

Arsha Vidya UK: one year on

Arsha Vidya UK has taken its next significant step almost exactly a year since it was granted charity status: our devoted teacher, Swamini Atmaprakashananda, now has a base in which to live and teach in London.

A remarkably generous couple, regular students with Swaminiji, devotees of Pujya Swami Danyanada, committed to the study of Vedanta, made a decision to pool their savings to buy a second house. The main idea was to give Swaminiji a stable base in London. The requirements were: a living room large enough to comfortably accommodate 20-30 students, 3 bedrooms (one for the couple's use at weekends), two bathrooms and a decent sized kitchen. It needed to be accessible by public transport and in an area that was quiet and secure.

After several months of searching, a delightful house presented itself in the leafy suburbs of South London, on the borders of Kent. It met all the criteria. From the moment of decision, everything flowed without a single hitch. Within a week of making an offer, keys were exchanged. The date, Wednesday 25 November, by remarkable coincidence, happened to be Swaminiji's birthday!

The keys were deposited in the local temple for blessings and collected the next morning in order to clean the house in preparation for moving day. The previous owners had left the place spotless, in good decorative order, requiring hardly any work. So the Thursday volunteers had little to do apart from light dusting and the inevitable exploration to establish the whereabouts of essential things like switches, meters, dustbins, fuse boxes, etc.



Moving day: Friday, 27 November. Swaminiji and a small group arrived at the house at 3am, and performed the traditional pujas, starting outside the front door. Abhishekam water collected from the temple was used to bless the various rooms. Doors, windows, cookers, boilers were all blessed with chandan and kumkum. Only after Devi had entered, could the furniture and other belongings follow. The moving team did their job with great efficiency. Sofas, books, beds, tables, utensils, crockery, foodstuffs, clothes quickly found their proper place... Food was prepared, ready for the students.

By 7.30pm the house was ready to receive students for the first class in the new venue. The atmosphere was perfect. A resolution was made to preserve the sanctity of the place, to keep it clear of anything that could distract from the study of Vedanta.

Saturday, 28 November. Swaminiji left for India, via Kuwait, at 7.30am. In her absence, students gathered to chant 1008 Mrityunjaya mantras and prayers to Ganesha, Devi and, of course, Dakshinamurti. It felt like a small gurukulam. London turned a corner.