

A Very Special Retreat



In Rishikesh, where the Swami Dayananda Saraswati's ashram sits, there is an auspicious bend in the Ganga. The murmur of rippling water is a constant call to stand in awe of its magnificence and power.

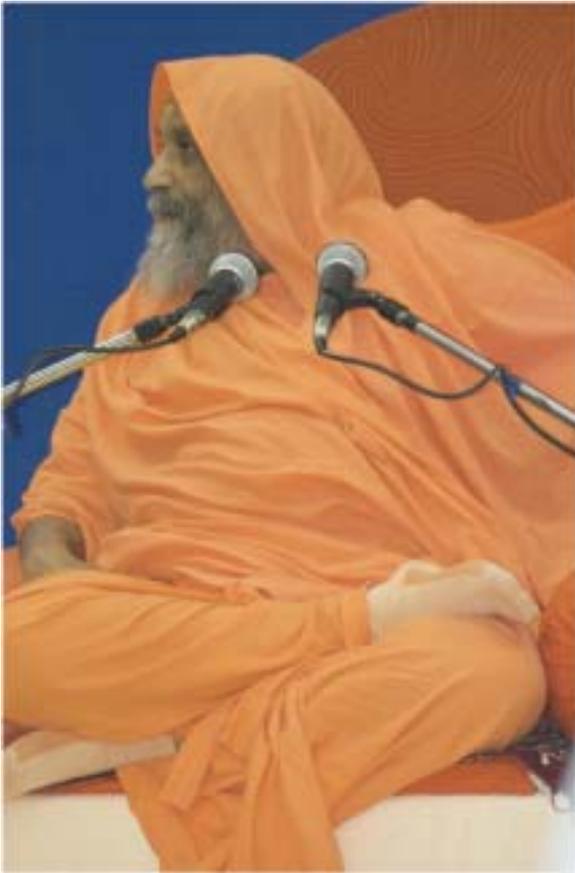
Pujya Swamiji had personally extended an invitation to CEO's and VIP's to attend a

Special Vedanta retreat from October 8 to 14, 2012. The purpose was to give the group useful insights on leadership through the GITA, which would not only transform one's perspective to life, but also enable participants to influence the lives of many others around them and to contribute towards shaping a more sustainable and responsible society.

Participants aged 30 to 75 came from India, Oman, Dubai, France, Thailand, Nepal and the US. Some had grown-up under Swamiji's gaze, others experienced their first introduction to Vedanta.



In the vast lecture hall overlooking the river, there is an overwhelming sense of admiration, reverence and deep affection for Swamiji as he enters the room and invites us to be seated. Almost a minute passes before he speaks, where only the whirling of the ceiling fans can be heard. In the softest of voices he says into the two microphones installed in front of him: "Fasten your seat belts, we are taking off".



And take off we did. The master's first lecture began with one of the many anecdotes he was to share over the week:

"A boy is happily playing with a balloon and all of a sudden the balloon bursts. He is inconsolable despite his parents' attempts at



comforting him and promises of other balloons or treats. All in vain."

"Do you know why he is crying? " Pujya Swamiji asks, *"Do you know?"*

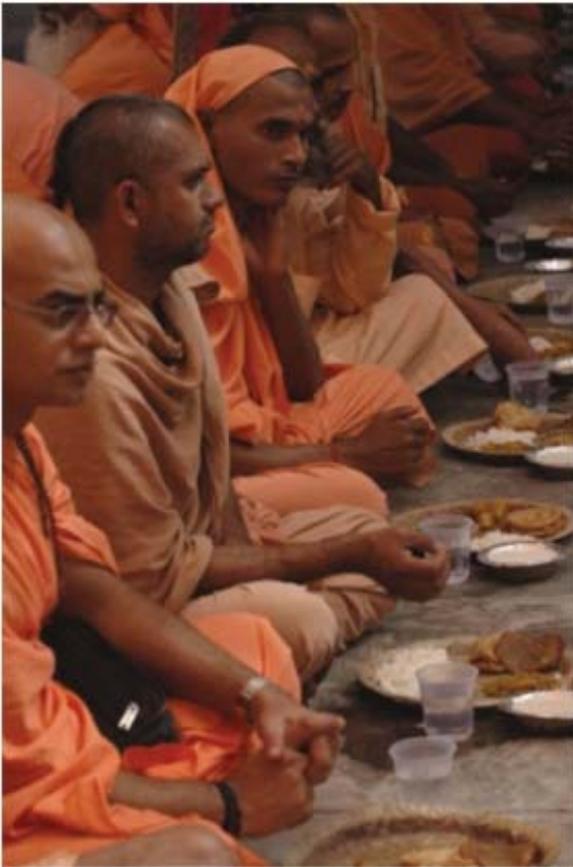
He narrows his eyes and scans the audience. A seemingly obvious answer floats in the air silently.

"He is crying, not because his balloon burst, but because his brother's balloon is still flying"...

Almost 5 hours every day for the rest of the week, Pujya Swamiji took the group on a journey of self-discovery, adequacy, and yes, ...happiness. *"The goal of life is self-acceptability,"* he told the audience several times. *"Animals do not have a problem accepting themselves,"* he says drawing laughter, *"the mosquito does not lament that it is small and insignificant"*. In his unique style Pujya Swamiji shared his vision on freedom, compassion, result of action, choice, relationships and attitude, all the while referring to verses from the Bhagavad Gita.

Imperceptibly, the teaching became increasingly more complex as the week went on, leaving all of us with a healthy thirst to delve deeper into the understanding of Vedanta.

Despite Pujya Swamiji's admission that his lectures are "improvised", everyday he took the participants to new heights, to finally touch on the vast notion of Iswara. One could almost feel the silent gasps of recognition and "A-HAs" during the lectures, that Pujya Swamiji punctuated with mischievous humour drawn from every day situations. Most



of all, he told us in many different ways that *"everything was the way it should be"*.

In addition to the lectures, the retreat offered a full programme of guided meditations, chanting, yoga and cultural evenings. The week also saw a wave of visitors, young and old coming to pay their respects to Swamiji.

A touching moment was a presentation by Ms Sheila Balaji of Swami Dayananda's AIM for SEVA school project, which aims to bring education and life skills to tribal and rural children throughout India. Touching the lives of 10 million people with almost 100 schools already established, the project is rapidly expanding to all districts of India.

Retreat participants took turns in offering bandararas at the ashram. Almost every day saw a *bandara* where 200 to 500 *Swamis* sat under a white and saffron canopy erected for them to receive food and gifts. Swamiji had told us to observe carefully how swiftly they came and vanished in utmost silence.

Participants' reactions:

"I feel adequate, I am where I should be, I am home"

**Xavier, Executive Coach
from France**

"I cannot imagine my life without Swamiji's teaching, I want my relatives and my friends to know that fact about me"

Pael, young script writer

"I cannot say that I understand all very clearly, but I seek fervently... for me a big part of this experience is being here" says CEO Prabha from Oman pointing at the Ganges.

It is my first time, I came because a friend encouraged me to attend and I intend to take it further as I feel there is truth in Swamiji's words.

Vivek, Entrepreneur.

Thanks to this teaching, I know I am a good mother, a good friend and a good professional, says CEO Marisa, Private company CEO, Thailand.

**A Report by Marie Ange- Head
Communications, UN.**