

2023 Retreat on *Brahma Sutra Bhāshya*, *Vishnu Sahasra Nāma* and *Rāmāyana* at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, USA

The 2023 Fall *Vedānta* Retreats, guided by the venerable Swami *Tattvaidānanda*, were not just for mere ordinary spiritual gatherings. These retreats unfolded as a captivating journey into the depths of ancient wisdom, offering participants an immersive experience that spanned across continents and dimensions.

The retreat kicked off with two one-week *Vedānta* programs, delving into the *profound Vishnu Sahasra Nama Stotram* text and completing the enigmatic *Sundara Kāndam* of the *Rāmāyana*. These teachings were not just dry recitations of ancient verses; they were a vibrant exploration of timeless truths.

The crown jewel of the retreat, however, was the five-week program that followed, a deep dive into the fourth *Brahma Sutra*, enriched by the scholarly insights of luminary *tikākārās* like *Ratnaprabha*, *Bhāmatikāra*, and Ananda Giri. The interest in this course was so high that the on-site accommodations were fully booked, prompting seekers from around the world to tune in via the ashram's online streaming services.

Swami Muktātmānanda taught Sanskrit grammar through the prism of Vidura Niti during the initial two weeks, while Jagadeesh Acharya, armed with Medha Michika's Enjoyable Grammar Volume 2, taught Sanskrit for the five-week program. The spiritual pursuits of the retreat were augmented by daily yoga sessions led by Lance and Monica.

Nididhyāsanam sessions conducted every morning by Swamiji were the spiritual fuel that ignited deep contemplation on the teachings. These sessions added depth to the daily discourse leading to assimilation opportunities for the attendees.

Swamiji's teaching style is nothing short of mesmerizing, the style and substance spoken to the oneness he is teaching and directly experiencing. He weaved a tapestry of knowledge that transcended boundaries, drawing examples and metaphors from the realms of worldly life, *purānic* stories, epics, scientific theories like quantum mechanics and relativity, the cosmos, chemistry, medicine, mathematics, and the wisdom of diverse traditions—from Shakespeare and the Bible to the teachings of Jesus, Buddha, and the Sufi poets. With every word of *Sri Shankara Bhāshya* he delved into etymology, *niruktam*, and the *Pānini sutras*, leaving no stone unturned.

While the discussions often explored various technical intricacies, the seven weeks felt remarkably fresh, thanks to Swamiji's labor of love. Between the daily Satsang and classroom sessions, the retreat also touched upon life's profound questions, making the most technical discussions relevant to all participants, regardless of their background.

Swamiji, in his customary humility, expressed profound gratitude to Pujya Swamiji, the ashram's

dedicated team, and all the eager students. He does not consider himself a teacher but a speaker guiding a congregation of *jigñāsu*—those thirsting for spiritual knowledge. His message was clear: *moksha*, liberation, is not a distant dream but an attainable reality, here and now.

In truth, the 2023 Fall Vedānta Retreats were not just a series of classes; they were a transformative experience that led everyone, from seasoned seekers to newcomers, to be profoundly enriched and inspired on their spiritual journey.

Bhagavat Sahasra Namam – First two One-week retreats

The two-week-long 2023 Fall Vedanta Retreats were a captivating exploration of the profound wisdom of the *Vishnu Sahasra Nāmam*, hereafter referred as VSN. *Vishnu* here does not signify a deity but represents the Universal Power that permeates everything. In fact, the VSN is not a mere list of divine names. It reveals the nature of the Supreme Reality and is the very quintessence of Advaita Vedanta.

Each day of the retreats unfolded a name or two from the VSN serving as a portal to the *Upanishadic* vision of reality. These names are not meant for recitation; they are the gateway to move from world consciousness to *Bhagavān* consciousness. Using Swamiji's metaphor, studying some Vedantic texts is like consuming a whole fruit, but the VSN? Well, it's more like savoring grapes, one at a time.

What made this journey truly unique is the way Swamiji related each name to one's innermost reality. VSN is not about worshipping a distant deity but about recognizing the divinity within all living and non-living beings. The ancient Rishis saw *Ívara* as the inner commander and controller of all beings, not as an extra-cosmic force, and these teachings brought that vision to the listener's life. *Ívara* that is unknown and unknowable by the mind is supremely accessible here and now by all *sadhakās*.

For those who seek the path to the truth, VSN is a beacon of light for *Vedantic Upāsana*. It ignites devotion, expands consciousness, and kindles the flame of spiritual awakening. Each session of the retreat was not just a class but a transformative inner journey. Vishnu happens to be one more name occurring in the VSN text and hence the text is more aptly termed *Bhagavat Sahasra Nāmam*. Many more *Sahasra Nāmam* texts based on puranic deities have emerged with occasional Vedantic content.

To get a glimpse of how *Swamiji* provided descriptions here are two names that is summarized: *Tvashta* and *Madhusudana* being the first and last names covered in the first two weeks of the retreat.

Tvashta

Many well-known books, provide an intriguing translation: "He who makes all beings shrunken at the time of cosmic dissolution." While this interpretation may seem accurate, it can make the

connection to *Ísvara* *feel* somewhat distant, requiring one to delve into cosmic dissolution, a realm often reserved for epic mythologies.

Swamiji described this name to mean "the one who destroys." As humans, the tendency is to construct images of gods and goddesses shaped by desires and insecurities. The prayers often take on a supplicatory tone, rooted in a sense of self-pity. But here's the catch: This kind of worship can rob one of the 'sense of wonder' in the relationship with *Ísvara*, the divine.

In the vision of the Rishis, life and death exist in perfect equilibrium, an eternal dance in this apparitional universe. Think of fire, for instance—it sustains life but can also bring about destruction. Similar aspects can be observed in all natural forces and beings. *Ísvara*, in this context, is like an ocean of compassion and, at the same time, a formidable force, akin to *Rudra*, capable of wielding immense death and destruction. This name, "*Tvashta*," aligns *Ísvara* with the malefic aspects of life.

Is it possible to replace insecurities with wonder and not see *Ísvara* not as a distant deity but as a presence that is sensed wherever there's death and destruction, here and now? Consider recent global calamities like the Covid-19 virus. *Ísvara*, in its benevolent form, also manifested as vaccination. *Swamiji* beautifully woven poetic examples showing how one can sense the higher power even amidst destruction—be it tsunamis, raging wildfires, or ongoing conflicts like the one between Russia and Ukraine. Remember the outbreak of mad cow disease? Five million cows were culled in a matter of hours! Even during the darkest days of the Second World War, where carnage and death were widespread, *Ísvara*, as *Tvashta*, can be sensed.

Ísvara is understood as the *karmaphala dhāta*. But here's the twist: *Ísvara* does not punish individuals for their sins. It is one's own actions that appear to bring about consequences. When this realization, that one is beyond body-mind identification and hence cannot be truly killed, is assimilated, a new wonder dawns: It is possible to relate to the punitive aspects of *Ísvara* with a sense of wonder.

Ísvara, in dual appearance—both benevolent and malevolent—is omnipresent. Engaging in upāsana or spiritual practice with this understanding here and now can liberate one from the shackles of fear and insecurities, enabling one to transcend the realm of opposites and embrace the wonder of the universal presence.

Madhusudana

The typical translation of *Madhusudana* is "the one who slayed the asura called *Madhu*," which might not immediately resonate in one's heart. Behind every worthwhile Purānic story lies a profound connection to the universal truths.

The story unfolds with two *Rakshasās*, *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*, supposedly originating from Lord Vishnu's earwax while he was in *Yoga Nidra*, a state of deep meditation or cosmic slumber.

These mischievous *asurās* caused havoc and Lord *Vishnu* awoke to vanquish them. But here's the twist: These descriptions cannot be taken literally. *Madhu* and *Kaitabha* symbolize the inner demons within the confines of the human mind—attachments and aversions.

Swamiji, drawing from the *Bhagavad Gita*, particularly verse 2.53, explained how human minds are constantly bombarded with erroneous ideas, much like the whispers of *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*. Think about it—since childhood, it is a common experience to have absorbed countless misconceptions from family, friends, and society. The allure of cleansing sins by taking a dip in a dirty river or temple pond might sound absurd but driven by greed (*rāga*) and insecurities (*dvesha*), the human mind is often driven to follow such directives. These inner demons, *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*, in the ears cause untold harm.

The core theme here is how attachments and aversions disrupt peace and tranquility, a topic that is richly illustrated with examples from various facets of life. The antidote? The power of *viveka* (discernment) and *vairāgya* (detachment) coupled with a deeper understanding of life. When one conquers the inner demons, one becomes none other than *Madhusudana* dwelling in the heart.

Overcoming all identifications arising from the sense of 'me and mine' by asserting *Viveka* can lead one to be dead to this body, this mind, and this *nāmarupa* world, here and now, even while breathing. That is directly realizing *Madhusudhana*.

There is a wise adage that states, "If you don't seek what you don't need, what you need will come without your asking." As humans, the fundamental needs are food, clothing, and shelter. Interestingly, ego-driven concerns need not interfere to get the basics of life. The body and mind naturally take care of each other while one can abide in the true essence as the witnessing awareness. This is what it means to be one with *Madhusudana*.

There is a general ego-driven concern about how one would get food for survival. Food comes to all living beings because of the laws of entropy. The second law of thermodynamics asserts that the universe tends toward disorder from order all the time. But wherever life shines, there is negative entropy—order created within the ocean of disorder. Living beings consume food to direct negative entropy or order to sustain the life which reflects in the organism. Regardless, the total disorder is highest when living beings consume food in line with the law; one may say the law of entropy brings food to all beings. One is in awe observing how every creature anywhere in this universe can find the food necessary for life to continue reflecting in that organism. Food is thus a manifestation of this cosmic order, reaching every creature, from single-cell entities to the mightiest mammals.

With this profound understanding, one can become a "nobody" in the best sense—absolved of all worries of even taking care of basic needs of food and fully conquering attachments and aversions. With maturity one can 'die' to bodily concerns, this mind, and hence the world. This is the

direct realization of *Isvara* as *Madhusudana*—the one who slays the inner demons, guiding one to a state of blissful harmony within.

***Samanvayādhikaranam* – Five-week retreat**

The first *sutra*, covered during the Fall retreat of 2021, was about the enquiry into *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, and the preparations required to begin such an enquiry. It is an analysis of a *vākya*, namely a sentence from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, which states, “*tadvijijnāsasva, tadbrahmeti.*” The enquiry aspect is stressed when a student approaches a preceptor to know the truth and is told to enquire because of the insight that the right question acts like seeds allowing the sprouting to take place.

A quick answer to a query usually involves the intellect, yet this obscures the truth; indeed, the truth sought is that which lies behind the mind and makes the mind itself conscious. The emphasis is to ask a seeker to be a ‘light onto oneself’ and discover the truth in silence.

The second *sutra*, which was taught during the Fall retreat of 2022, pertains to an approach to conducting the enquiry. It is an analysis of a *vākya* that occurs in the *Bhrigu Valli* of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* which suggests enquiry into the source of the appearance of birth, and death of all beings and states, “*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti.*”

The third *sutra* was also covered in 2022. It asserts that the Vedas alone are the *pramāna* or most authoritative means of knowledge for enquiry into *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. This is an analysis of a *vākya* from verse 2.4.10, of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that states ‘*sa yathādraedhāgnerabhyāhitātpṛthagdhūmā viniścaranti, evaṃ vā are’sya mahato bhūtasya niḥsvasitametadyadṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo’tharvāṅgīrasa itihāsaḥ purāṇam vidyā upaniṣadaḥ ślokāḥ sūtrānyanuvyākhyānāni vyākhyānāni; asyaivaitāni niḥsvasitāni || 2.4. 10 ||*

Swami TV taught the fourth *Sutra*, “*Tat tu samanvayāt*” in this year’s Fall retreat. It asserts the harmony obtaining in the major *Upanishads* of all the four *Vedas* in communicating the vision of *Brahman*, the nature of the innermost reality of all beings. It refers to the harmony in the messages of the *Chandogya Upanishad* from the *Sāma Veda*, 6.2.1, referring to “Before this world appeared, there was only existence, one alone, without a second”, *Aitareya Upanishad* from *Rg Veda* 1.1.1 stating that “The Self verily existed as this, one alone before this world appeared”, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* from *Yajur Veda* 2.5.19 stating that “That very *Brahman* is without a cause, without being an effect, without an interior, without an exterior”, and *Mundakopaniṣad* from *Atharva Veda* 2.2.11 stating that “All this in front is *Brahman* alone, the immortal”

The *Brahma Sutra Bhāshya* of *Sri Shankarāchārya* is mostly about refutation of assertions of *Sankhya* philosophy except in the case of this fourth *sutra* wherein the refutation and revolt are of the assertions of the *Purva Mimamsa* school of thought that emphasizes rituals and mental worships only. This is because the giants of the *Karma Kānda* of the *Vedās* namely *Jaimini Maharishi* who was the *sutra kara*, *Kumarilabhatta* who provided the *varthikas*, *Prabhākāra Mishra* who em-

phasized upāsana as karma, and *ShabaraSwami* who provided *Bhāshya*, all critiqued that the purpose of Vedas is only to provide 'dos and don'ts' in the execution of karmas. Any statement in the Vedas and especially in the Upanishad portion which occurs positionally at the end of Karma Kānda, not connected to the above rule is deemed redundant and be ignored.

Their thesis is built on the basis of a sutra of Jaimini Maharishi that declared that Upanishad vākyas are meaningless unless it is possible to connect them to a *karma or upāsana* via *Karta* or *Karana* or other *kārakās*. For example, a statement that says that one's innermost reality is indeed the cause of all that appears as the universe, by itself has no activity associated. Such a statement of truths found in the *Upanishad* would be declared useless and redundant by use of *Jaimini's* aphorism.

This is refuted by this fourth *Brahma* sutra showing how *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, is independent, separate from rituals and mental worships and that all Vedanta vākyas are harmonized in offering a vision of the ultimate reality with clarity. Such a topic of attaining liberation from struggles of life is called *Moksha* and is not addressed elsewhere in the *Vedās*.

Bhashyakāra, *Sri Shankarāchārya* first develops a case against assertion of the stated *Jaimini sutra* and provides the vision of the ultimate reality of one without the second found in all the major *Upanishads*, understanding of which as one's own innermost reality can lead to liberation. Then he shows how to limit applicability of the said *Jaimini sutra* using *Mimamsakā's* own rules of science of sentences and describes the *Siddhānta* of the *Upanishads* which is but a radical revolt of the tenets of *Karma Kānda* that asserts that activities, rituals and mental worship can lead to the liberation. Further, the definition of liberation by the ritualists as going to a place called heaven is also refuted.

Samvāda – a play

With *Swamini Srividyananda* at the helm, this year's retreat took a creative twist reminiscent of previous editions. In a theatrical display of intellectual combat, students brought to life a debate known as the "*samvāda*." This captivating play cleverly portrayed the clash between *Purva Mimāmsa* perspectives, represented as the "*Purva Paksha*," and the profound *Vedāntic* understanding, presented as the "*Siddhānta*."

However, this performance wasn't just for entertainment; it served as an instructive tool to unravel the intricacies of the *Mimāmsa* thesis. The central argument of the *Purva Mimāmsa* is that any statement found in the *Upanishads* not tied to a specific ritual or action is essentially redundant. This dramatic rendition not only captivated the audience but also shed light on the depth of this philosophical discourse.

For those interested in witnessing this engaging debate, a reference is provided below to watch the play on YouTube, where the clash of ideas comes to life in a captivating performance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBicBbdVd7Y>

Brief Summary of the Debate

In a nutshell, *Sri Shankarācharya's* commentaries employ a binary style, framing a debate between those who advocate achieving results through rituals and mental worship mandated by the *Vedās* and those who assert that true liberation from life's challenges and dualities can only be attained by realizing one's genuine nature beyond the body and mind. This understanding leads to timeless liberation in the present moment. Many religions promise a heavenly existence after death, achieved through time-bound rituals and mental worship during one's earthly life.

This ongoing debate remains relevant throughout history because religions often cater to human desires and insecurities, offering the prospect of uninterrupted post-mortem pleasures in a heavenly realm. These beliefs are rooted in religious scriptures, but they have inherent flaws which the commentaries highlight.

Sri Shankaracharya's commentaries draw from key sentences in major Upanishads to elucidate the vision of Moksha or liberation. This is not conceptual though most often a conditioned mind in the habit of accumulating knowledge tends to view *Moksha* as a concept. This comprehensive study provides an overview of the core teachings of the *Upanishads*. Swamiji dedicated significant time and effort to elucidate these references, resulting in a comprehensive summary of Vedānta shastra in the presentation, emphasizing the truth of the Self.

Points and counterpoints

Activities or *karma*, driven by desires for specific outcomes or rooted in insecurities, are inherently limited in their potential. However, the ultimate truth, often referred to as a "*parinishtitha vastu*," cannot be attained through effort, for it exists timelessly and is uncreated. Consequently, traditional rules of 'do's and don'ts' do not apply to such a truth, as it cannot be made subservient to rituals or mental worship. This phenomenon is observable in contemporary behavior, where mantras from scriptures are chanted in rituals without a genuine understanding of their meaning or relevance. It is done as though the relevance of these truths are made significant by inclusion in rituals. This disconnect between rituals and understanding has persisted over thousands of years, with ritualists and worshipers often showing resistance to comprehending the deeper messages of the Upanishads.

Furthermore, the pursuit of liberation is not intended for an individual but **from** the individual. Persona arises from identification with the body and mind, with mind's nature being to inherently divide and perceive opposition. Liberation, as taught in the Upanishads, is the realization of oneness, where the Self is seen in all, and all is seen in the Self. The *Karma Kānda*, which begins with rules regarding eligibility for specific rituals, starting with who is eligible, introduces divisions, and thus, the understanding of oneness is an antithesis within the ritualistic and worship-oriented sections of the Vedas. Even the concept of heaven after death maintains hierarchies,

highlighting the pervasive divisiveness. Hence the topic of *Upanishads* is entirely different from the *Karma Kānda* section and represents a revolt against prior sections. Therefore, the *Jaimini Sutra* has no applicability in the domain of the *Upanishads*.

Human interpretation of scriptures is varied, often dictated by the likes and dislikes of the interpreter. The idea of making Upanishadic statements being made subservient to *Karma Kānda* arises from such a bias. Religions of today exhibit this approach as well, inventing new neo-fangled rituals while declaring them to be in line with the scriptures. Many teachers of Vedanta acquire only a conceptual understanding, which can lead to erroneous justifications for divisive and contradictory behaviors. To prevent such mistaken notions in understanding *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Swamiji* exhorts one to always be guided by *Sri Shankarāchārya's Bhāshya*.

Sri Shankarāchārya points out that even within the *Karma Kānda*, *Jaimini's sutrās* have limited applicability. Some objects described in *Vedās* have no connection to mandates. As revealed through detailed analysis. *Sri Shankarāchārya* illustrates that *Jaimini's sutra* is only applicable to *arthavādās*—stories created to justify specific *Vedic* mandates in the performance of a ritual.

Ritualists argue that despite studying *Upanishads*, inner transformation remains elusive for many. This is countered by the concept of "*avagathi*," wherein those who grasp the truth undergo an inner transmutation. This differs from the cognitive knowledge of a conceptual *Vedānta* scholar, whose unassimilated knowledge can be as harmful as undigested food.

Sri Shankarāchārya emphasizes that not recognizing one's true nature as whole leads to the misconception of being the body and mind, which underlies the belief that activities and accomplishments are the path to the Truth. Such an assertion deems the entire foundation of the *Karma Kanda* as rooted in ignorance. Instead of realizing the body-less nature (*asharitatvam*), one mistakenly identifies with the body and mind thereby creating a false identity parading as self, the "*mithyātma*," which becomes the source of endless suffering.

Ritualists argue that this body identification involved in doing rituals is figurative, like saying "That person is a lion." *Sri Shankarāchārya* points out that in all figurative expressions involving two entities, both entities are known well, and one cannot be mistaken for the other. Therefore, this argument is dismissed, as body identification arises solely from ignorance and is not figurative. Ritualists, by identifying themselves as mere doers, do so out of ignorance, not in a figurative sense.

Upanishadic statements, like "you shall do *śravanam*," are often misinterpreted as mandates by ritualists. However, such interpretations can be easily dismissed. Firstly, *śravanam*, which means listening to understand the teachings, is not a form of karma or ritualistic action. Moreover, these statements are not always intended as mandates, especially when viewed in the context of individuals transitioning from worldly and religiously mandated lives. The etymology of the words used in these statements doesn't always imply a command or obligation.

Topics

This retreat delved into a myriad of topics that hold direct relevance to our everyday lives. It was a profound exploration of the Bhāshya, where each word became a gateway to meaningful discussions on life experiences.

The retreat touched upon subjects that resonate deeply with our existence—loneliness versus solitude, the intricate dance of fear and fearlessness, and the enigmatic concept of Moksha, highlighting why viewing timeless realization within the confines of time is inherently contradictory. It also clarified the various *pramānas* or means of knowledge that our human minds are capable of comprehending, while shedding light on how to understand the Veda itself as a *pramāna* of *Atma* which is *Aprameya*.

One such illustration from the retreat is the exploration of fear. Swami Tattvavidānanda succinctly stated, "Freedom from fear comes when you can think freely." Here, freedom signifies a profound comprehension of life's processes, a discovery of what is real. This discovery liberates us from the shackles of fear, for it reveals that there is nothing to lose, and, therefore, nothing to fear. Realization is not a result achieved through a step-by-step process; it is more akin to an explosion that transcends the boundaries of the mind. By becoming intimately familiar with the workings of our own minds, we can prevent our minds from disabling us. We break free from false thinking and the fear that stems from ignorance of what truly is. This retreat offered a pathway to liberation from the relentless cycle of pleasure and pain, here and now.

Throughout the retreat, the emphasis was crystal clear—beyond gaining mere conceptual knowledge, it was about embodying and internalizing these profound truths. Through daily Satsang, classes, and meditation sessions, attendees were guided to avoid the pitfall of merely acquiring knowledge, encouraging instead, a deeper transformation and realization of these timeless teachings in their lives.

Aphorisms of Swami Tattvavidānanda

During each retreat *Swamiji* coins very pithy phrases akin to aphorisms and incorporates them into his teaching. Here are a few that attendees have found very helpful.

Digital Māyā

In this age of cell phones and internet, social security numbers (USA), Permanent Account Numbers (India), Credit card numbers, mobile phone numbers, credit card verification value (CVV) number etc., identities assumed have become enormous addition to the burden of *saṁsāra*. The first step is to be cognizant of these and try to lead a life that is 'simple, orderly and disciplined'.

Syllabus Māyā

Humans tend to have a strong acquisitive spirit. While this may translate well in worldly endeavors where accumulated knowledge and information gained serves well, it fails when it comes to

understanding the truth of oneself. The understanding required in Vedanta is not accumulating knowledge, such as ticking off how many scriptures have been studied, how well one has networked with mahatmas, and displaying books in the 'showcase' as in a syllabus of study. Genuine learning is possible when one has an open mind not sullied by syllabus *māyā*.

Shut up and get out!

One of the most effective meditations for many attendees is called the "chup meditation." It is a Hindi word to tell someone to keep quiet. This meditation has its origin in the anubhava of a mahatma, *Swami Rām Sukhdāsji Maharāj* who was considered an embodiment of *Gitā* vision. An example of *Gitā* verse one can relate to for this meditation would be *Gita* verse 3.18. The vagaries of the mind are such that it tends towards listless thinking, suffering by thinking of the past, longing due to greed and attachments, and becoming insecure due to imagining the future. All these thoughts create psychological time which becomes a bondage. A quick manner to come out of it is to tell the mind to metaphorically shut up and be silent. The challenge posed is if one can wander away from the portals of psychological past and future which is akin to getting out.

Work hard and love all

In going over the kind of fatigues one goes through in life, it is important to recognize that certain fatigues are good for the body and mind while some are poisonous. One should let the body work with the spirit of *karma yoga* after gaining a deep understanding of the true essence of *karma yoga*. It is best for the body to never be lazy, and the directive is to allow the body to work hard. There is no need to pamper the body and be generously indifferent to it. Feed it, clothe it and give it medicine when needed only but be indifferent at all other times.

Intellectual fatigue in a similar manner is very good for a healthy life and spirits. *Swamiji* exhorted *jigñāsus* to stay alert by activities such as reading about basic science and learn *Pāṇini* Grammar for example.

Nervous fatigue and emotional fatigue are really the sources of most diseases. Stress in life is caused by certain attitudes born of ignorance. The true nature of Self is *Ananda*, and it really appears as unconditional love of all beings. A living entity is made up of cells and it is found that fundamentally there are no differences in cell structure in animals and plants. This body is made up of trillions of cells. It is found that while cells may have a boundary, they act as though they love all other cells. That inner harmony is why the hundreds of organs of a living entity work together as a system sustaining life. However, a mind entangled with various identifications and afflicted by the disease of 'me and mine' disrupts the equilibrium in nature, affecting the cells in the body to behave abnormally, resulting in various ailments.

The antidote is simple. Each morning upon waking up one must remind oneself to love all without expectation. By being awareful in all actions, the mind will be calm. Practicing *pranāyāma* and living a simple life with Vedantic *Upāsana* in daily life can lead to an attitude of loving all un-

conditionally.

Comments by few Attendees

Many people spoke eloquently about the teaching and impact on the last day. In addition, there are but very few samples of comments by attendees as to how the retreat helped them in their sādhana for inner transformation.

“A transformational ‘*Bodhisattva*’ moment for me was when I approached *Swami TV* in person and started saying, ‘*Swamiji*, I have a problem...’, he stopped me right on the tracks and said, ‘YOU don’t have a problem; your mind may have a problem; your body may have a problem; but YOU never have a problem!’. It is in that one instant that I became a Witness to the crimes of ignorance committed by me, myself and the misplaced I!” - Venkatraman

“*Swamiji* guided us to experience *Sākshi* in his lectures. I have been dwelling on *Sākshi* for 2+ yrs. In the process, the retreat helped me a lot to practice the meditation of “I am that I am” – Raghu Duggirala

“It was towards the end of the *Brahmasutra* camp 2023 when *Swamiji* said something that went straight to my heart. I have often heard the vākya “*Aham Brahmāsmi*”. During the talk *Swamiji* mentioned very candidly that for most of us it is a challenge to feel ourselves as the creator, sustainer, all-powerful, all-knowing etc. How to correctly understand then??

Swamiji stated the way to look is inwards at ourselves rather than outside. What we are all looking for is happiness, fearlessness, absence of desire and it is all within us and this truly is the meaning of “*Aham Brahmāsmi*” The honest and straightforward explanation offered by *Swamiji* brought tears to my eyes. I think for the first time I understood and experienced this *Mahāvākya*. For this I will always be thankful to the Teacher” – Yashodhara Kirtne

“*Swamiji* points out that being and knowing are one and the same. Sat shines as *Chit*.

An understanding of this statement has, somehow, been reached and, often in daily life, the person withdraws, and I be. There is no knower, knowing, and known but the Presence.”- Fatima Macho Oritz.

“A wonderful takeaway is a direct recognition that knowingness transcends both knowledge and ignorance. That, abiding as awareness, one can see that though things happen, causality is unreal, so every moment is ever fresh.” – Jennifer Catto

Written by T.K. Srinivas and Sumana Rao

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Photos in the cover page #2