

Family Retreat Vedanta III at Saylorsburg PA



“It is the invariable law of *karma* that righteousness or honesty confers happiness to a person and the opposite makes him unhappy. Happiness and unhappiness are the states of mind and not outer phenomena.”

Swami Viditstmananda Sarswati

The Vedanta Retreat III of the year 2013 was held at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam along with Children’s Camp at Saylorsburg, PA from August 4 to August 11. Approximately 60 adult participants and 30 boys and girls of varying ages from 6 to 17 attended the camp.

On Sunday August 4, the registration was completed during the day. Orientation was held in the evening by Suddhatmaji. He explained the course schedule and gave information regarding the facilities at the Gurukulam.

Swami Viditstmananda Sarswati taught Kathopanishad Chapter I and Bhagvad Gita Chapter IV. Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji taught KuntiStutii.

The children were grouped according to their ages as the Juniors group 6 to 9, the Seniors group 10 to 12 and the teens group 13 and above. Each group had its own activities such as Vedic chanting, yoga, Sanskrit study, drama practice; get together, games, aarati, nightly camp fires and Gita

study administered by the staff and volunteers. Suddhatmaji, Lance Daniels, Andres, Nityaji, Ushaji, Terry, Gambhiraji and Savithri Auntie participated in the children’s programs.

The Yoga classes were conducted by Aoife.

Kathopanishad starts with the dialogue between Naciketa and Lord Yama. Swamiji taught this chapter verse by verse and in details. Lord Yama offered Naciketa three boons. As the first boon Naciketa asked Yama Raja to remove Vajasravasa’s worry and bring about his happiness. This indicates his love for his family. Boon was granted. As the second boon Naciketa asked Yama Raja to teach him the sacrifice that enabled the performer to go to Brahmaloaka and enjoy immortality. This indicates his desire and faith in the knowledge. The boon was granted. Additionally, Yama Raja granted that this ritual will be named after Naciketa. For the third boon, Naciketa said, “There is doubt about a man when he is dead. Some say that he exists; others say that he does not. This I should like to know



and taught by you.” Yama Raja wanted to be convinced about Naciketa’s determination and qualifications to receive this knowledge. Therefore He offered him several alternatives. But Naciketa refused to accept any alternative. This indicates his Shradha. The first chapter ends here. Swamiji said that this chapter shows what Shradha is. It is determination, trust, devotion, humility, fulfilling the moral obligations, intense desire for knowledge for eternal freedom.

In the study of Bhagvad Gita, Swamiji continued chapter IV from the last Retreat. The teaching was for a clear understanding

of Karma Yoga as described in the later part of this chapter. Bhagwan Sri Krishna says that a wise man should have no attachments, no desires, and renunciation of worldly things, liberation, and a centered mind in the knowledge. Bhagawan Sri Krishna describes various yajnas. Then Bhagwan explains Pranayama and the method to perform it. Bhagawan tells Arjuna that action is required to attain knowledge. However, knowledge is to be gained by sacrificing the action in the yajna for knowledge. Ultimately there is no action left. That is Moksha. Bhagawan says; do not doubt the knowledge because it is sinful to do so. The chapter ends here. Swamiji completed the chapter during this retreat.



Swami Viditatmanandaji conducted guided meditation classes every morning.

Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji taught KuntiStuti which describes her devotion for Bhagwan Sri Krishna. Swamiji presented this topic with illustrations and number of stories.

Suddhatmaji conducted classes in Vedic chanting. He said when you study Vedas, what you learn is what you are. He explained the meaning of Varna, swara, matra, balam, Sama and Santana in chanting. The Vedas were heard. They are Shrutis. He explained the meaning of Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakarna, Nirukta, Chhandas and Jyotish. Shiksha is the science of phonetics. In brief, one should know akshar, matra and swar shuddhi. He said that the mantras are to be chanted and not sung. Suddhatmaji conducted guided chanting sessions on alternate days during the week.

Pandit Mukesh Desaiji taught Hindustani Classical Music on alternate days. He answered questions from the students. He said that different gharanas have different ways of teaching music although the basic music remains common to all. Panditji presented entertaining Bhajans in the evenings.

On August 9th, a distinguished group of artist presented Carnatic Music Concert at the Gurukulam. Harini Darbha is a well known vocal singer from Andhra Pradesh. She is an engineering graduate and is also trained in Music at the Madras Music academy. She is a TV and All India radio artist. She has won several awards in music. Deepa Shastri from Bangalore accompanied Hariniji on violin. She is a performer on TV and Radio. Prakash Rao accompanied Hariniji on Mridangam. He has a distinction of accompanying Lalgudi jayraman, G.J.R. Krishnan and T.N Sheshadri. He lives in

New Jersey. They presented several compositions of Pujya Swamiji and Thyagraja.

A cultural program was presented during the evening on August 10th. Savithri Auntie organized the program. Adult students in Mukeshji's class presented "Kamal lochan kati pitambar" a Sri Krishna bhajan in raga Yamana Kalyana, seven beats teen Taal. It was done very well. Juniors chanted Ganesha bhajan under the direction of Usha Chandrasekaran. The juniors danced to a song "My name is Madhavi" depicting costumes from various states in India and showing the unity in diversity of the people of India. Trained by Gambhiraji, the seniors chanted Medha Suktam and they also chanted Rama Stotram under the direction of Terry. The senior children and the Teens staged a play "Har har Patra ", the story of Bhasmasura and Mohini. The Teens chanted verses from Bhagwad Gita Chapter V under the direction of Ushaji. The highlight of the program was an adult

student presentation of lighting lamps on Shabari Mala. Suddhatmaji proposed a vote of thanks to all the performers, teachers, volunteers, counselors and the staff.

The kitchen staff worked hard to accommodate the needs of the students and the children. The priests Sri Ganesan and Sri Ravichandran performed the pujas regularly and on time. Suddhatmaji, the staff and the volunteers worked hard during the camp to make it a success.

Kathopanishad is one of the major Upanisads and belongs to Krishna Yajur Veda. It is a metrical Upanishad. In this camp the first chapter was completed. The Upanisad is a profound discourse on Atma and its nature. It will be continued next year. The Study of Bhagwad Gita will also continue.

The retreat ended on August 4th, 2013.

Reported by Arvind Bagal

"Duty is that which must be done whether or not it is in agreement with my likes and dislikes. If the like and duty coincide, the action becomes spontaneous. If the like does not coincide with the duty, the action becomes deliberate—this is karma yoga with respect to action. If I do what I fancy, regardless of whether it is proper or not, it is an impulsive action. An impulsive person is in the hands of likes and dislikes and therefore full of conflicts. A deliberate person, who does what should be done, releases the mind from likes and dislikes in course of time. The sense of duty grows upon the person such that the duties are performed as naturally as breathing and eating. The mind of such a person is fit instrument to appreciate the teaching of Vedanta".

Pujya Swamiji