

## Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

### The Qualifications necessary for the Study of Vedanta

A detailed description of the qualifications essential for the study of Vedanta is provided in the following passage:

अधिकारी तु विधिवदधीतवेदवेदाङ्गत्वेनापाततोऽधिगताखिलवेदार्थोऽस्मिन् जन्मनि जन्मान्तरे वा  
काम्यनिषिद्धवर्जनपुरःसरं नित्यनैमित्तिकप्रायश्चित्तोपासनानुष्ठानेन निर्गतनिखिलकल्मषतया  
नितान्तनिर्मलस्वान्तः साधनचतुष्टयसम्पन्नः प्रमाता ॥

*adhikārī tu vidhivadadhīta-veda-vedāṅgatvenāpātato'dhigatākhilavedārtho'smin  
janmani janmāntare vā kāmya-niṣiddha-varjanapuraḥsaram nitya-naimittika-  
prāyaścittopāsanānuṣṭhānena nirgata-nikhila-kalmaṣatayā nitānta-nirmala-  
svāntaḥ sādhana-catuşṭaya-sampannaḥ pramātā.*

The competent student is an aspirant who, by studying in accordance with the prescribed method the Vedas and the Vedāṅgas, has obtained a general comprehension of the entire Vedas; who, being absolved of all *pāpa* in this or in a previous life by the avoidance of actions performed with a view to attaining a desired object and those forbidden in the scriptures, and by the performance of daily obligatory rites and occasional obligatory duties, as well as through penance and devotion, has become entirely pure in mind, and who has adopted the four means to the attainment of spiritual knowledge [Vedāntasāra, 6].

The first and last words in this passage are *adhikārī* and *pramātā*. An *adhikārī* is a competent student, and a *pramātā* is an intelligent person. An *adhikārī* is a *pramātā*, the competent student is an intelligent person. This intelligent person has certain characteristics: He is desirous of knowing the nature of the Self; he is a *sadācāra*, one who follows the path of merit and has a good understanding of the various modes of life and of his duties in the here and the hereafter. This conscientious, intelligent, and discriminating person is called a *pramātā*. Such a person is a competent student. How does he become a competent student?

#### ***The competent student possesses the four-fold qualifications***

*Sādhana-catuşṭayasampannaḥ*. The competent student is *sampannaḥ*, endowed with the *sādhana catuşṭaya*, the four-fold qualifications. What are the four-fold qualifications? They are: *viveka*, *vairāgya*, the *śamādiṣaṭkasampatti*, and *mumukṣutvam*. We will discuss each of these qualities in detail later. Let us review them briefly now.

*Viveka* means discriminating between the permanent and the impermanent. *Vairāgya* is dispassion towards the impermanent and a desire for the permanent. *Śamādiṣaṭkasampatti* is the maturity of mind that obtains in an abiding and focused mind. *Mumukṣutvam* is a keen desire for liberation.

One who has these four-fold qualifications is competent to study Vedanta. In fact, all the four qualifications can be reduced to one qualification: a keen desire to know. *Mumukṣutvam* is not only a keen desire to be liberated, but also a keen desire to know. This shows a certain maturity on the part of the student, that he or she understands knowledge to be the means to liberation. Everyone is interested in becoming free; everyone wants to be liberated from bondage and the sense of smallness and limitation. However, a person should have the maturity or understanding that he can become free from smallness only when he gains knowledge. Therefore, *mumukṣutvam*, the desire for freedom, gets transformed into the desire for knowledge.

Who is the one competent to learn Vedanta? Very simply put, it is the one who is interested in learning. The interest or keen desire to learn does not arise in every mind because the mind has many distractions and fascinations that conflict with or take precedence over a commitment to learning. There are many other commitments that become obstacles to a commitment to knowledge. Therefore, *mumukṣutvam* or the keen desire to be liberated or desire for knowledge will only arise in a certain kind of mind. In short, the individual who possesses the four-fold qualifications of *viveka*, *vairāgya*, the *śamādiṣaṭkasampatti*, and *mumukṣutvam* atleast in some measure, even if not in full measure, becomes competent to study Vedanta.

#### ***The competent student possesses a pure mind***

The *pramātā* or one who is desirous of learning requires a certain kind of mind. Here such a mind is described as *nitāntanirmalasvāntaḥ*. *Nitāntam atyantam nirmalam svacham svāntam antaḥkaraṇam yasya saḥ, nitāntanirmalasvāntaḥ*, the student is one who possesses a clean, orderly, and pure or transparent mind. *Svāntaḥ* means *sva antaḥ* or *antaḥkaraṇam*, the mind, which is *nirmalam*, transparent. Such a person is described as being transparent, meaning that there are no angularities in him; he is the possessor of a mind that is pure and devoid of likes and dislikes. *Nitāntanirmalasvāntaḥ* is one whose mind or heart has become totally pure. He is the qualified student.

The impurities of the heart can be briefly classified as *rāga* and *dveṣa*, likes and dislikes. Various reactions such as *kāma*, *krodha*, or *lobha* are impurities of mind. *Kāma* means lust or passion, *krodha* means anger, and *lobha* is greed. They are described as impurities because they are a distraction to the mind. When there is lust, anger, or greed, the mind cannot be abiding or focused. Such a mind is distracted. Therefore, these are called impurities of mind. They are also known as *ripuḥ*, enemies. When we have these reactions, the mind is not in our control or available to us; rather, the mind is in the control of these enemies. When the mind is released from the control of desire, anger, and greed it becomes an abiding mind that is under one's control, a pure or a clean mind, a 'transparent' mind. Water is pure when it is transparent; similarly, the mind is pure when it is transparent. A mind free

from reactions, angularities, or complexes is called a pure or transparent mind, *nitāntanirmalasvāntaḥ*.

***The competent student has conquered all the impurities of mind***

Why are there likes, dislikes, passion, anger, and greed in our minds? They are the products of past sins or improper actions. Therefore, they are called *kalmaṣaḥ*. Often, we are under the sway of our own fascinations and attractions; we do things that go against our own interests. Often, we don't realize this at the time of performing these actions, but they appear later as obstacles making our own minds our enemies. Our past actions that we thought were for our well-being and that did not conform to proper values become obstacles to us today. Therefore, the obstacles we face today are the wrong, unrighteous, or unmeritorious actions that we have performed in the past.

Interestingly, Vedanta requires us to take total responsibility for ourselves. It does not blame others for our difficulties. Generally, there is a tendency to blame somebody else for our difficulties, fears, complexes, and sadness. Vedanta says that nobody, including ourselves, is to be blamed. Today's obstacles are the result of actions performed in the past. Therefore, it asks us to accept responsibility for our difficulties and proceed to deal with them. It requires a deliberate effort to remove the impurities of the mind and make it pure, *nirgata-nikhila-kalmaṣaḥ*.

Purity is the nature of the mind just as purity or transparency is the natural property of water. If water is muddy, impure, and unclean, it implies that some impurity such as mud or dirt is present in the water. Similarly, purity or transparency is the nature of our minds and all impurities are extraneous factors; they are foreign elements that have somehow been imposed upon the mind on account of actions that were performed in the past in violation of the harmony of life. Just as it is possible to clean water by filtering out the impurities, it is possible to clean the mind by filtering out the impurities. If impurity were the nature of the mind, this would not be possible. For example, heat is the nature of fire and thus, you can never separate heat from fire. However, heat is not the nature of water and, therefore, you can cool hot water.

***The competent student has purified his mind by performing various duties***

The impurities of the mind can be removed by a method of purification given by the Vedas, *nitya-naimittika-prāyaścitta-upāsana-anuṣṭhānena*. By *anuṣṭhānam*, the performance of *nitya-karma*, *naimittika-karma*, *prāyaścitta-karma*, and *upāsana*, one can get rid of the impurities. *Nitya-karma* are one's daily obligatory duties. *Naimittika-karma* are incidental or occasional obligatory duties. *Prāyaścitta-karma* are expiatory rites performed to nullify or neutralize negative effects, and *upāsana* is worship. Vedanta does not merely talk about this or analyze the problem; it helps us to do something about it. Whatever problems we have today with reference to our minds are problems that have existed through the ages and in all societies in one form or another. The

Vedas give us a effective program for purifying the mind, which requires the performance of certain duties.

Everybody has certain duties, meaning actions that must be performed because we enjoy a certain place in life. We also enjoy certain privileges and must return or repay the enjoyment of these privileges by way of reciprocal participation or by way of the performance of duties. What privileges do we enjoy in this life? There is the air that we breathe; that is a privilege. There is the water that we drink; that is a privilege. There is the food that we eat; that is a privilege. There is the earth on which we walk; that is a privilege. There is space that accommodates us; that is a privilege. The sun illumines everything for us and gives us energy; that is another privilege. The moon cools us and gives nourishment by way of the sap in the vegetables; that is yet another privilege. In this manner, when we look at life, we find that we are enjoying many privileges: that we are born into a given family; that this body is given to us; that we were raised and educated, and so on. These are all privileges we enjoy. That this knowledge is available to us is also a privilege that we enjoy; many teachers and sages dedicated their lives completely to the pursuit of knowledge and made this storehouse of knowledge available to us. This is a privilege that we are currently enjoying. Thus, we enjoy many privileges, but there are corresponding obligations. If we don't fulfill our obligations, we have to pay the price. It is quite possible that we may avoid the obligatory duties by being 'clever', but we cannot really get away from the overall scheme of God; whenever we enjoy privileges we must repay the debt in terms of our duties and participation. This is the principle behind *nitya-karma*, our daily obligatory duties, and *naimittika-karma*, incidental or obligatory duties.

*Prāyaścitta-karma* are expiatory rites. It is recognized that in spite of our best intentions, we end up committing some errors. We are not always alert, competent, or in the best frame of mind and, therefore, knowingly or unknowingly end up violating the harmony. *Prāyaścitta-karma* or expiatory rites are meant to neutralize the effects of these violations. Specific rites are recommended for specific violations. *Upāsanā* is worship or mental worship of the Lord.

### ***The competent student avoids prohibited and desire-prompted actions***

It is not enough that we do what needs to be done; it is also necessary that we avoid doing certain things. What should we avoid? These are *kāmya-karma* and *niṣiddha-karma*. *Niṣiddha-karma* are prohibited actions. The scriptures prohibit certain actions because they violate the prevailing harmony and, in fact, violate us. Whenever we perform an action that goes against the very nature of the Self, we are violating ourselves. Therefore, the scriptures tell us not to do certain things. They say, *himsā na kurīyāt*, do not hurt anybody, or *surām na pibet*, do not drink alcohol. Some of the *viddhi-niṣedhas*, injunctions and prohibitions, may be specific to a particular time and

place in society and may not apply elsewhere, but the overall spirit is applicable at all times and in all places.

We should perform actions that are in keeping with our nature and avoid whatever violates our nature. Since I don't want to be hurt by anybody else, it is only proper that I should not hurt anybody; therefore, the injunction that you refrain from hurting anybody, *himsā na kuriyāt*. Since I do not want anyone to lie to me or cheat me, I should also not lie to others or cheat them. Since I do not want my belongings to be stolen, it is only proper that I not steal from someone else. Some injunctions like 'Don't hurt,' 'Don't lie,' 'Don't cheat,' or 'Don't steal' are common to all societies. There are the universal 'dos' and 'don'ts', and there are particular 'dos' and 'don'ts' that pertain to a particular society. But in every society, every religion, and every culture there are *vidhi* and *niṣedha*, injunctions and prohibitions. We should deliberately refrain from things that are prohibited; otherwise, we run the risk of violating the harmony and end up accumulating the very obstacles that we want to remove.

*Kāmya-karma*, desire-prompted action, is also to be avoided. We are advised to refrain from performing actions that are meant to fulfill or achieve certain ends. A student preparing for the study of Vedānta should deliberately avoid performing *kāmya-karma*. Any action prompted by desire produces a certain result; the one who performs the action will have to experience the result; thus, a chain of cause and effect of action and result is perpetuated and likes and dislikes are created. In order to remain free from the reaction of likes and dislikes, it is better not to perform actions that produce these likes and dislikes.

The performance of daily obligatory duties, incidental obligatory duties, expiatory rites, meditations, and worship, and the avoidance of prohibited or desire-prompted actions frees the mind from negativities and impurities. This leads to a pure mind and pure heart and makes such a person competent to study Vedānta.

***The competent student has purified his mind either in this life or in past lives***

Occasionally, we find some people who possess this pure frame of mind right from childhood, e.g., Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and other saints and sages. We find that from birth or from a very early age, they already possessed a frame of mind that did not require them to go through the performance of these duties. How do we explain the fact that these sages were born with a pure mind without necessarily going through this program? The answer is given as, *asmin janmani janmāntare vā*, all of these things may have been done in this life or in previous lives.

Life is continuous existence. This is not the first embodiment that I have. My life is nothing but a series of embodiments, which have been assumed from time beginning-less. Therefore, we are what we are on account of not just this one birth, but on account of all our past births. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [6-45] that one attains the ultimate goal having

become cleansed of all impurities over a number of lives, *aneka-janma-saṃsiddhastato yāti parāṃ gatim*. Perfection is attained over a number of lives. This is a program that stretches over many lives. Each one of us should understand that whatever merits we possess today and whatever privileges we enjoy in terms of the opportunity to study the scriptures is because we have earned it. It has perhaps been earned not only during the course of this lifetime, but over the course of many lives in the past. Therefore, we find that different people possess different degrees of purification. Everyone has been working over many lives, *asmin janmani janmāntare vā*. Whether these purifying actions are performed in this life or in past lives, this is how one gains the qualifications.

In each life, one attains a certain degree of self-purification and evolves to a certain extent. Thus, this is a journey of evolution; an evolution towards the Self. The evolution in this case is not the creation of something new, but the manifestation of one's true nature. Our true nature is freedom and perfection, and this journey is a manifestation of that. What is it that stifles the manifestation of our true nature? Why is it that the freedom and perfection or fullness, which is already our nature, is not manifest or evident to us? It is because the impurities of the mind distort our true nature; all that is required is the removal of these obstacles and impurities. Therefore, life is nothing but a program for the removal of inner impurities and the manifestation of our true nature. Often, we find people who are enlightened or highly evolved at a very young age. They are those whose program of self-purification has already been accomplished over previous lives.

The idea is that, over course of time, one who has gone through this discipline of self-improvement or self-purification, whether in this life or previous lives, attains a mind that is free from impurities; a pure mind in which the required qualifications manifest themselves. One then enjoys a disposition in which a keen desire to know arises and thus becomes competent to study Vedanta.

***The competent student has gained the knowledge of the Vedas and the auxilliary texts***

In order to follow this program of self-purification, we need to know which actions are to be performed and which actions are to be avoided. We need to know about *nitya-karma* and how they are to be performed; we need to know about *naimittika-karma* and how to perform them; we need to know which actions are prohibited, *niṣiddha-karma*, and we need to know about *prāyścitta-karma* and how to perform them. How do we gain this knowledge?

This knowledge is to be gained through education; specifically, through the knowledge of the Vedas. *Vidhivat-adhīta-veda-vedāṅgatvena-apātatiḥ-adhigata-akhila-vedārthaḥ*. The capable student is an *adhigata-akhila-vedārthaḥ*, one who has gained the knowledge of the entire Vedas. What sort of knowledge is this? It is *apātatiḥ*, general knowledge.

In the olden days, in India, education was nothing but the learning of the Vedas, the scriptures, which are all-inclusive. They give us knowledge of the four *puruṣārthas* or ends sought by all human beings: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. In the Vedas, we find ways of gaining material prosperity or *artha*, material pleasures or *kāma*, righteousness or *dharma*, and also ways of gaining happiness, *mokṣa* or liberation. These four *puruṣārthas* encompass everything. Therefore, one's education was considered complete with the study of the Vedas.

*Vidhivat*. One has to qualify to study the Vedas and they have to be studied in a particular manner because they are sacred scriptures. In the olden days, when a boy reached the age of about eight, he underwent *upanayana* or the sacred thread ceremony. He was given *dīkṣa* and then sent to live with the teacher under whose guidance he studied the Vedas.

*Vidhivat-adhīta-veda-vedāṅgatvena*. To study the Vedas, it was also necessary to study the ancillary texts. These ancillary texts are six in number and are called *vedāṅgas* or 'limbs' of the Vedas. Specifically, they are *śikṣā*, *kalpa*, *vyākaraṇa*, *nirukta*, *chandas*, and *jyotiṣa*. *Śikṣā* is the science of phonetics and teaches the student correct pronunciation; *kalpa* teaches the performance of rituals; *vyākaraṇa* teaches grammar; *nirukta* is a dictionary explaining the etymological meaning of the Vedic words; *chandas* teaches the science of prosody, and *jyotiṣa* is the science of astronomy or astrology. It was necessary for a student to study these subjects to enhance his understanding of the Vedas. Grammar and correct pronunciation are required in order to understand the Sanskrit scriptures. Knowledge of how to perform the rituals is also required. An understanding of the words and how to interpret them requires a study of the *niruktam* for their etymological meaning. This ancillary information provides the general knowledge required in order to study the main text.

In those days, when a boy went to the *gurukulam*, he first learnt to memorize and recite the Vedas. Secondly, he studied the meaning of the mantras that he learnt from the teacher. Thirdly, the student was taught how to perform the rituals. This knowledge, along with a general understanding of what the Vedas convey, was gained from the teacher. The Vedas teach *abhyudaya*, the way to gain material prosperity as well as *niḥśreya*, the way to gain spiritual prosperity. Later, once his education was complete, the student entered *gṛhasthāśrama*, the life of a householder, and performed the rituals.

In the course of his study of the Vedas, a student also studies the Upaniṣads. He recites the Upaniṣads and gains a general idea of what they have to say. For example, he learns that *brahmavidāpnoti param*, the knower of *brahman* attains the limitless and *satyam jñānamanantam brahma*, that *brahman* is *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam* [Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2-1]. He is taught that *tarati śokam-ātmavit*, the knower of the Self overcomes grief [Chāndogyopaniṣad, 7-1-3]. The young student may not understand the full import of these

statements; however, the impressions are planted in his mind and will, someday, grow into a desire to know the Self.

To summarize, the competent student or *adhikārī* is one who is desirous of knowing the true nature of the Self; he is also called a *pramātā*. A person desirous of such knowledge is endowed with the *sādhana*catuṣṭaya, the four-fold qualifications, e.g., *viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śamādiṣaṭkasampatti*, and *mumukṣutvam*. These qualities arise in a *nitāntanirmalasvāntah*, one whose mind acquires purity. The mind becomes absolutely pure *nirgatanikhilakalmaṣatayā*, when all impurities have been eliminated from the mind. The impurities of the mind are eliminated *nityanaimittikapṛāyaścittopāsanānuṣṭhānena*, by the performance of *nitya-karma* or daily obligatory duties, *naimittika-karma* or incidental obligatory duties, *pṛāyaścitta-karma* or expiatory rites, and *upāsanā* or worship. It is not enough that all the duties are performed; the competent student is also required to avoid actions that will cause impurities, *kāmya-niṣiddha-varjanapurahsaram*. In other words, one should perform actions that are designed to remove impurities and at the same time, deliberately avoid actions that will cause impurities. Therefore, *niṣiddha-karma* or prohibited actions and *kāmya-karma* or desire-prompted actions should be avoided. The different actions such as those required to be performed to remove impurities and those that are required to be avoided as the cause of impurities constitute the program of self-purification to prepare the mind of a student for the study of Vedānta. This program is accomplished either in this life or in past lives, *asmin janmani janmāntare vā*. The student gains knowledge of the scriptures while performing the required actions and purifying his mind, thus gaining the qualifications that lead to *jijñāsa*, the desire to know the Self. Such a student is competent to study Vedānta<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.