

## Spiritual Retreat at AVG 2018 May 14-18th

Shraddhavaan labhate jnaanam". This was the theme of the spiritual retreat (14th - 18th May) at Anaikatti Gurukulam conducted by Acharya Uday Acharya for 15 participants from Mumbai, Pune, and Chennai. The participants ranged from 30 to 75 years age-wise. There were some first time learners of Vedanta as well as veterans of many years of study.

The retreat was flagged off on the 13th night at 8 pm with a visit to Guru Teertha to take the blessings of Pujya Swamiji, followed by an orientation session at Guru Krupa where all subsequent sessions were held. A welcome kit was given to participants which included a printed brochure, note book and assorted material.

Swami Sadatmanandaji and Swami Shankarananda graced the occasion and spoke a few words regarding the Gurukulam and the nature of the spiritual retreat. The Swamijis were happy to know that Acharyaji was a senior disciple of Pujya Swamiji who had also studied Vedanta from Swami Taranandaji and other Mahatmas in Rishikesh.

Acharyaji introduced the topic by speaking on Purushartha nischaya. The pursuit of moksha begins when one realises that pursuit of Dharma, Artha, and Kaama is endless and unfulfilling by nature. Fulfilment does not come by more of something but by something more. The goal is not reached by crossing milestones. It is already present in and through the journey and needs to be discovered rather than be reached.

Participants had the opportunity to witness pujas offered to both Murugan swami and Dakshinamoorti swami at one and the place in the satsang hall as the main temples were being renovated for maha kumbhabhishekam. The Morning temple Puja was followed by meditation sessions and breakfast. Acharyaji's chanting and guided meditations made the participants to explore the depth of their inner being. The morning and mid-morning Vedanta sessions were on "Brahmavid aapnoti param" from Taittiriya Upanishad and "Shraddhavaan labhate jnaanam" from the Bhagavad geeta.

The one infinite immutable Brahman was shown to manifest as the many finite changing elements of creation without any process of transformation. The very same changeless Brahman is present as the inner self and support of the five shariras that are born of the same created elements. One who knows Brahman as the self, residing in one's heart, attains Brahman and enjoys the fulfilment of all desires. The four Kripas - Ishwara, Shastra, Guru and Atma, were highlighted as elements of Shraddha that led to self-knowledge. The 20 values mentioned in The Bhagavadgita were highlighted as different aspects of adhikaaritam that qualifies one for self-knowledge.

The morning sessions included a chanting class by Swamini Sharadanandaji and Swamini Vedarthanandaji who taught us "Nidhanapataye namah" which is a part of the temple Puja chants in their own unique way. We became consciously aware of the importance of each swara and correct pronunciations while chanting. For instance, word namah in "nidhanapataye namah" is to be chanted evenly without resorting to the higher swara.

Afternoon sessions were reserved for workshops on different topics. They included reviewing the story of our life and sharing reasons what makes each person angry. The sessions were highly interactive and insightful. Night satsang alternated between singing kirtans, tiruppugal, geet ramayan, etc. besides question answers on Vedanta and other topics.

We were graced by the presence of Swami Tannishthananda who spoke of his days as a student of Vedanta and the unique teaching methodology adopted by Pujya Swamiji.

A trip to some religious places was one of the highlights of the camp. A bus was arranged for us on the 17th to visit the nearby temples of Marudamalai, Perur and Isha Foundation. The half day trip extended for almost the whole day due to which the evening satsang was converted to a vedanta class.

The concluding day saw two presentations by the participants and a PowerPoint slideshow on the camp highlights.

The valedictory function was attended by the Swamis and Swaminis of the gurukulam who along with Acharyaji distributed the guru prasad book Action and Reaction written by Pujya Swamiji. Recording of the camp proceedings was made on CD and copies of the same will be distributed to the participants to revisit their camp learnings.

Special thanks are due to Mrs Girija Natarajan and Mrs Kalpana Acharya for coordinating the spiritual retreat, to Mr Ramachandran for coordinating the transport arrangements, to Mr. Nagraj and his wife Kamala who took care of the participants with warmth and care, to the two Swamini ammas who taught us chanting and lead the temple prayers, to the Acharyas, residents and staff of the ashram in the Gurukulam for making us feel at home in a spiritual ambience, and last but not the least to Br. Kumara Chaitanya for his time and effort in recording the camp proceedings.

Not to be forgotten was the friendly peacocks who graced the camera and the line of horned deer who walked across our path and galloped right through the gurukulam. A tortoise and a snake were some other friends who made a guest appearance. All in all, the gurukulam stay was a unique experience in which we got touch with the many aspects of Medha Dakshinamoorti swami - Ishwaro Gurur Aatmeti Moortibheda vibhaagine Vyomavad vyaaptadehaaya Dakshinaamoortaye namah.



-Report by Kalpana Acharya