

## Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Saylorsburg, End-of-Summer Report

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam nestled in the foothills of the Pocono Mountains of eastern Pennsylvania, near New Jersey and two and a half hours from Manhattan, is one of the best-kept secrets of the Western Hemisphere. It is a traditional institution for residential short or long-term study of Vedanta and Sanskrit, as well as of the various *vedaṅgas* such as yoga, *jyotiṣa*, vedic chanting, classical music and dance, *ayurveda* and so on, with a residential guru.

*Gurukulam* means living as family, *kulam*, of the *guru* for a period of time in order to study the Vedanta *sāstra*, teaching, and also doing *gurukula seva*, helping with the upkeep and functioning of the gurukulam.

*Veda* means knowledge and *Vedānta* refers to the knowledge or *vidyā* of *sat*, the changeless and ultimate existence. This *vidyā* has come down to us unchanged from ṛṣis or sages who received it in revealed form directly from the Lord. The Lord is visualized in the form of the first guru, called Śri Dakṣiṇāmūrti. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the *mūrti*, form of the Lord, who is *dakṣiṇā*, looking South, from the Himalayas to the plains of India. In this form, the sacred river Gaṅgā is seen flowing from Dakṣiṇāmūrti's hair, which symbolizes the flow of knowledge from teacher to student. Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Pennsylvania was the first Arsha Vidya Gurukulam to have a temple dedicated to Śri Dakṣiṇāmūrti.

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, state of Pennsylvania, USA, was

inaugurated for a three-and-a-half-year residential course taught by Pujya Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati from 1986 to end of 1989. Subsequently Pujya Swamiji began teaching his three-and-a-half-year courses at the new Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Anaikatti in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, India.

### SPECIALITIES OF ARSHA VIDYA GURUKULAM - SAYLORSBURG



From 1990 onwards, the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam of Saylorsburg has had an annual program which best serves the families of Indians residing in the Western world, especially those established in North America, by providing not only the Vedanta *sāstra*, but also the Vedic culture, in practice and significance, for future generations of Sanatana Dharma adherents. These include Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Confucius followers and people from all living and revived dharma-based indigenous cultures. The gurukulam

continues to include short and long-term resident courses for adult seekers of the Vedanta knowledge of the Vedas who come from diverse backgrounds and many nations.

Meanwhile the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam of Coimbatore became the place best suited for the three-and-a-half-year Vedanta and Sanskrit courses mainly for those Indian and international students who might wish to teach Vedanta upon successfully completing the course.

In order to run these two gurukulams, as well as the annual Vedanta camps for short-term residential study at Arsha Vidya Pitham, known as Swami Dayananda Ashram in Rishikesh, Pujya Swamiji appointed several of his senior disciples to share the institutional teaching load.

During the summer season Saylorsburg gurukulam has a full schedule of back-to-back family camps beginning with the Independence Day Family Vedanta Retreat and ending with the Labor Day Patrons' Family Vedanta Retreat, followed by the Yoga and Sound camp, where Vedanta is also taught.

In 2014, due to his age and health problems, for the first time Pujya Swamiji did not cross the ocean to conduct the camps during summer. The regular *ācāryas*, Swami Vidadatmananda, Swami Tattvavidananda and Swami Pratyagbodhananda, who normally teach some or all of the Vedanta texts at these camps, maintained the full schedule with Swami Vidadatmanandaji and Swami Tattvavidanandaji taking up the texts which Pujya Swamiji would have taught.

Śrīmatī Savitri Mani had some new helpers for the children's programs at the Family

camps this year. After the Pūrṇa Vidyā Teachers' Training camp, Savitri Aunti was able to go back to India to be with her daughter and new grandchild.



**Pūrṇa Vidyā teachers' performance with Saumya, Ram, Savitri Mani and Suddhatma**



**Pūrṇa Vidyā teachers receiving diplomas from Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati**

The Pūrṇa Vidyā Teacher's Training camp this year was assisted by Saumya Chaitanya. Saumya and Bindu taught the children's Vedic heritage classes for the two four-day patron's camps and Lakṣmī conducted the *pūjā* program for the children on Janmāṣṭamī, Lord Krishna's birthday. Lakṣmī also guided the three age groups of children-to-teens in producing spectacular theatrical performances at the four-day Labor Day weekend Patron's Family Camp.



**Children performing *pūjās* for Lord Krishna's birthday, Janmāṣṭamī**



**Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji and Br. Surya Narayan chanting on Janmāṣṭamī**



**Children and teachers with Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati after performance**

Lance taught yoga for both the adults and children during family camps. Lance and helpers conducted the piñata games celebrating Lord Krishna's birthday, Janmāṣṭamī.



Surya and Usha taught Vedic chanting. Sandra helped with the meals and arts and crafts. Pandit Mukesh Desai taught music classes at most of the camps for the adults. Master Chef Ramachandran provided the creative and tasty vegetarian cuisine with his helpers.

Other highlights of the Summer Program like Pujya Swamiji's *nakṣatra homa*, *Gaṇeśa caturthi homa* and the Yoga and Sound retreat with Yogi Ramanand and Pandit Mukesh Desai are reported separately.

During the fall season this year Swami Tattvavidananda is filling in for the classes Pujya Swamiji would have taught in the one-week and two-week Vedanta camps as well as teaching the 7-week Vedanta course he normally conducts.

The 28th Gurukulam Anniversary program was reported in the August Arsha Vidya Newsletter and can be watched in full at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L3A1o04xqs&feature=youtu.be>

Pujya Swami Dayanandaji's surprise attendance by Skype comes right in the middle of the video followed by his address. It is not to be missed.

*Report by Swamini Vilasananda Saraswati*