



## 27. SWAMMINI SADVIJI CHAITANYA

Swamini Sadviji Chaitanya is a vedic monk and disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, She is currently Resident Director and Acharya of Arsha Vijnana Mandiram near Valdosta, Georgia. She is also a former Professor at the University of California, Berkley and has taught at several US universities including San Francisco, Oberlin, Oregon and Valdosta. She is a prolific speaker who has given lectures and seminars at many prestigious events in US and abroad, including at the Vatican Inter Faith meeting.

### INTERVIEW

***Q: Can you please tell me what this Sanskrit word “dana” means in the Vedanta tradition?***

Swamini Sadviji Chaitanya: The word danam is a noun derived from the root verb da, which means, “to give.” Danam includes all kinds of giving, whether it is money, resources, or time, and is considered in the Vedic tradition to be an invaluable means for spiritual growth. There are two kinds of growth that occur in a person’s life. The first is the growth from childhood

to adulthood. This happens naturally, without the person's intervention. The second kind of growth is spiritual growth, which does not happen on its own, but has to be self-initiated. The spiritual journey of a human being primarily entails growing from being a consumer to a contributor. There is a natural desire to contribute, to make a difference, and acting in accordance to this desire facilitates spiritual growth. When this tendency to give, to share, and to care is stunted to various factors, such as a sense of insecurity, it not only affects the individual concerned, but can also lead to a scarcity mentality in communities and nations.

***Q: How is dana practiced through the teaching of Vedanta? For example, do swamis/sannyasins charge for the teaching? And if not, why not?***

Swamini Sadviji Chaitanya: Practicing dana helps in gaining emotional maturity. It also helps increase one's self-confidence. Emotional maturity is a preparation for gaining the knowledge of non-duality, known as Vedanta, where the self is revealed as limitlessly whole, as the cause of the universe. This knowledge is not anyone's intellectual property. It is timeless, and has been handed down through teaching lineages known as guru-parampara. Receiving this knowledge is a blessing, and being in the position to share this sacred teaching with others who might be interested in it is a greater blessing yet. Traditionally, one does not charge for the teaching, because of several reasons. The knowledge that one is whole being an already an established fact is only hidden from a person due to self-ignorance. The teaching of Vedanta removes self-ignorance, and, consequently, one is able to appreciate one's own glory as the whole, which was already pre-existent, even before the knowledge was gained. There cannot be a price placed on the knowledge of the infinite. It is priceless. Finally, if the teacher is a sannyasin, it means that the person

has given up the pursuit of things, including money. The question of charging for anything does not arise.

***Q: What are your thoughts on lay teachers that don't know the scripture but still charge for "satsangs", or for meetings on Skype video, phone, internet or by other means?***

Swamini Sadviji Chaitanya: One cannot teach what one does not know, and this applies to all bodies of knowledge including spiritual knowledge. In this universe, there are many kinds of teachings and teachers. They all have roles to play assigned by Bhagavan in the big karmic order. Some of them may have something useful to share, and we pray that they use their abilities to inspire others to bring out the best in themselves and their students, and follow a dharmic life.

**END OF INTERVIEW**