

AVP Rishikesh — 3-Months Course Inauguration

13 January 2025!

At last, the day we had been waiting for had arrived.

We took the flight from Pune and arrived at the Ashram at 6.15 PM looking forward to the soon-to-be our home, for the next three months. Swami Dayanand Ashram, Rishikesh!

Though late in life, our hearts were made up and longing to get the opportunity of a lifetime to study the Upanishadic teachings. Never too late for Enlightenment!

Coming to Rishikesh with an open mind, we just blended into the Ashram accommodation allocated to us. Without much ado we settled in and as we were just in time for the dinner at 7.00 PM. We were off for the first meal: simple and tasty, to suit all palates.

The winter has been severe this year as per the news reports we have been tracking along with the Australian Open but the additional unexpected factor was the breeze coming from the bank of the Ganges, flowing right next to the Ashram. A moonlit night soon made us forget the overwhelming cold with the clear view of the moon on an auspicious full moon day which was nature's unmatched bonus.

We were ready for the orientation after dinner as the classes were starting the next day. As we gathered at the lecture hall it was amazing to find people from all parts of India as well as foreign nationals: America, Australia, Thailand, Switzerland, Malaysia, Japan; but when introduction started, it was easy to connect. Though from different walks of life and different age groups, we all were "Seekers".

During the Induction, we were welcomed warmly by Swami Sakshatkrtananda Ji, the Head of the Ashram along with Swamini Swatmavidyanada Ji and other esteemed Faculty. The General Manager Sri Gunanad Ji walked us through the Dos and Don'ts of the Ashram. We students were asked to introduce ourselves briefly and were given the Handouts. We retired for the day.

We were up the next day, 14 January 2025 at 5.30 AM for the morning Puja. For the start of our spiritual learning what can be better than 14 January? Bihu, Lohri, Makara Shankranti, Pongal, many names, one festival - marking the start of the Harvest Season celebrated throughout India. So, our Vedanta Course started on 14th January 2025 with Prayers and Puja and Homage to our dear Guru Swamiji Dayanand Saraswati at the Samadhi

Mandir. The chanting of the mantras and offerings made us feel so special to be in the Guru's presence.

Followed by a lavish breakfast truly enjoyed by one and all.

After that, it was the first and introductory class in Upanishads by Swami Sakshatkrtnanda Ji. It was truly a treat for the mind as Swami Ji began with a prayer, just flowing into the introduction so simple and beautiful that no one need ever be afraid of learning the scriptures.

This was followed soon after with a special puja to the Sun God to invoke His Blessings, given the start of the Course on this auspicious day. It was held in the open, next to the Sri Gangadhareswar Mandir. Makara Shankranti symbolises the start of the harvest season and so during this Puja, rice was cooked with dal in a clay pot, allowing it to boil over, symbolising hopes for abundance of the harvest and prosperity. This rice dish, Pongal was served as Prasad at the end of the Puja. The gentle soothing sound of the Ganga flowing next to us, the bright Sun made us aware of all the elements around us.

This was followed by a Bhandara (feast) for Sandhus who were invited to partake in this Bhandara and bless the occasion and the Ashram. Those who came to its gate never went back without food as Maa Annapurna was there for the asking.

After lunch, we had a break which gave us time to assimilate all that had taken place and of course we couldn't wait to start our first Bhagwat-Gita class after tea break. Dear Swamini Swatmavidyananda Ji gave us these sober teachings in such a humorous way that it kept us alert not knowing what was coming up next. Some students were literally falling off their seats. The closing prayers at the end of the class, as always, was a good way to bring us back to the ground.

We had a short tea break and evening temple Puja. After a break before dinner, a simple dinner was provided which was welcome after such lavish start.

The day ended with Satsang and Question/Answer session.

A glorious beginning of the three months Vedanta Course.

Could it get better?

Let us see.

Photo in cover page #31