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Kaivalyopaniṣad
Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati's transcribed talk

This is the twenty ninth part of the serial article, continuation from Oct 2023 newsletter.

पुनश्च जन्मान्तरकर्मयोगा-

त्स एव जीवः स्वपिति प्रबुद्धः ।

पुरत्रये क्रीडति यश्च जीव-

स्ततस्तु जातं सकलं विचित्रम् ।

आधारमानन्दमखण्डबोधं

यस्मिँल्लयं याति पुरत्रयं च ॥ १४ ॥

punaśca janmāntarakarmayogātsa

eva jīvaḥ svapiti prabuddhaḥ

puratraye kṛīḍati yaśca jīvastatastu

jātaṁ sakalaṁ vicitraṁ

ādhāramānandamakhaṇḍabodhaṁ

yasmin layaṁ yāti puratrayaṁ ca

पुनः - again च - and जन्मान्तर-कर्मयोगात् - because of the deeds of past lives सः एव - the very same जीवः - *jīva* स्वपिति - (as though) dreams/sleeps प्रबुद्धः - awake पुरत्रये - in the three cities क्रीडति - sports यः - who च - and जीवः - *jīva* ततः - from whom तु - indeed जातम् - is born सकलम् - the entire विचित्रम् - varied आधारम् - substratum आनन्दम् - joy अखण्डबोधम् - unbroken consciousness यस्मिन् - in whom लयम् - dissolution याति - goes पुरत्रयम् च - and all the three cities

Again, because of his deeds of past lives, the very same *jīva* comes back to the dream or wakefulness. The *jīva*, who (thus) sports in the three cities, is the substratum, the indivisible consciousness and joy, from whom the entire varied diversity has sprung up and in whom alone all the three cities dissolve.(14)

Once again, on account of past actions, the one who is the limitless self awakens. On account of identification with the gross body, he is the waker; on account of

identification with the subtle body, he is the dreamer, and on account of identification with the causal body he is the sleeper. This is his life story. What else is there? If you want to write your autobiography, this is it. You can write whatever details you want, but it is essentially waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. And it is the same the next day, and the next day, and the next. If we don't gain the knowledge, we go from womb to tomb, gain the next body, and begin the process all over again.

What is it that wakes us up? Deep sleep is such a pleasurable experience that nobody would want to wake up. Most people are reluctant to come out of sleep. When the alarm rings, the first impulse is to stop it and pull the comforter over one's head. That is the first reaction. Nobody wants to give up the experience of the deep sleep state, because, in fact, it is the experience of happiness. Yet we are forced to get up. It is our past *karma*, unfulfilled desires, ambitions, duties or pre-occupations, which force us to wake up. It is our *karma* that wakes us up, because, when we go to sleep at night, all our desires and ambitions remain intact, in the causal or seed state. They don't get destroyed in the deep sleep state. Therefore, the fellow who went to sleep with whatever desires he had is the one who wakes up, and then those desires, which were in the causal state or seed state, begin to sprout. Just as the seed that is put in the ground takes a little time to germinate and sprout, so also, the desires that are dormant during the deep sleep state germinate and want to sprout; we wake up each morning because of desires that want to be fulfilled. Sometimes, we go from deep sleep to dreaming and then to waking, though sometimes, we go from deep sleep to waking; sleep is not a continuous experience. This is the process that goes on day in and day out.

What do we learn from this? Why does the Upaniṣad describe these three states?

It is to make a point that the one who is the waker alone is the dreamer, that he alone is the sleeper, and that he alone is again the waker. The experiences of the three states are different from one another. The waker has no entry into the

dream, the dreamer has no entry into the sleep state, and the sleeper has no entry into the world of waking. Thus, each state excludes the other two. The waker is not the dreamer and the dreamer is not the sleeper. Yet there is some continuity; when we wake up in the morning, we know that we have been sleeping and have now woken up. We do have that degree of awareness, is it not so? When you wake up in the morning, how do you feel? Do you feel like, 'Hey, a new person is born today'? No. Sometimes we might wish that it were the case, but that is not really so. There is continuity of existence. That is why we recollect that the one who was sitting on the dais and talking yesterday is the one sitting and talking today. In all these changing and discontinuous experiences, there is a continuous thread, and it is that which is important to us.

The *sāstra* draws attention to the fact that there is a changeless thread linking all these changing experiences. It is the same *jīva* or self that sports in the three different 'cities,' the waking, dream, and deep sleep states, the three realms. We know that the one who sports in the city is different from the city. Today, we are in Ben Lomond, but tomorrow we might be in San Francisco. Three days later, we might be in New York, and thus sporting in different cities. But when can we go from one city to another? It is only when we are not that city. For instance, San Francisco is where it is and New York is where it is. Only one who is neither San Francisco nor New York can go from one city to the other. The fact that we travel from one state of consciousness to the other shows that the waking world one is not, the dream world one is not, and the deep sleep world one is not. Even the waker, dreamer, and sleeper one is not. We are the self that connects all the three and yet transcends all the three. We can learn this much from our experiences, and when this much is learned, the nature of the experiences does not matter.

To be continued...

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the twenty seventh part of the serial article, continuation from Oct 2023 newsletter.

जनकस्य वचः श्रुत्वा विश्वामित्रो महामुनिः । धनुर्दर्शय रामाय इति होवाच पार्थिवम् ॥ १-६७-१
ततः स राजा जनकः सचिवान् व्यादिदेश ह । धनुरानीयतां दिव्यं गन्धमाल्यानुलेपितम् ॥ १-६७-२
जनकेन समादिष्टाः सचिवाः प्राविशन् पुरम् । तद्धनुः पुरतः कृत्वा निर्जग्मुरमितौजसः ॥ १-६७-३
नृणां शतानि पञ्चाशदœ व्यायतानां महात्मनाम् । मञ्जूषामष्टचक्रां तां समूहुस्ते कथंचन ॥ १-६७-४
तामादाय सुमञ्जूषामायसीं यत्र तदœ धनुः । सुरोपमं ते जनकमूचुर्नृपतिमन्त्रिणः ॥ १-६७-५
इदं धनुर्वरं राजन् पूजितं सर्वराजभिः । मिथिलाधिप राजेन्द्र दर्शनीयं यदिच्छसि ॥ १-६७-६
तेषां नृपो वचः श्रुत्वा कृताञ्जलिरभाषत । विश्वामित्रं महात्मानं तावुभौ रामलक्ष्मणौ ॥ १-६७-७
इदं धनुर्वरं ब्रह्मन् जनकैरभिपूजितम् । राजभिश्च महावीर्यैरशक्तैः पूरितं तदा ॥ १-६७-८
नैतत् सुरगणाः सर्वे सासुरा न च राक्षसाः । गन्धर्वयक्षप्रवराः सकिन्नरमहोरगाः ॥ १-६७-९
क्व गतिर्मानुषाणां च धनुषोऽस्य प्रपूरणे । आरोपणे समायोगे वेपने तोलने तथा ॥ १-६७-१०
तदेतत् धनुषां श्रेष्ठमानीतं मुनिपुंगव । दशयैतन्महाभाग अनयोः राजपुत्रयोः ॥ १-६७-११
विश्वामित्रः सरामस्तु श्रुत्वा जनकभाषितम् । वत्स राम धनुः पश्य इति राघवमब्रवीत् ॥ १-६७-१२

janakasya vacaḥ śrutvā viśvāmitro mahāmuniḥ ।
dhanurdarśaya rāmāya iti hovāca pārthivam ॥ 1-67-1
tataḥ sa rājā janakaḥ sacivān vyādideśa ha ।
dhanurānīyatām divyaṁ gandhamālyānulepitam ॥ 1-67-2
janakena samādiṣṭāḥ sacivāḥ prāviśan puram ।
taddhanuḥ purataḥ kṛtvā nirjagmuramitaujasaḥ ॥ 1-67-3
nrṇām śatāni pañcāśad vyāyatānām mahātmanām ।
mañjūṣāmaṣṭacakraīm tāīm samūhuste kathañcana ॥ 1-67-4
tāmādāya sumañjūṣāmāyasīm yatra tad dhanuḥ ।
suropamaīm te janakamūcurnṛpatimantriṇaḥ ॥ 1-67-5
idaīm dhanurvaraīm rājan pūjitaīm sarvarājabhiḥ ।
mithilādhipa rājendra darśanīyaīm yadicchasi ॥ 1-67-6
teśāīm nrpo vacaḥ śrutvā kṛtāñjalirabhāṣata ।
viśvāmitraīm mahātmanāīm tāvubhau rāmalakṣmaṇau ॥ 1-67-7
idaīm dhanurvaraīm brahman janakairabhipūjitaīm ।
rājabhiśca mahāvīryairasāktaiḥ pūritaīm tadā ॥ 1-67-8
naitat suragaṇāḥ sarve sāsurā na ca rākṣasāḥ ।
gandharvayakṣapraravāḥ sakinnaramahoragāḥ ॥ 1-67-9
kva gatirmānuṣāṇām ca dhanuṣo'sya prapūraṇe ।

āropane samāyoge vepane tolane tathā || 1-67-10

tadetat dhanuṣāṁ śreṣṭhamānītaṁ munipuṅgava |

darśayaitanmahābhāga anayoḥ rājaputrayoḥ || 1-67-11

viśvāmitraḥ sarāmastu śrutvā janakabhāṣitam |

vatsa rāma dhanuḥ paśya iti rāghavamabravīt || 1-67-12

Janaka, having heard of Rama's feats, had a small ray of hope. This boy seemed all he could wish for in a husband for his daughter. If Rama could actually set an arrow to this bow, the king had found a match for Sita, the one who was not born of a womb. Vishvamitra said, "Show Rama this bow." King Janaka ordered his men to apply sandalpaste to the bow, to garland the god-given bow, and to bring it. Then the party proceeded to the place where the bow would be shown. Ahead of them, five thousand fellows, men used to hard work, solid fellows, weight-lifters, muscled and stout, somehow managed to place the great bow in an iron box on an eight-wheeled cart and struggled to roll it through Janaka's palace.

King Janaka addressed Vishvamitra who had Rama and Lakshmana by his side. "Please look, *brāhmaṇas*, this is something to see. Over the years this bow has been reached for by many kings and princes. It has been worshipped and respected by our family as long as it has been ours to keep. This is that bow. To bend it, to set an arrow and send it flying, one must first tie this bow. The *devas* themselves have tried, celestials of all kinds have tried, the *rākṣasas* have tried, not to mention human beings." Janaka has some doubts because many, many contenders had gone before. Janaka turned to Rama, seeing in him but a boy, "Please see this Dhanus." Rama and Lakshmana had been getting restless, waiting for these words. The box was opened and Rama peered inside.

महर्षेर्वचनाद॰ रामो यत्र तिष्ठति तद॰ धनुः । मञ्जूषां तामपावृत्य दृष्ट॰वा धनुरथाब्रवीत् ॥ १-६७-१३

इदं धनुर्वरं दिव्यं संस्पृशामीह पाणिना । यत्नवांश्च भविष्यामि तोलने पूरणेऽपि वा ॥ १-६७-१४

बाढमित्यब्रविद॰ राजा मुनिश्च समभाषत । लीलया स धनुर्मध्ये जग्राह वचनात्मुनेः ॥ १-६७-१५

पश्यतां नृसहस्राणां बहूनां रघुनन्दनः । आरोपयत् स धर्मात्मा सलीलमिव तद्धनुः ॥ १-६७-१६

आरोपयित्वा मौर्वी च पूरयामास तद्धनुः । तद॰ बभञ्ज धनुर्मध्ये नरश्रेष्ठो महायशाः ॥ १-६७-१७

तस्य शब्दो महानासीन्निर्घातसमनिःस्वनः । भूमिकम्पश्च सुमहान् पर्वतस्येव दीर्यतः ॥ १-६७-१८

निपेतुश्च नराः सर्वे तेन शब्देन मोहिताः । वर्जयित्वा मुनिवरं राजानं तौ च राघवौ ॥ १-६७-१९

प्रत्याश्वस्तो जने तस्मिन् राजा विगतसाध्वसः । उवाच प्राञ्जलिर्वाक्यं वाक्यज्ञो मुनिपुंगवम् ॥ १-६७-२०

maharṣervacanād rāmo yatra tiṣṭhati tad dhanuḥ |

mañjūṣāṁ tāmapāvṛtya dṛṣṭvā dhanurathābravīt || 1-67-13

idaṁ dhanurvarāṁ divyaṁ saṁspṛśāmīha pāṇinā |

yatnavāṁśca bhaviṣyāmi tolane pūraṇe'pi vā || 1-67-14
 bādhamityabravid rājā muniśca samabhāṣata |
 līlayā sa dhanurmadhye jagrāha vacanātmuneḥ || 1-67-15
 paśyatām nṛsahasrāṇām bahūnām raghunandanāḥ |
 āropayat sa dharmātmā salīlamiva taddhanuḥ || 1-67-16
 āropayitvā maurvīm ca pūrayāmāsa taddhanuḥ |
 tad babhañja dhanurmadhye naraśreṣṭho mahāyaśāḥ || 1-67-17
 tasya śabdo mahānāsīnnirghātasamaniḥsvanaḥ |
 bhūmikampaśca sumahān parvatasyeva dīryataḥ || 1-67-18
 nipetuśca narāḥ sarve tena śabdena mohitāḥ |
 varjayitvā munivaram rājānam tau ca rāghavau || 1-67-19
 pratyāśvasto jane tasmin rājā vigatasādhvasaḥ |
 uvāca prāñjalirvākyam vākyañño munipuṅgavam || 1-67-20

“Whaa!” Rama said. “Now with my own hand I am touching this sacred bow. I will try to lift it and string it and fire it.” The problem was, if he did lift it he had to marry. He turned to Vishvamitra and Janaka for permission. “Do you think I am the one to be your son-in-law?” Vishvamitra and Janaka, as one, gave their approval. Rarely is this Dhanus brought for *darśana*, and already Maithila’s people had come to know the Dhanus had been brought forth. They had heard of this Prince Rama and his exploits and the fate of the *rākṣasas* he encountered. A large crowd had assembled, and in the middle were the mighty bow and the prince.

“I wish he were a little more grown up,” they murmured and gossiped. “He is too young, I think.” All because it was a big thing, and a very big thing in their kingdom. All eyes and ears were on Rama now.

Rama, the great joy of the Raghava family, received the okay from the *ṛṣis*, and as though playing with a lily stalk, lifted the sublime and potent bow from the iron box. He set its point near him to tie its string, and leaning in easily, he bent the bow. The bow broke in two. It happened quickly. Such a crack had never been heard, like great thunder from heaven, like an earthquake had caused the mountains to fall. Vishvamitra and Janaka and Rama and Lakshmana stood the sound, but all the other thousands were laid low and actually lost consciousness for a bit. Such was that bow. King Janaka was not sad about losing that bow, in fact he was happy. He was happy that Shiva’s Dhanus had been waiting only for Sita’s marriage. The bow had done its job; it had brought Rama for his Sita. Janaka was all joy, and his people were awestruck – at last a husband for their princess.

To be continued...

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the fourth part of the serial article, continuation from Oct 2023 newsletter.

The Early Days

Princess Amba had already chosen, mentally chosen, a king whose name was Sala. The other two girls were still free to choose. Because of his grudge, the Kashi king slighted the Kuru family, a royal *kṣatriya* family, and it was certainly a big slight, by not inviting the Kuru family to the *svayamvara* of the three girls. Bhishma, of course, recognized the insult. Bhishma was furious, and he went to the *svayamvara* anyway. Anybody could go; you need not be invited. If you were from a royal family you were a qualified suitor.

The gossip went around the *svayamvara*, “Look at this old guy. Bhishma wants to marry after all these years. He must have changed his mind. He made a firm oath that he was not going to marry in his lifetime. Look at this. All who are here are mortals, will he settle for a mortal?” Like that, all the people began talking lightly. Then, as the girls were about to enter the *svayamvara* hall, Bhishma announced that the girls would marry Vichitravirya. This was within the custom. If the girls did not object, then Bhishma could take them. If any of the other suitors objected, then he should fight formidable Bhishma. That was the Kshatriya custom. Bhishma outright announced that Vichitriya would marry the three as queens and he himself would willingly fight for the right. The girls were silent, nobody else said anything, and Bhishma took the girls and headed for Hastinapura.

In the end there were those who objected and those who tried to fight with Bhishma. There were those who had been disappointed and those who tried to chase him. Of course for mighty Bhishma such threats were all nothing. He made short work of his challengers and then he went on his way. Then Sala, who had thought he was going to marry Amba, confronted Bhishma, and there was a battle. Sala lost his charioteer, then his chariot, then the battle, and Bhishma just took off. Bhishma settled the girls in his kingdom and started arrangements for the weddings. It was then that Amba told Bhishma that she had something to say,

"Before this *svayamvara* I had already committed myself to King Sala. It is Sala I want to marry."

Bhishma was stunned, "Why didn't you tell me before? When I announced my intention you should have spoken up and said that you were not willing. Now you tell me, and what can I do?" What he did was he took her to King Sala and left her there.

When Amba told Sala that she wanted to marry him he said no, "You are already taken and I was defeated and therefore I cannot claim you any more. I do not want to be a beggar. I cannot marry you, it is not proper. Look in the *dharmaśāstra*. Since Bhishma picked you up with his right hand you are his by right. Let Bhishma marry you."

Amba returned to Hastinapura and told Bhishma, "I have become richer in my wisdom and my *dharmaśāstra*. But I did not get anything else from King Sala. Do not destroy my life. Please get married to me."

Bhishma said, "No way. I have taken an oath, and I will never marry anybody. You can just forget me. You can just go plead with Sala."

She said, "There is no way to plead with him."

Bhishma was sad and regretful, and he scolded the girl, "You should have said something at the start. I am sorry that I have destroyed your life, but what can I do?"

Amba was furious. She went to the forest and protested to all the *ṛṣis*. She happened to meet her grandfather there, and her grandfather said, "I will put in a word to Bhargava." Bhargava was a teacher of archery, Bhishma's teacher. "I will put in a word for you. Bhargava is my friend; he is likely to come by. You stay here." In a few days Bhargava came by and was told what had happened. Bhargava, Bhishma's *guru*, sent for Bhishma.

Bhishma came immediately and offered his salutations and his services, "What can I do for you? Tell me why you called for me. Is there anything I can do?"

Bhargava spoke, "As your *guru* I want you to do something for me. You see, I have a girl here. You know this girl. I am telling you, you can break your oath not to marry because your *guru* says you can. I am giving you this instruction and

permission. Therefore you can break the oath and just marry her. That way you can just give life to this woman."

But Bhishma had already given his word in this matter, and he said, "I am sorry, I cannot do that."

Bhargava, said, "Then, as a *guru*, I am going to curse you." The two argued for some time. "Either you take my curse or you fight with me." Bhargava was furious.

Bhishma spoke, "I do not want a curse from you, I will fight with you."

Bhargava, a fierce warrior, and mighty Bhishma fought. All the gods watched with interest. Of course the assembled *devatas* wanted something, they always had an agenda. They watched the great fight as it went on and on. Finally Bhishma proclaimed that such a struggle might never come to an end. Bhishma picked up one of his *astras*, a weapon which was said to be able to destroy the whole world, some kind of an atom bomb. He took the *astra* in his hand, and all who watched were concerned and afraid that he would use this weapon. Narada and Rudra and all the *devatas* had come to watch a fight, but they ended up pleading to Bhishma, "Bhargava will never stop fighting, so you have to stop. You should stop fighting. Do not use this *astra*. Do *namaskāra* to your *guru* and go."

The *devatas* recommendation encouraged Bhishma to stop fighting, and Bhargava also felt relieved and thanked Narada for saving him from this futile effort. Bhargava addressed Bhishma, "You are a noble man. You are my worthy disciple. Nobody can fight like you. You are my equal, and I have all admiration for you. I praise your commitment to truth, and I bless you." Then Bhargava embraced Bhishma and told Amba, "Forget about Bhishma. Do something else."

Amba, caught between Bhishma and King Sala, being rejected by both, was very resentful and angry. She vented her hatred toward Bhishma, even though he had said he was sorry. There was no repair of their relationship possible. Amba did years of severe penance which gained the blessing of Karttikeya, Lord Shanmukha. Amba asked the Lord, "I want to see that this Bhishma gets killed. There is no one who will champion my cause; there are none who will go up against him. He is a blessed person, and I have no leverage. What else can I do? Please bless me."

Karttikeya gave Amba a garland and told her to keep it with her. He told her that anyone who wore this garland and fought against Bhishma would be victorious. He could defeat mighty Bhishma. She was happy to have this garland for now she could take revenge. She went around to the different kings and prodded them, "Here is a chance for you. You can gain back your kingdom. With this garland you can beat stalwart Bhishma and take Hastinapura. Vicitravirya is no threat, a nobody." But no one accepted. They all rejected her coaxing. The word *bhīṣma* itself spread a terror in their hearts perhaps. When she went to Panchala she spoke to King Drupada, "You, great king, rule according to *dharma*. You see what Bhishma has done; he has destroyed my life. I want to see that he has to pay for this. You should champion my cause; you should fight him."

The king of Pancala replied, "Bhishma is invincible. Who would fight against him?"

"This is not a problem." she said, "Take this garland given by Karttikeya. You just wear this garland and fight and Bhishma is finished. The god has promised this."

"This may be true," said the king, "but I have nothing against Bhishma. Even what you describe tells only of an omission on your part. He did not do anything intentionally. This is purely your *karma*. You are the one who did not speak up. Bhishma is a good man, a man of *dharma*. I have no reason to fight him."

Amba's frustration boiled over, and she took the empowered garland from her neck and threw it and walked away. The garland landed on a pillar and lay there and no one would touch it.

Amba returned to the forest and returned to her *tapas*. This time Lord Shiva came. Shankara came and assured her that her desire would be fulfilled. He said, "You yourself will have to do it. Next time you are reborn you will be able to do it; Bhishma will be killed because of you."

Amba said, "What is the use of my killing him in the next birth? To gain revenge means that I should know that Bhishma has paid the price for what he has done to me. I should have the last laugh at his expense. Then only is that revenge. How will I know?"

To be continued...

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 *Tattvavidānanda*, 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, *purāṇic* 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 *Pāṇini 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 *Íśvara* 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. *Íśvara* 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 *Íśvara* *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 *Íśvara*, 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. *Íśvara*, 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 *Íśvara* with the malefic aspects of life.

Is it possible to replace insecurities with wonder and not see *Íśvara* 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. *Íśvara*, 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, *Íśvara*, as *Tvashta*, can be sensed.

Íśvara is understood as the *karmaphala dhāta*. But here's the twist: *Íśvara* 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 *Íśvara* with a sense of wonder.

Íśvara, 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, “*tadvijijnāśasva, tad-brahmeti.*” 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 *Bhṛigu 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 *pramāṇa* 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 *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* that states ‘*sa yathādraedhāgnerabhyāhitātprthagdhūmā viniścaranti, evaṃ vā are’sya mahato bhūtasya niḥśvasitametadyadṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo’tarvāṅgīrasa itihāsaḥ purāṇam vidyā upaniṣadaḥ ślokāḥ sūtrānyanuvyākhyānāni vyākhyānāni; asyaivaitāni niḥśvasitāni || 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”, *Bṛihadaranyaka 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 Bhāṣya* of Sri Shankarāchārya is mostly about refutation of assertions of Sāṅkhya 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 Kāṇḍa 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.

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 Shankarachārya'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 Kānda* 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 jignāsus 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 *Brahamasutra* 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

Nov 16, 2023

Photos in the cover page #2

The anniversary went off very well inspite of the rains! About 500 people attended the function. We had specially invited the people from the nearby villages and the Aim for Seva, Anaikatti hostel students.

The celebrations started 3 days earlier with an anniversary retreat conducted by Chief Acharya Swami Sadatmanandaji on the Ten Shanti mantras . It was attended by 55 participants. The rain Gods also decided to join in. We had unprecedented rains with thunder and lightning for 3 days before the event. But after blessing and purifying the place, the rains stopped for a few hours on the day of the function and the sun peeped out to bless the event!

The program started at 10 am with arti to Pujya swamiji's paduka.

This was followed by an invocatory prayer by Smt Sarada Subramanian who sang a stuti to Lord Ganesha in her devotional and melodious voice.

The next item on the program was a dance by Smt Pavithra Srinivasan on Gita natyam. She brought the dhyana sloka and the verses of the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita alive !

It was not just a dance performance , but one in which all of us knew the words and the characters. She has founded the organization Arsha Kala Bharati and committed herself to present all 18 chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita with dance and music, for children and adults to help appreciate our scriptural texts. (visit www.gitanatyam.com).

This was followed by a report on Gurukulam activities by Sri Ravi Venkataraman, Secretary of Sruti Seva Trust who flew down from Chennai for the event.

The Chief guest Sri N.V. Nagasubramaniam, Chairman Kothanda Rama temple trust, Coimbatore and a devotee of Pujya Swamiji , could not attend and his message was read out by Swami Jagadatmanandaji . This was followed by a very lively talk by Swami Jagadatmanandaji in Tamil. Brief excerpts of his talk below translated by Smt Sadika in English.

Brief write-up of Swami Jagadatmanandaji's talk :

“ Pujya Swamiji Dayananda Saraswati resides in the hearts of everyone of us. With his divine grace, he has lead us in the pursuit of knowledge. May his blessings guide us towards attaining the knowledge of Advaita and to live with that vision.

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam has achieved the unimaginable in the past 33 glorious years since its inception. A Gurukulam is a place for students to learn and live under the guidance of a Guru. We call Arsha Vidya as a Gurukulam for this auspicious reason : in a Gurukulam

system, the disciples reside with the Acharya all the time, listening to and imbibing the teachings of the Guru while performing Guru seva. This is called living with the Master.

Swamiji talked about the stages for the pursuit of freedom.

Purushartha Nishcaya- ascertaining the objectives of life. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are called purusharthas. Out of these four Purusharthas - Dharma, Artha and Kama are Avantara Purusharthas, ie, secondary goals of life. The Parama Purushartha, ie, the primary goal of life is Moksha (freedom). One has to learn about all the four Purusharthas and understand that the primary purushartha is Moksha. This is *Purushartha Nishcaya*.

Sadhana Nishcaya-ascertaining the means for freedom in the form of knowledge After adopting Sadhana Nishcaya, we require

Pramana Nishcaya – Ascertainment of the appropriate means of knowledge of reality. It is in the form of Veda vakyam- the Upanishads.

The journey does not conclude here. The next step is choosing the **right tradition** to follow which will lead you to your destination. There exists several disciplines such as Advaita, Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita or Shaiva Siddhanta, etc. Even within each one of the disciplines, there are several sub-branches. It is said that as per the punya (good karma) accumulated from previous births through virtuous deeds, one gets to know about the Advaita tradition. We will then further come to know about Bhagavan Shankaracaryaji and his bhashyams.

To understand the message of Shankara Bhashyam or any sacred text we **need a Guru**. Only a Guru can unfold the Shastras. The shastras cannot be self-taught. To acquire a Guru, more punya is required. A Guru must be a *shrotriya brahmanishta* - one who is well versed in the scriptures, lives by it and has understood the ultimate truth. One has to have a lot of punya to find the right Guru like Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati.

Pujya Swamiji has taught the messages of the scriptures to one and all in the easiest and most understandable way possible. The blessed are the people who were fortunate enough to meet, interact and learn from Pujya Swamiji.

Personally, I did not get the opportunity to study under Pujya Swamiji. I am only a Bhakta of Swamiji. I regard Pujya Swamiji as Lord Dakshinamurti himself. The Mahatmas who were Swamiji's disciples are my Gurus. Swami Paravidyanandaji and our Chief Acharya Swami Sadatmanandaji taught me *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras* in the same voice and light, Pujya Swamiji would have extolled its messages unto me. I am indeed blessed and fortunate for this opportunity.

You would all have heard of the metaphor '*Philosophers' stone*'. Many would say that it is applicable to Pujya Swamiji. Just as how any metal that came into contact with the Philosophers's stone would also turn to gold, such was my transformation with Pujya Swamiji. As an expression of gratitude , I serve our Gurukulam along with Acharyaji, under his guidance.

Pujya Swamiji regarded one and all equally and would accept any individual as his shishya (disciple) regardless of their country of origin or religion and would teach them. Our Gurukulam continues Pujya Swamiji's legacy by embracing the very same principles and imparts knowledge to all seekers. In 2024, Acharyaji is starting a 108 day course residential course on Vedanta and Sanskrit. This will be followed by a long-term course. Over 70 students from across the world will be participating in the 108 day course. I pray to Lord Dakshinamurti that more programs will be conducted in the years to come .

Swamiji expressed his gratefulness and thanks to all present.

He thanked the staff, teachers and the devotees associated with the Gurukulam for their support and prayed for them . Swamiji thanked the chairman, Sri Shantaram and Smt Sunita amma and all the other trustees and expressed our heartfelt gratitude to them for their support.

Swami Tadevanandaji, our well-wisher who is present in all important events held here at our Gurukulam and Swamini Brahmaleenanda were on the dias gracing the function.

Swamiji thanked them for being present with us today on this auspicious day."

Swamiji said- " The list of people we are grateful to will go on and on. We thank one and all.

The people from our neighbouring villages have been invited for the function and will join us for lunch on this auspicious occasion. Acharya Sadatmanandaji was keen to invite them, in keeping with the convention earlier followed before Covid.

Many devotees and well-wishers are gathered here today . We pray that in the years to come, this will multiply and many more benefit from the Gurukulam and its activities.

Our sincere gratitude to everyone. We request for your continued support. Thank you."

Dr Parthasarathy, Medical Officer-in-charge presented a report on SDJ (Ayurveda hospital) which is part of Sruti Seva Trust. It was started by Pujya Swamiji 9 years back . Due to the commitment of Dr and his staff the SDJ Hospital has grown in size and efficiency and caters to people worldwide.

This report was followed by Anugraha bhashanam by Swami Sadatmanandaji.

Swamiji in his crisp and objective way spoke about the role of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam from different aspects.

Brief write-up of Swamiji's anugraha-bhashanam-

“ We are celebrating the 33rd anniversary of this AVG which was founded by Pujya Swamiji on 31st Oct 1990.

What is Arsha Vidya Gurukulam?

Simple meaning is : *guru* means teacher and *kulam* means residence. Gurukulam means residence of the teacher. This implies a place of learning . Of what? Learning Arsha Vidya- the knowledge preserved and imparted by the rishis.

So AVG is a place of learning, receiving the knowledge imparted by the rishis. This is a simple meaning.

Pujya Swamiji beautifully presents the spirit of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam . These are his words -

“The study of Vedanta is a serious study of oneself and it therefore entails personal care and attention on the part of the teachers. In the Gurukula set-up, the student receives this important care from the teachers. Arsha Vidya Gurukulam's are a humble effort to provide the students with this environment. “

Another way is to look upon the Gurukulam as an embodiment of the grace (krpA) and compassion (dayA) of Pujya Swamiji .

It is an avenue which provides an opportunity **to be a Contributor**. As Pujya Swamiji said *“ Everybody is a consumer, but one has to become a contributor for one's growth”*.

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam provides an opportunity to become a contributor. I am very happy that there are so many devotees who are contributing in terms of their knowledge, finance and their service. Thus, Arsha Vidya becomes an avenue for becoming a contributor. One more point Pujya Swamiji would highlight is that this Gurukulam is a place where the teaching is given **without any agenda**. Here we teach the students who come from all over the world, but we have no agenda for them that they have to start a center in our name, promote AVG, etc. Ofcourse, If they want to start some center, we may help . This is a rare thing to happen. Generally Asrams will have agenda to expand. But here we just teach without any agenda.

One more way is to look upon this Arsha Vidya Gurukulam as a place which is **contributing to the society**. Before this Gurukulam came up here, there were very few trees here. But after the Gurukulam came up, the green coverage has increased! This has been

officially accepted. One of the ardent devotees of AVG, Smt Sunitamma mentioned how there were only two trees here. Many trustees and their family members would themselves come and plant the trees. Swami Siddhabodhanandaji , Sri Ramanji and many others have contributed to make this place green. So, AVG is contributing to the environment. In a small way, this place **provides employment** to the people around and many of the workers have been with us for a long time. This place is trying to contribute in whatever manner it can.

This Gurukulam also provides an **altar for worship**. We have a beautiful temple of Lord Dakhsinamurti and also a temple of Kalyana Subramaniam (Lord Murugan) . Everyday regular pujas are done morning and evening by highly trained priests. The pujas are done under the guidance of Swamini Sharadanandaji and Swamini Vedarthanandaji. We really appreciate their dedication to the maintenance of the sanctity of these temples. Both the Swaminis also teach chanting to the students and are very particular about the purity and precision of pronunciation. I am happy to announce that they will be resuming the weekly classes very shortly.

In this manner this Arsha Vidya Gurukulam is a place for holistic growth. This place can work well only if the various supporters in the form of donors, sponsors, devotees, seva team members, management staff and the teachers who are all contributing in their own way.

Sri Ramchandranji , a senior student and also a teacher, has been providing his seva as the editor of Arsha Vidya Newsletter. We appreciate his silent contribution. It is not an easy job, Not only he has to serve as the Editor but he also has to answer the people if newsletters are not received by them or any other queries.

Like him so many people are contributing in their own way. Many Swamijis are coming to AVG and blessing it. I thank all of them. We pray for the blessings of Pujya Swamiji to continue the activities of this Gurukulam for the purpose of which it was founded by him.”

Finally, there was a vote of thanks by our Manager, Mr Anandan.

The program completed on time and ended with a sumptuous lunch prepared by our kitchen staff team. The rains stayed away all day.

We remember Pujya Swamiji on this memorable day and thank him for creating AVG, Anaikatti where the sampradaya of teaching still continues to this day.

We appreciate all staff members for the excellent arrangement and planning in spite of the rains and for another memorable anniversary!

- Report by Ms. Padma

Arsha Vidya Kuteeram, Sowripalayam, Coimbatore

Regular classes are being conducted by **Br. Tattva Chaitanya** at Arsha Vidya Kuteeram in Sowripalayam, Coimbatore. The class schedule:

Monday	Explanation of Adi Shankara's Stothrams	Online
Tuesday	Tamil Vedanta Text – Nana Jeeva Vatha Kattalai	Online
Wednesday	Divine History of Saints	Online
Thursday	Mundaka Upanishad	Online
Friday	Bhagavad Gita – 3 rd chapter	Online
Sunday (8 am to 9 am)	Bala Vihar sessions on chanting	In person at Arsha Vidya Kutteram
Sunday (11 am to 12 pm)	Bhagavad Gita home study – 2nd chapter	In person at Arsha Vidya Kutteram



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33rd anniversary of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti, Coimabtoe, India



Aradhana day puja - 15 Aug 2023 at Swami Dayananda Ashram, Rishikesh



Swami Sakshatkrtananda gave sanyasa (aapad-sanyasa) on 28th Sep 2023 to Sri.C.V.Natarajan of Dindigul in Theni Ashram and gave the name Swami Omkaranishthananda Saraswati (Swamiji has attained Samadhi on 15th October 2023) .