



# arśha vijnana gurupatala Sūktā

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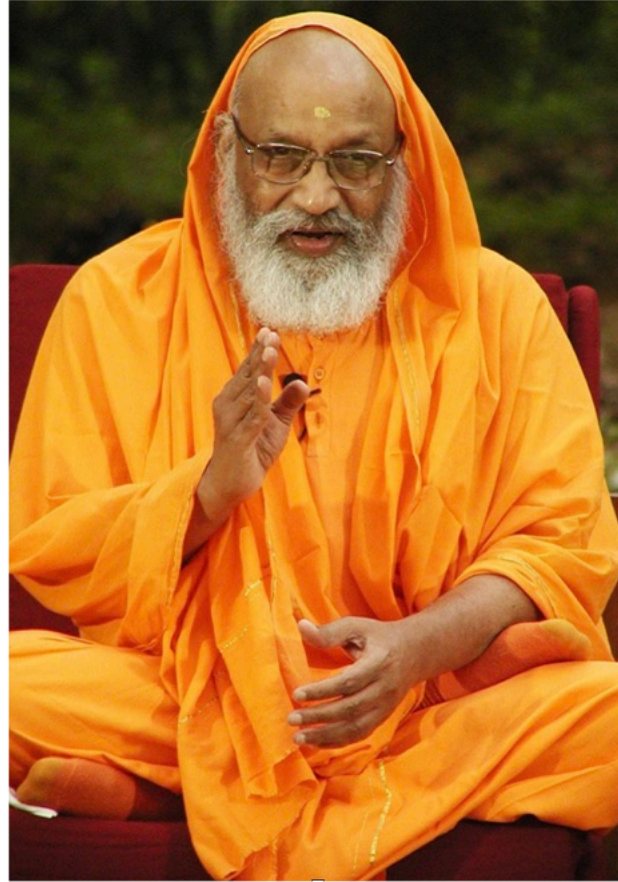
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## THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

*by Pujya Swamiji*



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The importance and reverence given to the teacher is something unique to the spiritual tradition of Vedānta. This is because for us the spiritual goal or the ultimate end of a human being is knowing oneself and knowing the Lord.

The *śāstra* tells us that between the individual, the world, and the Lord there is a certain identity or oneness. It informs you that this oneness cannot be separate from you. You are the one who is conscious of the world, and in fact, the world can be defined as anything that you are conscious of. There is nothing that you can say exists of which you are not conscious. Not only is everything you know the world, anything you don't know, but can know later, is also the world. Further, whatever is known to someone else is the world. In other words, the world consists of these two things: what is known to you and what is not known to you. Even if what is unknown does not become known to you at all, still it is known to you as being unknown—you are aware of your ignorance. What you know and what you don't

know—these two things together constitute what we call the world. The entire world is what is known and what is not known.

In this world that you are conscious of, there are many things and there are many beings. All of them are objects of your knowledge. Is this world entirely independent of me, the one who is conscious of it as an object, or am I part of the whole? The *śāstra* says not just that I am included in the whole, but that I am both the subject and the object. I am the conscious knower of the world, and the world is also me. What, then, is the common basis of the knower and known, the subject and object? The subject that objectifies the object cannot know the common basis; the subject can only know the object. Our usual means of knowledge—perception and various forms of inference, take the subject, the knower, for granted and focus on the object. They are not meant to show us the basis, the substratum, that connects the subject and object. Although we know ourselves experientially, we seem to miss our essential nature because the knower is constantly looking outward, as it were. Our usual instruments of knowledge—our body, mind and sense organs—cannot and are not meant to ‘see’ our true nature.

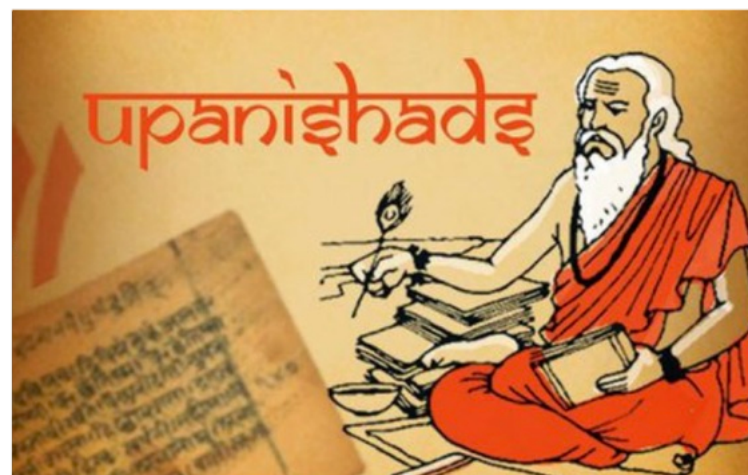
This is because it is you, the subject, who employs various means of knowledge to know an object. Anything known to you is an object—including time, space and everything in the universe of time and space. If there is a common basis, a substratum that includes you and the universe of time and space, you have no way of knowing it through your available means of knowledge. You have to give up for a number of reasons. All of the means of knowledge at your disposal are external to you. That is, they are employed by you, the subject, to know things other than yourself. Secondly, the knowledge gained by these means is the product or discovery of a human being; it is within the realm of what a human being can figure out. As a human being you have the capacity to stumble upon the knowledge of something that

can be objectified by your means of knowledge. However, you cannot just happen upon the knowledge that you are the whole. How would you stumble upon this truth? If you are the subject who uses a means of knowledge to know things other than yourself—things which you can objectify through your mind or sense organs—how can you possibly stumble upon the truth of yourself, the subject?

You can stumble upon an objectifiable empirical truth. The discovery of penicillin, for instance, was stumbled upon. Penicillin was an amazing discovery that was made purely by accident. A scientist was culturing a certain strain of bacteria for another experiment. When the bacteria unexpectedly died, he set about to find the cause. He found a fungus formation on the bacteria, and in subsequent experiments with that fungus duplicated the result with other bacterial strains. Then he knew he had stumbled upon something important. We can thank that scientist for enabling us to perform the varieties of surgery that are done today. Or, more correctly, we can thank penicillin. The scientist himself was baffled as to why he would receive praise

for the discovery, saying that he was not responsible for the substance that he accidentally happened upon. The substance was simply there. Anyone else, he said, could have discovered the same thing. His humility was based on his appreciation of the fact that any object can be stumbled upon, can be discovered.

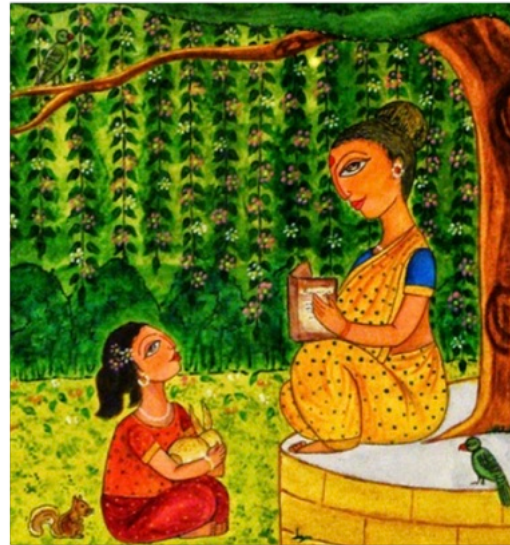
What cannot be objectified, however, cannot be stumbled upon. You cannot stumble upon the essence, the common basis, of the subject and object, because you are that very essence. There is no way to stumble upon the knowledge that you are this essence, because it has to come





from that very essence, that very source which makes it possible to discover things and to wield all other methods of knowledge. Only the very source of this world, the very source of all knowledge can give this knowledge to us. The body of knowledge which comes from this source is called Vedānta, as it is found in the end part (*anta*) of the Veda. We look upon it as a means of knowledge. Being a means of knowledge, it is not a matter of belief.

We generally believe that religious scriptures are the products of revelation. The Bible is believed to have been revealed by God and the Gospels, by the Son of God whose words were collected by his disciples. Later the prophet Mohammed said that he was the chosen mouthpiece of God. He said that God talked to him in his dreams and that he compiled God's words into the verses called the suras that form the Koran. It would seem that God goes on revealing different things to different people at different times. What are we to make of this? Maybe God has different tongues, so that there is one set of truths for one prophet, and another for a different prophet, which is why God revealed different facts to different peoples. Or, maybe different Gods spoke to different prophets? Which truth should I believe; which truth should I not believe? Furthermore, why should I believe any of them when there are so many different versions, none of which can be verified? According to one set of beliefs, if I follow a certain path, I will go to heaven. That requires that, first of all, I have to believe that I will survive after the death of the body. Then, I must believe that heaven exists, and that I will like being there. It is one continuous set of beliefs, non-verifiable beliefs. You may hold a belief that is non-verifiable, but how can you convert another person to a belief that is non-verifiable?



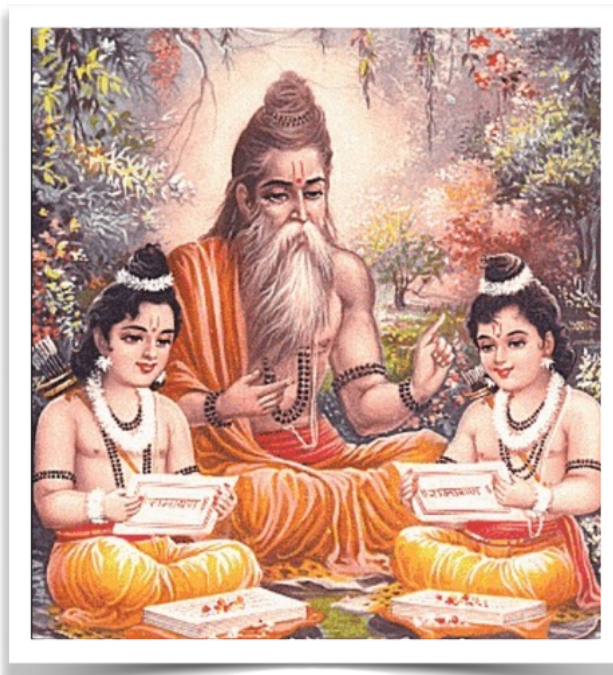
Some beliefs are verifiable, like some systems of medicine. In homeopathy, for instance, there actually is no medicine in the pill that is given as a remedy. According to homeopathy, every disease is due to a gross substance, and the subtle aspect of the same substance will relieve you of the disease. The basis of the treatment is that similar cures similar. The diagnosis is determined from your symptoms and seemingly irrelevant information, such as your marital status, salary, and so on. Then the doctor will refer to his manual of symptoms and remedies and choose the proper one. He then introduces one drop of

the mother tincture into a big bucket of water and goes on stirring it for hours. Then he takes one drop of this diluted substance, puts it in another bucket of clean water, and again stirs it. This procedure is called potentizing the remedy. A substance is considered highly potentized if it has gone through the process ten times. Finally, a tiny pill is made of a drop of the final substance mixed with sugar water. Although homeopathy may not be understood scientifically, the system often works; it is verifiable. If you say, "Swamiji I don't believe in it," you can try it yourself. You can be certain that if your symptoms worsen the next day, the doctor will be very happy because it means he or she has given you the correct medicine. The homeopathic principle is that the cure will, at first, aggravate your malady.

According to homeopathic doctors, there is a medicine for every condition. Unlike an unverifiable belief, homeopathy is verifiable. While it may not be a system of medicine, it is a system of cure. Āyurveda also is a system of cure that uses herbal remedies. Although we may not know what part of a particular leaf cures an illness, we know that the leaf does cure. Unlike a system of medicine, which extracts a certain part of a leaf to make a remedy, both āyurveda and homeopathy use the whole leaf. The whole environment remains intact. Even though, in a particular leaf, there

may be only one substance that is the actual cure, the other substances in the leaf are considered to be adjuncts, and are not discarded. The medicinal substance in its own natural environment is considered curative in the Ayurvedic and homeopathic systems. At any rate, you can verify your belief in such systems of cure by taking the medicine.

But how are you going to verify your belief that there is a heaven? If you say, “Swamiji, after death we can verify that there is heaven,” then I will have to accompany you there. Even then, if you tell me, “Swamiji, what you said is true. Here we are in heaven,” that is not verification. You have to verify it here. If I were to tell you, “Yesterday I went to heaven and came back. There is a heaven,” that statement would require your belief, because it is non-verifiable by you. How would you know that I went to heaven? Just because I said so? In fact, that is how belief systems work—on the authority of someone else. However, just because the existence of heaven is based on a non-verifiable belief, that does not prove that heaven doesn’t exist. The non-existence of heaven also requires proof in order to be verified. How can you verify that heaven does not exist? To be verifiable, it must be within the scope of our logic and perception, thus being available for research and criticism. Since you cannot prove heaven’s non-existence, much less prove its existence, we can give the benefit of the doubt to the scriptures and accept that there is a heaven.



The Vedas also tell us that heavens exist, but they tell us that heaven is not our goal. Heaven, as well as *naraka*, a place of pain, is only temporary, because they are within the fold of time. You go there and you come back. According to the Vedas, since heaven is not a final destination, the very effort to get there is meaningless. So although the Vedas provide methods for going to heaven, they also point out its limitations and ask you to consider why you want to go there.

You may say you want to go to heaven because you want to be free from suffering. Yet you won’t be free, because even there you will have a boss—Indra, the ruler of heaven. You may say that as a denizen in heaven, you will have a better standard of living than you now have. But there, too, you will only be an employee. Moreover, another denizen may have a more prestigious job. So in heaven, too, there will be a lot of comparison. The *śāstra* says that in heaven there are different classes of denizens, enjoying varying degrees of happiness. There is a karma-*deva*, a *deva*, an Indra, a Bṛhaspati, a Prajāpati, in ascending order of rank and degree of happiness. Therefore, even in heaven there is *tāratamya*—comparative degrees of *sukha*, happiness. Thus, the *śāstra* does not present heaven as the ultimate end.

You may say, “I want to go to heaven because as I am now, I am not okay.” Then I would ask why you don’t become okay. You have so much time available here to work on being okay. “I don’t think I will ever be okay.” So you have made two conclusions: “I am not okay” and “I don’t think I will ever be okay.” What is the basis of your



conclusions? “I am over forty years old now.” What does it mean to be over forty? You come to realize that your attempts to make happiness last have not worked. You still feel incomplete. If you are an Indian, perhaps you came to America. Then you got the green card, thinking that once you obtained the green card, everything would work out, but even after getting it, you haven’t changed much. Then you thought that if you got married, you’d be okay—you’d find that elusive everlasting happiness. But even marriage didn’t make you feel totally okay. You thought that if you had a child, you would be okay. After having the child, you find that, well, you’re okay but also not okay. Then you say, “Swamiji, now that I have a child, I don’t want to be here—I want to go to India.” Well, all right, go to India. “I can’t go to India yet, Swamiji. I think I should have some more money before I go.” When will you get that extra money so that you can freely go to India and educate your children there? Year after year, you go on postponing the trip. Your child has become a teenager by now. He comes home at eleven, twelve o’clock at night, and is not available even to talk to. So how will you take him to India? When are you going to talk to that teenager?

Naturally, having gone through these experiences, you now have a middle-age crisis. It is not that there were no crises before middle age, but before this time, you always thought you would solve them. By the time you reach middle age, you find that what you have been doing doesn’t work. And your psychological system also doesn’t wait for you to straighten out your life to your liking. All kinds of psychological problems start at this time; unresolved issues from your childhood

surface. And thus, not only do you feel that you are not okay, you conclude that there is no possibility of being okay. Then, when somebody promises that in heaven you will be okay, you are eager to believe it. You hold onto that belief for dear life. You hope to go to heaven in order to be happy, and until then, you live like a zombie, because that belief system has given you no hope for this life. It only instructs you to about what you need to do so that you will be allowed into heaven. Even after following all the instructions, you will have to wait for judgment day.



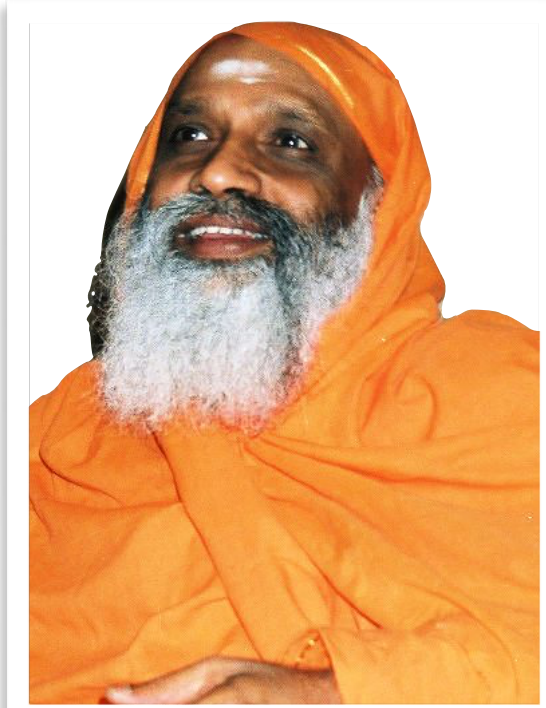
The two-fold conclusion that I am not well, and that I can never be well, is a belief that people somehow live with. The *śāstra* challenges this belief and asks whether you have really inquired into yourself before arriving at this conclusion. You may say, “Yes, I think about myself all the time. Not a day goes by that I don’t think about myself. Every morning when I wake up, I think about the kind of life I live and wonder why I should get up.” This erroneous belief you hold about yourself is *avicāra-siddha*, established without inquiry. Because it is arrived at without *vicāra*, inquiry, it is merely a notion. And it is a commonly held notion. What you are immediately aware of—a physical body, mind, and sense complex—seems to be you. You feel limited by it and

therefore feel like an insignificant person. Naturally, then, nothing is okay with you.

What Vedānta has to say about you completely negates your notion about yourself. And what it says about you is verifiable. While other traditions may also say that you are limitless, only Vedānta is a

teaching tradition, a means of knowledge, which will allow you to clearly see yourself as limitless. The words of the *śāstra* handled by the teacher point out that what you think about yourself is not true and that you are, in fact, the whole. As you listen to the words, you verify the fact for yourself. Since it is yourself that is talked about, it is verifiable. Vedānta doesn't talk about heaven; it talks about you, the one who wants to go to heaven. It shows how, in your pursuit of all pleasurable things, you are really seeking only yourself.

*Ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati*, "Everything is desirable only for the sake of the self." These words are attributed to Yājñavalkya, a great sage to whom they say the entire Śukla-yajurveda was revealed. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, he has a dialogue with his wife, Maitreyi, in which he tells her of his plan to go to the forest and become a *sannyāsi* so that he can gain *mokṣa*, liberation or freedom. Renouncing his vast wealth, he explained to her that he would leave half his riches, land and cattle to her. Maitreyi noted that the things he was leaving behind were obviously no longer valuable to him in his pursuit of freedom and asked him whether that same freedom would come to her if she held onto the things he was leaving behind. He said it would not. Why, then, she asked, should she hold onto those things that were of no use in the pursuit of freedom? Instead, she also wanted to pursue that knowledge which leads to liberation. She asked Yājñavalkya to teach her. It was then that he told her, *ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati*, "Everything is desirable only for the sake of the self." You love an object for your own sake, not for the sake of the object. While you may think that you love objects and people because of what or who they are, in fact, what you love is yourself. Yājñavalkya recited a long list of



things that people generally pursue in life. All of them are sought for yourself alone. For instance, you love your spouse for your own sake; you love your son for your own sake. Whatever you seem to love is nothing but the reflection of your own love. When somebody pleases you, you want to be near that person because you want your pleased self. It is the pleased self that you love. If a person displeases you, will

you tell that person, "I love you"? Once upon a time, you did tell that person, "I love you", and you got married. "I love you," you murmured. Now you are displeased and you say, "I allow you. Let us have some space." This is the polite way of saying, "Get lost." It is something like a person eating a dead pig and calling it pork, to avoid feeling disgusted or guilty. Or he eats a dead cow and calls it steak, so that there is nothing at stake. Even though you can talk of unpleasant things in a nice way, you can't say, "I love you because you make me unhappy." The fact that such a statement is impossible means that what I love is not the object which pleases me, but the pleased self.

At times I am pleased; at other times I am displeased. Of the two, which is my true nature? Is the pleased self me, or is the displeased self me? If the displeased self is me, then I should be pleased with being what I am. Thus, I should be happy when I am displeased; I shouldn't feel ill at ease.

But I don't feel at home when I am displeased. That proves the point that the displeased self is not me. The pleased self is me. In those moments when you are pleased, what obtains is the self. That self is not the wanting self that you usually consider yourself to be. In fact, it is just the opposite. Even though you say, "I am not okay," you are happy occasionally. At those moments of happiness, what obtains as you is the self that is pleased, which has no lack. You have no complaint to make



about that self, and therefore, that self is you. But since, out of ignorance, you take that self for granted, you must come to know the true nature of your self.

As Yājñavalkya tells Maitreyi, *ātmā vāre draṣṭavyaḥ*, “The self, my dear, is to be seen,” where ‘seen’ means to be clearly known. You must know the self just as clearly as you see a flower in your hand. How is that to be done? *Śrotavyaḥ mantavyaḥ nididhyāsitaḥ*, “It is to be listened about, analyzed and contemplated upon.” *Śrotavyaḥ*—the revealing words of the *śāstra*, delivered by a teacher who knows their truth, must be listened to; *mantavyaḥ*—all doubts must be removed so that the truth of the self is cognitively assimilated, and *nididhyāsitaḥ*—it has to be contemplated upon so that you clearly know it is you. Contemplation reveals old patterns of thinking which are obstructions to assimilating the newly discovered truth about the self. One has hypnotized oneself into believing that “I am not okay”, and the world seems to confirm that belief all the time. So I have to de-hypnotize myself—first by knowing what I am, and then by living a life which is conducive for this de-conditioning. That is the purpose of *śravaṇa manana nididhyāsana*.

Thus, you do not stumble upon the truth—you must hear it from a teacher who knows. And you must verify it for yourself. Since Vedānta is a means of knowledge through which you gain this verifiable truth, what objection can you have to employing this means? If you are a thinker who is able to understand how a means of knowledge works, you will have no problem whatsoever. You just need to employ the means of knowledge to know whether it works or not. For instance, I

know very well that in order to see color, I must employ my eyes, not my ears. My eyes are the means of knowing color. Do I need to be convinced of that fact? Do I demand to have other proof that my eyes see? No. I merely need to open them. I am the only authority who can say whether I see or not.

A means of knowledge is validated by employing that means of knowledge. That is how we know whether it works or not. If I say that Vedānta, the words of the *śāstra*, are a means of knowledge, you have to employ them and see whether they work or not. That is because the subject matter is verifiable—the subject matter is you. You have to employ the words and see whether they work or not. Before you do so, you cannot say that they don’t work; you cannot say they are not true. Therefore, a means of knowledge is a proof in itself. It validates itself by doing exactly what it is supposed to do.

That knowledge that I am the reality of everything and at the same time, free from everything, gives me freedom. And Vedānta is the method to gain the knowledge. Vedānta is not simply words. It consists of words, no doubt, but they are not descriptive words; they are employed words. You use these words in order to remove them. You use them, remove them, and make them stick at the point where they have to stick. The capacity to make you see is not in the written words alone. In fact, the whole Vedic tradition is an oral tradition, because in order for the teaching to work, it cannot simply be read. While the books can be of use to support the teaching, one has to expose oneself to the words as employed by the teacher.



# WOMEN AND MOKSHA

by Swaminiji



Growing up, there were many things in the Hindu tradition that I did not understand. For example, women were not allowed in the *garbhagudi*, the innermost sanctum sanctorum of a temple. Even in Devi temples, men solely dressed the Goddesses and were in charge of performing all *pūjās*. There is a paucity of women in public positions, in all the areas of the tradition. Everyone questions these practices at some point in their lives, whether it is done vocally or quietly. When the elders are probed, they

all say the same thing, which is, they simply practice what was handed down to them by their elders. Such responses leave one dissatisfied; it propels one to research into the cause for these glaring discrepancies in the tradition. This was my prime reason to study the scriptures, *mokṣa* followed soon after.

The phenomenon that has come to be known as patriarchy is not new a new phenomenon. Keeping this in mind, yet in view of Hindu tradition,

the right question to ask is therefore, whether these practices have scriptural sanctions at all? The short and complete answer is “No.”

## What do the Vedas say?

Hindu scriptures are divided into four categories. They are as follows:

1. *Śrūtis*- Primary text of the Hindu tradition.
2. *Smṛtis* - Scriptures reiterating the knowledge from the *śrūtis*.
3. *Purāṇas*- Mythological stories where the message of the Vedas are repeated via stories.
4. *Itihāsas*- Historical literature such as the famous Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa.
5. *Sūtra* - Small aphorisms of religious codes of conduct, *dharma*.

For the sake of this investigation, we don't have to look too far. We only have to rely on the veracity of the primary scriptures of the Hindu tradition - the *śrūti*. Upon studying these texts, one immediately notices that all the texts address the ‘two-legged beings’; in other words- humans, and humans include both both men and women. The texts are non-discriminatory when talking about the four human pursuits - *puruṣārthas*, which include *mokṣa*. It says it is applicable to both men and women, thus, sanctioning women as being qualified to pursue self-knowledge.

Even when looked at from the level of divinities, there is no difference between the feminine (Goddess) and the masculine (Lord). We invoke the feminine as Dūrga, Devī, Adi Śakti, para Śakti, and the same is invoked as the Lord in the masculine form.

To illustrate this point further, in the tradition we practice ancestral worship, in it we always invoke the *ṛṣis*; among them are 27 female *ṛṣis*. Their forms, *mantras*, and entire *sūktās* are found in the Vedas. A famous example is the *Devī sūktā*. Furthermore, investigation into the *śrūti* reveal that some of the *śrūti* themselves were channeled by women. Female sages like Sulabhā, Ghoṣā, Lopāmudrā, etc are all erudite sages mentioned in the scriptures. This shows us that there never was a scriptural sanction for what is most often practiced today,



the scriptures does not exclude women from practicing and studying this knowledge.

### Manusmṛiti

There are many disturbing statements in the early *smṛti* literature. One such work is the Manusmṛiti, which is maligned for giving a wrong message to and about women. It equates women to dogs and says both need a good beating. It declares that women are to be monitored and controlled at all times; as a young girl by her father, after getting married by her husband, and later in old age by her son. It makes statements on how to select an ideal bride for a son, to choose a girl who does not laugh or cry too much as excessive laughter does not suit a woman.

All these statements are extremely troublesome and has no doubt resulted in a number of the literate, intelligentsia in India to reject Hinduism altogether. There is no pride in owning up and embracing one's roots. How does one retain the pride of being a Hindu, a Vedic woman, connected with the grandeur of the teaching? Women who reject the tradition, cannot be blamed for it because women haven't been taught and haven't had a chance to learn the scriptures. Hearing snippets of Manusmṛiti is disheartening, one is bound to be feel disadvantaged and dejected. Hence, it is all the more important to understand that the Vedas do not sanction differentiation between men and women. In rejecting the tradition altogether, one also renounces the good, it is like throwing the baby out with the bath water.

### Change in Women's role in the Hindu tradition with time

Manu's writing give us a glimpse into the historical circumstances in which the post-Vedic women lived. In the same text, he talks about

thread ceremony for women, which is an initiation given at a young age so that one can study the vedas. Today, the thread ceremony is only given to men. In the same text he also states that women should go for *bhikṣā*, with a caveat that, women could only go to their friends and family's houses for safety reasons; he comments on the culture having deteriorated in his time. He talks about women going to the *Gurukula* to study the Vedas, proving that it must have been common for women to

go to the *Gurukula* in his time. We find that even in Yajurveda, women who studied the *Kaṭhaśākhā* were called *Kaṭhaki*. All this is ample proof of women in the Vedic times attending the Gurukula.

The Vedas talk of *Āśrama*, a set of duties dependent upon one's stage in life. They are *Brahmacharya* (student), *Gṛhastha* (householder), *Vanaprastha* (forest dweller), and *Sannyāsa* (renunciate). One is advised to commit to a particular *āśrama* completely. The Vedas gave the same two options to both men and women at the end of *Gurukula*. They could take *brahmacharya* on the way to *sannyāsa* or get married and enter the *gṛhastha āśrama*. It is interesting to note that the Vedas call a women who chooses *brahmacharya* a *brahmavādinī* and one who becomes a teacher and enters the *gṛhastha āśrama* a *sadyōvadhū*.



The *agnihotra* ritual, which is the offering of ghee into the sacred fire, is a great example of the inclusion of women in the tradition during the Vedic times. The Vedas say this ritual is to be performed by both men and women; not only does it sanction the participation of women but it is enforced by stating that any woman who does not adhere to these codes will be thrown out of society just like men. Today, women are not allowed to perform the *agnihotra* ritual. So all these examples are

indications of a drastic change in the tradition between the Vedic and post-Vedic times.

### Women ṛṣis from the Vedas

There are many examples of teachers and sages from the Vedas. Lets look at some of their stories.

**Gārgī:** When King Janaka desired to have a *sabhā*, a gathering of intelligent people, Gārgī, who was in the court of the King, was appointed as the judge for the debate. She quizzed sage Yājñavalkya on the nature of *ātman*. The dialogue between Gārgī and Yājñavalkya is beautiful. In the story, Yājñavalkya, who was supposed to be a wise and even-tempered man, loses his temper, displaying his limitations, while Gārgī is recognized as an erudite scholar.

**Lopāmudrā:** King Agastya's *ghora tapas*, difficult austerities, led to Lord Viṣṇu himself incarnating as Hayagrīva - the one with a horse's face, to teach the *Lalitā Triśatī*. However, upon manifesting, Hayagrīva chose to give this knowledge to his wife, Lopāmudrā instead as he saw her to be a real *ṛṣi*. Lopāmudrā then went on to teach Agastya.

**Maitreyī & Kātyāyanī:** Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī were wives of the aforementioned Yājñavalkya. Before going to the forest, he divided his wealth equally among the two wives. Maitreyī asks Yājñavalkya if this wealth would give her that for which he was giving up everything. When Yājñavalkya said no, Maitreyī asked him to teach her what he knew before he left. In this way, Yājñavalkya gives Maitreyī self-knowledge. Sureśvarāchārya, in his commentary of Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, says that these two women later went on to open a Gurukula for girls to teach Brahnavidyā.



These stories from the Vedas goes to prove that even though there are discrepancies in the current practices of Hindu traditions, there is no scriptural sanction for these practices.

### Mokṣa

After learning and understanding all this, where do we go from here? It is up to us to decide. One way to deal with this is to fight those areas where there is discrimination and another way is to focus on *mokṣa*.

The story of the *saṃsāra* tree shows us the futility of trying to fix things in *saṃsāra*. By all means, if you can change certain situations, change them, but know that change is best brought about by following a path of *ahiṃsā*, non-injury. *Ahiṃsā* towards the mind, body, and everything around you. Just because there are certain practices and discriminations, real and perceived, doesn't always mean that we take up arms to change them. Gandhi said the only thing you can change is yourself.

What is worth looking at is that women are already wired for *mokṣa*. The fourfold prerequisite, *sādhana-catuṣṭaya*, that *śāstra* talk about as qualifications for *mokṣa*, women already possess them.

### Sādhana-catuṣṭaya

**Śama** means a way of resolving anger. **Dama** means following a path of *ahiṃsā*. How girls are socialized in this culture means they already possess these qualities. This may seem discriminatory for a child, but it helps one become an *adhikārī* right from a young age. One cannot learn Vedanta at a young age but the qualifications surely can be built. Although, such a treatment builds resentment towards people and society; alongside it, one builds the qualifications for *mokṣa* as well.





Later in life, it is imminent upon one to let go of the resentment, to see the past and the background of one's life as a child with objectivity, *uparati*. In doing so, you will see a layer underneath, where you realize that you are already prepared for this knowledge. One has *titikṣā*, forbearance where a woman can bear all kinds of difficulties, including childbirth which is no small feat. A woman's life is full of sacrifices, she has *vairāgya*, dispassion, a precursor to self-knowledge, to the Bhagavān sitting in one's heart. For this reason, women do not have to leave their house to prepare for this knowledge; she does not need to go to the Himalayas and perform severe austerities. A woman also naturally possesses *medha śakti*, good memory because women remember everyone's wants and needs. Women are the caregivers, sustaining everything with the patience of mother earth. Women display immense *śraddha*, trust pending understanding, *samādhānam*, a focus, without which one is unable to perform the innumerable chores. Hence, women are already

primed for *mokṣa*. One only needs to recognize the gifts of this flawed and painful upbringing and let go of the pain and see it as a plus.

### Conclusion

When you understand this clearly, you will not throw the baby out with the bathwater. You will see the greatness of the tradition and transcend the small stuff. Only when you recognize that this whole life has prepared you for *mokṣa*, it will be easy to give in to the knowledge without resistance.

For *mokṣa*, you have to give up both the sense of doer-ship and the sense of experiencer-ship, a sense of feeling assailed. In our culture, men are raised to be doers. They are in the forefronts, getting all the accolades. Women, however, are relegated to the background, not by choice but due to some karmic design. Therefore, by design, women don't seem to have the problem of doer-ship, however, women may fall in the space of experiencer-ship, 'why does this happen to me?', 'why me?' are examples of this experiencer-ship, *bhokṛtvam*.

If one keeps looking into the past, one has fallen into the sea of experiencer-ship; a pitfall one has to avoid for *mokṣa*. To transform childhood experiences, one has to let go of hurt and pain by understanding that one is already qualified for *mokṣa*. Hence, the focus here is to not feel sorry for oneself. One has to rise above it all. Both *karṛtvam* and *bhokṛtvam* have to be dropped.

Once, I asked Pujya Swamiji where he had seen and met the most *jñānis*. After a long silence, he told me that whenever he visits households, the husbands always sit with him and talk to him and do all the required rituals, but it was the woman busy in the kitchen who would come out perhaps for two minutes to give tea or food who he recognized as *jñānis*. He said they knew he knew and he knew that they knew he knew.

# Editorial



Everything that occurs is the fructification of a possibility brought about by one's own previous *karma* - both personal and collective. When those possibilities appear as challenges, it is easy to slip into the blame game because things are not as one thinks they should be. Whether something unexpected happened, or even if another abused their free-will to create an issue, the fact remains that whatever unfolds is in keeping with the order that is *Īśvara*. When things are challenging, contemplating upon the simplicity of this fact, that it is all *Īśvara*, releases one from being bound by the karma unfolding.

As Lord Krishna reminds us in the Bhagavad Gītā, a *jīva* has no say over the results of karma, only over the actions. Contemplating on this in difficult times is an invitation to oneself to consider how one will behave under the circumstances giving rise to the challenge. One cannot change what has occurred, but one does have a say over one's response, even if it is more appropriate to not respond. When the mind

is tasked with contemplating upon a response, or lack thereof, it is not seeking to lay the blame.

One can also bring *Īśvara* into the situation, seeing that what has manifested, is *Īśvara*. The difficulty for many is the unconscious idea that *Īśvara* is some mastermind that is directing the manifest *jagat* from afar. However, *Īśvara* is the very order of how the *jagat* is unfolding here and now and the *jīva* can surrender to that - if not cheerfully - gracefully through prayer. By acknowledging that one is not in control, one is relieved from the pressure to try and change what cannot be changed.

Finally, one can contemplate upon the fact that “I” is untouched by the challenges. It is the one identified with the body, mind and senses that perceives what is as a challenge. Gradually, as the knowledge of “I” as none other than *Īśvara* is assimilated, so too, what was once seen as a challenge is known as *Īśvara* alone. For that person the question that would be asked is, “What challenge?”





# Bahamas Retreat Jan'23





## REFLECTIONS by Sankar Niranjana

The two-fold purpose of the Gaṇapati Upaniṣad is to help the struggling *jīva* with eradication of fear and sorrow and with elimination of alienation. The *jīva* has no control over the reality/laws of Bhagavān, and their smooth functioning. Nature, in the form of trees, rivers and animals, always follows the laws/manifestations of Bhagavān but a human being does not necessarily have to. This privilege comes laden with a lot of baggage!

The knowledge of this Upaniṣad enables us to see that there is intelligence that makes everything function and this is not separate from my own knowledge. What shines through all names and forms is just knowledge; however, we keep getting caught up in names and forms. Every heart is a battlefield of contradictions which is disconnected from oneself and others, from the universe and its resources, and from the source of the universe itself.

The complaining individual is made to understand that they are the non-complaining Brahman by understanding Gaṇapati in all forms. Gaṇapati presented by the Upaniṣads refers not to the elephant-faced deity, but to an all content being, that is beyond the body, mind, sense complex at the level of both transcendental and the immanent. He is commonly invoked as an *avatāra* for the sake of meditation in a physical form. However, the Upaniṣad speaks of Him in the form of the universal truth.

Gaṇapati refers to knowledge in the form of all laws of the manifest universe. This infinite knowledge (“intellect without a head”) is that

which simply IS – not in the form of a *pramāta* (knower), *prameya* (known) or *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge). The knowledge being unattached to all the above is Gaṇapati. The Brhadāranya Upaniṣad refers to this as “*jyotiṣam jyotiḥ*” (light of all lights) that powers all intelligence. I surrender to that intelligence, which is manifest in all names and forms.

Gaṇapati is seen as the embodiment of the *mahāvākya* “*Tat Tvam Asi.*” It is the creator, preserver, and resolver of this universe. One prays for the values of *satyam* (speaking the truth) and *ṛtam* (living the truth— where there is alignment of thought, word, and deed).



Obstacles to this alignment abound, in the form of *adhyātmika*, obstacles due to one's own subjectivity, *adhibautika*, obstacles at the empirical level, and *adhidaivika*, obstacles in the form of natural disasters; vigilance is necessary to live the truth. These may be karmic factors that tend to repeat themselves. Obstacles rise as difficult, uncomfortable situations due to having transgressed righteousness in this or past lives.

The word “*ava*” means protect and is used as a command from a place of privilege here; one feels alienated and very challenged at all levels leading to this plea. The purpose is to pray for protection of this alignment and for freedom from obstacles of different sources. Prayer becomes personal – consciousness resting in a *jīva* is being invoked. Protection of the teacher, the student, the one who commits this to

memory, from obstacles in all forms and directions is elaborated. Gaṇapati, seen non-dually as one, is praised as the embodiment of speech, knowledge, the five elements and happiness. Also as the one who has transcended the *guṇas*, the different bodies, states of being, time, space and



as the one contemplated upon constantly by *yogis*. The Upaniṣad ends with the *dhyāna śloka*s, meditation verses, and the *phalaśruti*, what one will gain by study.

This Upaniṣad is considered the ‘head’ of the Atharva Veda. After an immersive *śravaṇam*, listening, we now understand its profound nature and how important it becomes for staving off any obstacles in the spiritual pursuit.





## REFLECTIONS by Shambhavi



This January I had the good fortune to be at the Sivananda Ashram in the Bahamas while Swaminiji came for a week to teach the Gaṇapati Upaniṣad.

The combination of the ashram's daily schedule, which includes *satsang*, meditation, chanting, yoga, healthy food and many opportunities for *seva*, with Vedānta teachings, is one of a kind. Whenever Swaminiji is teaching it is as though an arrow of light and love is penetrating the heart and allows it to open up to the sense of oneness.

I was happy that many of Swaminiji's students were able to come for the retreat. There is a strong bond of harmony and friendship amongst Swaminiji's students. Some of us had previously only met online and yet whenever we meet in person, it is like meeting an old friend. Just like Swaminiji herself, her students are full of liveliness, humor and joy. They all blended very naturally at the ashram, and became an integral part of the community, contributing and serving in many ways.

During the retreat, Swaminiji mentioned that one develops devotion by switching from being a person who prays to being a prayerful person. Prayerfulness is an important qualification that brings forth grace and *punya*, both necessary for the spiritual path which can be likened to swimming upstream in a river. Praying to Gaṇapati, as the source of all, and reciting the Gaṇapati Upaniṣad, we can overcome the karmic obstacles along the path. This gives us relative protection until we gain absolute protection by knowing the essential oneness between Gaṇapati and ourselves.

Swaminiji presented these teachings as an invitation to dare and trust again. To allow the words of the *śāstra* as they are being unfolded by the guru to transform our sorrow, pain and despair into happiness and comfort. We must have enough *śraddhā* - trust pending understanding - to allow the guru to operate on us and remove the cataract of self ignorance which makes us see everything subjectively rather than objectively. This is the only method to correct our vision.

Everything in the world shines thanks to the light of consciousness or knowledge. The problem is that we perceive the objects as being separated from us. We get attached to the names and forms according to our likes and dislikes without recognizing the source of their existence as consciousness, which is the truth of us. This sense of duality leaves us alienated, disconnected and fearful.

The gift of knowledge was described by Swaminiji as the gift of *Īśvara*. This is the only cure to the disease of *bhāva-roga*, existing in ignorance, which endows us, the miserable *jīvas*, any human being identified with the body, mind, senses and therefore with complaints, with a frantic desire of becoming something other than what we already are. In order to be truly happy and free we must discover ourselves as a non-demanding, appreciative, contented being that is one with the limitless source that is free from fear, sorrow and pain.

Swaminiji's teachings affected me at various levels, as they were all powerful and glorious. What I am taking away with me most is learning



how to truly listen and to see clearly what is happening around me, without having preconceived notions on how things are supposed to be. Another unforgettable teaching is to live and act with as little disturbance as possible - acting gently like a cat and occupying space without even being noticed.

May we be as focused and determined as Garuḍa;  
May we have full commitment to the study and understanding of this knowledge, without any obstacles;  
May Swaminiji's compassion be the compass that guides us to the lighthouse of knowledge;  
May we always dwell in the glory of Om, which is our real home.





## Do Not Harm (the value of values - Ahimsā)

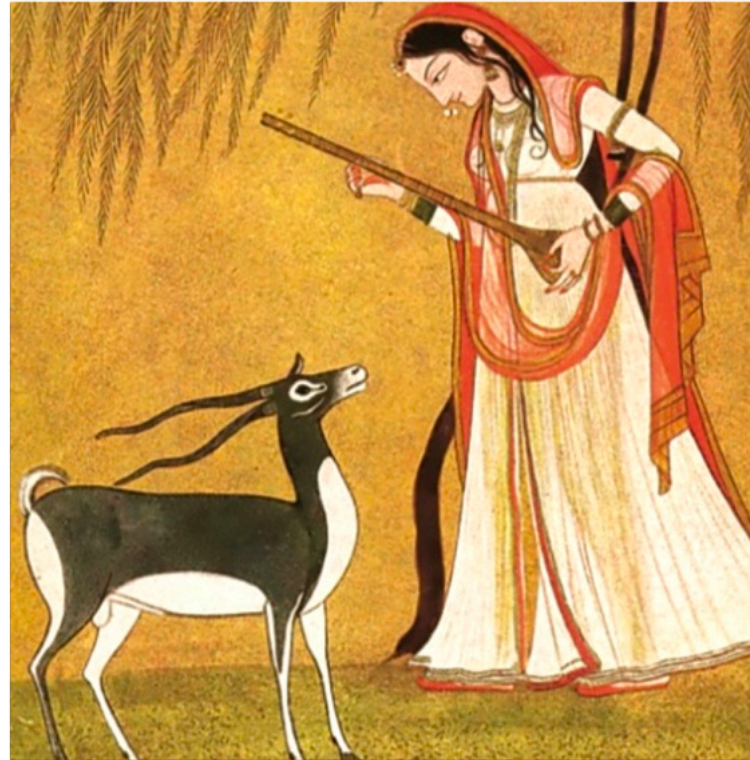
Poem by Varalaxmi Niranjana

Adding to the value string of beads  
Is not to hurt by thoughts, words & deeds.  
Most supreme form of righteousness  
Let it be there in your daily business.

Being vegetarian is a choice  
Imagine those animals have a voice!  
Humans have free will.  
To choose what to grill.

You may name it fancy as veal  
It is really a baby cow as a meal.  
You may call it as pork  
It is really the pig on your fork.

You may enjoy immensely as beef  
Giving the cattle a lot of grief  
You pack it and process it.  
You disconnect and create a split.



Fancy names create the distance  
Knowing the truth creates resistance.

Don't eat animals as dishes  
Let them live, including the fishes.

Inherent desire is to be free.

No hurt, pain and carefree.  
Vegetables and plants do not flee.  
When you are on an eating spree.

Do no harm is the value!  
Respecting everything is a revalue.

No *himsā* is the core principle.  
Embrace the value as a disciple!



## A SIMHĀVALOKANA by Varalaxmi Niranjana

This past year has been a blessing for me to be with Swaminiji on a weekly basis in zoomkulam and during various retreats. Below I summarize my understanding of the texts we have studied. I find that the weekly classes serve well for removing the tumor of ignorance while breaking habitual wrong-thinking happens when I am in Swaminiji's presence at various retreats.

The Bhagavad Gītā is the vaccine against “samsaritis” administered week after week to boost our immunity. Calling *rāga-dveṣas*, likes-dislikes, terrorists, Swaminiji urged us to flee from them and take refuge in *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* is having *samatvam*, equanimity, when receiving the results of actions, along with the ability to interpret *svadharma* according to place and time with the right attitude, *kauśalam*.

In Saddarśanam, we saw that while *samsāra*-syndrome has a variety of symptoms, *brahma-vidyā* has no side effects, and no one is allergic to it. From this text, we learned how to develop a prayerful attitude in everyday life and how to drop scarcity mentality. It taught us to accept the non-acceptance of ourselves and to start the spiritual journey from wherever we are. Even as Swaminiji unfolded the nature of ignorance and how to move from subjectivity to objectivity over 40 plus classes, the mind kept asking, ‘Are we there yet?’

The Taittirīya *bhāṣya* classes stir the mind from different angles. Through the teaching of the profound meaning of *satyam-jñānam-anantam*, the mind stopped coopting agency. Now the loci of errors of *annamaya*, *prānamaya*, and *manomaya* are being dissected.

It was a joyful moment for me when we learned in Bodhasāra that the thoughts in the head are the *gopikās* dancing around with no purpose, and “I” is the Krishna who lights them up. I reveled in the glory of Rāma and learned to identify Sītā within, the latent *śānti*. These classes

are beautiful pearls of wisdom strung together by Swaminiji. The podcast classes and multiple other small retreats serve as adjunct chemotherapy, radiation therapy, physical therapy, and psychotherapy to eradicate this karmic tumor of ignorance.



The *Jīvan Mukti Viveka* unfolded the roadmap for a *jīvanmukta* with the prerequisite qualifications of *viveka*, the ability to distinguish infinite from finite, *vairāgya*, growing out of desires for finite, and *mumukṣutvam*, the desire for freedom from sorrow. The Vedānta gym was opened for us to develop the six-pack of *śama* and *dama*, mental and behavioral resolution, *uparama*, not sweating the small things, *titikṣa*, glad acceptance of what is, *śraddha*, trust pending understanding, and *samādhāna*, single-minded focus. For me, the most significant learning point was about the inner *sannyāsa* and how it begins with minimizing desire for things to be different.

In the Vākyaavṛtti retreat, I felt myself move to a new home called Om. The significance of the daily

routine of *japa*, meditation, yoga, committed studying, and *seva* gets reinforced every time you attend a retreat in person. The monotony of sitting in the living room and just turning the laptop on for Vedānta classes can be broken by attending these live classes and retreats.

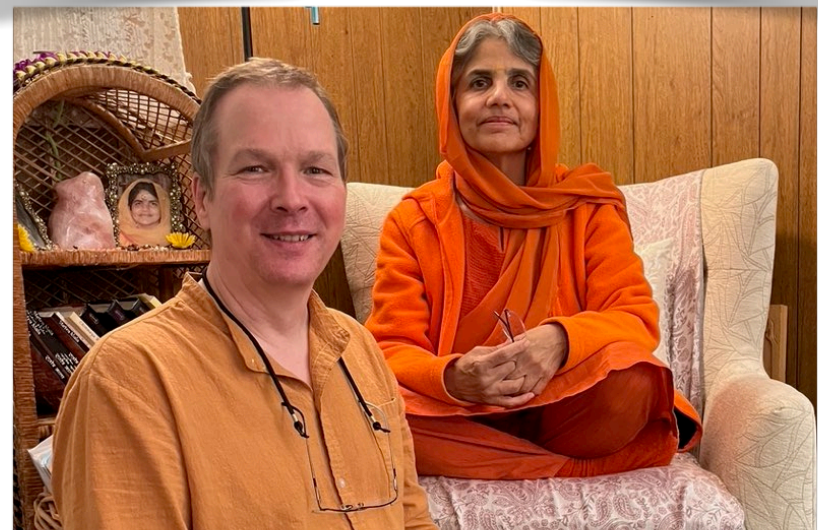
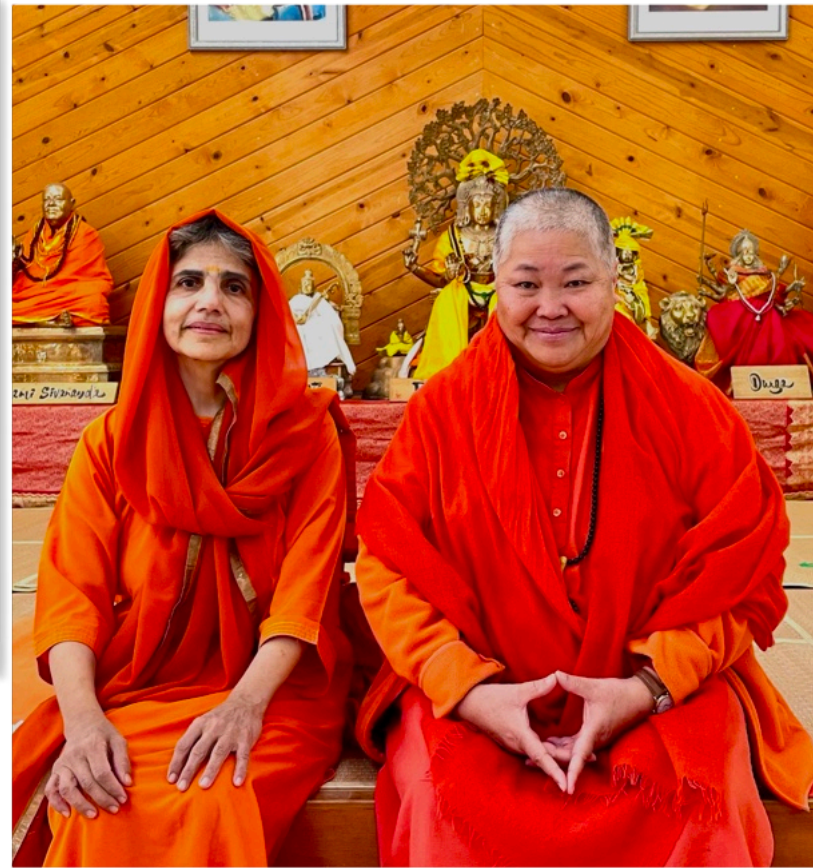
Swaminiji explained how to overcome one's own omissions and commissions (guilt) and other people's omissions and commissions (hurt) in the aptly named freedom from guilt and hurt retreat.

The *mahāvākya* revealing the oneness between *jīvā* and *Īśvarā* is resolved in the Gaṇapati Upaniṣad. As tidal waves start to roar in the ocean, one wave raises in the form of knowledge, one wave raises in the form of known, and one wave raises as a means of knowledge. In this notion of samsara Brahman “as though” appears as many, the “as though” *jīva* suffering from ignorance and the “as though” Guru removing the ignorance.

I surrender to that which is the cause of this “as though” reality of universal experience, *Īśvara*, with joined hands: *Namaste*.



# Sivananda Yoga Farm, CA - Nov'22 & AVG, Eugene Jan'23





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**Sūktā Editors:** *Janani Chaitanya, Arpan, and Kate Herse*