

### Swami Cetanandanda and a group of his Japanese students & parents with their children conducted a retreat and pilgrimage on Ramayana

As I began teaching Ramayana to the children of students who had studied Vedanta, I wanted this India retreat to be a retreat where children and adults could work together to accomplish this.

I have been teaching in Japan for about 16 years using PujyaSwamiji's "Bhagavad Gita Home Study". During 16 years, many Japanese students got married and had children, and naturally, the bringing up of children in proper manner has become the main topic of their lives.

PujyaSwamiji said that the growth of a person is "growth from being a consumer to a contributor". In order for adults to achieve this growth, we focussed on the care of children. We also studied "Spiritual Heritage of India", 52 TV-talks of Pujya Swamiji. We are sure for us bringing up children following PujyaSwamiji's teaching would become karmayoga and bring about the right growth for both adults and children.

First, in a small group of adults, we studied the "Ramayana" of PurnaVidya, directed by Pujya Swamiji. Then we watched the Ramayana video with Japanese subtitles of a TV program broadcast in India about 20 years ago, and began the group discussion of famous scenes. If there are parts of the video program that are difficult to understand, we also look up the English translation of the original Valmiki "Ramayana". This small group of adults has taken the lead in initiating Ramayana storytelling sessions for the children, using the animations from the Ramayana.

Most of the members who came to India this time are members of this group.

After a year of this "Ramayana with Adults and Children" program, heroes such as Rama, Sita, and Hanuman have begun to grow up in the hearts of the children, and of adults. I think this is very important for a person's life. What should be the relationship with parents? What should be our relationship with our brothers and sisters? How should our friendships be? What are good thoughts? What are bad thoughts? Why do we need to pray to protect good thoughts?

Each time, the adults prepare the Ramayana talks in a way that even the children can understand. This process is nothing but taking care of the immature child inside of us as adults. We have come to realise that in order to communicate with children based on the Ramayana, we need to grow as adults.

Thus, this Manjakkudi retreat was a wrap-up of the past year's "Ramayana for us adults and children," and an opportunity for further exploration in the future.

And especially important to the success of this India retreat was the invitation of Swami Aishvryanandaji from Indore. Swamiji spent the dates of the Rameshwara pilgrimage and Manjakkudi with us. Swamiji answered the children's questions in a detailed and easy -to-understand manner to the children's satisfaction during the daily satsangas.

And I want to say special thanks to Swami Ramesvaranandaji. He gave us an auspicious day with his chanting during the puja in the morning meditation hall. He also gave us a lot of guidance from the beginning to the end of the retreat.

We also received a lot of help and love from Sri Srinivasanji. And Prasenjitji, Balaramanji, Hemaji, Padmaji, and other Manjakkudi staff members prepared in the practical aspects of the retreat, such as preparing the school visit, temple visit, Veda-pathashala visits, Aim for SevaChatralaya visit, Rameshwaram pilgrimage, homa, kiirtan, etc. I would like to thank them for their support.

Let me tell a little about how the people of Manjakuddi welcomed the Japanese adults and children who came to India for the first time after learning Ramayana in Japan.

The adults and children from Japan arrived in Manjakuddi in the middle of the night, and first thing the next morning there was a drama by surprise.

In the morning, they woke up and all the Japanese, adults and children, went to Jnanapravaha together. As they made their way down a pathway lined on both sides with tropical plants as tall as the adults, suddenly eight children dressed as Vanaras appeared. They jumped up and down shouting "Jaya Rama, Jaya Rama" to welcome the Japanese. Both adults and children who had just arrived from Japan were overjoyed. Then came Rama and Sita, then Hanuman and Lakshmana, and finally the saints Vashista, Bharata, Shatrughna, Ravana, Vibhishana, and many others.

Both Rama and Sita kindly welcomed the Japanese, and both adults and children were so moved that they began to cry. What a "surprise welcome party! I would like to thank everyone at the Dayananda School and College for organizing this welcome event. This Manjakkudi retreat will remain in the hearts of Japanese children as a good memory forever and ever!

I express my utmost respect to PujyaSwamiji, who has always, always guided us as Isvara towards our human goal.

- Swami Cetanananda

*Photos in the cover page #31*