

**Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**

***Pramāṇam and the Role of the Teacher***

***Question***

What does *śabda pramāṇam* mean? Why is the teacher so important in this?

***Answer***

A *pramāṇam* is a means of knowledge. *Sabda pramāṇam* means that the words of the scriptures are a means of knowledge. A *śabda* becomes a *pramāṇam* if it comes to me through the teacher. Words are usually understood in our own personal context, and therefore, not just any words, but the scriptural words unfolded by the teacher are the *pramāṇam*. That is the reason why we don't approach the scriptures directly. We approach them through the teacher who unfolds the words for us in an appropriate way. It is a one-to-one communication.

In the beginning, there appears to be a lot of subjectivity in these words. Go along with it, and it becomes clearer and clearer to you. Also, cooperate with the teacher and the teaching. When I discover that a certain conclusion that I was entertaining is contradicted by the teaching, then I should let it go. My conclusions were perhaps without a basis or based on wrong reasons. Learning is a process of letting go of the false conclusions or false notions, and gaining new insights. So, as I let go of these false conclusions, the subjectivity is also let go. In due course, the words become more and more effective, as my mind is more and more open. In the beginning, it is subjective because there is something I still want to hold on to. Certain conclusions are very important to me. Certain beliefs are very

important to me. I am seeking security from my own belief systems. To the extent that I let go of my conclusions and beliefs, to that extent my mind becomes more available to understand the teaching in its true sense.

The Upaniṣad is a means of knowledge not so much in defining the Self, as in removing our false notions about the Self. They remove my ignorance, if I am open to it and willing to create a space or distance with my own conclusions. When I see my own self from the point of view of the Upaniṣad, then I can see the fallacy of my assumptions. Therefore, identification with the teacher becomes important. I will identify with the teacher provided I trust that the teacher does not have an agenda of his own and my well-being is his only agenda. If the trust is there, then there won't be any emotional problems. Then I look at my own self from the standpoint of the Upaniṣads, apart from myself. The Self is nothing but a bunch of conclusions. What we call ego is a whole bunch of different conclusions. It is difficult for me to look at my complexes by myself. Therefore, I must examine myself from a perspective that is free from these complexes, and for that, we need to identify with the teacher. This identification with the teacher comes from having *śraddhā* and *bhakti*. The devotion and reverence for the teacher enable me to identify with the teacher gladly. Otherwise, nobody can de-identify with the ego. You are always going to hold on to the ego. We judge everything based on that. Here, the process is reversed; I am willing to judge my own ego because somebody is more valuable to me than my ego. If my trust and devotion is such that the teacher becomes more important to me in my life, then, by identifying with the teacher, I will be able to examine my ego. If it doesn't happen, you have to wait until that happens.

Sometimes the identification with the teacher is an instant process; devotion and reverence happens at first sight. Some people take more time. Sometimes it does not happen even after a very long time. It is a matter of our *prārabda*. When someone else is more important than me, it is a great fortune, a great blessing. All that blessing is God's grace. You cannot have *satsang* without God's *kṛpā*. We can always pray to the Lord for *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* and *bhakti* can be acquired by the grace of the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed and edited by Jaya Kannan, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.