

## Purna Vidya Camp at Saylorsburg

The Arsha Vidya Gurukulam is a beautiful and serene place nestled among tall trees in the Poconos mountains – an ideal back drop to imbibe and attain spiritual knowledge of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and other Vedic texts. This Gurukulam was established by Pujya Swamiji in 1986. It is patterned after the ancient gurukulam of India where knowledge is imparted by the rishis. Here Vedanta is taught, true to the sampradaya or traditional way of learning. Each time I visit this ashram, the peace and tranquility of the place envelopes me. A week-long “Purna Vidya” study camp was held at the Gurukulam following Swami Dayananda Saraswathi’s 80th birthday celebrations and the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam’s 24th anniversary. About 35 devotees attended this workshop with talks given by both Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji Chaitanya. We started the day with meditation, followed by classes given by Sadhviji. In the evening the whole group drove to New Jersey by bus and car to hear Pujya Swamiji’s discourses, that were attended by some 900 people in a large auditorium.

Purna Vidya means the knowledge of one self as a Whole, Limitless being. This is the teaching of Vedanta. The distance between an individual and this Whole, that is Ishvara, is zero. If there were any distance at all between oneself and Ishvara, there would be no Whole. Even though in the

world we may play different roles in reference to various people in our lives, one’s relationship to Ishvara is unchanging through each and every role.

As humans, the pramanas available to us are focused on what we can objectify, called aparavidya. Everything in the jagat that is available to us, is only known as an object of our perception. Even the Vedas and Vedic rituals are aparavidya. This aparavidya is open to new discoveries and humans do a lot of research, specializing in very narrow fields, while still remaining ignorant of the truth; knowing which everything is as well known.

Each and every object is knowledge alone. Belonging to an order of reality, called mithya, objects exist in name and form only. This order of reality, mithya, being available for objectification by our senses, the pramanas that we rely upon, is mistaken for the truth. The truth, that is all knowledge, is consciousness, and all consciousness, including one’s self, is Ishvara. To understand this, paravidya, is to know the truth of oneself as Brahman. For this, another pramana is required, that pramana is shastra. All other pramanas can only give knowledge of that which can be objectified. Shastra, while operating in mithya, gives the knowledge of that which is not available for objectification. This knowledge of oneself as Whole takes place in the buddhi in the form

of a vritti. Thus, minimum knowledge of aparavidya is necessary. With this backdrop we realize the importance of understanding the rich spiritual heritage and culture of India, where shastra pramana has been handed down throughout time. Sadhviji provided succinct discourses on several aspects of the religious, spiritual and cultural issues through the Vedic vision that help one to understand what is necessary to obtain the knowledge of oneself as Whole.

Most of the Indian community has channeled their energy into building temples, but the Vedic tradition and

wisdom can only be imbibed through an appreciation of the 'sruti' and 'smriti' literature. It is most important that we realize the need for more such gurukulams and spiritual teachers, such as we have in Saylorburg. It is the teachings of shastra, only when given by qualified teachers, that can remove our ignorance – shastra alone will not remove ignorance. We are so blessed in having Sadhviji, an ardent disciple of Pujya Swamiji Dayananda Saraswati, as our guru, a teacher with the proper lineage, endowed with knowledge imparted by the rishis' of yore.

*By Charu Sivakumar*

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