

**Satsang with Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**  
**Vedanta 101**

*Question*

I am coming to the Gurukulam for the first time and would like to know what this Family Camp provides, and what I should expect when I go home.

*Answer*

This is a retreat and the purpose of the retreat is to help us live a contemplative life for a period of one week, when you are free from all other demands and occupations. There are no other expectations or demands of you, or duties other than applying yourself to study, prayer, and contemplation. This enables us to create a distance from the rest of our life. We all live very busy, active lives and the impact of our daily activities remains in our day-to-day life. It becomes necessary to be free of this impact. A camp such as this enables us to become objective about our own lives so that we can take stock of what the purpose of our life is, what our life is about, and in which direction we are going. Coming to the Gurukulam helps us to create a distance between ourselves and our daily life and relationships.

During the retreat, we will be studying a text, which gives us an overview of Vedanta, or the *Upanishads*. The teaching is in reference to our own life. The study of the text will enable you to understand the nature of basic realities of life. There is 'I', the individual, there is the world with which I interact, and there is God, who is the creator of the world. What is the nature of this 'I', the world, and God? What is the relationship among the three? These three are very important in our lives, whether we have thought about them or not, because each of us has our own conclusions of who we are, what the creation is, and what God is. It is necessary for our conclusions to be true to reality because our life will then be based upon that reality. Most people live their lives based upon their perception of reality and these perceptions determine their lives. The study of the text will help us determine what life is all about, what we are seeking in our life, and what we should do in order to achieve the goal of life. This is what you will take back with you. Hopefully, a retreat like this will create a desire to study Vedanta further, for you will discover its necessity in life. You will discover the clarity with which it explains life and how important it is. This will lead you to want to continue to study.

### *Question*

I am also a newcomer here. Please explain where Vedanta stands in the structure of Hinduism.

### *Answer*

The word Vedanta is made up of two words – *veda* and *anta*. *Anta* means end, and Vedanta means the end portion of the Vedas. This term is used for a certain kind of literature found in the Vedas called the Upanishad. The Vedas have two sections. The first section deals with rituals or *karma*, actions, and *dharma*, the way of living one's life. The second section, the Upanishad, deals with *jñānam* or knowledge. This is Vedanta.

Vedanta reveals the nature of the realities of life. It is very important to understand the realities of life because our life is based upon our own conclusions of these realities. This is the pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge is meant to dispel ignorance, and we will discuss how our sorrows or problems in life are the product of ignorance. Vedanta explains to us that unhappiness is the fundamental human problem with which every human being is battling. Our life is a process of avoiding unhappiness and seeking happiness. How do we fulfill this pursuit? That is what Vedanta teaches us. It shows us how to gain the happiness that we are seeking and how to become free, once and for all, from all unhappiness. Vedanta explains that it is knowledge of the realities of life that becomes the means for achieving the goal.

### *Question*

Can you please share with us the most valuable lesson that you have learned?

### *Answer*

The most valuable lesson that Vedanta teaches is that you already are what you are seeking to be. Each one of us is seeking to be something. I find that there is dissatisfaction with the way I am and an urge to be different from what I am. I am seeking to be pleased with myself, to be free, to be happy. Vedanta teaches that you are what you seeking to be, that you are already free and happy. Vedanta teaches us to live a life of knowing rather than one of becoming.

Usually a person desires to become someone. I am trying to become someone different without understanding what I am. I have concluded that I

must become free and limitless without inquiring into what I am. So the most important lesson to learn from Vedanta is not to take things for granted. Instead, we need to inquire into what is, into what I am. Are my conclusions about myself correct or do my conclusions need to be changed in the light of the understanding that Vedanta gives us? So the most important lesson I have learned is about the nature of basic realities, and the dropping of the various notions that I entertain about the world and myself<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed and edited by Malini and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.