## Vedanta Retreat I for the year 2012

## Swamiji's Message

Conditional happiness means you give something to get the happiness. This kind of happiness goes on decreasing. It works on the law of diminishing return. The real happiness is unconditional. It comes from within you. It means being able to enjoy whatever Ishwara gives you as His gift to you.

The First Family Retreat of the year 2012 was held at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Saylorsburg PA from July 22 to July 28. Approximately 70 participants and more than 80 boys and girls of varying ages from 6 to 16 attended the camp.

Swami Viditatmanand Sarswati taught the adult classes. The Children were divided in three groups according to their ages. The children camp was coordinated by Savithriji Mani and Lance Daniels. Considering that this was not a holiday week end the attendance was very good. There were many new students attending a class at the Gurukulam for the first time.

Accommodation for living in the Gurukulam was excellent. The food was fine and served on time. The kitchen staff worked hard to accommodate the needs of the big gathering and the special needs for the children. Priests Sri Ganesan and Sri Ravichandran performed the pujas regularly and on time.

On Sunday July 22<sup>nd</sup> registration was completed during the day. Orientation was done the evening by Suddhatmaji. He explained the course schedule and gave all the information regarding the Retreat and other facilities.

The topic for the course was Adi Shankaracharya's Vivekchudamani. Swamiji started the course with a general talk on the concept of limitlessness and the



reasons for feeling limited, the ignorance which causes the problem and the vedantic knowledge that removes the ignorance to open up the life of enlightenment. Swamiji then expounded on Bhagwan Sri Raman Maharshi's discourse on Upadesa Saram, verse by verse explaining the meaning and the implication of His teachings. Swamiji emphasized the significance of atma, anatma, the self and the ego. Swamiji used detailed charts to explain the complicated properties and interactions of gross, subtle and causal bodies, the senses, sense organs and their functions, the anthakaranam, the five elements, the prakrti and so also satva rajas and tamas gunas. Swamiji talked in details about the waking, the dream and the deep sleep states. A discussion on subject of Maya followed.

Swamiji's message was"

During the camp, for a few days we were hit with severe weather with heavy rains and a thunder storm, not uncommon in this part of the country. One day in particular the power was lost in the evening before the satsang class was about to commence. There was no electricity and it was dark outside and the hall as well. The sound system was

inoperative. The students gathered outside the temple hall and they were wondering if the satsang class will be cancelled. Here came Swamiji all set to conduct the class. Some candles were provided for the hall. The students gathered around and sat near Swamiji. Swamiji read the questions given to him by the students in candle light. This was not easy. He answered the questions. The satsang proceeded tlawlessly. Later on during the satsang the power was restored, lights and sound system was working in the temple hall and the satsang was completed with more questions and answers. Swamji finished the satsang with usual chanting along with the students.

One cannot forget this incidence which was an illustration of a determined mind and how it can achieve what it wants to do. It was a lesson for the students from Swamiji.

During the camp Suddhatmaji conducted classes in Vedantic chanting. He gave an overview of Veda chanting, the shanti mantras, chhandas shastras and the shabda shastra. The meaning of varna, swara, matra, balam, sama and sanatana was also explained. He talked about the shiksha, emphasizing the need to chant correctly. He said knowing the meaning of the mantras helps chanting properly and that the mantras are to be chanted and not sung. He then answered questions from the students. This was followed by guided chanting sessions on alternate days during the week. Pandit Mukesh Desai taught Indian Classical Music on alternate days. His teaching included raga Yamana and Yaman kalyan. Additionally, Panditji also presented melodious Bhajans in the evening for the entertainment of the students.

The children were grouped according to their ages. The junior group 6 to 10, the senior group 11 to 12 and the teen group 13 to 16. The children orientation took place on July 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Yoga studio during which the teachers and the counselors were introduced. The children

were given appropriate information and instruction and plans were made for the upcoming cultural evening program. Each group had its own activities such as Vedic chanting, yoga, Sanskrit study, games, aarati, camp fires and gita study administered carefully by the temple staff and volunteers.

The highlight of the children program was a presentation of cultural evening on July 27th. Savithri Auntie put together a program that was absolutely wonderful. The program opened with a Ganesha prayer by juniors. Children performed slokas and bhajans under the direction of Jayanthy Raman. The lezim dance was also presented nicely. A colorful dance was performed and was then followed by chanting by senior children group under the direction of Vijaya Veerswamy. An episode from the Maratha King Shivaji's life, showing his spectacular escape from Agra was presented as a drama by the senior children group. Another dance sequence was then performed by the seniors and this was followed by scenes from the Mahabharata Bhagavatam and the Kathopanishad depicting the four types of devotions namely artha, artharthi, jignyasu and gyani illustrated by the dice game, Dhruva, Nachiketas and our Pujya Swamiji. Students of Pandit Mukesh Desaiji's music class rendered a bhajan. Suddhatmaji offered thanks to all the performers, teachers, volunteers and the staff.

The retreat ended on July 28.

The students and the children gained important knowledge about the Hindu Dharma and the Vedanta during this camp. It was a memorable retreat. This was possible because of the dedicated work of Suddhatmaji and the staff as well as the volunteers at the Gurkulam and Swami Viditatmanandaji's scholarly teaching with illustrations, interpretations, stories and his keen sense of humor that made his every class and satsang a delightful experience.