

Ashtavakragita Vedanta Retreat with Swami Sachidanandaji

Arsha Vidya Pitham, Saylorsburg, PA hosted a spring weekend Vedanta course on the topic of Ash-tavakragita lead by Swami Sachidanandaji from April 4 to April 7th, 2024, at the facility and made it available to remote participants. It was an honor to be among the many brothers and sisters who were also called to participate in this sacred space with a Spiritual leader who translated and explained the teachings of the honorable Sage Ashtavakra in simple terms and in English.

Sage Ashtavakra's name reflects the eight deformities he was born with and is the author of the text Ash-tavakrgita (song of Sage Ashtavakra). This sage was the teacher of King Janaka (father of Mother Sita), who had all material wealth, was very successful, very much involved in worldly transactions and yet was a seeker of TRUTH. King Janaka was called to explore "freedom" while living his life responsibly and fully, while learning to be a mere witness to it all, without any emotional attachments. King Janaka was taught by the sage to accept any situations for what it is and to let go of the negative feelings for "contentment" (TRUTH) to take its place. And at a higher vibrational level to be a "witness" to navigate through the worldly plane with all its ups and downs, all the while recognizing himself in all manifestations around him, anchoring in that "Oneness".

We "witnessed" and felt a beautiful display of Mother Earths power (a safe Earthquake) at the same time Swamiji was elaborating on being a "witness" as the "Consciousness" and not the body. The timing of the Earthquake with the rumbling and deep shaking that was felt in few states of the US East Coast region including at the lecture hall, could not have been any more perfect!

The facility at the Saylorsburg gurukulam is serene, connected to nature and with impeccable daily spiritual practices of the seekers who occupy that space. It is maintained clean both outdoors and indoors and offers well balanced choices for nourishing the body at the cafeteria at mealtimes.

Daily activities start at 5:15 am with Ganapati Homa, then morning Abhiseka with Rudram chanting before classes start. After the evening arati and dinner, the day ends with a Satsang. The retreat schedule had a nice flow with daily activities such as Swamiji's guided meditation several times during the day, classes, satsang, and guided yoga practice. An opportunity to sit down with Swamiji and other students during mealtimes was well received and appreciated. All interactions were conducive to learning for a seeker in a company of likeminded seekers.

The positive and successful outcome of this retreat is due to the leadership of care, compassion, and patience from the spiritual leader Swami Sachidanandaji. Swamiji's open mindedness, nature of welcoming inputs and questions from the students, and listening to understand other viewpoints added a safety net and the freedom for the students to explore and expand their understanding and comprehension of the sacred wisdom.

Appreciate the energy and enthusiasm of Swamiji, students and the facility management team for creating the space for continued higher learning.