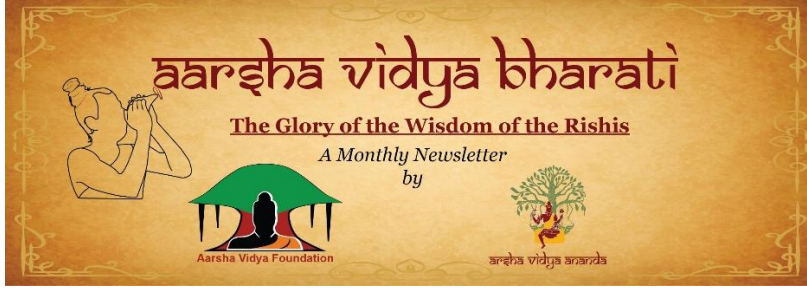


# Aarsha Vidya Bharati - Jan 2022

**Pausha - Magha 2078**

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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## Value of Values

**Ācāryopāsana (6/20)**

By Sunitha Suresh, Mumbai

*Ācāryopāsana* is a critical value for the study of vedanta. The word *Ācārya* means one who understands (*svayam ācarati*) and makes others understand (*anyān ācarati*). *Gurukulavāsā*, living with your guru in the gurukulam and learning from him/her was the traditional way *ācāryopāsana* was done. The literal meaning of *Ācārya Upāsana* is meditation on the teacher ie. on the teachings as the Guru stands for the vision of the teaching. A general understanding of *Ācāryopāsana* would be service and surrender.

### Seva or Service to the Guru

Seva to the guru implies a mind that is willing to surrender the ego and deprioritize *rāga-dveṣa* (personal likes and dislikes), a willingness to give with an attitude of respect, love and devotion for the Guru. The service and surrender is for the sake of the student and not the teacher as the Guru has clear knowledge of the self and has no needs.



In my early years of working for a corporate, I was advised by a well-meaning senior. The advice was...”If your boss asks you to jump, the only legitimate question you should ask is How high!”. Later, when I became a student of Vedanta, I understood how pertinent this statement is when it come to a Guru. The inner readiness to do seva if called upon and happy to do whatever is required, as no seva is too big or small for the Guru coupled with an unquestioning attitude is *Ācāryopāsana*. The Guru becomes the altar of surrender and the student is blessed with the knowledge. As *Bhagavān* Krishna promises in *Bhagavad Gita* (4:34)

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया |  
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः || 34||

*tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā |*  
*upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ || 34 ||*

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*Understand that by approaching with a prostration, by asking proper questions & by service to the Guru, the Guru who has the vision of the truth will teach you*

And that's why it is often said, when the student is ready, the Guru appears.

### **Importance of a Guru & the Pramāṇa**

We are asked to seek refuge in a Guru as the truth cannot be understood merely by our own contemplation, reading or any other effort on our own. Any knowledge requires a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*. To know the self the 5 *pramāṇa* we are given, are inadequate. They help us know the world. If there is a common basis, that includes me and the universe of time and space, I have no way of knowing it through my 5 available means of knowledge. To put the pieces of the puzzle together one needs to understand the reality of oneness and the ability to resolve the apparent contradictions. And hence it is said...



*Ācāryavān Puruṣo Veda ( Chandogya Upaniṣad 6.14.2)*

*A person who has a Guru, knows*

This statement reaffirms the importance of a Guru. The *śruti* is the *pramāṇa* and between the *śruti* and the student who wants to understand the *śruti*, is the teacher. The guru wields the *pramāṇa* and we must allow it to work on us like our eyes.

With adequate light, our eyes when open, see an object. Our will is not involved. There is no option. This is how a *pramāṇa* works and it is no different for the *śruti*. However, unlike our other *pramāṇa*-s which are intrinsic, *śruti* is from the outside. The difference is *Śraddhā*. When we see an object with our eyes, we do not question the validity of our eyes as a means of knowledge to see. Even if the object is distorted, we know a correction is required. We don't switch or change the *pramāṇa*, for eg using our ears to see! Likewise, *Śraddhā* in Vedanta must be absolute as it is about the limitless, it cannot be improved upon nor is it a point of view. In Bhagavad Gita (4:39), *Bhagavān* Krishna says

**श्रद्धावान् लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः |  
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति || 39||**

*śraddhāvān labhate jñānaṁ tatparaḥ saṁyatendriyaḥ |  
jñānaṁ labdhvā parāṁ śāntim achireṇādhigachchhati ||*

*The one who has śraddhā gains the knowledge*

Jagadguru Shankaracharya defines *śraddhā* as:  
*Guru vedānta vākyeṣu dṛiḍho viśvāsaḥ śraddhā*

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The respect, love and devotion towards the Guru & the therefore the teaching is *śraddhā*.

What we learn depends on our state of mind, our notions, our biases and is subjective. (Different people can learn different things from the same source.) Having *śraddhā* means our *ahaṅkāra* is under check. If this is not done, we only understand what we already know and not what the *pramāṇa* has to offer. While listening if our *ahaṅkāra* does not interfere, the *pramāṇa* works and negates the reality of our *ahaṅkāra*. When *śabda* is the *pramāṇa*, the *ahaṅkāra* does not/need not do anything. What happens is that the *śabda* creates a *vṛtti* showing you that you are the *Ātmā* that is Brahman. To keep the *ahaṅkāra* in check, *śraddhā* is required. With *śraddhā*, absorption of the knowledge takes place naturally without any obstacles. When faced with this knowledge, the *ahaṅkāra* is helpless because it is an error that has been corrected by the knowledge.

### **The Role of the Teaching Methodology or Sampradāya**

The *sampradāya*, which is an oral tradition, requires the teacher to use words we know, to convey something which is beyond words by implication. Wherever implications are there, context must be created. A special handling where words are explained elaborately and defined so what is meant is what is received by the student. Apparent contradictions and paradoxical statements are explained and resolved so that the implied meaning is seen. The Guru creates this inner environment using logic, reason & often our own experiences to enable us to see the truth of the self, the world and *Īśvara*. A position from where you cannot but see; is to be created, and that only a teacher who is a *sampradāyavit* can do.



And hence it is said, where a student was a teacher is now!

### **Seva to the Guru is Seva to Sanātana Dharma**

When we worship a form Shri Dakshinamurti in a temple, we know that it is not the form we are worshipping but *Īśvara* himself. In the same way when we do seva to the Guru, it is not to the individual person but to the *sampradāya* and the teaching itself, for what he teaches is not separate from him. Seva to the Guru is Seva to *Sanātana* Dharma. And is an expression of our deep gratitude and the fulfillment of our *ṛṇam* to the rishis and our Gurus who stand in the *paramparā*.

### **So what can I do?**

Our education system has unfortunately not helped create respect and national pride in our ancient history. We live in a society where people are biased by their education and denigrate our own native traditions. The history of India that we are taught in schools and colleges is a western view and disconnects the ancient Vedic times. This lack of historical awareness alienates us from our roots ie. The ethos of *Sanātana* Dharma.

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As Vedanta students, helping our Gurus preserve the Vedic tradition is one of the best seva-s we can do. The Sampradaya is kept alive and thriving and we pay it forward to the generations to come. There are many ways to do this when one has the willingness to serve and experience the irreplaceable joy that only 'seva' can bring. The next article outlines some ways of contributing to Vedic culture.

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