

Seminar Notes for March 31, 2005

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- **Why the visit to the Ashram**
- My goal: I met Swami Veda Bharati in August 2003 in a conference at the University of Toronto where he was a speaker at a symposium organized by me. The topic of the symposium was Unity of Mystical Understanding. I made an appointment with him to present to him the educational concept of SHEN. He offered to help me in the development of the course on Contemplation Methods. He invited me to spend time with him at his Ashram in receive that help. It is needless to say that I achieved that goal and much more during my stay with him.
- **About Rishikesh and the Ashram**
- When: Oct 18, 2004 to Dec 16, 2005
- Where: At Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama located at Rishikesh in Uttranchal in India
- Location: The foothills of the Himalayas in the Ganges valley. SRSG located about a km away from the Ganges.
- Travel: About 6 hours from New Delhi by car or train. Left Delhi by train at 6:00am and arrived at Haridwar at around 11:30am. Picked up at Haridwar train station by a cab and arrived at SRSG in Rishikesh about 45 minutes later.
- Importance of Rishikesh: Many Ashrams in Rishikesh, on the banks of the Ganges.
- History of SRSG: It is a new Ashram, built by Swami Veda Bharati after 1996 when his guru, Swami Rama left his earthly body.
- **About the atmosphere at the Ashram**
- Guest Accommodation: About 30 cottages of different sizes to suit families or singles.
- Permanent residents: Students at the Gurukulam housed in 2 student dormitory buildings and staff housed in one staff building.
- Sex Mix: Guests and students of both sexes were equally welcome.

- Nationality Mix: There were guests and students from different countries. Practically 50% of foreign origin and 50% of Indian origin. United nations type atmosphere. I met students, guests and faculty from India, United States, Canada, England, Germany, Italy, Austria, Korea, Fiji and China.
- Religion Mix: There were Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and even Muslims. No feeling of enforcement of uniformity of religion and thought.
- Silence: Silence and introspection were emphasized. Many people went into silence for a number of days at a time. Many went into silence for a day per week.
- Meals: Everybody ate in a common dining room at set times. Simple vegetarian meals for everyone. Smoking, meat and fish of any type, alcohol and drugs were strictly forbidden.
- **About the Ashram routines**
- The name of the Ashram is Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama. The word Sadhaka means a person who is engaged in an effort to know his own essence and the essence of the universe. The word Grama means village. The name of the Ashram means “the village of seekers of the essence of self and of the universe” named after Swami Rama.
- The Ashram ambience and its routines are designed to help in the search of the seekers of the essence.
- Compulsory programs: prayer and meditation at 6:00am, yoga from 6:30-7:30am seven days a week, lectures by Swami Veda from 8:00-10:00pm were mandatory for everyone, guests as well as students. In addition, there was a three hour meditation session once per week.
- Mandatory for students and optional for guests: Classes and scheduled activities for students six days per week from 9:00am- 1:00pm and 2:00pm-5pm. Schedule was posted and guests were encouraged to attend the sessions of their interest.
- Meals: Breakfast 8:00-9:00am, Lunch 1:00-2:00pm and Dinner 7:00-8:00pm.
- **About Swami Veda Bharati**
- Busy guy – 18 to 20 hour days in meditation and work. He needs very little sleep.

- Three secretaries and a publishing department of 3-4 persons kept busy full time
- 70 paid employees around the world
- Travels worldwide 9 months in the year and 3 months in India when headquartered in the ashram. Meditates during travel and claims to experience little fatigue or jet lag
- Working knowledge of many languages, expert knowledge of Sanskrit, English and Hindi.
- Deep thinker, philosopher, meditator and contemplator. Spends a long time in solitary meditation on a daily basis.
- Much sought after for speeches, conferences, etc. Has spoken at United Nations.
- Topic of evening lectures: Vedantasara meaning the essence of Vedanta which means the essence of the Veda. Thus, Vedantasara is a book the name of which literally means the essence of the essence of the Veda. Its topic is Shankara's Advaita or non-dualism.
- Extremely concerned about and constantly aware of all individuals. Many a time, he would be still be working at 6:00am and he would come to check and correct everybody's yoga and meditation postures.
- I have a personal story to share in this connection with constant awareness and concern about individual students and visitors. One day, I was very sick. I stayed in my cottage all day all alone, missed all meals and missed his lecture at 8:00pm. I wondered whether anybody would know if I died, I felt so bad. At 10:30pm there was a knock on my door. I rushed to the door to answer the knock. It was Joanna, one of Swami Ji's secretary, "I am sorry to wake you up, but Swami Ji wants to see you." I said, "I will be right over." I changed and walked over to Swami Ji's cottage and greeting him in his living room. He sat me down and asked me how I was doing. "I did not see you in my class this evening. You never missed my class. I thought you would be sick. Did you eat anything?" I told him that I was sick indeed and I did not eat anything. He at once ordered the preparation of vegetable soup for me. And that was all the reason why he sent for me. The next morning, I got up fresh and all my sickness disappeared. This is how somebody's concern affects you and Swami Ji understood very well and practiced it routinely in his busy life.
- Swami Ji's stated ambition for his students in the Gurukulam is that each one of them be capable of tackling the problem of the nature of deforestation of the Amazonian rainforest. This forest produces about 20% of the world's oxygen.

And it is being deforested by certain interests at an alarming rate for the common good of the world. How does one go about stopping this process before it takes alarming proportions? Swami Ji wants each one of his graduates to have enough courage, wisdom and feeling of oneness with the world to tackle this and similar problems facing the world.

- **About My daily routine**

- Wake up at 4:30am and go for an hour jog
- Meditation at 6:00am
- Yoga from 6:30-7:30am
- Breakfast at 8:00
- Cottage cleaning, shower, and study and writing from 9:00am-1:00pm
- Lunch 1:00-2:00pm
- Siesta, study and writing from 1:00pm-7:00pm
- Dinner 7:00-8:00
- Swami Ji's lecture from 8:00-10:00
- To sleep at around 10:30-11:00pm

- **About My Learning at the Ashram**

1. The Essence of the Essence of the Veda (**Vedantasarah**) is about Shankara's Advaita or non-dualism. Theories of causation represent the relationship between the ultimate reality (cause) and the universe (effect) in the following ways:

- **Transmutative Causation – Parinam Vada:** These theories explain the relationship between cause and effect by attributing transmutation to the cause into effect.
 - **Satkarya Vada:** The transmutation happens because the cause contains the attributes of all the possible effects. The cause changes into an effect when the attributes of the effect prevail. **Samkhya** school of thought is an example of Satkarya Vada.

- Asatkarya Vada: The cause does not contain the attributes of the effects. It changes into an effect like milk changes into yogurt when a starter is added to it. The **Visheshika** school of thought is an example of Asatkarya Vada.
 - Proposition – Vivarta Vada: This theory proposes that **the effect appears from the cause in the manner of the wave appearing in the sea.** In fact there is no change of the effect into the cause, but there is a materialization of the effect without any material change in the cause. Non-dualism is an example of this kind of theory. The ultimate reality Brahman appears as cosmos because that is its nature (vikshepa shakti or maya: **power to reveal**) like it is the nature of the ocean to create waves. It has two powers - vikshepa shakti: power to reveal and āvaraṇ shakti: **power to conceal.**
2. **Can ultimate reality be known:** The answer is a qualified yes. It can be known because of its power to reveal, but the search is not easy because of its power to conceal.
 3. **Harmonizing all perceptions:** To know and understand ultimate reality in a significant manner, one must harmonize different perceptions of it using all the available knowledge about it.
 4. **Different levels of truth:** It has to be remembered that ultimate reality is infinite in scope and infinity lends itself to different perceptions. Different perceptions may all be valid and apply equally, some may not apply at all and may be logically invalid, and none telling the whole truth as the truth being infinite cannot be articulated in finite descriptions.

How does one reconcile between the two theories of causation? Looking at the problem from the scientific point of view, both the transmutative and prepositional causation theories appear equally right. Consider the element nitrogen. Its atom consists of a nucleus with 7 protons and 7 neutrons and there are 7 electrons orbiting around the nucleus. Compare it with the oxygen atom. Its atom consists of a nucleus with 8 protons and 8 neutrons and there are 8 electrons orbiting around the nucleus. Chemically, both nitrogen and oxygen are different elements. From the point of view of particle physics, the only difference is in the arrangement of the constituent particles. There is no recognizable difference in the constituent particles themselves. The

constituent particles do not change from one element to the other. At the chemical level nitrogen is nitrogen and oxygen is oxygen – both different, but at the particle physics level, there is no difference whatsoever other than in the arrangement and number of particles in an atom. Here the chemical level corresponds with causation by transmutation and the particle physics level corresponds with the causation by proposition. Although we here talked about three different particles constituting an atom, modern particle physics is fast approaching a unity of fundamental particles constituting the three just like **one ultimate reality**.

5. Three Levels of Existence

- Ultimate or Transcendental Level: Ultimate reality of an object is this level of existence. This is also called the true reality. **At this level both a snake and a rope are the same. At this level, it is an illusion to consider the snake and the rope as two different realities.**
- Behaviour or Pragmatic Level: It is the level of reality at the ordinary pragmatic level. **At this level a snake is a snake and a rope is a rope and it is an illusion to consider the two as the same.**
- Illusory Level: It is that level of existence in which, for example, a rope may be taken as a snake. **This truth of this level lasts only as long as the illusion is not removed.**

6. **Unity in diversity:** Both physics and vedantic non-dualism point to the unity underlying the apparent diversity of the universe. Conscious behaviour at the pragmatic level must be moderated by the knowledge of this underlying unity.

7. **Role of Meditation:** Everyone at birth is self-centred without any sense of underlying unity. In a loving family, natural love and affection creates a family identity extending to the blood family enabling occasional transcendence of selfishness because of the identity of the self with the family members. Social relations may further expand the unity feeling to close friends in the community. But the spiritual destination is the identity of the self with the whole of universe

because of the unity of the essence of all beings. How does one develop the feeling of one universal community extending to all beings?

The problem is one of learning and developing an intelligibility of the underlying unity. The solution is no different from the solution to the problem of human development in general. Learning is the key to human development of all spheres including spiritual. The fact that education helps in learning is no secret. In spiritual development too education and learning are important.

One starts with the acquisition of cognitive knowledge. Reflection of the knowledge clarifies the understanding and the knowledge so learnt is available for practical use to the extent it is understood. Further contemplation and meditation centred on the acquired intelligibility refines it and deepens its position in human consciousness making it part of one's personality. The more you meditate and contemplate, the more the spiritual development leading to the ethic of essential oneness and unity.

8. Role of Correct Breathing in Meditation: Relaxed body and a relaxed mind are essential in developing the focus in meditation. It is well understood that deeper the breath, the higher the degree of bodily and mental relaxation.

In normal lives, we use only about 15% of the lung capacity to breathe. It may be sufficient for ordinary activity, but for stress free lifestyle and mental activity in meditation, one needs to use as much of the lung capacity as possible. Therefore, there is a need to develop a habit of **deep diaphragmatic breathing** not only during meditation but otherwise as well. It leads to a stress free relaxed attitude that is conducive to turning the attention inwards – a process that is essential for achieving depth in meditation.

9. Role of Physical Postures in Meditation: Yogic exercises should be performed in slow motion with full awareness of all muscular movements, a relaxed body, a relaxed mind and rhythmic and deep diaphragmatic breathing. The primary goal of the physical exercises should not be conditioning of the body, but preparation of the body and mind for meditation by turning the

attention inwards in full awareness and mindfulness of all mental processes.

10. Neti, neti (Not this, not this): During meditation, one develops new insights into our essential unity and oneness. One must be prepared to examine them critically and drop the older intelligibility in favour of the new if the new is found to be an improvement. One must have a free and open mind and be willing to drop the older intelligibility as a level of truth that you have transcended saying, “not this, not this”. “Not this, not this” is not merely a linguistic expression but a deep meditative experience indicating the transcendence a level of truth now less relevant to your current spiritual station. It must be noted that deeply held belief systems and preconceived ideas can prove to be hindrances to spiritual growth as growth implies replacing one’s current intelligibility and worldview by those resulting from deeper insights.