

Report On 2014 Year-End Family Vedanta Camp

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA



The year 2014 was culminated in the customary way at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam (AVG), Saylorsburg, PA with a year-end family Vedanta camp from Dec 24-31, 2014. The camp was attended by 120 adults and 75 children. The Vedanta topics covered included Kailvalya Upanishad (KU), Kali-Santarana Upanishad (KSU) and Navadha Bhakti (NB). The KU and NB classes were taught by Swami Pratyagbodhananda while Swamini Svaatmavidyananda taught the KSU classes.

The camp began with an orientation program on the eve of Dec 24th conducted by Swami Pratyagbodhananda. A typical day during the camp consisted of guided meditation in the morning, three one-hour classes on Vedanta and an hour of satsang in the evening. In addition, Vedic chanting and yoga classes were also included. The





guided meditation sessions were conducted by Swamini Svaatmaavidyananda.

Swami Pratyagbodhananda in his class on Kaivalya Upanisad enlightened the audience on the essence of Veda and how the self is deluded by Maya and self ignorance. Swamiji further unfolded how this ignorance is removed by the knowledge of Brahman and that after gaining the knowledge the person meditates upon the one being that is all pervading consciousness and happiness. A beautiful analogy was brought out, considering the ego as the lower *arani* and Om as the upper *arani* and on account of the repeated friction between the two *aranis*, in the fire of knowledge that is born, for the wise person the bondage of samsara is burnt. In the Navadha Bhakti classes, Swami Pratyagbodhananda highlighted the nine types of devotion - Shraavanam, Keerthanam, Smaranam, Padasevanam, Arcanam, Vandanam, Dasyam, Sakhyam and Atmanivedanam. Swamiji emphasized that even if one takes one type of devotion with shraddha one can gain Ishwara's grace to gain self-knowledge.

Swamini Svaatmaavidyananda in her talks on Kali Santarana Upanisad highlighted the meaning of the word '*kali*.' While '*kali*' generally stands for the '*kali yuga*,' Swaminiiji beautifully enhanced the meaning of the word by suggesting that it stands for the *kashaya*, the unconscious or the 'inner child,' a term well known in analytical psychology. With the decline of dharma in the '*kali yuga*' and a concomitant increase in the circumstances for the manifestation of the *kashaya*, a human being, as though possessed by the '*kali*,' struggles to cross the ocean of samsara. This, in fact, is the concern of Narada when he posed the question to Brahmaji as to how one would overcome the effects of the '*kali*.' Notwithstanding this conundrum, the desire for freedom, the *mumukshutvam*, is an innate urge in every human being. The *mumukshu* has to become a *jijnasu*, the seeker of self-knowledge as knowledge alone is the means for liberation. Swamini Svaatmaavidyananda underscored that the Kali Santarana Upanisad gives the solution to this problem through the response of Brahmaji to Narada's question which

entailed the process of reciting the sixteen names of the Lord as in the mantra, "hare Rama hare Rama Rama hare hare," or "hare Krishna hare Krishna Krishna Krishna hare hare." By the recitation of the Lord's name with sincerity, the mumukshu turned jijnasu, gains antahkaranasuddhi and with concomitant pursuit of the Vedanta Shastra for a length of time, in due course his/her self-ignorance is destroyed and the person's true nature is revealed as being non-different from the total.

CHILDREN PROGRAM

The program started with the orientation session addressed by Smt Savithri Mani in the Yoga Studio. The children were divided into groups of juniors, seniors and teens. The chanting classes for juniors and seniors were conducted by Br Girija and Br Radha. Vedic Heritage classes for juniors and seniors were conducted by Br Suryanarayanan, Smt Usha Swaminathan, Ms Shreya Anand and Br Radha. Vedanta classes for the teens were conducted by Br Girija and Br Suryanarayana. Yoga classes for all the groups were conducted by Lance, Vasiliki and Aiofe. Arts and Craft for juniors were conducted by Vasiliki. SmtLakshmi Anand conducted question and answer (Q&A) session for the teens based on Vedic Heritage. Sanskrit classes and Q&A session for seniors were conducted by Br Radha and Br Suryanarayanan. The teens were addressed by different speakers including Swamini Svaatmavidyananda on various topics. During the camp a one-day field trip was arranged for all the groups to America on Wheels museum. During the camp fire the children exhibited their talent by singing, dancing and playing on various musical instruments. Vignesh and Amogha helped in conducting games for children. On the final day of the camp there was a cultural extravaganza show presented by the



children depicting the nine types of devotion through stories from the Puranas. For the cultural program the children were trained superbly by Smt Savithri Mani, Br Radha and Br Girija. At the end of the program AVG Manager Sri Suddhatma gave the vote of thanks.

The children presented a talent show on the evening of 31st Dec. As the midnight hour approached, Pujya Swamiji through Skype blessed all the campers and ushered in the New Year with the chanting of "Om Nama Sivaya." The campers were exhilarated by this auspicious beginning.

During the New Year day celebrations on January 1st pre-recorded New Year messages of Pujya Swamiji followed by that of Swami Tattvavidananda and Swami Veditatmanandawere shown to the nearly 1000 attendees who were present. Swami Pratyagbodhananda and Swamini Svaatmavidyananda also gave their benedictory messages following which there was a Pushpanjalito Lord Dakshinamurthy with the chanting of the 108 names of the Lord by the priests, Sri Ravi and Sri Ganesh. The New Year celebrations concluded with a sumptuous lunch thanks to Sri Ramachandran and his team who also took care of the culinary needs of the campers during the week.

Report by Br Girija & Br Radha