



# The Philosopher King in the Modern World: Exploring philosophical leadership in the Hindu tradition

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May 14, 2019  
9:00am – 4:30pm

## Summary

In this workshop, we will explore the importance and potential relevance of philosophy and spirituality to modern-day leadership from the perspective of the Philosopher King in Advaita Vedanta-Non-Dualism in Hindu philosophy.

The focus of the workshop will be to draw on two important historical texts, in order to explore their relevance to political leadership in the modern world: *The Ashtavakra Gita* as well as brief excerpts from *Yoga Vasistha*.

This workshop will place significant emphasis on individual experiential comprehension. With the aid of guided meditation and discussion of these chosen texts, participants will explore how meditation, philosophy and spiritual instruction may be beneficial in the training of a political leader. Throughout the day, with the aid of repeated brief guided mediation, participants will attempt to vivify, inspire and vitalize the subject matter in a very personal and immediate context. Through this experiential exploration, the workshop will also substantively investigate the concept, discipline and role of the Philosopher King within the Hindu philosophy of Non-Dualism, Advaita-Vedanta, seeking to better understand the importance and implications of this philosophy for political leadership in the modern era.

Important questions that participants will explore in this workshop include: Does the philosophical training of a political leader have any relevance within the political landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is there a connection between philosophy, spirituality and politics? Can meditation be used as a tool for training the Philosopher-King? And if so, what is the impact of the direct experience in this discipline? Important parallels will also be drawn between the evolutions of two philosophical cultures: Advaita Vedanta on the one hand and Plato's theory of Forms on the other. What is permanent and real? What is impermanent and unreal? What is the potential relevance of these ideas to the Philosopher King? And finally, on the concepts of universalism and 'the other', what bearing do such concepts have on leadership?



# WSSR WORKSHOPS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

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## Outline

### **9:00-11:00 Introduction: Advaita Vedanta-Non-Dualism**

- What is Non-Dualism?
- Training of the Philosopher-King
- Guided meditation

### **11:00-11:15 Break**

### **11:15-12:00 Training of the Philosopher King in the Advaita Vedanta tradition**

- Study, Examination and Discussion of Texts:
  - *Ashtavakra Gita*: this classical Advaita-Vedanta text is a revelatory dialogue between King Janaka of Videha and Ashtavakra, a Vedic Sage and spiritual teacher. This text highlights the training of the Philosopher-King in the Advaita Vedanta philosophical tradition. King Janaka has three fundamental questions that form the basis and outline of this discipline in philosophical terms:
    - What is knowledge, what is liberation and how are they attained?
    - What is ignorance, what is bondage and how are they removed?
    - What is dispassion and what is its relevance with regards to knowledge, liberation and bondage?
  - *Yoga Vasistha*: The passages from this text describe King Janaka's profound insight into his role as a Philosopher-King.
- Guided meditation

### **12:00-1:30 Lunch**

### **1:30-2:45 Group Study Projects**

- Each group will be assigned related topics/questions to explore in the context of what they have learned

### **2:45-3:00 Break**

### **3:00-4:30 Group Presentations**

- Each group will present their understanding of the assigned topic, followed by group discussion
- Concluding guided meditation

## Required Readings (see [Course Reserves website](#))\*

Zimmer, Heinrich. 1969. *Philosophies of India*. Edited by Joseph Campbell. Bollingen Series XXVI. New Jersey: Princeton University Press:

- Part I. The Highest Good I. The Meeting of East and West, Chapter 1: "The Roar of Awakening", pp. 1-14
- Part III. The Philosophies of Eternity III. Brāhmanism, Chapter 4: "Vedānta", pp. 409-425

John, Richards. 2015. *Ashtavakra Gita*. New York: Abhaya Books:

- Chapter 1, pp. 4-12.

Venkatesananda, Swami. 1993. *Vasistha's Yoga*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Part V, Chapter 1: "The Story of King Janaka", pp. 204-209

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