

## **2021 Camp on Brahma Sutra Bhashya** **at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, USA**

The 2021 Fall Vedanta Camp by Swami Tattvavidanda (Swami TV) covered Adhyasa Bhashya and the first Sutra in the Brahma Sutra. Every word of the Bhashya was analyzed threadbare to provide students the ways and means for inner transformation. This is the first time in a decade that the camp enrollment had surpassed the available slots for physical attendance subject to Covid 19 limitations. There were about 90 people enrolled for live attendance and a similar number from other continents and time zones who attended remotely over live streaming sessions.

It was the first-time attendance for a few students. One such couple, who had come just for the earlier one-week camp only, rearranged their work schedule to attend the following 5-week course fully and even have decided to relocate to an area near the Gurukulam. Some students, who were never exposed to Vedanta were captivated by the teaching and now cannot think of life without sustained sadhana. Such anecdotes of transformation point to the power of the teaching, that is synonymous with the teacher.

Characteristic to Swami TV's teaching, the style was once again multidimensional, multidisciplinary, integrated, original, ever fresh and taught with unconditional and non-directional love for the learners. Swamiji quoted Bertrand Russel at a satsang, "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge". The entire teaching was a meditative experience for the students, inspired by the love of Swamiji and guided by the highest standards of scholarship. The purpose is only one and that is for every attendee to realize that moksha is here and now, and that the inner transformation required is indeed possible with clarity, earnestness for the truth and effortless sadhana.

Swamiji examined every facets of divisive and fragmentary thinking that is present in one's secular and religious lives and how that must be overcome to realize the oneness that expresses itself as unconditional love for all beings. The entire teaching, while guided by the words of Bhashyakara, also leveraged examples from the lives and works of great Mahatmas and Philosophers attesting to the fact that knowledge knows no boundaries. A partial list includes the following - Literary works of Shakespeare, Kalidasa, Philosophies of people such as Bishop Berkley, Immanuel Kant, Sutras of Panini and Patanjali, Prasthana-Thraya Bhashyas, words of Buddha, Christ, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramana Maharishi, Akandananda Maharaj and Guru Nanak, quotes of Scientists such as Einstein, Newton and Schrodinger, poems of Swami Rama Tirtha, quotes of Swami Vivekananda, sto-

ries of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, vision of God of Spinoza popularized by Einstein, Kabir's poems, lyrics of St Thyagraja, quotes of St Francis of Asisi, and works of Bertrand Russel. The teachings seamlessly integrated the findings of latest research in medicine, surgery, organic chemistry and astrophysics. Yes, they even included articles from New York Times. The spirit of oneness that came through was not conceptual but one that resonated in the heart of the students. Swamiji used tikas and recommended translation of Brahma Sutra by Thyagaraja and Swami Gambhirananda. Teaching methods included Abhinaya, humor, electronic gadgets, anecdotes as well as a skit based on Adhyasa Bhashya directed by Swamini Srividyananda and enacted by some of the students.

There were many requests for the return of 7 to 9 weeks Course. Swamiji has assured that he will continue to teach once a week from India starting from December 2021.

The camp was enhanced by Sanskrit classes taught by Swami Muktatmananda. Swamiji covered sandhi and some of the vibakthi rules using numerous examples from Bhagavad Gita. His simplified style inspired many students to continue the study of Sanskrit and requested Swamiji to conduct online classes once a week throughout the year which he graciously agreed to do. Terry Coe taught Sanskrit classes for the beginners who were never exposed to Devanagari scripts.

Arpan and Monica gave yoga classes every morning during the camp to keep the attendees fresh and active. Chitra engaged them with meditative songs during some nights after the satsang sessions.

It was due to Pujya Swamiji's vision for the new facility and the realization of it with Swami Veditmananda's blessings and leadership that such a large number of attendees could be accommodated even while adhering to Covid 19 related restrictions. The students are grateful to ashram staff and management for providing a nice learning environment and for sumptuous meals.

#### Sample topics covered

While an exhaustive list of topics covered is not possible here, a small representative list is included to give an overview so that the reader may be encouraged to procure the recordings from the ashram's bookstore.

Spirit of the sutras are to use minimum words that hints at the truth. First there is the word and then silence wherein one discovers the truth. Adhikarana nyaya is used in expounding and organizing the 555 sutras into 191 adhikaranas. This nyaya is likened to a Court proceeding with five element model namely subject matter,

doubt surrounding the subject matter, purvapaksha views, utara paksha which is a systematic refutation of the purvapaksha views, and siddhanta which is the conclusion.

**Adhyasa:** An individual is limited not because he is essentially limited but because in his ignorance, he has mixed up the real with the unreal which is called adhyasa. If he addresses this mix up and eliminates it in his life, through viveka then eventually he will know the truth and thus be liberated. This is an interesting situation, in that, adhyasa – superimposition has to be established first in order to negate it, thereby eliminating the basic cause of human suffering. The transactional life of a human being is centered on the ‘me and mine’ syndrome.

**Artha adhyasa :** The syndrome of me, is aham-idam as in ‘I am the body and body is me.’ Sentient being is taken as body which is insentient and vice versa.

**Samsarga Adhyasa:** The syndrome of mine is mama-idam as in ‘my sofa, my house, my money.’ The sentient I is connected to insentient in terms of quality.

There are other adhyasas such as dharma adhyasa as in atma dharma (lakshana) of asthi bhathi being superimposed on vishaya Dharma which is jadam. For example, dharma adhyasa can be understood when one says ‘pot exists and it is evident.’

**Khyati prakaranam.:** Khyati means erroneous perception. The various khyathi vada of Vaiseshikas & Naiyayikas, Sunyavadis, Kshanikavijnana vadis, Akhyati vadi from the Mimamsaka School and Sankyas were analyzed and dismissed. The philosophical vision of khyati is that in life you are looking for certainty. The cardinal principle of philosophy is that uncertainty is a fact of life. Death is certain but when it will be is uncertain. Sankara subscribes to anirvacaniya khyati, which is, life is a glorious uncertainty.

**Adhyasa Bhashya** is epistemological and not subject to emotions. There is adhyasa in pramana-premaya vyavahara, which includes Veda as a pramana as well. Without the pramatha (knower), there cannot be pramana (means of knowledge) and prameya (known) and the very appearance of pramatha is due to adhyasa. Further, atma itself is aprameya meaning it cannot be objectified and known by the buddhi. It is svatha siddha and only by adhyasa there is an appearance of

pramatha.

While it is true that shabda pramana (Vedas) is an independent means of knowledge, it has to be loaded onto the buddhi first and buddhi cannot comprehend the light of awareness that lights up the buddhi. The role of Veda as an independent pramana has to be understood in negative terms only. It teaches you that self-knowledge is knowing all that is not the self. Negative understanding is the highest understanding. One can refer to the bhashya in second chapter of Gita where all this is explained. In addition to these classes, Pujya Swamiji's lectures that is the basis for the Gita home study has Sankara's teaching on the role of Veda as a pramana.

Conceptual Vedanta: The entire Course emphasized the need for learning via direct perception (aperception). When you gain knowledge, but you do not realize it, it remains as conceptual knowledge and slowly becomes poison-like. The poison is, that you get a false notion that you are a vedantin, and then you may even consider yourself as a teacher of vedanta. Because once you declare even to yourself that I am a teacher of Vedanta, then the process of learning comes to an abrupt end. There is no more learning, because that heart is unfit for learning anymore. It leads to what is called spiritual ego and that is the poison, just like undigested food becoming poison. Swamiji refers to himself as the speaker only and not a Guru or teacher and explained why he considers himself a learner only all the time.

Panini Sutras, Mimamasa, Nirtuktam were dealt with in detail wherever appropriate. For example, the word 'shraddha' is understood as follows: Reality is sat and it is understood provisionally as the other and somewhere above. In Sanskrit anything which is paroksha, the other, is indicated by the syllable ra which is letter repha. For sat, if you attach repha it becomes shrat because sa becomes shra. So shrat is the reality, sat taken as the other and paroksha. Hence 'shrat dadati iti shraddha.' Shraddha is the right mental attitude, which is the capital in this journey of discovering the reality. It helps us to get established in that sat which is taken as shrat as paroksha and the other. With that attitude one is sure to gain satyam as not the other and not as paroksha but recognize the truth as aparoksha and as atma. Shraddha is therefore love and cheerfulness in taking up and pursuing the sadhana and the intense enthusiasm to reach the goal.

The topics were reinforced during the daily meditation sessions and nightly satsangs.

They included topics such as but not limited to

- Conclusion is not the truth
- Mind converts search for truth into conclusion
- World is not material but mathematical
- World of objects is linguistic, observational, and not existential
- Matter is a matter of belief
- Traditional means fossilized intellect.
- Brahman is not a concept. Gita and Upanishad do not offer an image of God to worship
- Both mind and matter are unreal. Mind validates matter, matter validates mind
- Where, why, when cannot be asked about ajnanam or about big bang (since space, time , causality are created after big bang.)
- Fear and greed cause adhyasa
- Adhyasa is pramana siddham and anubhava siddham but not yukthi siddham, meaning it is not logical
- Truth is timeless, not traditional, not observational, not linguistic, and existential

The day we love the spirit of glorious uncertainty, we know life which is the spirit anirvachaniya. That is why the first sutra is 'Brahma jignasa' emphasizing enquiry. To begin enquiry, one cannot be trapped by what is known in the mind which is only based on the past. Even the so-called future is only a projection based on the past. All knowledge based on memory is only an impediment to the enquiry. An open mind leading to creative intelligence is required for beginning the enquiry.

In the first sutra, atha in 'athatho brahma jignasa' is understood as here-after the enquiry of Brahman begins. It describes the prerequisite that is shown as not dharma jignasa. It refers to sādhanā chatuṣṭaya namely viveka, vairāgya, śat saṃpatthi of the mind and mumukṣutvam. Each of these were covered in-depth. The six-fold saṃpatthi (wealth) of the mind as described in Brhadaranyaka upanishad were addressed exhaustively.

Sama - quietude from vasana vikshepa (scattering of the mind)

Dama - mastery of indriyas from vikshepa of Indriyas

Uparama – withdrawl from kamyā karmas and focus on dutiful and purposeful actions in order to prevent vikshepa of karma

Tithiksha – endurance to protect from vikshepa of sukha and dukha of the body/mind

Shraddha – intense desire to know the truth to protect against the vikshepa of ‘doubting thomas nature of the mind.’

Samadhana – attention that protects against the vikshepa of the mind due to ahamkara (ego) and mamakara, otherwise described as the ‘me and mine’ syndrome.

#### Concluding statements.

All the lectures were focused on empowering the learners to realize that one must be a light unto oneself. The sastra and teacher are there only to point to the inner guru. With direct perception of the teachings the inner transformation is but natural.



Written by T.K. Srinivas, Nov 14, 2021