

## Rishikesh Three Year Course

Three year Vedanta and Sanskrit course at Rishikesh Ashram was recently concluded. Feedback from some of the participants are given below;



Acaryas and students of three year course

What is the nature of the universe seen in front of us? What is the nature of “me” who is seeing this Jagat? By asking whom, can we know the nature of these two? Whose words can we believe? When I was in this confusion, fortunately, I came to know that a one year course is beginning at Arsha Vidya Pitam at Rishikesh. To my fortune it turned out in to a 3 year course with the blessings of Pujya Swamiji who is the bridge of knowledge between Sanatana Dharma and the modern times. Having joined the institution in Rishikesh I have gained clarity of knowledge through proper Sravana of Prastana traiya bhasya through Sri Santatmananda Saraswati . I offer my pranams through vaca, manasa, sirasa.

Through Sastra vakyas I understood that, kartrtva and bhoktrtva are only superimpositions (adhyasa) and not real. “ I am “ the only reality sustaining this whole creation.

-Vasudeva Rao

ओं नमो ब्रह्मादिभ्यो ब्रह्मविद्या-संप्रदाय-कर्तुभ्यो वंश ऋषिभ्यो नमो गुरुभ्यः।

I would like to start by thanking Pujya Swamiji for starting this institution, without which, I would never had the opportunity to learn what I have learned in last three years. Also heartfelt thanks to Santatmanandaji and Brahmavidyandaji for allocating significant amount of time for teaching despite the competing priorities. Prostrations to all aacaryas who have contributed to my learning in the last three years.

I joined the course with a very limited goal of understanding one upanishad and after three short years, I can comfortably say that this limited goal has been achieved. This could not have been possible without the patient teaching of my aacarya Swami Santatmananda & Swami Brahmavidyananda. Every teacher, by their unique teaching style and emphasising different aspects of vedanta, have helped me to understand sastra better.

It is really amazing that it took such long time to understand one simple sentence, that too an obvious fact about myself. Even more amazed at the teachers patience in trying (day after day after day) to make the student understand such an obvious fact.

I do realise that this understanding is not the end but just beginning. This understanding is like initial steps of a child who has just learned to walk independently. With great effort, it gets up, takes couple of steps and falls off and reverts to crawling. In time the child grows up to be a boy and then a man to whom walking becomes so natural that he does not pay any attention to the walk but just pays attention to job at hand. Only time will tell if this understanding becomes as natural as walking whereby there is only enjoyment of scenery (as my own self). If that day ever comes (by the grace of Ishwara) that would be the proper accomplishment of goal and the real offer of gratitude to Pujya Swamiji and all other aacaryas.

As for the Sanskrit and chanting was concerned I was quite sceptical in the beginning, as my goal was to understand just one upanishad (and also my chanting skills and language skills are very limited). But luckily, I kept up with both the classes with the encouragement of aacharya, which helped me with the pronunciation (of tongue twisting words) and familiarity with the script and the words. This greatly helped towards the end of the course where the Sanskrit content increased significantly in the teaching. I now understand the importance of chanting and Sanskrit in a course like this.

Thanks to all my chanting teachers including Swami Paravidyananda, Swamini Vedarthananda and Swamini Saradananda of Annaikatti Ashram.

- Madhoo

"Four years ago, by Isvara's grace, I had the chance to have an exposition to Vedanta during the 3 months course given by Swami Santatmananda in Rishikesh. For me it has been a revelation I found the nights too long, so eager I was to listening the next class. It seemed that I had been waiting for this teaching since a long time and now it was coming as if each piece of the puzzle found their own place.

Besides the listening of Upanishads and other prakaranas, the vedic chantings, learning of sanskrit, for which I find a particular interest and daily abhishekam at the temple was a rejuvenating. I was impressed by the words of the sastras and the way Swamiji was conveying them with such a style that they entered very deeply. During this period, all notions about myself and time and space were gone. This is the most exalted teaching I have ever had. During the 2nd and 3rd year the teaching went more intense with the study of Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sankaracarya. Satsangs were there to answer questions that could come during the classes but very often the answers came by themselves if we give the time to the unfoldment of the teaching. I find that it is one of the wonders of this vedantic knowledge that the understanding is getting more and more clear along the way. It is also amazing as how each Upanishad has its own manner of describing the vision of oneness without any contradiction.

We salute the commitment of our Acarya Swami Santatmananda and Swami Bhramavidyananda to deliver this teaching during these 3 years. Class after class with generosity, patience and compassion they gave their best to unfold the vision of Vedanta. It has helped me to grow spiritually, to be more alert in my responses and overall to appreciate the presence of Iswara in every moment of our life and surrender unto him ; it is the most important thing for which I keep a profound gratitude.

My salutations and prostrations to Pujya Swamiji for having granted us, foreigners, the opportunity to learn this knowledge in English and for having perpetuated this advaita parampara with so many competent teachers. And through him I thank our acaryas for their guidance on this path and for having given us this vision.

The course is over and I know that this vision of Vedanta is deeply rooted in me (snake is dead definitely). Knowing that the source is there at any time is the best life insurance. It will not quit me and will continue to accompany me. It gave very firm foundations for my future home study and may be for its transmission. For all this and deep from my heart, Ishvaraya Namah !..."

**-Marie and Pierre called as Meera and Atmaram.**

It must have been some मङ्गल arrangement of forces in 'the order' that I happened to listen to a lecture, that was being rendered by Pujya Swamiji, during one of the camps. Topic was- ChandogyaUpanishad chapter 6- selected verses. I was not new to spirituality. In fact I was at an Ashram in Rishikesh, in search of 'some organised and proper teaching of vedanta. Dominant thought in mind, during Swamijis lecture was, "will it happen- that I get a chance to learn from this wonderful teacher!" . . . .

Thanks to Pujya Swamijis compassion, foresight and dedication that extremely well designed courses are successfully being run by competent and committed teachers. I have been able to make good use of the support system set up by Swamiji.

The texts taught during the first year gave very good foundation for what followed. Course design and the coverage are effective and sufficiently comprehensive; lot of freedom was also available to the students. If one does not focus on what is intended to be learnt here, and instead gets drifted due to immaturity, then it is like 'missing out on the vital which was possible to have been gained'.

Three year course has helped me understand 'life situations' objectively, given confidence, शास्त्रनिष्ठा and enthusiasm to live happily and contribute to society better than what I may have. I express gratitude to my Acharya Swami Santatmanandaji, Swami Brahavidyanandaji, Swami Parabrahmanandaji, Swamini sisters who taught chanting, and in fact everyone who helped me learn.

वन्दे गुरु परम्पराम्।

- Nandagopal

I would like to express my deepest and heart felt gratitude to Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder Arsha Vidya Pitham , the resident acarya Swami Santatmananda Saraswati and other venerable teachers of the tradition for initiating me into the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. This study would not have been made possible by their generous support and guidance.

During the course of the study, the students were led through most major Upanishads along with Shankara Bhashya, the Bhagavad Gita and portions of the Brahmasutras and several supporting texts. A highly systematic effort was made to acquaint the students with technicalities of Sanskrit with a special focus on the Paninian sutras. In addition, the students were also taught the fine nuances of highly technical Vedic chanting. The explanations of the textual material was richly worded, poetic, interspersed with anecdotal humour. The traditional scholarship and the command of the Advaitic texts and its unequivocal assertion of

Jiva-Brahma Aikyam was truly inspiring and indeed had a life altering impact on me as a person. The numerous satsangs and personal conversations with the teachers put to rest doubts that I had, moulding my thought process towards a newer and a more harmonious understanding.

-Nitin Dutt