

Swami Dayananda Memorial Retreat - Camp 1 (March 4 to 11 2023)

The first of five residential Retreat Camps was conducted by Sri Swami Sadatmanandaji, the Chief Acarya of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti and it started with a full house. Having selected 31 mantras of the Svetasvatara Upanishad over eight days, the retreat was attended to capacity by students from India and all around the world. Three one hour classes were held daily and at night a 45 minute satsang was conducted where engaging questions were taken up and answered by Swamiji based on the day's classes. Students were absorbed as he took them through the first chapter consisting of 15 mantras in great detail.

Every mantra was chanted by Swamiji after which the students repeated the mantras on their own as is his unique tradition and established by him during the courses conducted by him at Anaikatti. In addition to the complete first chapter, mantras 5 and 15 of the second chapter; mantra 19 of third chapter; mantras 3, 5 & 10 of the fourth chapter, mantra 10 of the fifth chapter, and mantras 8, 9, 11, 18-23 of the sixth chapter. For each mantra the *anvaya* was given for the benefit of the students.

The beautiful imagery of this Upaniṣad was presented in a manner that both first time students who were exposed to the Brahma Vidya of the Upaniṣad and advanced students were both benefited. Citing grammar he made sure that the new students were not overwhelmed by the technicalities. Requesting the students to absorb the teaching with an open mind and "brutal honesty" and not feel ashamed if they did not immediately grasp the vision of Vedanta. He further revealed that it was important for the students to indulge totally in *śravana* during the class and only later practice *manana* and *nididhyasana* by spending time with the *upadeśa*. He also brought out the fact that Vedanta gives the highest self esteem especially relevant at a time when the world having been afflicted by a pandemic followed by war had created extraordinary stress in society at large.

Sri Swamini Chidekarasananda took chanting classes for the participants teaching Ganga Stotram and Lingashtakam and also explained their meaning. Participants enjoyed Swamini's melodious voice and benefitted from her teaching. Br. Punya Thiru took yoga classes every day and many participated.

During the camps several bhandaras were held for the sannyasis residing in Rishikesh. Tickets for these bhandaras are much sought after by the sadhus here. On the penultimate day Swami Sakshatkritanandaji conducted the satsang at the invitation of Swami Sadatmanandaji and the students enjoyed interacting with Swamiji listening with awe at the answers to their doubts. *Om Tat Sat*