduism. Today, any idea of India cannot be defined by Hinduism alone. We need to balance both being modern and ancient civilization. We don’t have a sense of identity of being Indian. Further can we claim to be secular? Mukundji’s views were that we would be in a better place if we adopted a harder notion of secularism which kept all religions off from the functioning of the state but at the same time from the religious side is to provide a certain degree of autonomy unless of course it violates fundamental constitutional principles. Swamiji put forward his thoughts by saying in the olden times there were Raja-gurus to handle any ethical issues. There was never a real need in India to bring in that type of secularism. Autonomy has to be given equally to all religions. Moving ahead because of so

many years of minority appeasement are we swinging the other way? Is Hinduism slowly converting into Hindutva? Mukundji's views were the term Hindutva in political discourse has acquired a meaning that stands for aggressive religious based nationalism. We need to at least acknowledge that a term like this could worry others living in a country where there is a large minority. Then the follow up question was, is this aggression justified? Hindus being the majority are not even given a prominence of a minority. Mukundji agreed that we are a majority with a minority complex. He acknowledged that this feeling exists and this gives rise to expressions like 'lets reclaim what we have lost'. He did not believe in the idea of reclaiming anything. The task should be getting on ahead rather than harping on the past. We need to honestly acknowledge the things happened in the past but the people who are living today are not responsible for what has happened in the past. To this Swamiji responded saying Sanskrit version of Hinduism is Hindutva; is the status or qualities about being a Hindu. We are ready to move on but the problem here is we need to acknowledge the past and then move on. Ever since independence until the recent Supreme Court judgment, there never has been an acknowledgement of the destruction that was brought in India by foreign invasion. Where is the acknowledgement of the past where Hindus have suffered? How can we move forward? There is nothing wrong in reclaiming our heritage. At a personal level if I don't own up my past I cannot have a healthy self-esteem. Similarly as a nation, if we as Indians do not acknowledge and own up our history, our heritage we will not be proud of anything in India. This is just a glimpse of the rich discussion on allied topics in the panel discussion.

Takeaways of some participants attending the Vedic Wisdom Festival.

This year my biggest takeaways were how we can bring more sattva in our lives by adopting an Ayurveda prescribed lifestyle. I also gained clarity on the framework of Dharma as means to individual and social happiness. - Naveen, Pune.

The panel discussion was very informative and put across by Swami Brahmanidanandaji very clearly and assertively. These discussions are very necessary to awaken the Dharmic Kshatriya in each one of us.
- Kamini Asrani, Mumbai.

I gained great insights into how the knowledge contained in the Vedas of the limitless non-dual reality stands as the basis of the Hindu culture. I learned how this wisdom manifests in and through people's lives, branches of studies, the infrastructure, governance model and all other areas of the individual, family, society and nation. The speakers from varied backgrounds and nationalities highlighted the universal and eternal relevance of the vedic wisdom. My heartfelt pranams to Swamiji, Swaminiji, all the Acharyas and scholars who spoke and to the organisers Sunitha and Suresh.
- Prashanth Mohan, Australia.

There were blessed opportunities to reinforce my learnings on Dharma giving everlasting happiness, learn some nuances of Ayurveda upadesha that are best practices to lead a

healthy life and how it is linked to purusharthas, breaking unhealthy thought patterns and thinking clearly, how my nature is anandah and happiness happens, what is moksha, the beautiful elucidation of sadhana and devotion in an art form, beautiful insights on how spiritual mindset will give worldly happiness too and some thought provoking discussions on Hinduism. I'm truly a more enriched person as a result of this exposure

- Jaya Ramachandran, Bangalore.

The Vedic Festival not only opened the wisdom of the Vedas to us, it also covered a wide range of current issues that we often hear about. Apart from Swamiji and Swamiji's discourses which are like nectar to us, I was particularly happy to listen to Jonas Masseti from Brazil. How this knowledge has influenced masses across the world but we as a country are not able to accept this wisdom in a vast majority. The concluding panel discussion was very engaging and put forward to opposing viewpoints. Suresh was once again at his best in taking us all on this wonderful journey.

- Sraboni Chaudhuri, Mumbai.

I felt blessed to attend this festival live first time. Really keen for the Mumbai ashram to be set up so international students like myself can plan to attend short-term courses. Some of my key takeaways were

1) Swamiji said - "This festival is connected to you & what you want is universal for a human being. Limitation is not what I have but what I see that I am - that matters." 2) Ishwarya shared - "You train the body in order to forget the body." 3) Acharya Jonas shared - "Spiritual growth happens only with effort. Once you investigate what you want or why a person behaves in a certain manner or why I am not happy, growth happens". - Nirmala Iyer, London, UK.

Swami Brahmanidananda in the panel on Hinduism ji handled the viewpoint of the guest with so much tact, diplomacy and elan, countering each point with the appropriate facts, and firmness assertiveness, even when we were told that Hindus should learn to "move on", as if nothing had happened to them through countless invasions. To move on we needed at the very least an acknowledgment of the atrocities that were undeniably perpetrated. He emphasized that the Hindu community needed validation before we could move on. He stood up for our religion, our culture, our world view with the same amount of assertiveness that he had always taught us, his students. - Meena kripalani, Mumbai.

"Love resolves contentious division. But to discover love without conditions is beyond the reach of the average survivor-ego, in this highly competitive society. Without the experience of such love there is nothing worthwhile in life to accomplish.."

- Swami Dayananda Saraswati