

Memorial & Independence Day Week-end Retreats at AVG Saylorsburg

The summer season of Vedanta Retreats began at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania this year with Swami Veditatmanandaji's annual Memorial Day and Independence Day weekend retreats. This year, Swamiji selected verses from Chapter Two in the Bhagavad Gita on Sankhya Yoga or Yoga of Knowledge. Several returning students attended the retreats as well as many new families who were visiting the Ashram for the first time.

During the Memorial Day Retreat, Swamiji discussed *Karmanyeva Adhikaraste* BG 2.47.

Arjuna suffered because he did not want to fight the battle against his relatives. Arjuna wanted to take the path of renunciation or sanyasa instead of action so that he would not have to fight. He turned to Lord Krishna for help and became his student. Lord Krishna teaches renunciation as a state of mind, one who has a pure mind free of likes, dislikes, and demands rather than a particular lifestyle. Lord Krishna taught Arjuna that he was fit for action or karma and that it was his duty to fight the battle to protect dharma. Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna that karma, or deliberate action, when performed with the right attitude can be a means of inner purification and spiritual practice. In brief, Swamiji first taught us that our actions should conform to dharma. Our actions should be driven by duty rather than our

own likes and dislikes which are driven by the ego. Second, our actions can be an offering to the Lord. Our actions should be dedicated to a higher cause rather than just for the sake of ego gratification. Lastly, our actions should serve others. Transforming ourselves from consumer to contributor leads to inner purification by getting rid of our likes and dislikes. During the retreat, Swamiji taught the students in great detail how karma yoga is used to purify the mind and it is in only in this state of mind that we can appreciate our true nature which is whole.

During the Independence Day Retreat, Swamiji discussed *Yogah Karmasu Kausalam* BG 2.50. Swamiji described kausalam as the path of freedom as opposed to akausalam which is the path of bondage. Kausalam is the real skill required for living life. It is this skill that enables one to create well-being and happiness for themselves. Lord Krishna teaches us that happiness is our own true nature. Our extroverted minds make us believe that happiness comes from external objects and situations. Swamiji explained that the right attitude makes our minds turn inward, directed towards the Self so that we can experience our true nature which is happiness. Karma yoga is the attitude towards karma. It entails doing what is right whether it is convenient or not. Our actions must support the values of non-violence, honesty, and helping

others. We must also practise samatva, or sameness of the mind with regards to the results of our karma. Prasada buddhi or graceful acceptance of what appears as either success or failure allows us to welcome everything. The proper attitude gives us immediate happiness. It will help us to overcome reactions of the mind and free us from our likes and dislikes. This will create an objective mind that allows one to inquire into the nature of the Self. It will make us stop and ask "What am I seeking in my life?" It will lead to the discovery that you are already what you are seeking to be. During the retreat, Swamiji provided detailed examples on how we can practise the right attitude or yoga in our daily lives.

Other camp activities included chanting classes by Sri Suddatmaji where students learned to recite Medha Suktam and Durga Suktam. Music classes were conducted by Pandit Mukesh Desai. Concurrent classes for children were taught by several Gurukulam staff and volunteers. During the evenings, Pandit Mukeshji led the group in singing several bhajans. The highlight of every evening was Satsang with Swamiji where he further clarified the teachings for the students as well as answering several general questions. It was a great blessing for all who attended these retreats.

"The gain of pleasure rests upon the convergence of three constantly changing factors, never fully predictable, nor, even under one's control. Moments of pleasure require the availability of the object, availability of the appropriate, effective instrument for enjoying the object, and the presence of the proper frame of mind for enjoyment of the object. Of course, we do have moments of joy from time to time, but being dependent upon the alignment of three changing factors they last but a moment. The objects of enjoyment are limited, bound by time. In the very process of enjoyment some gets expended, and all are subject to change, in the hands of time. The instruments of enjoyment also are time-bound, limited, and not capable of consistent performance. And the mind, being what it is – whimsical, capricious – gets tired of what it once eagerly desired and sought. Thus, trying to maintain a moment of pleasure is like throwing a saddle over three wild horses, sitting astride all three, and being able to successfully guide them in one direction".

.....**Pujya Swamiji**