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Ātmānam ced vijānīyāt

PujyaSwamiji's transcribed talk

This is the third issue of the serial article, continued from previous issue.

If Vedanta is a means of knowledge for the self, then we have to know what it says. Does it say that ātman is *śūnya*, emptiness; does it say it is *kṣaṇika-vijñāna*, flickers of consciousness, does it say that body is the *ātman*, does it say that the *buddhi* is the *ātman* or does it say ignorance is the *ātman*? Each one of these views is claimed as being said by Vedanta. We have to prove that it does not say any one of these. Now, it is a question of *mīmāṃsā*, analysis, to find out what Vedanta does say. We look into the *vivakṣā*, what it wants to say.

In this analysis, we look into the whole thing—what is said in the beginning, what is said at the end, what is often repeated, what is glorified and so on¹—to know exactly what it wants to say. It has nothing to do with any opinion. It implies analysis of words that are the basis for clear knowledge.

What does this clear knowledge of the self do? This knowledge eliminates all the *anarthas*, everything that is undesirable, along with the root system. The root system here is ignorance alone. All your *anarthas* are only due to lack of self-knowledge. Therefore, it destroys the ignorance that is the root cause for all the problems by revealing what the self is. Positively, this knowledge makes you gain Brahman. Brahman means *pūrṇa*, the whole. It makes you discover that you are the whole, which means everyone is interested. The word '*upaniṣad*' itself creates an interest in inquiring into it, by telling you the result of this knowledge.

AYAM PŪRUṢAḤ THIS PERSON

The *mantra* '*ātmānam cet...*', that we have taken up for unfolding, reveals the fulfillment of a person who has the knowledge of the self. There are five steps in a *vyākhyāna*, unfoldment, of any *mantra*. First is *padaccheda*, resolving the *sandhi* and separating the words. In Sanskrit when the words are in succession in a given sentence, they undergo a grammatical phonetic change called *sandhi*. In *padaccheda* the words are separated and shown individually. The next step is *padārthokti*, giving the meaning of the words. *Pada* can be a compound also. The third step is, therefore, *vigraha*, resolution of the compounds.

1 There are *ṣaḍlīngas* - six pointers, to find out the *tātparyā* - purport of a text: *upakrama-upasaṃhārau*, what is said at the introduction and conclusion; *abhyāsa*, what is repeatedly stated; *apūrvatā*, what is not covered by other means of knowledge; *phala*, that for which result is mentioned; *arthavāda*, that which is glorified; and *upapatti*, reasoning.

When the meaning of the words in the compound is given, one also explains, in the process, how the compounds are resolved. Since many *vigrahas*, resolutions of compounds, are possible, we have to find out what is appropriate. *Vigraha* is an important step in an exposition.

The fourth step is *vākya-yojana*, connection. It covers a number of things. The meaning of the whole sentence is arrived at in keeping with what has gone before, what is coming later and the syntactical connection between different words in the sentence. This harmony in meaning is *vākya-yojana*.

The final step is *ākṣepasya samādhānam*, answering the objections. When you arrive at a particular meaning, somebody can say that it is not right. It is called *ākṣepa*, an objection. You have to answer all the objections. You also raise objections and answer them. Then what you have said 'stays'. This five-fold presentation is called *vyākhyāna*, an exposition or an explanation of a given sentence.

The padaccheda for the *mantra* is: *ātmānam, cet, vijānīyāt, ayam, asmi, iti, pūruṣaḥ, kim, icchan, kasya, kāmāya, śarīram, anusañjvaret*.

Ayam pūruṣaḥ, this person, *ātmānam vijānīyāt cet*, suppose were to know the *ātman*. How does one come to know about this *ātman*, in which way does one know? One knows the *ātman* as '*asmi iti*', 'I am'. Then the second line of the *mantra* gives the result of this knowledge. *Kim icchan*, desiring what; *kasya kāmāya*, for whose purpose; *śarīram anusañjvaret*, would he get afflicted along with the body? *Śarīra* means the physical body or subtle body. This is the *padārthokti*, just the meaning of the words in the *mantra*.

There are no compounds in this *mantra*, only some words that have to be explained. Now, let us look at *ayam pūruṣaḥ*, this person. *Pūruṣa* has the same meaning as *puruṣa*. The lengthening of the vowel 'u' does not make any difference. Why is the person called *puruṣa* in Sanskrit? In English we have the word 'persona'; the mask of the person. *Puruṣa* has a similar meaning, with a little difference.

This body is called *puri*, a city. It is not a city, but is likened to a city. It has all the characteristics or features of a city and its problems. It has all the various systems of a city and it is a walled city. Your anatomy becomes a wall, as it were. The gates are the various apertures in this body like the eyes, ears, nose etc.

In this gated city there are different departments; there is a food department, there is a distribution department and so on. They are the five *prāṇas*. There is a minister who is the *buddhi*. Then there are the intelligence people in the form of the five senses who bring in data. There are *sahakārins*, people who help get things done. These are the five *karmendriyas*, the hands, legs and so on. A city must have a king. That king is called *puruṣa*. The one who lives in this *puri*, body, is 'you' the *puruṣa*.

There is a demonstrative pronoun '*ayam*' along with the word '*puruṣa*'. *Ayam* means 'this' which never becomes 'that'. That which never gets eclipsed and from whom you can never draw yourself away, is '*ayam*, this.' This is you, the self which is never subject to become 'that'.

In Sanskrit we have three words qualifying knowledge: *pratyakṣa*, direct knowledge; *parokṣa*, indirect knowledge and *aparokṣa*, neither direct nor indirect knowledge, that is, immediate knowledge.

Pratyakṣa-jñāna is perceptual knowledge. *Akṣa* means *indriyas*, senses. *Pratyakṣa-jñāna* is knowledge born of direct perception through the senses. It is again divided into two types—*indriya-pratyakṣa* and *sākṣi-pratyakṣa*. What is perceived by a sense organ like the eyes, ears and so on, is *indriya-pratyakṣa*. Therefore, a sensory perception is *indriya-pratyakṣa*.

Now, suppose I ask you, "What did you eat yesterday for your dinner?" You recall it. You see whatever comes in your mental screen, exactly like a monitor screen. This is called recollection. It is nothing but the thoughts occurring in your mind in certain succession, which you see. Suppose I ask you, "What are you thinking now?" You are able to see what thinking is going on in your mind. You say, "My mind is restless." How do you know? There is somebody seeing the mind. Who is that somebody? It is 'you'. That 'you' is *sākṣin*, the witness, of what happens in your mind. What is evident to you without the mediation of senses is *sākṣi-pratyakṣa*, a witness perception.

Any recollection takes place because of witness perception. Suppose you recollect your childhood experiences. From one such recollection you make a conclusion that your hydrophobia, fear of water, is due to your mother. She, in her concern and anxiety, told you, "Do not go near water, do not go near water." That became a fixation and you developed hydrophobia. Your recollection is witness perception. But then, out of that, when you arrive at the cause for your hydrophobia, it is inference.

When you see the smoke on a distant hill, you conclude there is fire, even though you do not see the fire. This knowledge of fire is inference. When you see the smoke, it is direct knowledge. When you infer 'there is fire' it is indirect knowledge. Any inferential knowledge is *parokṣa*, indirect.

Knowledge born of *śabda*, words, can also give indirect knowledge, but not always. Suppose, I give you a description of a place called Neelkant Mahadev that I have seen in the Himalayas: "It is near Rishikesh. It is a small valley surrounded by mountains. There is a beautiful temple for Lord Śiva." Now, you have knowledge of that place born of description. It is indirect knowledge.

We have another type of knowledge that is peculiar, which is neither direct nor indirect. When I say that knowledge is not direct, it becomes, naturally, indirect. Suppose, I say it is also not indirect; in the negation of indirect knowledge, I negate both. So, it is neither *pratyakṣa* nor *parokṣa*. It becomes *aparokṣa-jñāna*, immediate knowledge, knowledge that does not require either direct or indirect means of knowledge.

.....to be continued

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This will enable us to act fast.

Editor.

Camp at AVG Anaikatti by Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

From December 14 to 18, 2019

Value of Values



A group of twenty values mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita in five verses from the 7th ślokā to 11th ślokā is said to be “Knowledge”. Krishna calls them as knowledge as they are important for every human being to live a happy and fulfilled life. Everyone wants to be happy. To be happy, one should follow these values. Not following the values makes the person unhappy. To satisfy our basic need of happiness, and avoiding unhappiness, one should follow these virtues. Whatever we do or not do, behind everything the motivation is either attaining happiness or getting rid of unhappiness. This is universal desire, without exception. This is the fundamental reality of life. This applies to everybody equally. We all are seeking that basic reality which is happiness. In technical word, it can be called *brahman*, *satyam-jñānam-anantam* and they all amounts to one word- happiness. Since this is the only important thing in our life, it is obvious that which leads to happiness should become the most or only important thing of life.

When Lord Krishna says that this is knowledge, it is important because there is ignorance in our life. We want happiness but we do not know where it is. We have this misconception of looking for it where it is not, which is ignorance. Ignorance is not knowing something. It is the absence of knowledge. This ignorance is more dangerous, it has two aspects *āvaraṇa* and *vikṣepa*. The nature of ignorance is beautifully explained through the rope-snake example in Vedanta. Not knowing what it is *āvaraṇam*, - I did not know the rope. Seeing it as a snake creates fear in me. What I think is a snake causes fear in me. Rope is causing fear on account of ignorance and it is my conclusion that this object is snake and that causes fear. Is there a valid reason for the fear? That fear cannot go unless I know the object as rope. Self, *ātmā* is like a rope, and we are born with ignorance of our true nature. Everything is Brahman - *tat tvamasi*, my own self is Brahman. All the *upaniṣads* reveals this fact that you are limitless. I don't know what my true nature is. If Brahman is difficult to perceive, let me say, "I am beautiful, kind, loving person."

It is the perception of snake that causes fear, I am a fearful insecure creature, always on the guard. You can see how we are suffering, not because of what we are but what we think ourselves to be. Fear is not caused by rope but by what I think and perceive that object to be. Ignorance has two aspects, not knowing what it is and taking it contrary to what it is. Limitlessness, happiness, fearlessness is my true nature, and I take to be opposite of all of that. Our life is based on our perception of ourselves. What I think, what I desire, what I do, the way I come across, is all based on my perception of myself. How I perceive myself is not based on what I am. Like a millionaire actor playing the role of a beggar. How I perceive myself is what determines how I live and do things. This is how self-ignorance causes the distorted perception of myself. Self-knowledge will be the right perception of myself. Ignorance is the false or distorted perception of myself. The knowledge is the one that enables me to have true perception of myself. For that, we expose ourselves to the teaching of Vedanta.

Every day we are told in Vedanta class that you are *Brahman*, everything is *Brahman*. In spite of being told, it doesn't create impact on us. One Swami during *cāturmāsa*, was giving Vedanta teaching. One guy always responsive and happy was disturbed in last days. Swami calls him, and asks: "What is the matter". "Swami ji, three days ago after evening class, someone caught hold of my neck and shouted at me, "are you blind?" I realized that I was not wearing my shoes but the same make of a new pair of shoes of the other person. That person tells me that I am blind, thief . . . Swamiji he told me blind, thief... how can he do that, accuse me like this. For three nights, I lost my sleep."Swami ji said, "For two months I am telling you, you are Brahman that did not affect you and once this fellow told you, you are blind, thief and you got affected !!!"

śruti is communicating with us. What is that communication? You are Brahman, what all is there is *Brahman*. Kindness, love, beauty is a reality. If these words created corresponding reference in my mind, knowledge has taken place. I know I am *Brahman* but it doesn't seem to create as much impact as someone says you are stupid. Four people were going and when their names are called, they look back one by one. When it is said 'Oh stupid..' all the four looks back... That's our perception about ourselves. That shows what perception I have about myself. If the self-ignorance doesn't affect my life, I will not take care of it. There are many things that I don't know. We are ignorant about most of the things. "There is very little thing that we know", Bhartuhari says so. *Aparāvidyā*, ignorance is fine; what is important is *parāvidyā*, knowledge of self. This ignorance causes misery in our life, and it is important to remove it. It can be removed by exposing ourselves to the knowledge by *śravaṇam*. It will bless us only if our mind was able to see the meaning of the words of the *upaniṣad* coming to us through the teachers. If we see it as the sages saw it, then it makes difference in our lives.

There is one important faculty called mind. Even for worldly knowledge, we require proper preparations. Preparation of mind – *saṃskāra* is required for learning anything. Orientation of mind is needed. Even to understand my words, the listener should have *saṃskāra* of English language and the subject matter. Everything requires preparation. When we are told that you are Brahman, for that to become meaningful to me, I require *saṃskāra*, preparation, orientation, that makes sense to me. For knowledge to take place, it certainly needs *śravaṇam*. The teacher does his best, something more is required on my part which is *saṃskāra*, purified mind. *yatanto'pyakṛtātmānaḥ*-15:11, those who have made their mind *saṃskṛtam* - refined, sees the true nature of self. Prepared mind is required. *Antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*- purification of mind also becomes a means of knowledge. Words coming from teachers are means of knowledge accompanied with right prepared mind. This is what we need to work on. This is where the values come into place.

These five verses occur in the thirteenth chapter in *kṣetra-kṣetrajña-vibhāga-yoga*. Knower of the field is called *kṣetrajña*. These ignorance with which we are born creates a distorted perception of myself. It makes me to take non-self as myself; it's nobody's fault, we are born with it. There are two entities, object and subject (*kṣetra-kṣetrajña*). Whatever is outside the body I know that, I am not that. When it comes to this body, we seem to be deluded there. I know this hand as I know the clock. In short, my body is very well object of my awareness. When it comes to clock, I can say I am not the clock. When it comes to body, I say I am the body, this ignorance manifests in our life. Very first few words of the thirteenth chapter -*idaṃśarīraṃkaunteya* 13:1 says that this body is called *kṣetra*; the one who is the knower of the body is *kṣetrajña*, the subject, a conscious being. What I am, is the union of subject and object. For that, to understand that, the teaching is given.

In this session, we are going to address mind part of it. A prepared mind, *saṃskṛta* mind is the means of knowledge. Those who have not prepared their mind, in spite of being told, will not get it. Prepared mind is an important instrument in self-knowledge. *SamskṛtamAntahkaraṇam*, pure refined mind, is an important ingredient for knowledge to take place. Lord Krishna glorifies prepared mind also as knowledge. Mind would not be prepared unless it is refined by the practice of the values which shapes the mind, makes it worthy and prepares for self-knowledge.

So, the values are also the means of knowledge, and hence Krishna glorifies values as knowledge in the verse- 11 of the thirteenth chapter - '*etatjñānamitiproktam*'. Without these values, it is not possible to refine the mind, they are required. Therefore, Lord Krishna glorifies values also as knowledge as they are essential ingredients of knowledge. When I enjoy a sweet dish, what am I enjoying? I am enjoying myself. At that time, whatever is the external object, it creates a condition in mind, these objects have diminishing value, first piece of cake, gives great happiness, second , third, fourth and happiness decreases, goes away. Any time I have this idea that I am limited being, I become unhappy. No choice in having these values which are the means of refined mind, they are called Value of Values. What matters to me is 'I', it always come first. Happiness of the self is the most important thing for us, so these values that refines the mind are important, as they will enable me to enjoy my own self. It is important that we know how valuable these values are, then only we have the motivation to do something.

Happiness is the most valuable thing to me in my life, wrongly known self denies me the happiness which is my nature. Something that denies me what is my birth right. Self (*ātmā*) is known to everyone. Ignorance doesn't mean I do not know myself. I always know myself as *ātmā* which is self-conscious, self-revealing. I am aware of the self, but that is not the knowledge of the self. In deep sleep state, dream state and state like that we are always aware of self. If there is darkness, I don't see the rope and there is no problem; in broad day light, I see rope as rope, so no problem; it is in the twilight situation that is where the wrong perception is created. Non-perception is not a problem, wrong perception is a problem. To be wrongly aware of the self is a problem.

I am born with this ignorance of taking the body as myself. I know myself wrongly, this wrong perception is the problem. That has to be corrected, with the teaching of Vedanta. Wrong knowledge of the self denies me that happiness. That's why self-knowledge is important. Knowledge of the self, that gives me correct knowledge and removes ignorance is important to make me happy. Self-knowledge is the means of happiness, for that, we need refined mind and we get that by following these values.

These values that are prescribed to us by Lord Krishna, all scriptures also prescribe this. We know the values, many of them we are aware of. Not only Vedas teaches values, all scripture teaches the same values more or less. Truth, love, compassion, nonviolence are all universal values. 'Are these values universal or subjective?' is the question. One may say, Swamiji, truth is not a universal value, what is truth to you is not a truth to me; what is nonviolence in one condition, can be violence in other condition. A doctor putting knife in stomach is not violence but a thief doing it is violence. These are subjective, individual values. If that is so, then I have freedom to practice as I understand them.

Non-violence is a universal value, because everyone loves non-violence. A value is not determined from my behavior, it is what my expectations are, how I expect to be treated by others. I do not want to be hurt, physically, emotionally. Even a violent person does not want to be hurt by anyone. Values are not determined by my behavior but by my expectation from others. No one wants to be hurt physically or emotionally. We agree in what we expect from others. Logically speaking, in life, a rule must be a universal one- *yatra yatra-dhūmaḥ-tatratatra-vahniḥ*- wherever there is fire, there is smoke; it must be a universal law. There cannot be any creature that wants to be hurt. Universally, each one agrees that we do not want to be hurt. Non-violence, thus, is a universal value.

I don't want anyone to tell me lies. Even the one who is cheating everyone, doesn't want to be cheated. Even while sharing their spoils among themselves, cheaters do not want to be cheated. So, the values are determined by not what I do but what my expectations are. In that sense, these are universal values. Why they are universal, because there is a universal law. Truthfulness is everywhere in the creation, except in human beings. Other than human beings, the whole universe is honest. Only in *Pañcatantra* stories, we hear about animal telling lies, e.g. donkey wearing tiger skin along with fox and going to a sugarcane field to steal sugarcane and after having stomach full, wanting to sing.... these things happen only in the stories, not in real life.

jīvojīvasyajīvanam- one life form depends upon other life form, this is how the universe has been created, there we find creatures living on other creatures but even that violence is only for sustenance, nothing more than that. This is how nature is, no violence for the sake of violence, just for sustenance. That's how order of the nature is sustained. That's what keeps the whole universe going. There is non-violence, truthfulness, honesty in the universe. The whole universe follows a moral order called *dharma*. There is an order; whole universe follows that order; that's why there is harmony in the universe because of the universal order. Harmony everywhere except in human beings. Human are capable of violating the order; other creatures do not have freedom to violate the order. Humans have free will, and that is where the necessity of values come-in.

Freewill is the freedom to violate the order; otherwise, the whole universe is like an orchestra. All other creatures play their tune as per the law of nature and maintain harmony of this orchestra. Only humans have turned it into noise, because we have freedom to do it. I assert my freedom by doing things the way I want to do it. My definition of freedom is to disturb the order. Human-being exercises freedom by doing what they want. Therefore, there is the need for prescribing the values. *Vidhi*- is an enjoined action- something that has to be done for our own well-being. By following that, we help ourselves, and by violating, we hurt ourselves. That's why, values are universal because the order is universal, and these values are based on that universal order. How does it help me if I follow the value, and how does it hurt me if I violate it? This is where we come to Vedanta. That universal order is you, *tat tvamasi*. So when we violate the order, we violate ourselves. Who cares? Values are universal based on the order of *īśvara* and that is my own self. When we violate the order, we are hurting ourselves, damaging ourselves. *īśāvāśyopaniṣat*, mentions this about those who hurt themselves. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* talks about it, the result of wrong values is self-hurt.

What is *mithyā* is taken up to be *satyam*, and by holding on to that, we hurt ourselves. This is what is going on. If that is not brought to our attention, then our life can very well become the process of self-hurting. So, lots of techniques, packages are there on the stress management, yoga etc. to get some symptomatic treatment. Nobody knows the real cause of stress except Vedanta. Violating myself is the real cause of stress. I am fighting with the self. That is the stress. I am rejecting, condemning, disapproving myself which is the cause of all the stress. Values and conflict, all conflicts in life arise because of wrong values; there is an order that creates conflict; whenever we try to violate that order, it creates conflict. Violating the order amounts to violating myself, and thus one part of me hurts the other part of me, and conflict is arising. When I deliberately hurt somebody, the conflict has to arise. We have two consciousness. I am conscious of what I expect from others; I am conscious of what others also expect from me. So, when I deliberately do something wrong, this guilt arises in me, which is because of this two-way consciousness.

Only humans have guilt, no other creatures have guilt. If I hurt somebody, cheat somebody, there arise a sense of guilt, because I know that I was expected to do otherwise. A cat doesn't get that feeling while making breakfast of a mouse whereas I have that sense of guilt when I hurt someone. I don't want to get hurt is common to all beings, but others also want the same treatment from me which is not there in other creatures except humans. Creator *īśvara* has given this single consciousness in all the creatures that they don't want to get hurt by others. That is why one life lives on other lives without sense of guilt. Would that not have been nice, if we too did not have that guilt and hurt! Animals have no sense of guilt or hurt.

So, they are liberated, *vimuktaḥ* - one who is free from guilt and hurt, in that way animals are also in the same category as enlightened being. One is not capable of feeling and the other has grown out of it. Is it good to feel hurt and guilt? *īśvara* has created the most evolved creature-humans, who is also the most miserable creature. Human being is champion in creating suffering for self. Everything is created by us, that is why, we can become free from it, because all the sufferings are our own creation. If it comes from elsewhere, I cannot be free from it. If happiness comes from elsewhere, how can I guarantee it? Because I am the source of it, I can get it.

Sādhana is to stop creating unhappiness for ourselves and start creating happiness for ourselves which we can do it. Has *īśvara* helped us or hurt us by giving us these hurt and guilt, the source of all miseries? Cat doesn't have free will, so no hurt or guilt, it cannot choose for itself. All unhappiness is created by making wrong choices, and we can change it by making right choices. How do I know what is right choice? 'The Values'- they represent the right choice; it is a guidance given to us. When free will is given to us, we are bound to make a choice, and when we make a choice, we are stuck with responsibility. Why did *īśvara* do all these things to us?

Transcribed by Sri Manoj Kitta , Edited by Sharanji

...to be continued

Relationship between bhakti and jñānam.

2020 Śivarātri Talk By Swami Paramarthanandaji

We have got a very vast religious literature which highlights the importance of *Bhakti* or devotion to God. And we have got an equally vast spiritual literature also which highlights the importance of *jñānam* or spiritual wisdom. Both *bhakti* and *jñānam* are highlighted in our tradition. So the natural question comes what is the relationship between *bhakti* and *jñānam*.



Our tradition says that both *Bhakti* and *jñānam* are equally important. They are complementary virtues and they reinforce each other, and both *bhakti* and *jñānam* have got two levels. One is general *bhakti* and the other is special *bhakti*. *Sāmānya bhakti* and *viśeṣa bhakti* and similarly knowledge also has two levels *sāmānya jñānam* and *viśeṣa jñānam* – general knowledge and special knowledge like general theory of relativity and special theory of relativity.

We consider all the four as very important for the follower of our tradition. And we have to use all the four means, general knowledge, special knowledge, general devotion and special devotion, we have to very judiciously use at the appropriate stage or level. Now the question is what is the sequence in which all these four have to be used?

This is going to be my topic today, “Relationship between *bhakti* and *jñānam*.” These four must be used in a particular order. The first one is *sāmānya jñānam* - general knowledge of God. Who is God? I should have a general knowledge, a rough idea. And this general knowledge will lead to general *bhakti* called *sāmānya bhakti*. *Sāmānya jñānam* will lead to *sāmānya bhakti*.

Based on my general knowledge, I will develop a devotion to God. That devotion is general devotion. And after this general devotion, I have to later graduate myself to *viśeṣa jñānam* or special knowledge of God. So *sāmānya jñānam* to *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam* to *viśeṣa bhakti* is the journey of a basic follower. Let us see each one of them briefly.

sāmānya jñānam

sāmānya jñānam is general knowledge of God. In our tradition, *Bhagavān* is defined as the creator of the entire universe *jagat-kartā*, *viśvasya-kartā*, *sarvasya-kartā*, the creator of the entire universe. And if *Bhagavān* has to create the entire universe, His knowledge and power must be limitless. So He is *sarvajñah* and He is *sarva-śaktimān* and He is *sarva-vyāpi* - Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent. And having said that *Bhagavān* is Omniscient, Omnipotent creator of the world, scripture gives an additional knowledge. Suppose you pray to that God, worship that God, then by the grace of that God, you can fulfil all your desires you can get whatever you want. You can get rid of whatever you don't want also. Thus *bhakti* or devotional worship of the Lord, either through prayer or through *pūjā* will fulfil all your desires. At the end of every prayer, we find a portion called *phala-śruti*. A list of things you can get to by the *pārāyaṇam*, chanting by *pūjā* etc. If you look at the list everything you want will be there.

रोगार्तो मुच्यते रोगाद्बद्धो मुच्येत बन्धनात् भयान्मुच्येत भीतस्तु मुच्येतापन्न आपदः

rogārto mucyate rogādbaddho mucyeta bandhanāt bhayānmucyeta bhītastu mucyetāpanna āpadaḥ

विद्यार्थि लभते विद्याम्; दनार्थि लभते दनम्; पुत्रार्थि लभते पुत्रान्;

Vidyārthi labhate vidyām; danārthi labhate danam; putrārthi labhate putrān;

Whatever you want you will get. And when we develop a love towards that God, we can acquire whatever we want. You will find in the *phala-śruti* almost everything is promised name, fame, money, position, possession, children, grandchildren. Everything is provided and they will say even *mokṣa*. You chant this, *mokṣa* readily available. So this makes a person worship God with prayer, *pūjā* etc.

This is called *sāmānya bhakti* and the *sāmānya bhakta* in the second level naturally will do varieties of *pūjā* to get rid of his problems. He is called *artha-bhakta* and he will do varieties of *pūjā* for getting varieties of things he is called *arthārtī bhakta*, for Gītā students to remember, that a *sāmānya bhakta*, a general devotee will become an *artha / arthārtī bhakta* to get rid of problem, to acquire various things.

And among the *sāmānya bhakta*, general devotee that is the second level, there are some rare ones who have got a rare desire which is different from conventional desires of the *sāmānya bhakta*. And what is that desire? He has been worshiping the Lord in the form of a particular deity. Even though *Bhagavān* cannot be limited to any particular form, for the sake of *pūjā* our scriptures offer varieties of forms. Thus we have got several deities, several forms in which you can worship that Lord and a particular form is called *iṣṭha-devatā*. Thus different people have got different *iṣṭha-devatās*. These rare *bhaktas* have a desire and the desire is that I want to have *darśanam* of that Lord.

No doubt I am doing *pūjā* to the photo, *pūjā* to the idol. But I want to have the direct vision, mystic vision of that *devatā*. And the scriptures talk about varieties of *sādhana* for *devatā darśanam* also, like *nāma-japa* or *dhyānam* or *tapas*. *Dhyānam* means meditation, *tapas* means varieties of austerities, they are prescribed in the scriptures and the scriptures point out if the sincere devotee follows those *sādhana*s then *Bhagavān* will specially appear for him because *Bhagavān* is omnipotent and He has infinite power. Therefore He can take any particular form that the devotee desires with His special power called *māyā-śakti*. Śaṅkarācārya says in his *brahma-sūtra bhāṣyam* –

*syāt parameṣvarasya api icchāvaśāt māyāmayam rūpaṁ sādhanānugrahārtham 111/20
brahmasūtram*

स्यात् परमेश्वरस्य अपि इच्छावशात् मायामयं रूपं साधकानुग्रहार्थम् १।१।२० ब्रह्मसूत्रम्

Of course he can take several incarnations for the sake of the world in general, *Bhagavān* can take a special *avatāra* for the sake of the devotee also and he gives *darśanam* to that devotee. This is possible according to the scriptures and some *bhaktas* get interested in the vision of God directly. The scriptures promise that such a vision is possible, but they also add a note that even if a devotee has such a vision, the vision of that particular form of God is not the ultimate. It is not the ultimate vision of the total, because it is only a particular version of God which temporarily comes and goes. Therefore it is a great vision, but it is not ultimate. And therefore a devotee must remember that his real goal is going from *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam* is the goal, but not the vision of a particular form of God.

Even if a person gets the vision of that God, he should employ that vision and ask the Lord, Oh Lord! My aim is to go from *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam*. If I don't ask for *viśeṣa jñānam*, even the vision of God is absolutely not relevant and that is what is said in the famous story of *dhṛvā* in *bhāgavata-purāṇa*

Dhṛvā goes to the forest to get the vision of *nārāyaṇā* and he practises severe penance. If you study the penance of *dhṛvā*, we will be scared whether it is possible and after long penance, *dhṛvā* gets vision of God and he gets an opportunity to interact with the Lord also. He should have asked the Lord, Oh Lord give me *viśeṣa jñānam* and *viśeṣa bhakti* which is otherwise called *mokṣa*. But instead of this, *dhṛvā* asked for the empire of his father because there is a competition between *dhṛvā* and his step brother. Because of the competition *dhṛvā* does not ask for *mokṣa*, *dhṛvā* does not ask for the *viśeṣa jñānam* or *viśeṣa bhakti* instead he asked for emperorship. And afterwards *dhṛvā* himself regrets, “I goofed up the wonderful opportunity I had, instead of asking for the greatest goal, I asked for the temporary benefit of Emperor-hood” and curses himself. Therefore the scriptures warn, “Never be carried away by anything, including the vision of God”. Whether you get the vision of God or not, you have to pray for *mokṣa* or *viśeṣa jñānam*. And let us assume that there is a *bhakta* who intelligently asks for special knowledge of *Bhagavān*. Then what will be the special knowledge?

So now we are going to third stage, from general knowledge to general devotion to special knowledge which can be gained only from a Guru through the study of scriptures. Wonderful scriptures like the Bhagavad-gītā, etc., talk about the special knowledge of *īṣvara*. And what is that? It is the continuation of the general knowledge. We have to pick up the thread from general knowledge of God. What is the general knowledge of God? God is the creator of the entire universe, including time, space etc,. And before the creation of the universe, *Bhagavān* must be there; otherwise he cannot create the world. Therefore before the creation of the world, *Bhagavān* alone was there.

सदेव सोम्य इदमग्र असीद् एकमेवाद्वितीयम्

sadeva somya idamagra asīd ekamevādvitīyam

There was no second thing at all, because second thing has to be created. Now comes a logical question there was nothing else other than *Bhagavān*, how can *Bhagavān* create a world? Because to create something, *Bhagavān* requires a raw material. If we have to create anything you require a raw material. Carpenter can create furniture only if he had got raw material called wood. If a gold smith has to create ornament he requires gold as a raw material. For a cook to create varieties of dishes, he requires provision. Now the question is when *Bhagavān* alone is there, how can he create the world without a raw material? Where did *Bhagavān* find the raw material? And the scriptures give the answer that *Bhagavān* finds the raw material within himself as a part of himself.

He takes his own part and out of himself he creates this world. And the scriptures give an example also, just as spider creates the web by taking the raw material out of itself, it doesn't go anywhere for the raw material spider contains the raw material as its own part. Similarly *Bhagavān* has got two portions, one portion is called technically *puruṣa* and the second part of *Bhagavān* is called *prakṛti*. Thus *Bhagavān* has got two portions, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Of these, the *prakṛti* portion is an ideal portion which is very pliable which is very plastic which can be shaped into any form, like the children have got certain plastic clay with that they can shape any form. The very word *prakṛti* means *prakarṣena karoti yogadvāt prakṛti*. That which can be shaped into anything and everything in the creation. *Prakṛti* can modify into time, space (*ākāśa*), *vāyu*, *agni*, *āpaḥ*, *pṛthivī*. In fact the entire creation can be the modification of *prakṛti* part of *Bhagavān*. Therefore the scriptures say the entire universe that we experience is none other than *Bhagavān* only. What type of *Bhagavān*? Partially *Bhagavān* only. Which part of *Bhagavān*? *Prakṛti* part of *Bhagavān* alone we experience.

Therefore where can we experience god?, where can we experience God?, *viśeṣa jñānam* says whatever you experience is God alone. So we ask a counter question, where can you not experience God? And therefore *sarvaṁ īśvara mayam jagat; sarvaṁ viṣṇu mayam jagat; sarvaṁ śiva mayam jagat*. Thus the universe is called *viṣvarūpa īśvaraḥ*, the universal version of God. Then, comes the next question. What about the other part of *Bhagavān*? Where is the other part of *Bhagavān* called *puruṣa*? The scriptures give us a *viśeṣa jñānam*.

Viśeṣa jñānam

What is that *viśeṣa jñānam*? The entire *prakṛti* has become the physical Universe, the material Universe. But we require a consciousness principle to experience the universe. The material universe is inert. The inert universe cannot experience anything. Therefore the *puruṣa* becomes the experience-principle, the conscious principle obtaining in every living being. Thus our physical body is *prakṛti* our mind is *prakṛti*, our sense organs are *prakṛti*. Behind the body, the mind and the sense organ, there is the consciousness-principle, sentient principle called the experiencer-principle. That experiencer, “I am” is none other than the *puruṣa* part of God. Thus the entire creation can be divided into two, the experiencer and experienced; subject and object. And the subject experiencer is *puruṣa* part of God and object experienced is *prakṛti* part of God. Thus all the living being and all things are nothing but *puruṣa prakṛti rūpa īśvara* alone.

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव विद्ध्यनादी उभावपि ।

विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् ॥ १९ ॥

prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva viddhyanādī ubhāvapi

vikārāṁśca guṇāṁścaiva viddhi prakṛtisambhavān BG 13-19

कार्यकरणकर्तृत्वे हेतुः प्रकृतिरुच्यते ।

पुरुषः सुखदुःखानां भोक्तृत्वे हेतुरुच्यते ॥ २० ॥

kāryakaraṇakartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtirucyate

puruṣaḥ sukhaduḥkhānāṁ bhoktṛtve heturucyate BG 13-20

पुरुषः प्रकृतिस्थो हि भुङ्क्ते प्रकृतिजान् गुणान् ।

कारणं गुणसङ्गोऽस्य सदसद्योनिजन्मसु ॥ २१ ॥

puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho hi bhuṅkte prakṛtijān guṇān

kāraṇaṁ guṇasaṅgo'sya sadasadyonijanmasu BG 13-21

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।

परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः ॥

upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ

paramātmēti cāpyukto dehe'sminpuruṣaḥ paraḥ BG 13-22

Lord kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, that Oh Arjuna whatever you experience is me alone, which is the *prakṛti* part of me and you the experiencer is also me which is the *puruṣa* part of me. Therefore where is *Bhagavān*? What is *Bhagavān*? If you ask, we say everything is *Bhagavān*. Therefore *Bhagavān* is called during *sarvātmakaḥ*. So during *śivarātri-pūjā* after each *abhiśekam* the person will say “*Bhagavān sarvātmakaḥ supṛītaḥ suprasanno varado bhūtvā kṣema sthairyā dhairyā vīrya vijaya āyurārgya...*” where he uses the word *sarvātmakaḥ*, a profound word which means *Bhagavān* is not any particular thing in the universe, *Bhagavān* is not a particular person in the universe. *Bhagavān* is everything and every being. And this *sarvātmakaḥ Bhagavān* is beautifully described by śaṅkarācārya in his *Dakṣiṇāmūrti stotram* in a very beautiful verse. Being *śivarātri*, I will loudly remember this verse we chanted today.

भूरंभास्यनलोनिलोंबरमहर्नाथो-हिमांशुः पुमान्

इत्याभाति चराचरात्मकमिदं यस्यैव मूर्त्यष्टकम्

नान्यत्किञ्चन विद्यते विमृशतां यस्मात्परस्माद्विभोः

तस्मै श्रिगुरुमुर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामुर्तये

*bhūraṁbhāsyānalom̐baram aharnātho-himāṁśuḥ pumān
ityābhāti carācarātmakamidam̐ yasyaiva mūrtyaṣṭakam
nānyatkiñcana vidyate vimṛśatām̐ yasmātparasmādvibhoḥ
tasmai śrīgurumurtaye nama idam̐ śrīdakṣiṇāmurtaye*

A very beautiful sloka. Understanding sloka is called *viśeṣa jñānam*. So here śaṅkarācārya says *Bhagavān* is in the form of *pañca bhūtāni* the five elements. They talk about *pañca-bhūta liṅgam*. They say *ākāṣa liṅgam* is in Chidambaram but where is *ākāṣa*? It is everywhere. *Vāyu liṅgam* is in Kālahasti, but *vāyu* (the wind) is not in Kālahasti alone. So, when I breathe the *vāyu*, I am experiencing the *Bhagavān*. Thus *pañca bhūtāni* is *Bhagavān*. So,

bhūraṁbhāsyānalom̐baram = pancha-bhūtāni
aharnāth = the *sūryaḥ*, Sun.

The sun is Lord śiva and Sun represents all the stars and *himāṁśuḥ* means the moon. The Moon represents all the planets and satellites that is also *Bhagavān*, all the seven items *pañca-bhūtāni*, *sūrya*, *candra* - they are all *prakṛti* version of *Bhagavān*. Then he adds the eighth item, *pumān*. *aharnātho-himāṁśuḥ pumān*

Pumān means all the experiencing living being, the conscious being which corresponds to *puruṣa* aspect of *Bhagavān*. Thus the whole universe is *puruṣa prakṛti rūpa aṣṭha-mūrti* *īṣvaraḥ*. *Bhagavān's* *viṣvarūpam* is called *aṣṭha-mūrti*. *Aṣṭha-mūrti* means eight versions of *Bhagavān*.

What are the eight versions? *Pañca-bhūtāni*, *sūrya*, *candra* - they are the *prakṛti* version and “I”, the consciousness principle *puruṣa* version which experiences everything. Thus the world is God? What about “I”?

I am also God. And the one who has got this *viśeṣa jñānam*

What type of penance one should do, to have the *darśanam* of God? One need not do *dhṛvā* type of penance and *Bhagavān* need not come from somewhere. The *viśeṣa jñānam* is itself the penance.

yasya jñānamayam tapaḥ यस्य ज्ञानमयम् तपः

Once I have the *viśeṣa jñānam*. I don't wait for *īṣvara darśanam*. I don't get *īṣvara darśanam* at a particular time. I have vision of God all the time. And if you ask this person *viśeṣa jñāni*, have you seen the god? What answer he can give.

He cannot say "I have seen God". Because, if he says I have seen God, it means I do not see Him now so he cannot say "I have seen and he cannot say "I have not seen God". Therefore if anybody asks this *viśeṣa jñāni*, have you seen God, he will only smile. And he will say you are asking a wrong question based on your *sāmānya jñānam*. You will know the answer to the question when you know what I know. So, what is the answer? It is neither "I have seen" nor "I have not seen" but I am experiencing only the God everywhere.

antarbhahiśca tatsarvaṁ vyāpya nārāyaṇa stithaḥ

अन्तर्भहिश्च तत्सर्वं व्याप्य नारायणः स्थितः

And, this *viśeṣa jñānam*, special knowledge will lead to the fourth level. What is the fourth level? It is *Viśeṣa bhakti*.

What is *Viśeṣa bhakti*? Reverence not towards a particular deity in a particular temple, the reverential attitude is there everywhere. Whatever I see, I feel like doing *namaskāram*. Since it is not practically possible, he doesn't physically do *namaskāram*, but his mind is full of reverential attitude towards everything in the creation because everything happens to be *Bhagavān* and this reverential attitude freezes him from *rāga* and *dveṣa*. There is nothing with which he gets attachment because everything is *Bhagavān*. He does not hate anything because everything is *Bhagavān*.

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानाम्.

This is called *mokṣa*, freedom from *rāga* and *dveṣa*. *vītarāgabhayakrodhāḥ* वीतरागभयक्रोधाः.

This is because of *viśeṣa bhakti*. Wherever *viśeṣa bhakti* is, there is no *rāga* and *dveṣa* to disturb the mind.

Thus the journey of a *bhakta* is from *sāmānya jñānam* to *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam* to *viśeṣa bhakti*, when he/she sees *Bhagavān* everywhere.

And such a person offers a beautiful *śaraṇāgati*, surrender to the Lord through a wonderful sloka. That sloka is:

नमः शिवायेति शिवं प्रपद्ये
शिवः प्रसीदेति शिवं प्रपद्ये
शिवात् परं नेति शिवं प्रपद्ये
शिवोऽहमस्मीति शिवं प्रपद्ये

namaḥ śivāyeti śivaṁ prapadye

śivaḥ prasīdeti śivaṁ prapadye

śivāt paraṁ neti śivaṁ prapadye

śivo'hamasmīti śivaṁ prapadye

śivaṁ prapadye means I surrender to God *śiva* how? First I say "*namaḥ śivāyeti śivaṁ prapadye*" surrender to the Lord chanting the *nāma* - *om namaḥ śivāya*."

Then I say “*śivaḥ prasīdeti śivaṁ prapadye* Oh Lord, May you be gracious to me and give me *viśeṣa jñānam* with *jijñāsu bhakti*.”

I surrender to the Lord, *śivaḥ prasīdeti śivaṁ prapadye*
. Then *Bhagavān* blesses me with *viśeṣa jñānam* through a guru.

Then, “*śivāt paraṁ neti śivaṁ prapadye*
there is nothing other than Lord *śiva*.”

And finally fall flat declaring, “*śivo'hamasmīti śivaṁ prapadye*
If everything is *Bhagavān*, I am also that Lord *śiva* only, *śivo'hamasmīti śivaṁ prapadye*

This is what successful *bhakti* and *jñānam* leading to *mokṣa* on this auspicious *śivarātri* day. May Lord *śiva* bless us through all the stages and enjoy *viśeṣa jñānam* and *viśeṣa bhakti* and *mokṣa*.

Swamiji's talk was transcribed by Vaijayanti and Edited by disciples of Swamiji'

Retreat ID : V20-02

Retreat Topic : Vedic view of life

Retreat Dates : 8:00 PM Friday, 22nd May'20 to 12:30 PM Tuesday, 26th May'20

This retreat will be a family retreat.

The retreat will be conducted by Swami Shankarananda assisted by other teachers.

Family retreat means children are also welcome. Children aged between 7 and 16 accompanied by a parent or guardian may also be registered for the camp.

Children should understand English. There will be separate classes and activities for children.

Only limited seats are available.

Please register before 1st April 2020.

Seva from parents are welcome during the camp.

Retreat will include temple puja, meditation, classes on Vedanta, satsang (Question and answer sessions).

You may register for the retreats by filling up the registration form available in our website arshavidya.com.

Note: The retreat may be affected if the corona virus situation does not revert to normal by 7th May 2020

RESIDENTIAL SPIRITUAL CAMP

With the blessings of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Paramarthananda, Swami Sakshatkritananda, Swami Sadatmananda and Swami Shankarananda, Arsha Avinash Foundation conducted a residential spiritual camp. The camp was held for two days on March 14, 2020 and March 15, 2020 at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti. 25 students from Coimbatore, Trichy, Chennai and Bengaluru participated in the camp. This was the first residential camp organised by Arsha Avinash Foundation. For most of the campers it was their first visit to Anaikatti Gurukulam.



Swami Sadatmananda, Chief Acharya, AVG, Anaikatti inaugurated the camp and gave his benedictory address: He said that Arsha Vidya means the knowledge of Vedas received and imparted by Rishis. Arsha Vidya Gurukulam means the place of teaching Vedic knowledge.

All the four Vedas talk about the parama-purushartha (highest human goal) or Moksa. Moksa is gained by the knowledge of Vedanta. Prakarana-grantas briefly discuss about some topic of Vedanta. Bhaja Govindam and Sadana Pancakam are prakarana grantas.

Samsari aspires for money, pleasures and svarga. He tries to change the world to be free. But if he gains maturity, he becomes a Sadaka. Sadaka tries to change his attitude and himself to be free. Sadaka accepts adverse situations as conducive for gaining vairagya and for reducing the karma-phala of papa. He turns from a God fearing person to be a God loving person.

N. Avinashilingam taught Bhaja Govindam to the campers. He explained that the text teaches about the uncertainty of worldly pursuits. It hammers on the wrong thinking about giving undue importance to worldly gains. It finally declares that only atma-jnana will give permanent happiness to the seekers.

Ponmani Avinashilingam taught Sadana Pancakam. She explained that the text guides the Seeker step by step in 40 steps about the spiritual journey. It starts with the study of scriptures and ends with abiding in the knowledge of Brahman.

There were also sessions on Guided Meditation and Satsangh.

Swami Jagadatmananda conducted the Satsangh on Saturday and the topic was Nakshatra Siddhanta based on Vedic Astrology. Swamiji at the outset explained the importance of Jyotisha as one of the Vedanga and its need for a harmonious life. He said Jyotisha is a not to be believed as a faith and it has to be understood. He imparted the usage of Nakshatra Siddanta which is useful for daily planning of our activities and important life events. Swamiji invited the interested persons to attend the Vedic Astrology camp to be held from June 20th to 30th, 2020 at AVG, Anaikatti.

Feedback received from the students:

I have been curious about spirituality, religion and purpose of life for a long time now. A big challenge in this pursuit has been in identifying a starting point. This workshop has been a big help in this direction. Attending the sessions was very inspiring.- Shrikar Marur, Bengaluru

We spent two days in great spiritual learning.- M. Bhavani, Coimbatore`

The peaceful atmosphere in the Gurukulam, tasty and nutritious food, Swamiji's blessings, relaxing meditation sessions, informative Vedanta classes and lecture on Vedic astrology has given me happiness. - B. Sri Devi, Coimbatore

Camp was well organised. I felt that all the camp participants belong to the same spiritual family.- S. Ramakrishnan, Coimbatore

We enjoyed the pleasant Gurukulam environment, comfortable Gurukulam facilities, worship in the temple, punctuality of the classes, commitment of the Teachers and Students, educative meditation sessions and useful Vedanta classes. – N. Natarajan & N. Pushpa, Coimbatore

The Bhaja Govindam and Sadana Pancakam classes have educated me on the sadanas to be followed in spiritual life. This camp has given me great joy and fulfilment- G. Murali, Coimbatore

I have attended this camp along with my Parents. Post retirement, my parents have started attending your Vedanta classes in the city. After attending this camp, I am convinced that they are doing the best thing after retirement. – Miss V. Gayathri, Coimbatore

Report by N. Avinashilingam

An interview with Swamy Dayananda Saraswathi

by Andrew Cohen.

The interview that follows was excerpted from over 80 pages of transcripts documenting a series of dialogues between Swamy Dayananda and Andrew Cohen in February 1998.

What is advaita?

Andrew Cohen: In the last twenty years or so there has been great interest in Advaita in the West, as you know, and it's my impression that there has also been a lot of confusion about this teaching, that it has been very misunderstood and even abused in some cases. We wanted to speak with you so that we could present authoritative traditional view. So, to begin, could you please explain what the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta is?

Swami Dayananda: The word "advaita" is a very important word. It's a word that negates *dvaita*, which means "two." The "a" is a negative particle, so the meaning would be "that which is nondual." And it reveals the philosophy that all that is here is one, which means that there is nothing other than that one, nor is it made up of any parts. It's a whole without parts, and That they Call "Brahman" [the Absolute], and That you are – because the nondual cannot be different from you, the inquirer. If it is the object. So it has got to be you. And therefore, if you don't recognize that, you'll miss out on being the Whole.

AC: Can you please explain the historical background?

SD: The Vedas [sacred Hindu scriptures] are the most ancient body knowledge we Have in humanity. And the tradition looks upon the Vedas as not having been authored by any given person, but given to the ancient *rishis* [seers] as revealed knowledge. It is considered that the Vedas are traced ultimately to the Lord as the source of all knowledge, and *it is this body of knowledge that is the source of Advaita*. The Upanishads [the concluding portion of Vedas] talk about God realization – and they not talk about it, they methodically teach it. What I am doing today is what is taught in the Upanishads. The Upanishads themselves are a *teaching and also a teaching tradition*. And it's a communicable tradition – there's nothing mystical about it.

But I don't think asvaita is only in the Vedas; I think it's everywhere there is the idea, "You are the Whole." That is advaita, whether it is in Sanskrit, Latin or Hebrew. But the advantage in Vedanta is that it can be taught and it is taught. We have created a teaching tradition, and it has grown. Whereas in America, when suddenly people turn vegetarian, for example, all that they have is tofu and alfalfa and a few other things, because there's no tradition of vegetarian cooking. It takes time. You can't create a tradition overnight!

AC: Who are considered to be foremost exponents of Advaita teaching?

SD: There have been a lot of teachers who have maintained this tradition whose names we don't know. But from the Upanishads down we can say: Vyasa, Gaudapada, Shankara, Suresvara – these are the names we repeat every day. But Shankara occupies a central position because of his written commentary. It is the written commentary that gives you the tradition of teaching and method of teaching, and the method is very important in this tradition: How do you teach? There are a lot of pitfalls in this process, and one of them is the limitation of the language – the linguistic limitation. But the teaching has to be conveyed through words, which means that you must have a method – a method by which you can be sure that the student understands, because the enlightenment takes place as the teaching takes place and not afterwards. That's the tradition. So Shankara occupies an important place because of his commentaries, because he left written commentaries, because he left written commentaries on palm leaves for us. But I wouldn't say that the other teachers were any less important.

AC: Before Shankara there were no written commentaries?

SD: There were some. In fact, what I'm teaching every morning now is a commentary on one of the Upanishads, by Shankara's own teacher's teacher, Gaudapada. There are a few others also – Vyasa's sutras. These sutras are analytical work in a style of literature that has very brief statements, one after the other, so that you can memorize them. But these, again, are part of the tradition of teaching, so they are always backed up. You write the sutra and then you teach it to a group of people, and these together are what is handed down. Then, when you recite the sutra, you remember what we call "the Tradition." In fact, the whole of Advaita Vedanta is analyzed in the sutras.

The self is already present in all experience

AC: Why is it that you feel the study of the scriptures, rather than spiritual experience, is the most direct means to Self-realization?

SD: Self-realization, as I said is the discovery that "the Self is the whole" – that you are the Lord; in fact, you are God, the cause of everything.

Now nobody lacks the experience of Advaita, of that which is nondual-there's always Advaita. But any experience is only as good as one's ability to interpret it. A doctor examining you interprets your condition in one way, a layperson in another. Therefore, you need interpretation, and your knowledge is only as valid as the means of knowledge you are using for that purpose.

As the small self, we have no means of knowledge for the direct understanding of self-realization, and therefore Vedanta is the means of knowledge that has to be employed for that purpose. No other means of knowledge will work because, for this kind of knowledge, our powers of perception and inference alone are not sufficient.

So I find that by itself there is nothing more dumb than experience in this world. In fact, it is experience that has destroyed us.

AC: It has been my experience as a teacher that for most human beings, generally speaking, simply hearing the teaching is not enough. Usually they do need to have some kind of experience that makes the meaning of the words obvious in a very direct, experiential way. And then the person says, “oh, my goodness, now I understand I’ve heard this for so many years, but now I recognize the truth of it.

SD: Yes, but even that experience is useless without the correct interpretation. Suppose your sense of being a separate individual falls away for a moment or ten minutes or even an hour, and then suddenly that apparent duality seems to come back again. Does that mean the one true Self gets displaced? Of course not! Then why should enlightenment require an experience? Enlightenment doesn’t depend upon experiences; it depends upon my shedding my error and ignorance – that is what it depends upon, and nothing else.

People say that advaita is eternal, that it is timeless, and at the same time they say that they are going through an experience of it at a particular time and under certain conditions. That’s not traditional! But that is what we hear everywhere. The tradition says: “What you see right now is advaita.”

Suppose a fellow has an experience and then he comes out and says, “I was one hour eternal, that it is timeless means eternity. Whether it is one hour eternal or one moment eternal, it is always the same. So confidence in truth cannot depend upon a state of experience. Confidence in truth is in your clarity of what is. Otherwise what will happen is, “I was non dual Brahman for one hour and then I came back and now it’s gone.” Then every thought becomes a nightmare because when I am not in *nirvikalpa Samadhi* [ecstatic absorption in nondual consciousness], then I cannot even relate to the world; I have to be stoned forever, you know? Whereas enlightenment is just knowing what is. That is called sahaja, which means “natural”; it means just seeing clearly. If people insist on having a particular experience, that simply means that they have not understood the teaching. Even right now, for example, you are experience me right now.

AC: True.

SD: And your experience seem to reveal two things: one is the subject, the other is the object. But let us suppose that both of them happen to be one reality.

AC: All right.

SD: Then you don't have any lack of raw material here. The experience of seeing me or seeing anybody, seeing anything or hearing anything, thinking about anything – inside, outside, whatever – that experience is advaita. And if that is so, then we are not lacking experience, and therefore we need not wait for any experience to come. Whatever experience you encounter within yourself, that experience reveals nonduality. And if your interpretation itself that is duality. Therefore, it's a problem of cognition, and that problem of cognition is to be solved.

AC: Cognition of?

SD: Of this non-dual! Am I talking about something that is absolutely unknown to me? No. Unknown to anyone? Not at all. Right now, for instance, you see me and you say, "Swami is sitting here." How do you know? You say, "Because I see you, I hear you; therefore you are here." Therefore I am evident to you because you have a means of hearing; therefore Swami is. Swami is because he's evident to you. Sun is, moon is, star is, space is, time is – all these are evident to you.

The same is true of your experience of yourself. Suppose I ask you, "Do you have any memory of being in such-and-such a place?" "Yes," you'll say – because it's evident to you. To whom are all these evident? To you! To yourself. That means you are self-evident.

When are you not self-evident? Tell me – when? It is because you are self-evident that you don't need to become self-evident at any any time. All my experiences are because of my self-evidence. Therefore, the Self is already experienced – that's what I say. Self is experienced as the ultimate content of every experience. I say, in fact, that our very experience is the Self.

In all experiences, therefore, what is invariably present is consciousness, and no object is independent of that. and consciousness is not dependent on and has none of the attributes of any particular object. Consciousness is consciousness and while it is in everything, it transcends everything. That's why I say: this is advaita, this is nondual, this is Brahman, this limitless; timewise it is limitless, spacewise it is limitless. And therefore it is Brahman, and therefore you are everything already. This is the teaching, and what it means is that I need not wait for any experience because every experience is Brahman, every experience is limitless.

AC: But this is a subtle point that is not necessarily easy to grasp without some previous direct experience of the nondual.

SD: If the person doesn't see, then that means I have to teach further; or maybe they do see but in spite of that they say, "I still have got some cobwebs here or there" But that is not a problem; they just need to be cleared away.

First, you have an insight that is knowing, and then, as difficulties arise, we take care of them. I don't say it is not a matter of experience, but I say that experience is always the very nature of yourself. Consciousness is experience reveals that fact of your being Self-evident. And what is Self-evident is, by definition, nondual. So subject and object are already the same.

Here is a wave, for instance, that has a human mind. It thinks, “I am a small wave.” Then it becomes a big wave, swallowing in the process many other waves, and begins boasting, “I am a big wave.” Then it loses its form, and again becomes small-files a “Chapter thirteen, “ as you say in America, you know, bankruptcy – and now it wants to somehow get to the shore. But from the shore, other waves are pushing into the ocean, and from the ocean, waves are pushing to the shore, this poor little wave is caught in between, sandwiched, and begins crying, “ What shall I do?” there is another wave around, a wave that seems to be very happy, and so the first wave asks him, “How come you are so happy?” You are smaller than me! How come you are so happy?” Then another wave says, “He’s an enlightened wave.” Now the first wave wants to know, “What is enlightenment? What is this enlightenment?” The happy wave says, “Hey, come on! You should know who you are!” “All right. Who am I?” And the enlightened wave says, “You are the ocean.” “What?! Ocean? Did you say that I am the ocean, because of all the water by which I am sustained and to which I will go back? That ocean I am?” “Yes , you are the ocean.” And he laughs. “How can I be the ocean? That’s like saying I am God. The ocean is almighty, it’s all-pervasive, it’s everything. How can I be the ocean?”

So we can dismiss Vedanta’s statement of the non dual reality, or we can ask, “How come? How come I am That?” The nondual teaching is not necessary if our identity is obvious, if what is apparent to us is not a difference but an essential nondifference. Here, there is nondifference. There is no wave without water. Every other wave, and the whole ocean too, is one water alone.

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Sivaratri Puja at AVG

