

Guru-Poornima retreat by Swami Sadatmanandaji at AVG, Anaikatti

This was a special retreat because the 70 participants had the benefit of learning and also expressing their gratefulness to the Guru Parampara on July 3rd. It was a very lively group who happily took part in all the activities of the retreat. Some of them were visiting the Gurukulam for the first time. Swamiji who conducted the retreat (from July 2nd 2023 to July 8th 2023) mentioned that this retreat was unique since the cellphone did not ring even once during any of the week-long classes. Good discipline!

The main text taken up at the retreat was *Amrtabindu Upanishad*. This Upanishad is one of the five bindu upanishads attached to the Atharva veda. It consists of 22 verses and has a unique presentation. The bondage and solution to bondage is analysed based on the condition of the mind. What are the Impurities in the mind, how it can be removed, how a relatively pure mind alone can engage in atma jnanam and know the self, meditation with omkara, how long to study and how to contemplate on brahman are all the unique subject matter of this Upanishad.

The other text taught was *Svarupanusandhana-ashtakam* which is a stotram attributed to Adi Sankaracarya. It is a group of 8 verses dealing with contemplation upon one's true nature. Both the texts complemented each other. Sw Sadatmanandaji leisurely and systematically unraveled the words of these texts to the participants.

By popular demand, Chanting class was also done by Smt Shanti who came to participate and also shared her musical talent. Satsangs ended with devotional bhajans from Smt Shanti and other singers. We asked the participants to write a few words about their retreat experience. The response was very prompt! One of them, Smt Vamshi even wrote a poem of her entire retreat experience which she read on the last day. We hope to share it with you.

Swamiji ended the retreat with a few *Take-home* points to practice -

1) Learn to **let go** of the tendency to **blame others or blame yourself**. Don't blame others for your sadness, your samsara and you don't blame yourself. Instead, we take responsibility of our contribution to these challenges. So stop blaming and taking responsibility is the first message.

2) Have some **religious/ spiritual routine**. Most of you must be having such a routine. But for those who don't have, let this retreat be a motivational factor for starting this routine. Everyday for total half hour we commit to this routine. When ever we introduce something new, we always say something minimum for smooth, comfortable entry. The routine can be as follows-

- a) Do minimum 3-4 asanas for 6-7 mins and pranayama for 3 mins.
- b) If possible have some altar (picture or vigrah) and do some **symbolic puja**. Even if you do not have anything, you sit/ stand in front of the altar and offer your thanks to Bhagavan and say by your grace I am blessed. If you have an altar and you can do, then offer atleast pancopacara puja which takes 5 mins. The 5 step puja consists of- gandha, pushpa, agarbathi, dipa or karpuram and offer some naivedyam to the Lord daily . It can be dry-fruit or anything available.
- c) Next step is to do some japa for 5 mins of some mantra given to you or you can do 'Om Nama Sivaya' or 'Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya'. If you like devi then 'devyai namah'. Also chant one small stotram . This can be done even before japa.
- d) 5 minutes of meditation. Take a comfortable posture. Do salutation to Bhagavan or guru mentally -*sad gurave namah*. Visualise your body .Relax your body, be aware of your body. Then do 3 rounds of deep concious breathing . After that just watch your breath for 1-2 min. Then you do manasa japa (mental chanting) of any Ishta devata mantra like Ishaya namah, om sivaya namah, etc.

This is short and sweet daily religious routine of asana/pranayama, 5 step puja, japa and meditation.

3) Third Take-home point is - Everyday spend sometime **listening to sastra**. Not reading, but listening to some talk.

4) Fourth Take-home point is - **Be a contributor** in whatever way you can. May you have the attitude of mind to share what you have in whatever way you can.

These are the 4 Take-home points which are very nice to adopt in our life.

Sharing some retreat experience of the participants –

- *Sri Anish Srinivas, Chennai wrote-* “Advaitam instead of dvaitam. Not waiting for dvaitam to disappear for advaitam to be there “ is my take home from this auspicious Gurupurnima retreat we had at AVG , Anaikatti.
- *Sri Sriram and Smt Meenakshi , Chennai wrote -* This is our first such experience. The program was curated very well in terms of time, other arrangements, etc. The content and the directions obtained in them from Swamiji has enabled my journey into this spiritual pursuit. The environment and infrastructure were conducive for the journey. WE feel blessed to be a part of the retreat and look forward to take the journey further.
- *Sri T Ravishanker, Hyderabad wrote –* Amidst chaos, everything is in order. The goal and mission of life is only knowing yourself as that. Every being is in the grace of Brahman.

- *Sri R. Ganesan, Chennai wrote* – I feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to attend the classes of Sw Sadatmanandaji on the two Vedanta texts in the serene and blissful surroundings inside the Anaikatti Gurukulam. Swamiji's explanation on each of the verses in both the texts, filled with real life example and humour, made me relive the classes of Pujya Swamiji. With his ever-smiling countenance and witty comments punctuated with his trade remarks " *All Right*", " *switching back to the subject*", the learning experience was a pleasant and enjoyable event. I also learned the real meaning of the often-quoted sentence - "*following the footsteps of*" from Swamiji.
- *Smt Neela Govindaraj, Chennai wrote* - My experience of one week at AVG, my first visit was superlative on all counts. The Gurukulam is beautiful set in the lush mountains of Western Ghats. It is peaceful , reverberating with the bells of Lord Dakshinamurti temple, calls of peacocks and chanting by devotees. Swamij's lectures were riveting and opened my eyes to many ways through which I could work on day-to-day harmony and the ultimate purpose of life. The days were full of positivity and looking ahead to the future.
- *K Ganesh, Bengaluru wrote* - At the outset I thank Swami Sadatmanandaji and AVG for providing me an opportunity to attend the retreat. The retreat was extremely useful in my spiritual journey. I specifically liked the following.

1. The choice of the 2 texts chosen for the retreat I was not exposed to either of them and both the texts complemented each other in terms of the content.
2. Excellent delivery of the chosen texts by Swami Sadatmanandaji. Swamiji provided elaboration and made references to other texts such as Mundaka Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad and Karika where required thus providing us a platform for exploring the subject matter further. As a person who is just getting used to the nuances of Sanskrit Grammar, his help in splitting Sandhis, providing anvaya and vighraha vakyam were very useful.
3. The Chanting classes and the Satsang were beneficial.
4. The serene atmosphere at Ashram is very apt for learning Shastra. The rooms were very clean and comfortable. Tasty food was served on all days and extreme care was taken by the staff to provide variety. All the staff were very courteous.

On the whole the retreat was very useful to me and with Lord Dakshinamurthi's and Swamiji's blessings, I am looking forward to attending more retreats in the future.

Om tat sat

- Report by Ms. Padma

Photo in the cover page #31