

The 2022 Fall Vedanta Retreats conducted by Swami Tattvavidananda consisted of two one-week Vedanta programs focusing on Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram text, and Ramayana covering Sundara Kandam. The five-week program covered second, and third Brahma Sutras with every word associated with Sri Sankaracharya's bhasya and supported by tikas of luminaries such as Ratnaprabha, Bhamatikara and Anandagiri. Appropriate namas from Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram text was also covered during the five-week program that amplified the importance of focus on the upasana aspects of learning.

From the great epic Mahabharatha emerged important Vedantic texts such as Bhagavad Gita, Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram and Vidura Niti. Swami Muktatmananda used the text Vidura Niti to teach Sanskrit fluency and Kalpesh Jasapara did the same with rigors of Panini Grammar utilizing a verse of Bhagavad Gita. The retreat was augmented by daily practice of yoga led by Srimathi Vijaya Darve and Srimathi Monica Larenas.

At the start of the five-week retreat, as expected, the onsite enrollment had reached its limits and students were attending from many continents around the world. We are ever grateful to Swami Veditatmananda for realizing the vision of Pujya Swamiji to build such a facility where tranquility and peace speak their own unique language. We are thankful to the ashram staff for their role in maintaining a learning environment and the kitchen staff who worked hard to keep everyone happy with healthy meal options.

### Highlights

There were many Vedantic topics covered in this retreat. The selected highlights are provided below. As always, the presentation by Swami Tattvavidananda was multidimensional, multidisciplinary, integrated, original, ever fresh and taught with unconditional and non-directional love for all the learners. Swamiji assumed that each attendee to be a true jignasu and treated everyone as such both in class and outside.

### Critical Importance of Saguna Brahma Upasana to Spiritual Growth

The two consecutive week's retreat in the study of Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram text coupled with study of Ramayana provided a right frame of mind to delve into the meaning of second Brahma Sutra during the five-week program. Swami Tattvavidananda emphasized the importance of cultivating the consciousness through proper devotion to Isvara in order to realize the truth of our essential nature. The spiritual awakening is kindled, and a radical inner transformation is made possible when one learns to develop love for Isvara and further learns to relish that love.

Profound significance of each name in the Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram text were re-

vealed often over a whole hour of class to expound the glory of Isvara. It provided not only for opportunities to engage with an advanced vedantic text similar in scope to Brahma Sutra Bhasya in terms of its richness of content, but also provided for cultivating the vision of Isvara for bringing upasana in the listener's life. During the Brahma Sutra class, Swamiji brought in very fitting Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram names, which in a very uncanny manner happened to be a natural sequence of the names in the text. Here are two names and their significance, to provide a brief illustration as to how the names were covered and how they fit in the flow of topics.

### ***Vidhata***

The sutra jamadhyasya yathah points to the cause of jagat. Yathah is shown as mainly the material cause using the explanation of Ratnaprabha's tika which states that this sutra should be understood together with the sutra in the Prakrti Adhikaranam. Brahman is also called nimitta karana or efficient cause only to dispel attribution of this cause to any other agency. It was also shown that for Brahman to be both material and efficient cause jagat has to be apparitional and it is chetana Brahman. This can be understood as follows: In dream experience, the experiencer and the experienced are I alone; subject and object is I; material and efficient cause is I. I am creating a world out of myself. In the same way, Brahman creates the jagat out of itself. So, the jagat created by Brahman is like the dream world I created. Therefore, I am that Brahman – tat tvam asi! Suppose the jagat created by brahman is as unreal as the dream world then an enormous burden of samsara is likely to become less because the waking world is as unreal as the dream world. It must be understood that Brahman does not create anything since the entire creation is apparition just like there was no creation of the rope-snake.

Bhasyakara states that there are two attributes to the cause, sarvajnam and sarvasakti. Sarvajnam defined as 'sarvam janati iti sarvajnam,' means one that knows all, like the pot maker who knows all about making a pot. Sri Sankara uses the term Brahman and Isvara synonymously. Hence, we can understand Isvara as sarvajna, the one that links the karma-to-karma-phala which unfolds in an undetermined future. Hence Isvara is called karma-phala data.

The name Vidhata from Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram text means Isvara is the giver of karma-phala. This grand vision is sullied by the widespread belief that Isvara is the one who punishes 'bad' people and rewards his devotees. This is incorrect for Isvara is closer to the understanding of 'God of Spinoza' that Einstein underscored when asked about his views of God. Einstein famously said, "I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings." If so, how do we understand Isvara as Vidhata?

Associated questions that arise are: Can one avert karma-phala and more importantly what is karma-phala? If a person runs a business that results in gain or loss that cannot be viewed as the karma-phala for it is all part of one unitary karma. Karma-phala that is addressed here is really the adrsta (unseen) phala and it always appears as sukha or duhkha. Further, when sukha or duhkha occurs in one's life it is not possible to associate which karma resulted in that phala.

Isvara is likened to a highway which can be source of joy for a driver or a nightmare for a drunkard. Isvara only provides the conditions and context or nimitta for the phala to unfold. It is our vasanas of seeking pleasure or avoiding pain that turns those conditions into sukha or duhkha. Hence it is possible to not suffer by rising above the vasana-driven experience of karma-phala. There are many methods to go beyond the impact of vasanas one of which is understanding and realizing that true surrender to Isvara leads to harmony and peace in life as it unfolds.

There were powerful meditation sessions every day that reinforced the teachings with opportunities for contemplation.

### *Aprameya*

While unfolding the third sutra, 'sastrayonitvat,' bhasyakara describes two interpretations of this sutra, one of which is that sastra which is Veda is a pramana. In this context, it is important to reconcile that with the understanding that Brahman is aprameya, and that it cannot be described or objectified. Hence no pramana is needed to reveal brahma/atma which is self-shining. Gita bhasya (2.18) was covered in detail to correctly understand how Veda is a negative pramana in this context.

Though aprameya, Isvara is supremely accessible as one's own svarupa. One must develop sadhana to seek the truth inwards and attain a calm mind by being desireless. In the silence of the mind that ensues, one realizes Isvara as one's own essence.

### *Temple worship*

The daily satsang sessions offered to explore the teachings from a variety of perspectives. Swamiji explained how one must relate temple visit to commune with Isvara. Swamiji exhorted us to approach a temple only with one thought and that is 'I am a devotee of Isvara.' There cannot be any other thought arising out of desires, sense of self-pity or insecurity. This exhortation is only to jignasus who have undertaken study of Vedanta since any desire-based karma or upasana will come in the way of their inner transmutation.

Then upon entering the temple with the right attitude of devotion it is important to superimpose the form of Isvara with the nameless and formless anchor or alambana of the di-

vine sound om. This helps to negate all the vasanas of nama-rupas in the mind. At this point, visualize om in the heart and descend from the mind to the heart and abide there in meditative silence. The emphasis is in the inner silence which is freedom and represents boundless love of Isvara. Aprameya Isvara is supremely accessible.

### **Enquiry into Brahman – Janmadhyasya Yathah**

The first sutra, covered in depth during 2021 camp, emphasized that after commitment to realize the wealth of ‘sadhana chatustaya’ let the enquiry of Brahman begin. The sadhana consists of asserting viveka, vairagya, gaining of six-fold virtues of the mind and developing an intense longing for freedom. One must not conclude that one must gain the sadhana fully and then begin the enquiry of Brahman because that would introduce a time sequence in gaining a timeless reality. The sadhana itself is sadhya and vice versa. It is the enquiry alone that matters and not a conclusion which is always from the ignorant mind.

The second sutra, Janmadhyasya yathah is all about the enquiry of Brahman. Briefly put, without brahma jijnasa life is a waste. Dharmarthakama are not real, which is where most of our life is spent. They are fleeting and terminated by time. Realty is not touched by time. When we say Brahman is the Real we are familiar with the word, but word is not the thing. The feeling is Brahman, not the word. That this is the inner most reality must become a reality for every jignasu. Sastra and outer guru can only provide pointers to that supremely accessible and yet unknowable reality. That is why this exploration is said to be a timeless journey in a pathless land where the destination is already reached and yet the journey continues.

Brahman supports the appearance of mind and the universe and is purnam or whole. Mind and universe are like pairs of dipoles that always appear and disappear together and are in the realm of space time and hence unreal. Brahman is the source of all and in all. Brahman cannot be proved within the mind and when the mind transcended it need not be proved since all such questions are only within the mind. Reality is not result of a process or effort. Going beyond the immediate is a process which is karma resulting in phalam and therefore time bound. Reach Brahman by looking within and reach the frontiers of the known, the edge of memory. Bring all the known to the surface of the mind and negate them. Do the same with the unknown. Now it is possible to be in the embrace of that Reality. Brahman is the very foundation of that knowingness.

### **Svarupa lakshnam and tatastha lakshnam**

Lakshnam is a definition that helps to understand a thing. Satyam-jnanam-anantam is svarupa lakshnam of Brahman because it applies directly to the defined, but that is not what the sutra janmadhyasya yathah implies. Here it is tatastha lakshnam, the definition to the

relative standpoint, meaning, in relation to the absolute. It is like a pointing finger. The thing that brings about the birth, sustenance, annihilation of the universe is the definition for Brahman. There is a well-known logic named sakachandra nyayam, wherein the pointed tree branch is taken as the definition to the moon. Tree branch has no connection to the moon, yet it helps to locate the moon. It is superimposed on the moon. The definition for Brahman can be arrived at only in this way because it unknown and unknowable. It is not a thing, so you superimpose the jagat.

This profound meaning of the sutra serves to remind us that everything that appears to be born, sustained or resolved points to that Isvara. As examples, it could be a mental state of pleasure or pain that arises and resolves, a birth of a fruit or a birth/death of a person. They all serve as a pointer to Isvara, and one can transcend the unreal jagat to God consciousness. This transcendence includes crossing barriers of intellect and realize the wonderment of Brahman in seemingly ordinary events. It leads to brahma avagatih accomplished through an open mind wherein creative intelligence can take root. This is the purport of the sutra.

### **Sarvajnam and sarvasakti**

Brahman as material cause has two aspects, sarvajnam (all knowing) and sarvasakti (omnipotent). Swamiji brought in the definition of sarvajnam from Mandukya Karika wherein Sri Sankara considers sarvajnam as a karmadaraya samasa namely, 'sarvam ca tat jnapti svarupam.' Sarvam here means the 'is-ness' in this jagat referring to sat. The jnapti svarupa is cit referring to the knowing element that upholds the appearance of the jagat. Therefore, sarvajnam means sat-cit of nirguna Brahman.

From the omnipotent Brahman this jagat originated. It is saguna Brahman, which is sarva sakti, meaning infinite power. The cosmic soul is this power. It is easy to appreciate the unity of this power through the laws of nature. The entire jagat is the display of this power, which points out to the glory of saguna Brahman.

### **Rajju-sarpa drstanta : Seeing enemies and friends**

The metaphor of seeing snake in a rope is used as illustrations to describe an apparitional cause. Brahman is apparitional cause of Jagat. There is another practical purport of this drstanta. Human mind sees snake, which translates to seeing danger all the time, and everywhere. Suppose I am seeing another as an adversary then it is like seeing a snake. This problem of humanity of seeing 'serpents' occurs in all walks of life and in all stages of life from brahmachari to sanyasa ashrama, In my consciousness, I should convert the adversary into a friend in which case there can be no enemies or friends. Then there is only divinity. This is the vision of the snake-rope example. This is also the spirit of the sutra

janmadhyasya yathah.

### **Brahman is the source of all intelligence and sabda is pramana – Sastrayonitvat**

This third sutra asserts that Brahman is the origin of all intelligence in everything. It refers to nature's intelligence as well as that which is found in the heart. It is not the intellect which has its locus in the brain cells. This is one way to understand this sutra. Here, all revelations from the heart of rishis are apouruseya.

The philosophy of realism is dismissed by janmadhyasya yathah. The philosophy of idealism that asserts world is unreal but keeps the reality of mind is dismissed by this sutra sastrayonitvat.

All sutras in an adhikaranam have their origin in statements of an upanisad. When the compound word of this sutra is interpreted as sasti-tat-purusa samasa, the understanding is that cit is Brahman. The corresponding statement of this sutra is found in Brahadaranyaka upanisad.

Sri Sankara offers a secondary interpretation and that is taking the sutra as a bahuvrihi samasa. Here the understanding that results is that sastra is the yoni of Brahman. This means sastra which is the vision of upanisad is the only (negative) pramana to realize Brahman which is aprameya. The root statement for this understanding also comes from Brguvalli of Taittiriya upanisad. Sri Sankara dismisses the objection that one more adhikaranam for the same vakya is not a blemish because it establishes that sutra janmadhyasya yathah cannot be interpreted as anumana pramana but only using sabda pramana.

Janmadhyasya yathah focused on the sat aspect of Brahman while sastrayonitvat focused on the cit aspect of Brahman wherein sat shines as cit. The overall emphasis is realization and growth from local consciousness to God consciousness.

### **Sampradaya for communicating the vision of sastra for radical inner transformation**

All the lectures were focused on empowering the learners to realize that one must be a light unto oneself.

The word 'sampradaya' has many meanings in a given the context. In dharma jijnasa it means vidhi-niseda mandates. In worldly contexts, processes are codified so they are easily repeated. Even politicians have their own traditions. Translation of this word 'sampradaya' as tradition or parampara can lead one away from the purport of the vision of sastra. This is because traditions tend to propagate thoughts frozen in time.

Vision of the sastra is timeless and cannot be put in the flow of time. One definition of sampradaya is that it is a living stream of tradition as to what is communicated from the



preceptor to the listener in the present moment. The purpose of such a communication is to awaken the spirit of a jignasu to undergo an inner transmutation to be desireless and see the world as utterly unreal. All knowledge based on memory is only past ideas encased and often passed on. This is one reason for the mandate of the first sutra as brahma jijnasa so that one may enquire the truth for oneself. This example is seen in Brguvalli.

In ksetrajna bhasya, Sri Sankara says, “Therefore he who does not know the sampradaya should be ignored like an ignorant person although he has learnt all the sastras.” What this means is that learning the sastra as merely knowledge in the brain cells is not adequate. A Brahmanistha is one who is able to communicate to the listener, and enable for them to arrive at the grand vision of the sastra, here and now, leading to a radical inner transformation in the listener. Sri Sankara has made comments about sampradaya in Bhagavad Gita, chapter 18 also.

With this understanding, Swami Tattvavidananda adhered to this vision during all the discourses to ensure that every word of Sankara was fully understood by the listeners not only for the meaning but also the vision of the sastra. Living by example, and by emphasis in all aspects of formal and informal interaction with learners, Swami Tattvavidananda was able to communicate the vision of oneness of the sastra.

### **Nahi ninda nyayam in the context of mechanical rituals**

In Vedanta, there is a logic called ‘nahi ninda nyaya’ which is the logic of non-censure. Nahi ninda nindyam ninditum api tu stutyam stotum, the intent of the censure is not to censure one, but to highlight the glory of the other. Sri Sankara employs this nyaya in many situations. A mahatma is not against anything. For a casual observer the takeaway would only be the censure part.

Swami Tattvavidananda emphasized the importance of not leading a life of contradictions as a true jignasu. He pointed out many practices in the society that are rooted in avidya such as superstition which must be enquired into and avoided. He asked us to think about such things and did not provide mandates. In other instances, he used this nahi ninda nyaya to emphasize the importance of turning life itself into one stream of meditation without contradictions. He glorified the importance of love of Isvara in contrast to mechanical rituals.

### **Play**

There was a samvada, based on Swamiji’s discourses on janmadyasya yatah, enacted by the students and directed by Swamini Srividyananda. It provides for an excellent summary of many weeks of teaching. In the words of Swami Tattvavidananda, this significant effort is entirely due to the creative intelligence of Swamini Srividyananda and in his view it is a

one-of-a-kind play that was as instructive covering many topics as it was engaging the audience.

The link to the play is as follows:

<https://youtu.be/q3fei6mk7G8>

### **Comments of some of the students**

Many that attended the retreat provided verbal and written comments. Just for illustration, a select few are edited for brevity and presented. Some wanted to be anonymous and they are noted as such.

“Five weeks felt like a beautiful breeze that reminds you of janmadyasya yathah. After every class I was left with the feeling this was the most amazing class, filled with so much learning, simple and useful, brought down to us from the highest and the most technical text ... .” Pandu

“Through Swami Tattvavidananda’s teachings I was able to shed superstitions and wrong notions about our existence and the way we traverse through life. His deep knowledge of the subject and his ability to breakdown complex concepts and present it in an easily understandable way with metaphors, analogy and a tinge of humor, is priceless....” Jayanthi

“We have traveled at “warp-drive” with Sadguru Swami Tattvavidananda as he took us on a transformative journey of integrative study unfolding the vision of Vedanta; to finally arrive where we began—our inner being, to understand and to realize ourselves as Brahman.” Donna

“It has helped to trigger quiet examination of this mind and all its manifold gyrations and thought patterns, challenge cobwebbed conditioning, see the utter uselessness of doggedly holding on to ideations and the foolishness of defending them when the truth is beyond words.”

“However, also watching how the force of unconscious habits in the form of thoughts impel the mind in set rigid pathways again only to realize the way out is to befriend the mind rather than try to forcibly control it, immerse in chup meditation and apply vipaschana and prana viksana, mindfully walk and try to be aware of what is without judgment, condemnation, identification, assessing, comparing or measuring.”

“Till we were exposed to this teaching we had been totally clueless and misled by half baked understanding of the so-called Vedanta. The enormity of the gaps in understanding have been made clear and discussed threadbare during the lectures. The utter folly of living life without understanding the basics like, ‘love and do as you will,’ ‘one is fullness – purnah,’ ‘all is transient,’ ‘ego is a thought,’ ‘thinking is absence of awarefullness,’



‘accepting what ‘is’ is freedom from bondage.’”

“This mind can’t help seeking repetitive exposure to Vedanta teaching coming through Swami Tattvavidananda - as it is only natural to do so. May it happen timelessly. Om!”

“Harmony of life; breath and awareness in the present moment; just be = be attentive; being and attention are together. Attention liberates whereas thinking binds.”

“We moved nearer to Arsha Vidya Pitam to spend more time in service to the fellow mu-muksus. 2022 Fall Vedanta Camp has given immense pleasure to me and to my dharma patni. I would pray, wish, and hope that Swamiji will visit USA for another decade. We are pleased with the love and care of AVP staff.” Raghu

“I wish to manifest my profound gratitude to Swamiji. His way of showing us the Brahma Sutra in this Course has been like a mild rain penetrating very deep. Consequently, watching occurs during the day, acknowledging myself as the Knowing Principle, and so there is silence, and the Real reveals itself effortlessly, naturally, spontaneously. I have attended the Brahma Sutra Course online from Spain, and also wish to thank you all for the marvelous opportunity your generous work have offered to online students.” Fatima

“We are extremely grateful for Swami Tattvavidananda’s deeper and clearer exposition of the core teachings of Vedanta, every time we listen to such lectures. He always brings out more and more subtler and more powerful insights. His talk on the four obstacles to Brahman jijnasa anubhava of fullness are of great practical value for self awareness and transformation. With gratitude,” - Raj and Meera Paripatyadar.

“Heartfelt gratitude to Swamiji for taking us on a timeless journey to a higher realm. There were many pearls of wisdom shared during this course. Few that touched my heart are: 1. Be quiet, standstill, chup - experience you will Brahman. 2. You need not reach out for something within you. In reaching out you miss the real. 3. You are running away from Brahman by running after Brahman. 4. Love, peace, joy, meditate, inner silence – brahma avagati. With love and gratitude,” -Malini

### **Concluding statements**

Swamiji does not consider himself a teacher and says he is always a learner. He mentioned many self-examples to inspire the listeners to be life-long learners and to ceaselessly enquire the truth. This is in the spirit of Dasa Sloki that there are no gurus or sisyas.

Swamiji used many examples from Indian context where he grew up and emphasized that those should not be viewed in the light of patriotism. In fact, he emphasized that he does not want to travel to USA every year. However, with deep reverence, Swamiji said that he comes only due to his deep reverence to Pujya Swamiji Dayananda Saraswathi who told

him to continue the teaching at the ashram. Therefore, Swamiji considers the visits each year as an act of pilgrimage and be in the company of jignasus.

The retreat was as though living with the heart and vision of Sri Sankara and as learner words fail to communicate my joy and gratitude to Swami Tattvavidananda. Om Tat Sat.

Written by T.K. Srinivas, Nov 14, 2022

