

Mauritius Camps with Sri Swami Sakshatkrtanandaji August-September, 2019



Beginning on August 11, 2019, students from overseas joined local seekers at the Arsha Vidya Ashram in Mauritius for the first of three one-week camps with Sri Swami Sakshatkrtanandaji. During this first camp Swamiji and 14 students were accommodated in the newly constructed housing block. Each of the eight rooms is comfortable and well appointed with an ensuite bathroom. Additional students were housed just a two-minute walk from the ashram.

Prior to the morning class, daily *abhiṣekam* in the Lord Dakshinamurti temple took place. The flowers, bilva leaves, dhurva grass and even some fruits used for *pūja* were all grown in the ashram compound itself. In the evenings the beach directly opposite the ashram provided a beautiful place to walk and contemplate upon the day's classes.

Swamiji took Kenopaniṣad in the mornings and Bhagavad Gītā Ninth Chapter in the evenings. The topics for all three camps were the same.

The teachings of the Kenopaniṣad as presented by Swamiji, in a nutshell, follows. The *upaniṣad* begins with a question from the student about that in whose presence the respective functions of the body-mind-sense complex take place.



The teacher beautifully answers the student saying that it is *śrotrasya śrotram*, the ear of the ear, etc. It is not the ear that we know, nor it is another ear, because it is also the eye of the eye. Rather, it is one invariable presence in all variable things that enables the diverse organs to do their respective jobs. That invariable presence cannot be anything other than oneself, 'I'. I, the self alone, is *satyam*, that cannot be negated at any time.



Everything else is subject to negation, including the body-mind-sense complex that is negated in sleep. The teaching is complete here and so, since 'I' cannot be known through any means of knowledge at our disposal, not being an object of knowledge, the teacher proceeds to talk about the method of teaching handed down by the tradition. 'I' is revealed as that which is different from the known and also the unknown. Both the known and the unknown, are known to me. That which is different from both known and unknown is I, the self.



Lord Dakshinamurti

In the second chapter of the *upaniṣad* the teacher negates any possibility of the *vastu* being misunderstood as an object by saying that one who knows it very clearly (meaning, as an object) does not know it. The teacher continues on to say that the one who does not know it (as an object) knows it. In the fourth mantra the teacher unfolds how this self is known in and through every thought that arises in the mind as the consciousness that is manifest in those thoughts; thoughts arise in consciousness, exist in consciousness and go back to consciousness. Thus, consciousness is present in every cognition and as such is known as the very self manifesting in the thoughts.

The third chapter presents a story highlighting the distinct presence in every organ that is responsible for its functioning. The ear of the ear, etc., is the common presence in the form of consciousness while the presiding deities, who bless the functioning, are the distinct presence in the form of various laws/order responsible for the functioning. The story illustrates how the deities are unable to function without the blessing of Īśvara in the form of order. Symbolically, the deities refer to various organs that they preside over. The fire-deity, wind-deity and Indra were not able to know the Lord when the Lord appeared in the form of an effulgent being and when Indra surrenders to Īśvara, in the form of Brahnavidyā, he was taught this knowledge and Indra passes on that knowledge to Agni and Vāyu. The fourth chapter has certain meditations connected to the story and the *upaniṣad* ends with restatement of the result of this knowledge.



Residential Block

Bhagavad Gītā Chapter 9, is titled '*rājavdiyā rājaguhya yoga*.' Swamiji explained the importance of the Bhagavad Gītā within the tradition; having the same status as the *upaniṣads*, it generally receives more attention because it addresses everyone, not just the *uttama adhikāri*, the most qualified and prepared student, that is usually found in the *upaniṣads*. The Ninth Chapter first presents the glory of this vision as the most purifying one, that which releases one from all inauspicious things and never diminishes. Then Lord Kṛṣṇa straightaway unfolds the nature of the self in less than two verses after which he states both the results of gaining self-knowledge, and what happens when one instead follows various other pursuits.



Camp 2

In the nightly satsangs during the first camp, after Swamiji had answered any question, we were treated to musical performances by Darshana and on the last evening a fascinating presentation by Krishnan about a visit he and Indu made to Kailasanatha Temple in Ellora.

During this first camp two special events took place at the ashram. On the 11th August we had the *kumbhabhiṣekam* of the temple for Pujya Swamiji. Located off of the lecture hall, this small temple houses *pādukas* and pictures, including a life-sized one of Pujya Swamiji. Each morning *naivedyam* and *ārati* are offered. Additionally, students are free to sit and meditate here during the day. Two local priests presided over the *homa*. The second event marked Pujya Swamiji's birthday on 15th August. On this day the deities each received milk *abhiṣekam*, the students having had the opportunity to do *pradakṣina* around the temple carrying the milk prior to the *pūja*.



Throughout our stay Swamini Prajnananandaji made sure that all the details regarding the accommodations and necessary transportation were taken care of. She also took us onto the roof which proved to be an excellent observation point for watching the night sky and the rising and setting of Lord Sūrya Bhagavān over the ocean. Additionally, we had two sightseeing trips and a ride in a glass-bottomed boat. Swaminiji's attention to these details and more made the camp comfortable and allowed us to fully engage with the teachings.