

Ārṣa Vidyā Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA,

33rd Anniversary – August 11, 2019 ¹

Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati – Keynote address on Renunciation

Inner divinity

Swami Tadatmanandāji beautifully brought out the point that when we see divinity in ourselves we will see divinity in others. If there is divinity in me, how come I don't experience it? It is because of the darkness of ignorance. Divinity or consciousness or limitlessness or wholeness, by whatever name it is called, is my own nature. Since it is unfortunately veiled by ignorance, one fails to see the divinity in oneself. Ignorance is removed by knowledge just as darkness is removed by light. If we understand well how ignorance manifests itself in our lives, then we would know how to progressively get rid of that ignorance. It is, however, important to know that the removal of ignorance is not a one-shot deal. The removal of ignorance is a process, which culminates in abiding in the divinity that is oneself, and hence appreciating the divinity that is everywhere else. As Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji said, Bhagavad Gītā provides a two-step program to remove the ignorance that veils the inner divinity. The first step is *karma-yoga*. The second step is *jñāna-yoga*. All of this involves *tyāga*, renunciation, which is a means for removal of ignorance. “*tyāgenaike amṛtatvamānuṣuḥ*”² that through *tyāga* many gained the immortality, meaning the divinity or limitlessness. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “*tyāgāt śāntiḥ anantaram*.”³ The renunciation is not as much an action as it is an attitude born of an understanding. As soon as *tyāga* takes place, we experience peace in our mind. Any agitation or sorrow that we experience, is due to lack of *tyāga*, or holding on to things. This “*holding on to*” is what we have to slowly let go.



The nature of ignorance

The ignorance that veils the inner divinity can be explained as being made up of three *guṇas* or three dispositions: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* means purity, clarity, cheerfulness, happiness. *Rajas* means agitation. Lord Kṛṣṇa says ⁴ that *rajo-guṇa* manifests as *lobha*, greed. But the whole chain,

¹ The 33rd anniversary of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, USA was conducted on August 11, 2019 at the newly inaugurated Swami Dayananda Vijñāna Bhavanam. The keynote address by Swami Vidadatmananda, given on this occasion, is summarized here. The talk was transcribed and edited by Krishnanand Maillacheruvu and V. Swaminathan, respectively.

² त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानुशुः (Kaivalyopaniṣad, 1.3)

³ श्रेयो हि ज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्ध्यानं विशिष्यते । śreyo hi jñānamabhyāsājñānāddhyānaṁ viśiṣyate

ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम् ॥ dhyānātkarmaphalatyaḡastyāḡacchāntirantaram (Bhagavad Gītā 12.12)

Knowledge is better indeed than the practice of yoga; meditation is superior to knowledge; renunciation of the results of actions (is better) than meditation. Because of renunciation (there is) peace immediately. (Note that the translations of the Gītā verses referred in this article are taken from Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Arsha Vidya Research Publication Trust, Chennai, India, 5th reprint, 2015.)

⁴ लोभः प्रवृत्तिरारम्भः कर्मणामशमः स्पृहा । lobhaḥ pravṛttirārambhaḥ karmaṇāmaśamaḥ sprhā

रजस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे भरतर्षभ ॥ rajasyetāni jāyante vivṛddhe bharatarṣabha (Bhagavad Gītā 14.12)

Arjuna, the foremost in the clan of Bharata! Greed, physical restlessness, undertaking of activities, mental restlessness, longing – these are born when rajas has increased.

kāma-krodha-lobha, desire-anger-greed, is the manifestation of *rajo-guṇa*. Greed is the result of fulfilled desire, and anger (*krodha*) is the manifestation of unfulfilled desire. *Tamo-guṇa* connotes ignorance, which manifests as inactivity or laziness (*ālasyam*), sleep (*nidrā*) and inadvertence (*pramāda*). The *tamas* is what we have to progressively remove from us to own up our inner divinity. The encouraging aspect is that we do not have to wait until someday when all these are removed. Even if a little bit of ignorance is removed, there will be a sense of peace, and self-satisfaction. Then, we will know that what we are doing is right. When Arjuna gave up his bow and arrow and declared “*na yotsye* I will not fight this battle,”⁵ it is an expression of his ignorance. There was no motivation on his part to do what was right. Sometimes the *tamas* creates the delusion such that what is right appears wrong, and what is wrong appears right. This is what happened to Arjuna. He said, “Lord, I do not see that any purpose is served by fighting this battle.” He articulated a number of reasons, taking the help of the scriptures to justify, how the battle would cause nothing but violence and destruction. It would appear that he was not quite satisfied with his explanation because ultimately, he surrendered to the Lord, realizing that he was missing something. “*Śiṣyastē’ham śādhi mām tvām prapannam*” “I am your disciple; please teach me, who has taken refuge in you.”⁶

The manifestation of ignorance

Ignorance manifests as resistance to doing what is right, and sometimes even as the inclination to do what is wrong. *Adharma* is the grossest manifestation of ignorance. Sometimes one is compelled to even sacrifice or violate the basic values. Arjuna says in the Bhagavad Gītā, “*atha kena prayuktō’yaṁ pāpam carati pūruṣaḥ*,” “O Lord, impelled by what, does a person go against his values and commit *pāpa*?”⁷ As Pūjya Swamiji⁸ used to say, everybody knows what his values are. Basically everyone knows what is truthfulness, what is right, what is nonviolence, what is kindness, and so on. Still, something compels one to go against these values. The primary obstacle to realizing one's divinity is the violation of values or *adharma*. Hence, the first level of giving up ignorance is to give up *adharma*.

Values, commonly sensed and acquired

The first step towards realizing the inner divinity is a commitment to the right values, such that whatever one does is based on the moral values. Pūjya Swamiji called the moral values as commonly sensed values that everyone is aware of, namely that I should not do to others what I do not want them to do unto me. I do not want others to hurt me, and it is only right that I should not hurt them. I do not want others to cheat me, and lie to me, and therefore, it is only proper that I should not cheat, and lie to them. I want others to be kind, and forgiving to me, and that is what I should be with respect to them. These basic values are known to us because I know that what I expect from others is what they expect from me.

⁵ न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह । *na yotsya iti govindamuktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha* (Bhagavad Gītā 2.9)
'I shall not fight.' Speaking thus to Govinda (Lord Kṛṣṇa), he became silent.

⁶ यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चितं ब्रूहि तन्मे शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ।
yacchrēyaḥ syānniścitaṁ brūhi tanmē śiṣyastē’ham śādhi mām tvām prapannam (Bhagavad Gītā 2.7)
Please tell me that which is truly better for me. I am your student. Please teach me, who has taken refuge in you.

⁷ अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः । *atha kena prayuktō’yaṁ pāpam carati pūruṣaḥ*
अनिच्छन्नपि वार्ष्णेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥ *anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ* (Bhagavad Gītā 3.36)
Arjuna said: Vārṣṇeya (Kṛṣṇa)! Impelled by what, does a person commit sin, as though pushed by some force even though not desiring to?

⁸ Swami Vidadatmananda's teacher Swami Dayananda Saraswati

When I know the commonly sensed values, and what is expected of me on every occasion, why do I still find myself violating the values? The reason is that we have another set of values called acquired values. Some values we have brought with us as *saṃskāras* from past lives, and others are acquired. Basically, we grow up in a society where we find everyone giving importance to wealth, fame, and power. People with wealth, fame, and power are the ones who are honored, and respected all over. While I may not as such have a value for money, I do have a value for being respected, a value for being honored, a value for being successful. Naturally, then, wealth, fame, and power become my acquired values. Hence, I have two sets of values, the universal values or the commonly sensed values, and the acquired values for material things. When there is a clash between the two sets of values, very often, the acquired values win! The commonly sensed moral values such as truthfulness and honesty lose ground. One fails to recognize as to how damaging this situation is. The value for wealth, and power can be assessed as they are gross, and quantifiable. But one does not readily see the damage caused to oneself by the sacrifice of the universal values. So, in order to bring out the divinity within oneself, the important thing for one to understand is the value of values, as to how all the moral values are extremely valuable to oneself.

The first level of shedding ignorance – Renunciation of *adharma*

The manifestation of the self-divinity is impeded by ignorance, which operates in the mind in the form of an impulse to violate the values. In other words, *adharma* is the first level of impediment. Therefore, there should be a commitment to *dharma* or righteousness. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that this is a difficult process; “*yattadagre viṣamiva pariṇāme'mṛtopamam*” “which in the beginning is like poison, but which, in the end, is like nectar.”⁹ One may protest, “Swami, this teaching is not practical. It is all good in the classroom. I guess it is alright for you Swamis, because you are given everything by others. You don't know what the world is like. You don't have to work in the world.” This is, perhaps, a valid objection. Nevertheless, even in simple situations following values such as speaking truth seems to be difficult! Suppose someone asks me, “Swami, what is your age?” If I do not want people to think that I am old, I lie that I am ten years younger than I am. (*laughter*) Or considering my age now, I add five years to it, and people compliment me saying, “You look young, Swamiji.” I happily respond, “Oh, Thank you.” (*laughter*) In other words, the value for looking young makes one to lie about one's age. In order to satisfy the acquired values, such as whether one should look young or look in a particular way, and so on, even in simple day-to-day things, one violates the moral values without realizing. Another example is jealousy, which arises seeing another person getting something more than what one has. Jealousy consumes the individual. Pūjya Swamiji remarked that jealousy has no value, no purpose! One must have the conviction that the basic moral values are valuable, and further, one has to recognize that they are valuable to oneself. The first level of *tyāga* is of this *adharma*, of this compulsion that might arise in one to violate the moral values, to take a short cut, or to get some cheap gains. One has to overcome this tendency and follow the right values. Following *dharma* is the first step towards discovering the inner divinity.

⁹ यत्तदग्रे विषमिव परिणामेऽमृतोपमम् । *yattadagre viṣamiva pariṇāme'mṛtopamam*

तत्सुखं सात्त्विकं प्रोक्तमात्मबुद्धिप्रसादजम् । *tatsukhaṃ sātvikaṃ prōktamātmabuddhiprasādajam* (Bhagavad Gītā 18.37)

That which in the beginning is like poison (and) which, in the end, is like nectar, that happiness is called *sāttvika*, born of the purity of the mind.

The spirit of participation

As I follow the right values, I feel good about myself. In practicing a value, I may perhaps have to put up with some humiliation. It will certainly require sacrificing something that is dear to me. But then, doing something that is the right thing to do gives me self-satisfaction, a self-worth. Having a low self-esteem is a serious issue. Even though other people might respect me, I do not feel that I am worthy or respectable, because I know what all I am doing, and how I am compromising the values. Thus, following a value gives me self-respect, self-worth, and therefore, self-satisfaction. But even this first step has to be preceded by something else. When Arjuna said, “I will not fight,” Lord Kṛṣṇa said, “Arjuna, that is not right.” Pūjya Swamiji used to say that if *karma* or participation was not the purpose of our lives, then the *karmendriyas*, the organs of action, viz., the hands and legs, would not be given to us. Just the head, eyes, and ears would have sufficed. But we are given hands and legs to participate. Lord Kṛṣṇa said to Arjuna, “*śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyed akarmaṇaḥ*.”¹⁰

If one is inactive,¹¹ That is, one knows what is to be done, and still does not do that, then one has to bear the consequences. In the words of Pūjya Swamiji, if one goes against *dharma*, then one gets rubbed in the process. The Bhagavad Gītā and the Upaniṣads point out how the whole universe, except the human being, works on the principle of *paropakāra*, service to others. This is because the rest of the universe is programmed. *īśvara* has programmed everything sentient and insentient in a manner that everything in the creation participates in the scheme of things. Everything contributes.

It is an interdependent universe. Nothing is independent in that nothing can survive on its own without the contribution from others. For this anniversary event to happen, so many have worked behind the scenes. As Śuddhātma said, even the rain gods helped by not bringing the showers! Even in a simple thing such as giving this talk, so much favor from others is involved. There are many factors that make any event possible. When we recognize all the favors that we are receiving constantly, we become humble. There arises in us a sense of gratitude. This gratitude is a great value. We discover this gratitude in ourselves when we recognize how fortunate we are, how much favor we are receiving. It is unasked favor! How all elements of nature are constantly serving us! This year, in the Children’s program, “Being a Contributor – *pañca mahā yajñas*” was the theme that the children worked on in all the camps. The five kinds of offering daily, *pañca mahā yajñas*, must be there in one’s life, because one receives favors from five aspects of the creation. The *devatās*, or the natural forces, and elements, are helping me. My parents, and ancestors are responsible for what I am. My teachers, and thinkers are responsible for all my knowledge. Many human beings help me. All the other beings help me as well. For example, how many volunteers have contributed to make this event possible. How many human beings contribute to my life – farmers, businessmen, and so many others, whoever they may be, and wherever they may be? If I look around, the whole nature is constantly contributing to my life. There is nothing in the universe that does not contribute to my life, directly or indirectly.

¹⁰ नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः । नियतां कुरु कर्मा त्वां कर्मा ज्यैयो ह्यकर्मणः

शरीरस्यात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्ध्येदकर्मणः ॥ *śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmaṇaḥ* (Bhagavad Gītā 3.8)

Do action that is to be done because action is superior to inaction. Even the maintenance of your body would be impossible by inaction.

¹¹ Here inactive is not to be construed as actionless.

The second level of shedding ignorance – Renunciation of non-participation

In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, there is a whole Brāhmaṇa, a whole section, called Madhu Brāhmaṇa, devoted to the description of the interconnectedness in the universe. “*iyam pṛthivī sarvēṣāṃ bhūtānām madhu,*”¹² “this *pṛthivī*, earth, is the product of the actions performed by all the people.” And the *pṛthivī* in turn serves all the living beings. This is how the whole scheme of things is in the creation. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that one cannot become inactive: “*na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaiṣkarmyaṃ puruṣo’śnute*”¹³; He says, “Arjuna, you want *naiṣkarmya*? You want freedom from action? Freedom from action cannot come from inaction; only by performing right action do you gain freedom from action.” Further, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “*niyataṃ kuru karma tvam*”¹⁴ “Perform your duty, that is expected out of you in your role, according to the script of *dharma*.”

”The tendency not to participate should be given up. Some philosophers, like the Sāṅkhyas, and others, say that *karma* is an obstacle to spiritual progress because it involves *karṣṭvam*, i.e., it involves the sense of doership which comes in the way of contemplation upon the self. Maybe at some point it is an obstacle but not in the beginning. As Lord Kṛṣṇa said, “*yajñadānatapaḥkarma na tyājyaṃ kāryameva tat*” “*Yajña, dāna, and tapas* – an action that is a ritual, charity or religious discipline should never be given up.”¹⁴ The participation in the interconnected universe and doing our share to contribute is the second level of giving up the ignorance.

Some people give up *karma* because it is painful, as Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā “*duḥkham ityeva yat karma kāyakleśabhayāt tyajet.*”¹⁵ People give up *karma* for various reasons, either because it is inconvenient, is very boring, does not bring any desirable reward, it is too much of a hassle, or it may even bring pain as in the case of Arjuna. People tell me that they are going to retire, that is, they are taking premature retirement. I tell them that Lord Kṛṣṇa doesn’t want anyone to retire, because He is the one who has done this creation, and He wants us all to participate. There is this tendency to withdraw, to cop out or to drop out because the work is painful. For example, when we were growing up in India, we all used to work very hard to take the final higher secondary examination. Imagine someone who worked hard, and prepared well to take the examination but became so nervous just the day before the exam, went to his dad, and said, “Dad, I have made a decision. I am going to drop out.” (Laughter). This is the easy way out. Arjuna too wanted to drop out. Lord Kṛṣṇa said, “No way! Dropping out is *adharma*. It is ignorance. And therefore you must participate.”

12 इयं पृथिवी सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु, अस्यै पृथिव्यै सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु ।

iyam pṛthivī sarvēṣāṃ bhūtānām madhu, asyai pṛthivyai sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu (Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, 2.5.1)

This earth is (like) honey (i.e., effect, or helpful) to all beings, and all beings are (like) honey to this earth. (from The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, translated by Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashrama, 1997.)

13 न कर्मणामनारम्भान्नैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्नुते । na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaiṣkarmyaṃ puruṣo’śnute

न च संन्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥ na ca saṃnyasanādeva siddhiṃ samadhigacchati (Bhagavad Gītā 3.4)

A person does not gain the state of actionlessness by non-performance of actions. Nor does the person attain success (liberation) out of mere renunciation, *sannyāsa*.

14 यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् । yajñadānatapaḥkarma na tyājyaṃ kāryameva tat

यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥ yajño dānaṃ tapaścaiva pāvanāni manīṣiṇām (Bhagavad Gītā 18.5)

An action that is a ritual, charity, or religious discipline is not to be given up; that is indeed to be done. Ritual, charity, and religious discipline are indeed purifying for those who are discriminative.

15 दुःखमित्येव यत्कर्म कायक्लेशभयात्त्यजेत् । duḥkhamityeva yat karma kāyakleśabhayātyajet

स कृत्वा राजसं त्यागं नैव त्यागफलं लभेत् ॥ sa kṛtvā rājasam tyāgaṃ naiva tyāgaphalaṃ labhet (Bhagavad Gītā 18.8)

One may give up the karma as indeed painful out of fear of affliction to one's physical body. Having done that *rājasika* renunciation, one would certainly not gain the result of renunciation.

The spirit of contribution

Lord Kṛṣṇa did not simply stop with urging Arjuna to participate. He went a step further and said, “*yajñārthāt karmaṇo'nyatra lōkō'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ*.”¹⁶ Not only should one perform action or one's duty but that duty should be performed with the spirit of *yajña*, or with the spirit of offering. In the words of Pūjya Swamiji, one should transform oneself from being a consumer to be a contributor. In other words, doing what is *dharma* or what is right is excellent, but Lord Kṛṣṇa wants us to go a step further. He is teaching us not only to do what is right but to do it as an offering, as a contributor to the comfort, happiness, or well-being of others.

Saccidānanda is our nature

We can contribute at different levels. Our nature is *saccidānanda* – *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*. This is called divinity. We have infinite measure of *saccidānanda* within ourselves. Now, how do we bring out our own divinity? We bring it out by tapping into that divinity. We try to make every action a means of tapping into that divinity, which is *sat-cit-ānanda*. What is *sat*? *Sat* means existence. Doctors and people in the healthcare industry can help people live longer, healthier or happier. One can find ways to contribute to the health, and wellbeing of people. Of course, it is important that I should first live healthy and happy!

What is *cit*? *Cit* is consciousness or knowledge. One can contribute knowledge, by directly imparting knowledge. Or one can find a way to support the *paramparā*, this teaching tradition of the Ārṣa Vidyā, the knowledge of the *ṛṣis*. One can contribute directly by teaching. Many of the people who have been coming here for long time are very learned, and scholarly people in their own right. They can share their knowledge. Swami Chinmayananda Saraswatiji used to say, “If I have one unsuspecting listener I will attack him.” (*laughter*). It was his style, he would say that. (*laughter*). The idea is to share the knowledge. By sharing the knowledge, one will realize how much one knows, and what joy it gives. Just as giving love gives one great joy, sharing knowledge also gives one great joy, because it is the nature of oneself. It is the manifestation of one's fullness. One has to discover the ways to share the knowledge. There is a Swami who comes to Tattvatirtha¹⁷ every year from Śimla. He attends our classes, and writes letters to his devotees and friends, summarizing something from the class. People are very happy to receive his letters. All I am saying is that everybody knows, everyone has a lot of knowledge to share. As Swami Chinmayananda Saraswatiji used to say, “Don't be a spiritual capitalist!” (*laughter*). Thus, in some way or the other, sharing our knowledge directly, or being a part of sharing the knowledge, is another way of owning up ourselves.

What is *ānanda*? *Ānanda* is happiness or love. We can give *ānanda*. You may say, “How can I be *ānanda*? I feel so sad within. How can I give out *ānanda*?” (*laughter*). We want the world to make us happy, to fulfill our desires, to do what we want. We want the world to love us. This is the wrong attitude to have because it goes against a very fundamental reality. Nobody can give us love, and nobody can give us happiness. Nothing can give us happiness. Happiness comes by giving happiness. Love has to be discovered by giving love. Let us resolve to make our actions as a means of reaching out to people, to contribute, to create some comfort in somebody, to bring a little bit of happiness to somebody. One can make someone feel loved. One can express some kindness in one's actions. One can ask oneself, “Can I be compassionate? Can I be forgiving?” Kindness, compassion, and forgiveness are all expressions of love, and one can display them in one's life and actions. But one may say, “Swamiji, I love him but why do I have to show it in action?”

16 यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः । यज्ज्ञार्थार्थात्कर्मणो'न्यत्रा लोको'याम् कर्मबन्धनाह

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ *tadārtham karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara* (Bhagavad Gītā 3.9)

A person is bound by *karma* if it is not done as *yajña* (i.e., as an offering to *īśvara*). For this reason, Kaunteya (Arjuna)! Being one free from attachment, perform action for the sake of that (*yajña*).

17 Adhyatma Vidya Mandir, Ahmedabad, India. (<http://www.tattvatirtha.org/index.html>)

Lord Kṛṣṇa says that love and *bhakti* are not simply mental moods. They have to be expressed. There was a great teacher by the name of Vallabhācārya who explained the word “*bhakti*.” The word is derived from the root “*bhaj*” – *sevāyām*. “*Bhaj*” means “to serve,” one of the simple meanings. To “*bhaj*,” the *pratyaya* (i.e., suffix) “*ktin*” is added, which means “with devotion or with love.” So, according to Vallabhācārya, “*bhakti*” means “serving with devotion,” and not just the feeling of devotion in the mind.

As Pūjya Swamiji would say, “Physicalize your attitude.” If you want to express love, physicalize it, meaning that action becomes a vehicle for the manifestation of your love. If someone says, “I don’t feel the love,” the answer would be, “Do it; fake it till you make it.” (*laughter*). Because there is an infinite reservoir of kindness within ourselves, and we can easily afford to give a little bit. But we are not sure. “Swamiji, if I become kind, they will take advantage of me, and they will use me as a door mat.” Such fears and insecurities are there. Really speaking, they are the obstacles in giving. Our own minds become the obstacle. Well then, one does not need to give everything away. One can start by giving one little thing at a time. One can begin with just one act of kindness, a little bit of compassion, a little bit of forgiveness. If one feels good, then one will be encouraged to give more. This is the way to begin contributing *ānanda* or love.

Sat-cit-ānanda is what we have in infinite measure. That is what we can contribute in our own ways. What is important of course, is the spirit of contribution. We may not recognize that we have plenty to contribute. But we can start in a small measure and slowly discover the abundance in us to give from. Once a woman came to Pūjya Swamiji, and told him, “Swamiji. I hate my boss. What should I do?” He told her, “Every morning when you go to work, get a fresh and fragrant rose. Go to your boss and present the rose to him.” The woman was bewildered and remarked, “Really, do I present a rose to him?” Swamiji replied, “Yes, Do it.” The woman could not still believe it but Swamiji insisted that she must do that, if necessary, faking it in the beginning. Swamiji's prescription was to give the flower for one *mandala*, or 41 days. The lesson from the story is that the woman did what Swamiji told her, and her perspective changed.

The third level of shedding ignorance – Renunciation of action

By being a contributor, one progressively comes to the next stage. As Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji said the first stage is the performance of *karma*, then comes *karma-sannyāsa*. One may ask, “Swami, do I always have to perform the *karma*? Is there no end to it?” If duty is done in the right way, then there is an end to it. The inner satisfaction that, “I have done enough,” should arise in me. Of course, *karma-sannyāsa*, is renouncing action ritually, by a procedure. But ideally, when I feel that *tamas* is gone, that is, inactivity is gone, *rajas* is gone, that is, my selfishness and grabbing tendencies are gone, then I have *sattva*. *Sattva* is the last expression of ignorance, but a very favorable expression of ignorance. As the mind becomes *sāttvika*, there is progressively a self-satisfaction which grows into a certain degree such that I no longer see the need for doing anything. Now my priorities change, and there arises in me a strong desire for knowledge, *vividiṣā*. When this happens, the scriptures say that one can then renounce the duties. So, one can give up the duty but only to embrace a greater responsibility of pursuing knowledge. *Karma-tyāga*, renouncing actions, is the next level of renunciation. Then, one goes to the teacher, and the final renunciation happens in the wake of knowledge. The final layer of ignorance goes. Already a lot of ignorance is gone, and one is pretty close. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “*svakarmanā tamabhyarcya siddhiṁ vindati mānavaḥ*, by worshipping *īśvara* with one's *karma* or duties, a human being attains *siddhi* or perfection.”¹⁸ This perfection is a relative perfection, called *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi* or purification of mind.

¹⁸ यतः प्रवृत्तिभूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् । *yataḥ pravṛttirbhūtānāṁ yēna sarvamidam tatam*

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ *svakarmanā tamabhyarcya siddhiṁ vindati mānavaḥ* (Bhagavad Gītā 18.46)

Through one's duty, worshipping Him from whom is the creation of the beings, by whom all this is pervaded, a human being gains success.

Pūjya Swamiji used to say that when one gets to this stage, one has achieved 80% of the final goal. *Antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi* is not an ordinary thing. That is what takes time. To purify the mind of *rajas* and *tamas* or the *rāga-dveṣas* is a big thing. It is like turning the flow of the river. The Kathopaniṣad says, “*kaściddhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣat āvṛttacakṣuḥ amṛtatvam icchan*”¹⁹ “desiring immortality this discriminating person turned his faculty completely inwards” ; “turning inwards” means that he has made his mind free from *rāga-dveṣas*.

The fourth level of shedding ignorance – Renunciation of doership by knowledge

The mind now becomes inward-looking and abiding. That is the condition which is suited for the pursuit of knowledge. He goes to the teacher who is *śrotriya* and *brahmaniṣtha*,²⁰ and follows the pursuit of knowledge through *śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nididhyāsanam*, culminating in the final renunciation of the ignorance in the form of *karṭṛtvam* or doership. That is what Vedānta teaches as how to become free from doership by recognizing that the self is *akartā* or actionless. Of course, when the preparedness in terms of the relative perfection is already there, then the *śravaṇam* becomes most effective. It is said, “*paunaḥpunyena śravaṇam kuryāt*” “keep listening to scriptures again, and again.” Every time you listen, there is something to learn! Many people come and tell me, “Swamiji, every time I listen to the tenth man story, I get something new out of it.” Something clicks at different times. There is no alternative to *śravaṇam*. Listening must be continued. It is ideal, of course, if you come to a place like the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam where there is direct listening. Failing that, you can take advantage of the other means, such as the electronic media, that are available to us.

Translating the teaching to our lives

There is also an important thing called *mananam*. Let me give you my idea of *mananam*. Traditionally *mananam* is explained as a process of reasoning by which one removes one's doubts. I don't remember having many doubts anyway. Because the way the teacher teaches, it doesn't leave any doubt. Maybe the teacher does the *mananam* for us. When we listen to the teacher, and when we understand what the teacher is communicating, the important thing that we have to do is to ask what does the teaching mean to me? Suppose I have understood the principle of transforming myself from a consumer to a contributor, what does it mean to me in the way I am living my life? What should I be doing? What does it mean for me to be a contributor? In what way is the spirit of contribution reflected in my actions, attitudes, and values? In other words, translating the teaching to one's life is an extension of *śravaṇam*, which can be called as *mananam*. This is an important step. What we listen, and enjoy in the classes doesn't stay with us. We have not performed that step of translating the understanding to our own lives. And we find ourselves forgetting everything that we have listened, and we go back to the same rut. Therefore, *mananam* is very important.

19 पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत्स्वयम्भूस्तस्मात्पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् । *parāñci khāni vyatṛṇatsvayambhūstasmātparāṅ paśyati nāntarātman*

कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्षदावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥ *kaściddhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣadāvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchān*

(Kathopaniṣad, 4.1). The Lord destroyed the sense organs (by making them) extrovert. Therefore, everyone perceives outside (objects, and) not the *ātmā* within. Desiring immortality, a rare discriminative one with withdrawn eyes (from outer objects) sees the *ātmā* within. (from The Kathopaniṣad, based on Swami Paramarthananda's talks, compiled by Srojini Varadarajan, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Coimbatore, India, 2012.)

20 तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् । *tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrōtriyam brahmaniṣṭham* (Muṇḍakopaniṣad, 1.2.12). To gain the knowledge of brahman, he must go with sacrificial twigs in hand to a teacher who is well-versed in scriptures, and who has clear knowledge about brahman. (Muṇḍakopaniṣad, Part 1 Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Arsha Vidya Research Publication Trust, Chennai, India, 2006.)

We should be asking ourselves, “What does the teaching mean to me? How should I talk? How should I act? How should I change my attitudes?” The third step is *nididhyāsanam*, which is to assimilate the teaching, and make it our own.

The blessing of Vedānta

We discussed how ignorance is removed in several stages. First, *adharmā* is given up by following *dharma*, by following values. Second, inaction is given up by being active. Third, Self-centeredness is given up by being a contributor. Finally, the *karṣṭvam* is given up by knowledge of the self or *ātmā* that it is actionless. It is by *tyāga* that one gains immortality, “*tyāgenaike amṛtatvamānuśuḥ*.” *Amṛtam* is ambrosia and means *ānanda*. The whole process is for *ānanda*. Otherwise, who will want to do all this stuff if it was just for exertion? Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “*yattadagre viṣamiva*,” in the beginning it might look like exertion; “*pariṇāme'mṛtopamam*” but it culminates into *amṛtatvam*, meaning *ānanda*.⁹ So, Vedānta teaches us the journey of *tyāga*. And “*tyāgāt śantiḥ anantaram*,”³ any time one gives up something or one does something right, there is self-satisfaction and peace of mind.

This is the blessing of Vedānta, which teaches us *tyāga* as a means of removing ignorance and owning up our true nature, which is divinity. The more we discover the divinity, wholeness, fullness in us, the more we discover the true nature of ourselves. As our perception of ourselves changes, our perception of others also changes. We look at others the way we look at ourselves. No separate process is required. The extent to which we discover divinity in ourselves, we see the manifestation of divinity everywhere. For this discovery, first, it requires wisdom and clarity of understanding. Second, it requires courage to follow the values and to do what is right. We pray to Pūjya Swamiji, and Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti to give us the wisdom to accept gracefully what we cannot change, and give us the courage to do what we can to bring about the change to become a contributor. Let that wisdom, courage, and strength from our *gurus* and Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti be with us. Om!

**The 29th Anniversary Celebration
of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam,
Anaikatty is on 10th November**