

Vedic Wisdom Festival online 11-12 Dec 2021

In the fourth year of the Vedic Wisdom Festival organized by the Aarsha Vidya Foundation, Mumbai, spiritual masters from across the country and globe over two full days gave a glimpse of the richness of the Vedic Wisdom. The highest teaching of Vedanta and allied knowledge for our well-being with its depth, simplicity and sophistication were shared with about 350 participants. They shone the light on topics such as Mental health and Ayurveda, How Vedanta works, The glory of temples, Yoga for Vedanta, Sanskrit - the oldest and the most sophisticated language, Learning for Life from the Bhagavad Gita, Kalarippayattu - The ancient Indian martial art and much more.

The festival was inaugurated by the founders, Swami Brahmavidananda Saraswati by lighting of the lamp and Swamini Brahma-prajnanada Saraswati by chanting the inaugural prayer. Mr. Suresh Balakrishnan being the event moderator made sure that the participants got the most from of all sessions.

Swami Brahmavidanandaji paid tribute to Swami Omkarananda Mahaswamingal who spoke at the last Vedic wisdom festival and was very enthusiastic about coming for this year's festival as well. Unfortunately we lost him to Covid. Paying homage Swamiji said that Swami Omkaranandaji was a wonderful teacher of Vedanta, a great scholar of the Vedic wisdom and also an authority in the Dharmashastras and Karma Kanda. We received his blessing of a 22 minute video about 'Lessons from our scriptures' put together lovingly by his team. Swamiji was indeed present with us this festival too.

Swami Brahmavidananda Saraswati, spoke on 'How does Vedanta work?' Our normal living brings tension because we are seeking freedom from isolation, loneliness, purposelessness and lack of fulfillment. Quoting from the Mundaka Upanishad, he said that our outward focused sense organs seem to have turned our attention away from oneself. But, Vedanta sees oneself as a fulfilled being and a source of joy. So how can I discover this? In the vision of Vedanta, Atma is not available for perception, inference etc. The pramana has to come from an external source. The one who gives me this knowledge about myself, we call him/her a guru from a parampara with a traditional methodology of teaching.

Dr Parthasarathy R, a practicing Ayurveda Vaidya currently heading Swami Dayananda Jayavarthanevelu Ayurvedalaya(SDJ Ayurvedalaya) as a Director & Chief Medical Officer spoke on 'Ayurveda and Mental health' which was the continuation of the last year's

topic, 'Ayurveda for wellbeing'. Quoting the first shloka from the celebrated book 'Ashtanga Hrdaya', it salutes the vaidya par excellence for removing all the diseases that have originated from rāga. Every single disease originates from the mind and then affects the body. Kama (binding desire), shoka (grief), bhaya(fear) are the three factors that aggravate the vāta, pitta, kapha, the three doshas which are governing the functioning of the body further disturbing the sattva, rajas and tamas at the level of the mind. Then over an hour, Dr Parthasarathy elaborately explained how the mental wellbeing are closely related to one's lifestyle and cleared confusions.

Gurukul Belraj Soni an artist/performer/trainer of Kalaripayattu, the ancient and traditional martial art form of Kerala along with his student, Delna V Sridhar showed many video clips of demonstration of the many forms of Kalaripayattu (translated as Space for action or a battlefield). Kalaripayattu was revealed by Rishis Parashurama and Agastya and traditionally namaskara is done to the 7 storied altar before practice. Most societies had some form of martial art to keep fit, have control over mind and body and also to resolve conflicts. Over an hour the participants were able to appreciate how the sadhana of a martial art form could also serve as a powerful way to have adhikaritam for Vedanta especially as one maintains samatvam in the face of physical threat.

Padmashri Gloria Arieira student of Swami Chinmayananda and Swami Dayananda Saraswati who has been teaching Vedanta and Sanskrit since 40 years in Rio de Janeiro and other cities in Brazil and in Portugal spoke on 'Yoga for Vedanta'. *Moksha purushartha* is for understanding *paramarthika satta*, the absolute reality as 'I'. She said that this is a tradition of understanding. If you understand something completely, then that changes your way of looking at it. So, understanding of 'I' gives vairagya. We are prepared naturally to let go what is not real. Hence, freedom comes from understanding knowledge.

The second day of the festival began with a curated video clip from the archives by our beloved Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati ji. Swamiji helped us see that the sampradaya is a living tradition and hence the vision cannot be obtained from mere books or recordings.

Swamini Brahmajnananda Saraswati, spoke on the 'Learning for life from the Bhagavad Gita'. Reflecting on the worldwide experience of the pandemic, everything that we held on to for the sake of stability and security gave way. Arjuna an accomplished warrior also found himself shaken in the middle of the battle field and he did not want to fight. Quoting the verse 18.46, she beautifully summarized karma yoga. Definition of success according to the Bhagavad Gita is the one who performs *svadharma* to gain attain *an-*

tahkarana shuddhi. That is an accomplishment. How does one get that? She unfolded how by doing one's *svakarma*, one gains success, at whichever stage of life he/she is.

Chithra Madhavan with an M.A. and an M.Phil. in Indian History and a Ph.D. in Ancient History and Archaeology took the audience on a virtual tour to some of the most glorious ancient temples of Badami, Hoysalas, Kanchipuram, Srirangam, Hampi explaining the archaeological significance, their heritage, their culture and giving minute detailing of the magnificently carved sculptures in the temples.

Prof. C. R. Anantharaman an erudite academician with masters across multiple disciplines, MA in Sanskrit, Philosophy, Astrology and an M.Phil in Sanskrit with a Diploma in Hindi, spoke on the 'Greatness of Sanskrit'. Sanskrit means *samyak krtam* which is done to perfection. He further went on to explain how the great grammarian Panini made rules and regulations for the grammar in the form of sutras which we call as aphorisms and set the structure of the language so that a person with basic knowledge of Sanskrit can easily understand our ancient texts.

Swami Atmatrptananda, a traditional teacher of Vedanta teaching in Kolkata for more than 3 decades firmly believes that music played a huge role in understanding the knowledge. He spoke of his life journey from 'Music to the fulfilment of Vedanta'. Completely drawn in by the singing of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswatiji, he became his disciple and studied 3 years in Sandeepany ashram, Powai, Mumbai and 4 years in the Rishikesh ashram. He said that music was a wonderful way to evoke and demonstrate bhakti, understand Ishvara and helped to own up the ultimate knowledge of Vedanta. He also said that folk songs, lyrics of Hindi songs, subhashitams are revealed to writers by infinite intelligence in the form of Maa Saraswati 's blessings. So, instead of dismissing it outright he said we can learn and relate it to the knowledge of Advaita.

The event ended with a vote of thanks to all who had contributed to making it a resounding celebration of our own Vedic Wisdom.

The videos of the talks can be accessed here -

<https://www.youtube.com/c/VedicWisdomFestival/videos>

Om Tat Sat