

108 days course inauguration

The long awaited 108 Days Course in Vedanta was started on 15th January 2024 with the grace of Pujya Swamiji and under the guidance of Swami Sadatmananda Saraswati at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti. Out of over 150 applications received, Sixty Indian and overseas /foreign students selected were there to start the course.

The Inauguration Day commenced at 4:30 am with Ganapati homa, sraddha and Medha homa along with Ekadasa Dravya abhisheka to Lord Medha Dakshinamurti.

Later, at 10 am, anujna puja was conducted by Acaryaji at Guru Tirtha in front of the altar of Pujya Swamiji. Teachers, students and guests participated in this event and with divine grace all of them walked in a procession towards the lecture hall. Swamiji performed the prayers to the vighraha of Pujya Swamiji and Sankaracarya ji.

Brahmacarini Arthi Nagarajan, second level Sanskrit teacher of the course welcomed the gathering and was the able MC of the event. Many spoke showering their best wishes on the students. A gist of their message :

Swami Ganeshaswarupananda ji, of Arsha Vidyalaya, stated, “This next 108 days will be a life changing period in your life. It’s something which you cannot experience in any other way. Some of you I’m sure have gone through more short-term courses earlier, some of you have read or even studied the Bhagavad Gita, But what you are going to see here is the very vision of Vedanta, the very Vision which tells you about you.

You might have heard the word moksha. I remember when I first came to the course, I knew there was something called moksha, I knew there was something to know, that’s all. I didn’t know what it was, I had no idea what I’m going to understand, what I’m going to learn, but I had the commitment, and I had the shraddha that what I will learn will be transformational. There are very few people today who can expound the vision of Vedanta to you better than Swami Sadatmananda ji. So, all conditions are fantastically set for you, all I can say is please make the best use of it as far as possible, I'm sure you embarked on something which is wonderful, nothing can be better. All the very best to you.

Swami Jagadatmananda ji in his blessing speech explained about the importance of guru as the one who can give the lakshyartha of shastra and emphasized the requirement of shraddha which is required for students of Vedanta, on the words of guru and shastra. He blessed the students for their happy stay and joyful learning at the Gurukulam.

Swamini Brahmaleeanananda ji recalled her memories of student hood and the grace of Pujya Swamiji. She explained about who is a shishya. A person who is interested in gaining vidya, antevasi, who lives closer to the guru by dropping everything and concentrating on learning. He/she is a *shishya- siksha yogyah*, who is eligible to receive the teaching. She

highlighted, “you cannot get a better teacher than Swami Sadatmananda who has been exposed so much, so well to the shastra. Pujya Swamiji used to say without using one single word of Sanskrit I can convey this whole message in English itself to all to anybody who is there. But there is something that happens to you when you come to know Sanskrit because the Moola texts are in Sanskrit the Bhashyam is in Sanskrit. Medha Shakti is something that Swami Paramarthananda ji used to say, it is triple R - receiving properly, retaining it properly in the mind and be able to recollect and reproduce it at the proper time to make the connections. So let your prayer be ‘Lord bless me with this Medha Shakti’.

Later a recorded video of **Swami Sakshatkrtanandaji’s** blessing message from Rishikesh was screened. Swamiji in his speech, “I am very happy to be part of the inauguration of 108 days course which is a prelude for a long-term study. You are all blessed to be part of this course taught by the great teacher Swami Sadatmananda Saraswati. There are certain things which we can keep in mind presuming that all of you are committed to pursuing the long-term study. The purpose of study is not to propagate Vedanta. If you have this purpose in mind the impact of study may not be there because the study is not only for the sake of giving lectures. All of you have certain spiritual tendency because of which you have come to the Gurukulam. So we have to listen to Vedanta in order to absorb the vision for your own spiritual fulfilment, upliftment. After gaining the vision of what the shastra says there, you share. Sharing will happen automatically, if it is to take place. Therefore the spiritual study is not for the sake of pursuing some sadhana after study. The very study itself is sadhana. Therefore there is no sadhana to be pursued later after study.

I will give you some ideas on how to make the best use of your study by listening. When you listen you are surrendering to the words of shastra because shastra is a means of knowledge. Shastra is the only means of knowledge. To this means of knowledge, I Surrender. Just as I surrender to my eyes in order to gain the knowledge of forms. I surrender to my ears in order to gain the knowledge of sounds. Similarly, I surrender to shastra pramanam in order to know what the shastra says and this involves giving up all my preconceived notions, ideas, conclusions about what the reality is. I have to empty the mind, then only new understanding can enter. We have to have an open mind while listening to the shastra. After listening to the shastra, if you think that it is not in keeping with the reality you can dismiss it, but what shastra says is not negatable. It's very easy to get shradha because what shastra says is logical. We should know that shastra is logical. Shastra says whatever you objectify, whatever you perceive you are different from that. I see a donkey, objectify a donkey, I am different from donkey. Then this is clean logic. I see the body therefore I am different from the body, this is clean. But I take myself to be the body therefore there is an error, mistake involved here that is very evident. The mistake is very

evident, therefore if I can take myself to be the body, there is every possibility that I take myself to be mind also. Therefore what shastra says that you are not the body or mind. Therefore, I can have shraddha in the shastra and see what it wants to say, what it wants to unfold, therefore we must focus on shastra 100%. We must focus leaving aside everything else. Leaving aside all other purposes of study except study for the sake of knowing. That kind of total commitment is necessary when you are listening to the shastra. Generally, we say four types of Graces are required for the successful study of shastra. Ishwara Krpa, Shastra Krpa, Guru krpa and Atma krpa.”

Swami Sadatmananda ji, the Vedanta acharya for the course, started with his first teaching invoking the grace of Pujya Swamiji and Lord Dakshinamurti. Following is the highlights of his lecture :

Study of Vedanta is the pursuit of self-knowledge. When we are studying Vedanta, we are studying, or we are receiving this self-knowledge. The study of Vedanta is meant for self-knowledge.

Now the question can be - why do we need self-knowledge? we have knowledge of physics, chemistry, biology, computer science, etc, and we have ignorance of so many things, some quantum physics, et. So, we have knowledge of a few things, and we have ignorance of a few things. And I'm happily conducting my life without the knowledge of so many things. So, what is the great deal about listening and receiving self-knowledge?

To understand the significance of self-knowledge, if we analyze this human being and how he is distinct from other living beings. There are so many distinctions, one of the distinctions is human being is a self-conscious being. And he is self-conscious to the extent to have self-conclusions. Other animals also are self-conscious. They are also conscious of their surroundings and themselves, enough to have self-identity so they can recognize the members of their species, and the members of the other species. That self-consciousness they have, but human beings have got self-consciousness to the extent to have self-judgment. It is the habit of buddhi, it is the nature of buddhi to make conclusions. Whatever is known evident, buddhi wants to make conclusions. Because without making conclusions buddhi cannot operate. When I see all of you, I must have some conclusions about myself, some conclusion about you. Then only I can operate when I look upon myself, at least right now, as the one who is playing the role of a teacher, and you are the students then only I can talk. If my teachers are sitting in front of me, I will not talk like this. So, when I look upon myself as a teacher then I will operate in a particular way, and therefore our buddhi always wants to make judgment about oneself and about the things around. And the self, “I” am present in all the transactions and therefore our buddhi will have conclusions about the self. So, self-consciousness will lead to self-conclusions, self-judgment. And we have so many judgments about ourselves. *“I am fat, I am lean, I am*

rich, I am poor, I'm intelligent, I'm dull, I'm good looking, not good looking, so-so looking."

So many conclusions we have. And this common denominator of all conclusions is: *I am small, I am inadequate*. So, every individual, every human being has this conclusion, knowingly or unknowingly, I am small, I am inadequate. And this inadequacy can be seen with reference to so many things: knowledge-wise inadequate, this resources-wise inadequate, health wise inadequate, but common denominator is I am inadequate, I am small.

So, self-consciousness leads to self-judgment and self-judgment, common denominator is I am small. And this I am small; this conclusion is not acceptable to myself. The smallness of the self is unacceptable, and therefore there is self-non-acceptance. Every Jiva, every individual is having the problem of self-non-acceptance. Even if other people say that you are great, you are wonderful, etc., but my conclusion about myself doesn't change that I am small and therefore I am not completely acceptable to myself.

And having this self-own acceptance, naturally I will not be comfortable, therefore I seek acceptance, I try to gain something thinking that if I get this, I will be acceptable to myself. Now I am unmarried so people are saying so many things that once I get married, I will be acceptable. That doesn't happen. The wife or husband will say: you are idiot, you are like this, you are like this. So, your self-non-acceptance continues. And we try to seek acceptance from others, why? because in my eyes I am not acceptable, so at least in the eyes of some people, if I'm acceptable then I will feel comfortable, at least momentary relief will be there. At least they are saying, at least sometime relief will be there. And therefore, even though it is not a solution, we seek acceptance, approval from others, and for that we must struggle a lot.

To get acceptance approval from the world is not easy. Because people have different backgrounds. In fact, one lady said very nicely that I tried to please everybody, and, in the process, I displeased everybody. Why? because different people have opposite expectations. Some friends want me to attend Vedanta class, and some friends want me to go to Club. How to satisfy both? So, some will be unhappy, some will be happy. And that those who are happy also are not permanently happy, and therefore my struggle to be accepted by others continues. And even if I am accepted by others, even if they give the feeling, which is very unlikely, still I do not get this sense of acceptance from myself. I feel these people who are praising me do not know me, how inadequate I am.

It is something like you know little Sanskrit: " Ramah ramau rāmāh " And you go to some Village and you say ramabhyam, something you say and then people say you are great scholar, but you know how great scholar you are. When I went somewhere I was introduced that this Swami ji knows all for 4 Vedas, I know names of 4 Vedas, that's all. So thank God that person to whom I was introduced also did not know Vedas, otherwise I'll be trouble.

So even if people give some sense of acceptance, in my eyes I remain unacceptable. And this self-non-acceptance is a universal problem. And here this existentialist (called Charvakas) will come and tell that: you human beings are imperfect, limited, you must accept it, and just do as much as you can accept, your limitations, and make merry as much as you can when you are alive, and anyway one day you will die. So, in this existentialism there is no spiritual pursuit, because they say you are imperfect, and you cannot but be imperfect. And there are some religious people who will say that: yes, you are imperfect, you are limited, but if you follow us, you will go to a place where everything will be wonderful. But all these are unverifiable beliefs.

First of all, I Will Survive death, unverifiable, and after surviving death I will go to heaven, another in unverifiable belief, and I like heaven, unverifiable belief, and by following this person I will go to heaven, unverifiable. Nothing wrong in having unverifiable beliefs but we must know that it is unverifiable beliefs, is not knowledge. And there will not be spiritual pursuit in it. Spiritual Pursuit is there when solution is here when I'm alive, when solution is centered on I.

Since the problem is centered on I, the solution also has to be centered on I. And our sastras are giving the solution to this problem of self-non-acceptance, which is centered on I. And how does it give? by saying that maybe your conclusion about yourself being limited is wrong, your judgment about yourself is wrong, because many times in our life we have seen that our judgments were wrong. In fact, in in this pursuit of knowledge one needs to have this humility to accept that I can be wrong, I can be wrong. If that humility is not there you will continue to hold on to all conclusions and there will not be any change. So sastra says: your conclusion about yourself being limited can be wrong, and if that conclusion is wrong then, what will be truth about yourself? You are Limitless, your conclusion that you are limited, if it is wrong then your being Limitless can be a truth, can be the truth. And how it is truth? that you are limitless, you are what you are seeking in your life, how is it so? That is shown by the shastra.

So the pursuit of knowledge, the study of shastra is meant for discovery of one's true nature which is free from all limitations. And when you have this discovery the limitation of the body does not bother you, limitations of your sense organs even the mind will not bother you.

Pujya Swami ji used to say very nicely: everything becomes luxury. Modern civilization makes all the luxuries into necessity, whereas Vedanta makes everything luxury, including your body. Your body is a luxury. The world, the entire world is luxury. The entire Jagat. That is the beauty of self-discovery. And how it is so we'll be seeing in the following classes.

We invoke the grace of the Lord, so that we will complete this 108 day study of Vedanta successfully, meaningfully.

Om Tat Sat.



- Report by Ms. Padma