

Report on 2013 Upanisad-Bhasya Retreat and Children Retreat II

at Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg PA USA
With *Swami Veditatmanananda Sarswati*

The Bhāṣyam Vedānta Retreat was conducted from July 14 to July 20 at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg PA. Approximately eighty adults attended this camp and forty two junior children from ages 8 to 10 also attended the camp.

The registration was complete on the 14th of July and Suddhatmaji held an orientation in the evening. He explained the course schedule and the facilities available at the Gurukulam.

Swami Veditatmananda Sarawati taught Brahadaranyaka Upanisad Passages 1-4-7, 8, 9 and 10 with Sankarabhasya. It was continuation of last year's course. Swamiji held three classes every day and a satsang session in the evening.

Swamiji taught this Bhasya verse by verse explaining the meaning and implications. The Bhasya is in the form of discourse and objections. It is essentially a discussion in which Sankara refutes the objections and the teachings of Daiita. Swamiji explained the concepts of the undifferentiated and the differentiated self.

For the children, Lance Daniels provided outdoor activities, games and snacks service. Gambhiraji conducted classes in Vedic Heritage. Manaswiniji conducted Yoga Classes. Ushaji taught Sanskrit. Suddhatmaji taught the children Vedic chanting.

Many volunteers participated in providing various services and in organizing a Cultural Evening for the children.

On July 19th, Savithri Maniji presented a children's Cultural Evening. It was a beautiful presentation organized in a short, limited time. The program included Marathi Bhajan dedicated to Panduranga. Then followed a



Where there is an inner freedom, the external world is unable to create any bondage or dependence. The wise man becomes free while in this body itself. This is the goal of human life. The vision of oneness fulfills this goal.

Swami Veditatmanananda Sarswati

dance sequence composed by Manaswiniji, Chanting " Aditya Hridayam " by junior children trained by Suddhatmaji, and another chanting " Laghunyasa" by senior children trained by Gambhiraji. A play "Kannappa Nayanar " was performed by senior children. The junior children performed a play depicting Sarva Dharma Sama Bhavah.

In his vote of thanks Suddhatmaji thanked Savitriji as he acknowledged her long dedicated work performed for many years in organizing and presenting Children's programs at this Gurukulam.

Yoga classes were conducted by Susan Lalji which included Surya Namskara Classes in the morning. Sanskrit classes were conducted by Kalpesh Jasapara.



The Gurukulam Temple was under renovation. However, the pujas were conducted at the temple. The priests Sri Ravichandran and Sri Ganesa performed the Pujas regularly.

The Bhasya classes and the Yoga classes were held at the Yoga Studio. Children's programs were conducted in Pampa and Ganga buildings.

The study of Upanisad started with the explanation of the undifferentiated and the differentiated universe. The universe is differentiated in name and form. The meditation however, must be on self because everything is unified in it. The self is immortal. The self is dearer than anything else and it should be meditated as dear.

Elaborate objections and replies follow regarding how the Brahman became Brahman, how the Brahman acquired the knowledge to become Brahman, who gave this knowledge to Brahman and what is this knowledge. Swamiji presented a chart to illustrate the contradiction of one entity being the knower and the known and the possibility of infinite regression in trying to find out what did the Brahman know because of which it became everything.

Swamiji explained in a great detail why human being is uniquely qualified to achieve

moksha. Viveka can help a person to see himself as others, recognize his limitlessness and the ignorance that prevents him from recognizing this reality. With viveka, a Jiwa can achieve moksha.

The jiva has a notion that it is limited. It does not know that it is, in fact, the Brahman. This notion of limitedness is superimposed on it. The Brahma Vidya removes this superimposed ignorance and it reveals jiva's true nature. Additionally, the knowledge that 'I am not limited' is consolation to the jiva and it relieves much of the pain and suffering in sansara.

This Upanisad is one of the major works of Sankara. The mantras studied in this course reveal the nature of Brahman and that of the Jiva. The emphasis is on the Sankara's teaching of Advaita. Swamiji explained step by step and in detail all the mantras. The students enjoyed the course and are looking forward to the continuation of the study of this Upanisad next year. The students appreciated the way Swamiji conducted the classes and answered the all questions during the Satsangs.

The kitchen staff provided good food and served it on time. Suddhatmaji and the Gurukulam staff, the teachers and the volunteers worked hard to make the camp a success.

The camp ended on July 20, 2013.

Reported by Arvind Bagal