

# 108-Days Vedanta Course

at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti

## Inauguration September 2, 2019

On September 2, 2019, our 108-day course at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam (AVG), Anaikkati commenced under the guidance, grace and tireless commitment of Acarya Swami Sadatmanandaji. The morning was filled with prayers to invoke blessings as we started with a Ganesh Homa just before dawn, followed by Dakshinamurthy arti and culminated at the Gurutirtha, where we offered homage to Pujya Sri Swami Dayanandaji.



Soon after we gathered at the lecture hall, eager to hear the insights and wisdom imparted by the inaugural addresses of Swami Tattvavidanandaji, Swami Satchidanandaji and Swami Shankaranandaji. Then Acaryaji introduced the importance of taranavidya, referring to the knowledge of the limitless self, required to cross the ocean of bondage. Acaryaji further elucidated that the essential teachings of the Tattvabodhah and Bhagavad Gita were Atma Vidya and Brahma Vidya, thus planting the seeds of the course.

## Regular Classes

Over the duration of 164 classes, Acaryaji unfolded and illuminated the wisdom of the Tattvabodhah, generously elaborating with detailed explanations and relevant corollaries to help us establish a sturdy foundation and clear framework of the essential concepts of Vedantah. This grew apparent as we saw the teachings of Tattvabodhah emerge in our Bhagavad Gita discourses and could draw connections between the two texts. Throughout the course Acaryaji seamlessly interwove the larger vision of *atmajnanam* with the daily practices and values required for *cittasuddhih* and preparation for self-discovery, giving us practical and implementable insights on how to progress in our spiritual pursuit as well as lead a happy and peaceful life.

Furthermore, Acaryaji often integrated Sanskrit grammar and etymology to help us apply what we were learning in Sanskrit class. Meanwhile the lectures were seasoned with an endearing sense of humour and simple examples, such as the beloved clay pot, to illustrate complex and abstract ideas.

Acaryaji covered, with meticulous detail, the five main topics of Tattvabodhah: *sadhanacatustayam sampattih*, *atma vicara*, *tat padarth vicara*, *aikya vicara* and *jnanaphalam*. In parallel, he laid out a lucid vision of the entire Bhagavad Gita, uncovering the meaning of each of the 700 shlokas and explicating the knowledge of *jiva-svarupa*, *Isvara-svarupa* and *jiva-Isvara aikyam* as well as unequivocally depicting the path to moksha.

### **Chanting Classes**

With loving patience and compassion, Swamini Vedarthanandaji and Swamini Sardanandaji, led our chanting classes, guiding us in improving the nuances of our listening skills, while teaching us to harmonise with the group, properly pronounce *swaras* and maintain the appropriate tone and melody of each mantra. The power of Vedic chanting and its inward nourishment was often palpable during class and temple puja. Moreover, Swami Jagadatmanandaji acquainted us with Vedic Astrology and the meaning of the *panchangam*, which we chanted daily in appreciation of Ishvara's glory as the principles of time and space.

### **Sanskrit Classes**

Our study of Sanskrit was another remarkable journey. We were divided among three levels based on our Sanskrit skills. I attended level one, where many of us were starting from scratch. In three months, our teacher, Br. Sharanji taught us to read, write, analyse and translate basic sentences. This progress was only possible because of his generosity in time and skills and his heartfelt dedication to help us learn and reach our potential. The same can be said of Swami Vishwatmanandaji (Level 3 Sanskrit) and Ramachandranji (Level 2 Sanskrit), as well as the tutors— Swami Jagadatmanandaji, Br. Kumaara Chaitanya and Padma Ramaswami, who were ever-ready to support our progress.

### **Satsang**

The enthusiasm and curiosity of students came alive in evening satsangs, when Acaryaji clarified various queries and also expounded on the meaning of several *stotras*, such as Sri Dakshinamurtiastottarasatanamavalih, Sri Kamalajadayitastakam, and Gangastotram, giving us deeper context and connect to the profundity of these sacred verses. Once a week in satsang, we also had an optional Q&A revision session for students to engage in wholesome fun.

### **Daily Seva**

Our daily schedule included guided meditation, daily service and weekly maunam to encourage the transformation of knowledge into practice. Acaryaji guided morning meditation to coach us in contemplation and assimilating abstract concepts such as the order of Isvarah and oneness with the cosmos (*Vishwarupa darshana*).

To foster the spirit of karma yoga, we partook in daily seva duties, which included gardening, temple seva, kitchen duties, cleaning, library support and the tuk shop (thoughtfully set up for us to purchase our basic requirements and avoid the hassle of going to Coimbatore). Meanwhile weekly mauna provided us the platform to nurture inner quietude and self-discipline. Throughout the course, Acharyaji continuously motivated us to be accountable to ourselves and to our inner growth by reminding us of the importance of self-discipline, mindfulness, integrity and doing what is to be done. We also availed Pujya Swamiji's blessings by listening to his video discourses and his Gita chanting, while learning more about his teachings and his contribution to Indian culture through anecdotes and tributes from others.

During the course we observed several auspicious occasions such as Pujya Swami's Punya Tithi and Samaradhna Day, Saraswati Puja, Diwali, Guru Peyarchi Puja and AVG's 29th Annual Function Day (on which the Oduvars of Tirumarai Seva Mayam rendered a Tirumurai recital), Bhagavad Gita Jayanti (when we chanted the entire Gita) and Karthikeya Deepam (when we lit up the whole campus).



### Visit to Temples

AVG also organised field trips to Perur Temple and Avinashi Adheenam, of which fellow classmate Hema Chaurasia shared: "On December 13th, we visited the famous 12th century Perur Temple, known for its stunning Dravidian architecture. Acharyaji led us to each of the mandalas to offer our prayers and archana and seek blessings. Subsequently, we sat in the central enclave to follow Acharyaji in a brief session of bhajans and dhun—everyone was moved by the oneness felt with the Supreme God.

Subsequently, on December 20th, in response to the enthusiastic invitation from Avinashi Adheenam, another trip to the Vageesar Mandalayam in Avinashi was organized. After a warm welcome, and a traditional meal on banana leaves, we enjoyed insightful talks by both, Acharyaji and the Kamatchidasa Swamigal. On our way back, we visited the famous Lalitha Ambika Temple and neighbouring Sri-Anuvavi Anjaneya Nandavanam Temple, which has an impressive 45-foot tall statue of the Lord."



We are concluding this enriching course with the enlightened presence of Swami Veditatmanandaji who is offering a four day retreat on the 20 values of a seeker, as described in the 13th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita by Lord Krishna.

### **Course Participants**

Our class consists of 85 sadhakas of all ages from across India and around the world, representing 34 countries including Korea, Japan, China, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Turkey, Chile, Brazil, New Zealand and Australia. Despite the cultural diversity and varying levels of exposure to Vedantah, everyone's genuine commitment to self-knowledge and support of one other's journeys united us. It was a blessing for us to stay and learn in the serene forested refuge of AVG. The quality of accommodation, sattvik food, facilities and care were well beyond expectation. On behalf of all my classmates, I express our heartfelt gratitude to Acaryaji, all of the Swamijis, Swaminijis, Brahmacharis, staff, sevaks, and other visible and invisible forces that made this 108-day course possible. Om.

-Anjali Desai

### **Student Reflections**

*"AVG is the best possible place for study of Vedanta in its most pristine form. Acharya Sadatmanandaji teaches in a highlight systematic way. He has the great ability of unfolding the subject matter step-by-step, one concept at a time, while keeping in view the entire vision of Vedanata. The Sanskrit acharyas do a remarkable job of making the study of Sanskrit very joyful and simple. The ashram itself, located among forests and mountains provides the ideal setting for receiving and assimilating the ancient wisdom of the rishis."*

#### **-Brahmachari Rajesh, (Kerala, India)**

"I arrived at AVG with only basic knowledge of Vedanta. However after these 108 days, I am leaving with the complete vision of Vedanata. The highlight is without a doubt the teaching of Sawmi Sadatmanandaji...with his deep knowledge of sastra, he is able to expand on the texts and utilise plenty of real-life examples to help how Vedanta can be used in the 'real world'. Another plus is the daily Sanskrit lessons. I am able to now read and chant Sanskrit verses easily and the vocabulary is developing too. This far exceeds where I expected to be after just 3 months. For one who is willing to put in the work, follow the rules and is earnest in their pursuit of knowledge, AVG is the place to be."

#### **-Robbie and Allison Young (Australia and Sweden)**

*"The course comprehensively covered Tattvabodhah and Bhagavad Gita texts, basic level Sanskrit and chanting. The teaching methodology was simple and easy to understand with focus on imbibing the values in daily life. It has been a wonderful experience and I am grateful for all the learning I have had here in a short span of time."*

**-Rachna Gupta, (Dehradun, India)**

*"A very stimulating and challenging programme to understand the basics of Vedanta and obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita. This programme was nicely interwoven with Sanskrit grammar studies, chanting classes, and devotional activities in the Medha Dakshinamurthi temple complex. The infrastructural support with loving care provided to the sadhakas was extraordinary."*

**-Lakshmi Prabha and SR Balakrishnan (Coimbatore,India)**

*"The 108 day course was Ishwara's grace for me...There were numerous obstacles, but each time, either in class or in satsang, Acaryaji's teachings or answers to questions addressed those issues and helped guide me to what I needed to do. All obstacles soon turned out to be learning experiences in disguise. I thank Acaryaji, Swaminiammas, Sharanji, Kumaarji, for this opportunity and support and thank my fellow classmates for their understanding and letting me be myself."*

**-Krishnan Chandrashekar (Australia)**

*"If I had not attended personally, I would have difficulty accepting that such a rich environment for learning the Shastra exists in this current day and age. Acharyaji's teaching style is to simplify complex concepts and clarify misconceptions, doubts and questions every step of the way. He cared for each student in a fatherly manner, maximising their spiritual growth from the level where each person began. Also, ever member of the management and staff reinforced the Gurukul atmosphere and worked diligently to enhance our experience and ease our stay here."*

**-Hema Chaurasia, (USA)**

*"I am indeed fortunate in having been a part of the 108-days Vedanta course. The emphasis was on a spiritual way of life. The teaching of the Tattvabodhah and Bhagavad Gita was done in alignment with the values of life. That was sweetened by learning shlokas and hymns and strengthened by learning fundamentals of Sanskrit language. It was an incredible journey. My humble pranam to the Swamijis, Swaminijis and other teachers. My thanks to all the staff for their excellent support and help."*

**-Geetha Ramani, (Bangalore, India)**