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# LIFE & LIVING



**YOUR KEY TO ANCIENT WISDOM IN MODERN TIMES WITH SUNANDA LEELARAM, DAUGHTER-DISCIPLE OF THE INTERNATIONALLY EMINENT PHILOSOPHER AND FOUNDER OF VEDANTA ACADEMY, SWAMI A. PARTHASARATHY.**

**By Vidhi Gupta**

**S**unanda Leelaram, affectionately known as Sunandaji, has been studying and researching Vedanta, the ancient philosophy of India, for decades. Her father, Swami A. Parthasarathy, is the founder of Vedanta Academy, a unique institution of learning that enables the development of the intellect. Dedicating her life to the cause of human development, Sunandaji has been guiding leading organizations and universities on the practical application of Vedanta for over twenty years. We get into a conversation with her to seek answers for fundamental life questions and about Vedanta Academy.

**The world is in a constant flux of change. How does one find peace and balance in this fast-paced, highly developed world?**

The world consists of pairs of opposites, dvandvas in Sanskrit. Joy and sorrow. Profit and loss. Honour and dishonour. The chain of opposites goes on endlessly. None of them stay. Each passes away, yielding to the other. When the intellect is weak and undeveloped, the mind is affected by the opposites. Excited by joy, dejected by sorrow. However, when the intellect is fortified with the knowledge of Vedanta, you become objective. The more objective you are, less the impact opposites have on you. You rise above the external fluctuations. An unaffected witness observing the procession of the pairs of opposites in life.

Develop your intellect and begin to live objectively. Your mind remains peaceful and balanced at all times.

**What would you suggest for people to start gaining this wisdom?**

We need to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is information gathered from external sources: books, lectures, educators, institutions. One may be knowledgeable but unable to implement that understanding in one's own life. Wisdom, however, enables one to live by the knowledge acquired and follow a right course of action in life.

Wisdom is gained by one's own effort. Through

a process of thinking and reflection known as manana in Sanskrit. Knowledge is digested, absorbed and made one's own. Thereafter, one lives by that knowledge.

Education today has little provision to reflect upon the knowledge offered. Intelligent students and young adults qualify themselves to make a living. But may not be able to handle the many challenges life poses, both professional and domestic. The Vedanta Academy, India, founded by my father and guru Swami A. Parthasarathy, runs three-year residential courses open to youth in the age group 18-30 years. Students follow a schedule that includes a study of Vedantic literature, question and answer sessions, group discussions and individual reflection. The unique training provides the right atmosphere to imbibe and convert knowledge into wisdom.

**What does a day in the life of a student at Vedanta Academy look like?**

The day begins at 4:15 am and concludes at 9 pm. The schedule is carefully designed to maintain the three traditional disciplines - Karma Yoga: Path of Action, Bhakti Yoga: Path of Devotion and Jnana Yoga: Path of Knowledge. These practices are specially programmed to cater to the physical, emotional and intellectual facets of the personality to ensure the students' overall development. To develop the intellect, there is individual study and reflection from 4:30 to 5:45 am. During the day students attend lectures, group discussions and Q&A sessions. To cater to the physical aspect of one's personality, there are daily structured yoga classes from 6:20 to 7 am. Followed by jogging, gym and various sports. From 11 am to 1 pm students engage in karma action. They work in different departments of their own choice. This discipline helps them develop an attitude of service and sacrifice. To work for work's sake, not for results or rewards. To address the emotional facet of the personality, bhajans devotional singing and prayers are included in the schedule as well. The Academy provides the ideal environment for a seeker to evolve and become a better human being.

**Swami A. Parthasarathy is 96 and still working. What is his secret?**

Work or action never tires you. What fatigues you is worries from the past and anxieties about the future. When the mind is free of desires, you remain active physically while the mind is at rest. Actions are effortless and efficient. Swamiji stands as a

living example of this principle of life.

**As a daughter of Swami ji, how has your life and upbringing been like? How has that helped shape Vedanta today?**

Bhagavad Gita says: Whatever a leader does, others follow. Swamiji's life and work has been a source of inspiration. "Serve, love, learn and realise your Self" has been his direction for life. Without ever telling what one should do, Swamiji inspires by his own example. A living embodiment of these universal truths.

Vedanta is a 'gift of life' every child should receive from parents. The only way this can be done is living the Vedantic principles oneself.

