

# Isaavasya Upanishad Retreat at AVG, Anaikatti

By Swami Sadatmanandaji

The retreat took place between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of August 2019 at the Gurukulam in Anaikatti. I flew down from UK for the purpose of attending it. We were a mixed group of people – from those hearing Vedanta for the first time to 3 year course graduates and there were also *sannyasis*. Amidst the rolling mountains and rare flora and fauna surrounding the Gurukulam, Swamiji led us through a schedule of meditation sessions, classes, *bhajans* and *satsangs*. Outside of the classroom, we were blessed to be able to observe puja and *aarti* at the Lord Dakshinamurti and Kalyan Subramaniam Temple on the hill.



The lectures began with an introduction to Vedanta which inspired both new and senior students to learn more. Break times were filled with enthusiastic discussions about what we had heard. Masterfully, we were seamlessly led from the introduction to the invocation to the *Upanishad*.

The introduction began by the observation that human life is one where everyone is busy carrying out activities for some purpose. The multitude of human goals was categorized into the four Purusharthas, which were then elaborated upon. This sets the relevance for the study of Vedanta. The human personality was explained and the *atma-anatma-viveka* was unfolded.

Having given this *Drg Drishya Viveka* (discrimination of seer and seen), in the next class the cause of the world as *Ishwara* was explained. The method of appreciating *Ishwara* in and through every experience as Order or existence, was a useful understanding which many of the students began to tune into immediately. *Ishwara* was described as the material and efficient cause of the world. Thus having explained *Tat* (that *Ishwara*) and *Tvam* (this individual *jiva*), the relationship between the two was explained. We still had not formally started the *upanishad*!

When the *Upanishad* did begin on day 2, the profound invocation prayer - *purnamadah, purnamidam...*- which itself gives the essence of entire *Vedanta* was presented. Without a competent, learned teacher, this prayer itself cannot be clearly understood!

*Isaavasya Upanishad* is a short, all-comprehensive text consisting of 18 *mantras*.

The first *mantra* of the *Upanishad* which is often quoted –*isaavasya idam sarvam ..*- begins with a bang presenting the vision of *Vedanta*. The *Upanishad* in the first two *mantras* presents the 2 lifestyles one can adopt to pursue *jnanam - nirvrtti marga* characterized mainly by *sanyasa asram* for a prepared seeker and *pravrtti marga* characterized by *Grhastha asrama*.

*Mantras* 3 to 8 elaborated on the *nirvrtti marga*, the knowledge of the self and the result. A multitude of examples were given by Swamiji to explain what is *atma*, how it is the absolute truth and the impermanence of the world which we so strongly hold on to. *Mantra* 9 to 18 was on *pravrtti marga* characterized by *karma-yoga* and *upasana*. The combination of *karma-yoga* and particular *upasana* was presented as the best way to attain the result in the form of *krma-mukti*. Thus in this way, the entire *Upanishad* was unfolded over 19 classes detailing the 2 lifestyles and the means and results of *atma-jnanam*.

We were also blessed to attend the celebration of Pujya Swami Dayanandaji's birthday with Japa of Lord Dakshinamurti beeja mantra followed by a talk by Swami Sadatmanandaji.

My humble pranams to Swami Sadatmaananda who with his jovial demeanor, explained subtle and difficult concepts in a simple and clear manner.

Thank you very much for a wonderful fulfilling week of inward journey!!

**- Report up by Dr Chetan Morjaria**