

Vedanta Camp 2018 at Brazil

Showers of blessings on Shivaratri

Just as the rivers seek to flow into the ocean, seventy students from different parts of Brazil and one from Chile joined together to partake of the ocean of knowledge in a two week Vedanta camp. These students had travelled anywhere from 2 to 32 hours to arrive at the camp conducted by Acharya Jonas Masetti (Visvanatha) of Vishva vidya (www.vedanta.life) and Swamini Brahmajnananda from 4th - 18th February 2018. Held in a natural forest reserve area close to a small town in Minas Gerais, called São Thomé das Letras, this was also the time of the carnival in Brazil and hence meaningful that so many students including yoga teachers were able to commit their time to learning.



Every day, before sunrise, the students walked a twenty-minute trail up the mountain in a pilgrimage while chanting to perform Puja. This was followed by yoga class, Vedanta classes through the day, mantra chanting class by Denise Kuperman (Jonas Masetti's wife), Sanskrit class, sessions on emotional process work, class for physical exercises concluding with satsanga. In this intense week, the students had the opportunity to study important texts such as Isavasya Upanishad and Bhaja Govindam.

It was the second time that Swamini Brahmajnananda visited Brazil. We see that the connection of the students to the Vedic tradition and culture and their value for this knowledge is growing as Pujya Swami Dayananda ji continues to bless us. Swamini said, "*It is a joy to teach students who have receptive minds and open hearts. It is a joy to work with a batch-mate. It is a joy to do seva to Pujya Swamiji and this glorious tradition through every class and our lives.*" About the commitment of the students,

our teacher, Jonas Masetti says, "*I feel blessed and proud that hundreds of students, although being far away from India, are able to relate to the knowledge and the Indian culture with much dedication and devotion.*"

The students share their insights and experiences below:

Lia Ribeiro said that Isavasya Upanishad brought about the understanding of the necessity of the destruction of the seeker that exists in us, by eliminating ignorance about ourselves, which reveals the simple person: the simple and happy person that we are looking for isn't someone separate from us. She added that Bhaja Govindam invites us to find a space to know Govinda in my heart; to be free from the limitations we impose on ourselves through our notions. We are more than this body and mind. I am completeness, despite the incomplete situations.

Listening to the teachings of Vedanta with our masters and following the flow of their minds we can reach the understanding of the one who has the knowledge and is a devotee of Isvara. Asked about what he felt, the student Gabriel de Almeida, yoga teacher, highlighting the necessity of a camp for every Vedanta student no matter how many years of exposure he has, said *"If we talk about Vedanta, emotional exercises, Sanskrit, Vedic rituals and our experiences, other people do not understand what that means. It is essential that a Vedanta student, in his spiritual search, should participate in a camp"*. For the student Danielle Bera, also a yoga teacher, to be at the Vedanta Camp is to learn not only from Vedanta's teachings, but also from emotional experiences. *"It helps us to understand what we are, to know the truth: the search I always had since childhood,"* concludes Danielle.

Vedanta Camp 2018 gave the students the opportunity to get involved with the preparations and rituals of Shivaratri, in honor and reverence to Lord Shiva. On February 13th, students had 36 hours of fasting and participated in the many activities involving puja, akhanda japa, preparing the altars for Shiva, Ganesha, Durga and an altar to the Bhutas. A group of men performed the story of Shiva with theater and music and a group of women performed the story of Durga in a beautiful and festive setting on the mountain decorated with mandalas, flowers, flags on the roads. For Keli Andrade, 36, a sociologist, participating in the Shivaratri was a great anthropological experience. *"It was very important to be able to know the Vedic culture that involves Vedanta. It was very interesting to observe the feeling of a group so supportive and committed, making the event work as it should be with determination, even without knowing the meaning initially. The sense of belonging was very important to the group's dynamics. It was something 'suigeneres': it was not just the union of individuals, but a living organism"*.

José Casas, 26 years old, an allopathic doctor and Ayurveda therapist from Chile, said that the beauty of Shivaratri was the manifestation of devotion in different forms. *In the West, we have the perception of God as a person and now participating in other ways of appreciating God as Ishvara, it creates closeness in seeing Ishvara in everything. With the study of Vedanta and studying health and how the person lives in peace, the last remedy for any disease is the vision of God. Entering the ritualistic moment is a therapeutic act, it is a remedy for 'the disease of living.* We are privileged to live many rituals of the Vedic tradition. It gives an idea of how strong our teachers are and creates a lot of credibility, pride and we feel very blessed to receive all of this. It was amazing.

For Jacyr Rosa Jr, 54, lawyer, the Shivaratri was unforgettable. *"I did not realize that it could be something so strong, powerful and transformative. Feeling all the energy that was invoked and felt by all of us from the moment of preparation was amazing, all committed to doing the best possible, which is what we learn in class. I am very happy and I hope to be able to participate in other camps."* Karen Lyzie Leonardi, 40, housewife and mother, understood the Shivaratri as a cultural, religious manifestation that connects with the spiritual, divine. *"I enjoyed participating. At first, making food offerings bothered me, perhaps because of my culture, but at the end I understood the symbolism of offering to Ishvara, to extend to life."* Pujas, dance offerings to Nataraja accompanied by the rhythm of the drums, akhanda japa of Om Namah Shivaya crossed the day and night next to the firelight, with blessings of Shiva and the love of the masters.

As we welcomed the sunrise and the dawn of many, many blessings, Shiva was now consecrated in our hearts with this Shivaratri truly a night to be remembered for a long time. We are very blessed and happy for the opportunity to hear and live the teachings that have been passed on to us by the great teacher Pujya Swami Dayananda ji through the beloved masters Swamini Brahma prajnananda and Jonas Masetti. Om namah shivaya. Gratitude to all masters.

Compiled by Lia Ribeiro and other students of the Vedanta camp 2018 in Brazil