



Sri Gurubhyonamaha

## Sadhana Camp at Uttarkashi, Himalayas

A sadhana camp and the teaching of the great spiritual text, **Hastamalakiyam**, under the guidance of our beloved **Guruji Prem Siddharth**, was conducted for the benefit of his disciples in the holy month of Kartika, during the last 10 days of October, 2009. An enriching spiritual experience that it was, the camp included visiting the holy places of **Haridwar, Rishikesh, Uttarkashi and Gangotri**. A group of about 25 students were accompanied by **Guruji Prem Siddharth** and **Smt. Jyotsana Siddharth** along with a group of extremely competent assistants.

The journey to the Himalayas commenced at New Delhi, where all the devotees gathered at the railway station and boarded the train to Haridwar with a prayer to the Lord Shiva and Pujya Guruji for his blessings for this spiritual sojourn. This enjoyable journey was filled with laughter and happiness and also a melodious overture provided by Sri Srinivas Garu, who sang delightful bhajans to the Lord along with the rest of the group. The other groups of passengers were also more than happy to participate and contribute their bit to it. Swamiji, who was not to be left behind, masterfully lent his voice and added music this exercise.

It seemed that, in no time we had reached our first destination, Haridwar. It was here that we met the main organizer, Sri Janardhana Reddy garu and the party of cooks who were to accompany us in the journey. The accommodation at the ashram was very comfortable and Swamiji himself designated the rooms to the devotees. We met for dinner served to us by Swamiji himself along with his blessings and for the discussion of the following day's travel plans. After the sumptuous meal, which rejuvenated everyone, Swamiji ordered the group to rest after a prayer at the ashram temple to Lord Hanuman.

The following morning, as directed by Swamiji, the group went for the darshan of the Daksha prajapati Temple situated right next to the Ashram and performed puja to the Lord Shiva and Ganga Mata. Following a delicious breakfast and hot steaming tea and coffee in the slightly nippy weather, the devotees were ready for the six hour bus journey to the Sivanada Ashram in Uttarkashi.

All along the journey, we were greeted by beautifully hued landscapes and glorious rising mountains and valleys and the ever accompanying Ganga. The journey was interspersed with Bhajans led by Sri Srinivas garu and 'Jai'-kar's by Rathodji, who always kept up the spirits of the devotees. Following a lunch break at the scenic hills in Garhwal, we resumed our journey amidst the rising snowcapped peaks of the great Himalayas. By the evening we had reached the ashram tired, but also, filled with the marvels of the glorious nature revealed to us along the way.

At the holy Sivananda Ashram, where we were to reside for the next six days, we were received warmly by the ever loving Pujya Sri Premanand Swamiji, the president and other people of the ashram, with blessings, an ever present smile and refreshing snacks. Once we were settled, Guruji revealed to us the nature of the camp and gave directions for the sadhana and stay at the ashram. This was followed by the blessings from Premanand Swamiji who told to the group, the priceless nature of the learning that one can get at the ashram of the great Swami Sivananda. We unfortunately missed the presence of Swami Ramswaroopanandji at the ashram as he was in Bangalore at that time.

The following six days were filled with a busy schedule. Each day, the early morning puja at the adjacent temple of Lord Shiva was performed under the guidance of our Guruji, who encouraged us to do abhishekam in the holy Kartika month, with the chanting of Sri Rudram and other such prayers preceded by Ganapati puja and singing of bhajans and explained to us the need of punya and blessings of god that each of us for Atma Jnana.

There were also bhajan classes by Srinivas garu, who was more than delighted to teach some of his favorite songs to the eager learners. The simple and sweet nature of his bhajans appealed to the whole lot and the group was able to learn many bhajans and could sing them frequently at the bhajan sessions which happened each evening at the ashram lead by our Guruji and Premanand Swamiji.

These activities were followed by regular classes of the text, **Hastamalakiyam, a Nidhidhyasana Grandham**, as explained and taught to us by Guruji, in his inimitable and lucid style of teaching, which was grasped by the students eagerly and discussed them at length with each other for further clarity.

Guruji also conducted special classes for clarifying the doubts of the students where they could interact with him and ask him for further suggestions pertaining to the sadhana. These classes were an example of devoted learning and discipline as exhibited by the students.

Every evening at twilight, the Ganga Aarti was performed at the banks of the Ganga River which flowed behind the ashram. The worship of Maa Ganga was done by Jyotsana garu and Guruji on the behalf of everyone. Bhajans were accompanied by music played by Rathodji, Janardhana Reddy garu and others. It concluded each day with the diyas being offered to the flowing water by all the devotees.

A special Gangananam was planned on the mid-morning of Kartika Somavaram, for the benefit of the students. It was a lot of fun, filled with dancing and singing to the Lord at the banks of the Ganga River which flowed right behind the ashram. Everyone got in to bathe in the waters after an initial hesitation considering the temperature of the waters.

These activities obviously were fuelled by the great variety of breakfasts, lunches and great dinners served by the specially mentionable and talented cook, Semhwal, Sunil bhai and their team.

On the last day of the stay at the ashram, a trip to the Gangotri was planned and accompanied by Sunil Bhai and Rathodji. All the devotees had the darshan of Maa Ganga and bathed in the water. On the way to the holy place, we also had the fortune of coming across many small villages and the river of Bhagirathi in Tehri and Maneri which was wonderful and surrounded by magnificent peaks of snow. On the way back, we had lunch at the hot water spring at Ganganani in Maneri after a bath in the hot sulfur springs, where we were joined by Guruji and Jyotsana Garu.

Our sadhana camp at Uttarkashi had concluded with the classes of Hastamalakiyam and the Gangotri darshan. We thanked Premanand Swamiji for his love and blessed hospitality during the course of this camp and left for Haridwar on our journey back.

At Rishikesh, we rested at The Divine Life Society, Sivananda ashram situated on the banks of the Ganga and visited the various temples in the town for darshan. We also had the rare opportunity to meditate and pray at the ashram and learn about the life and teachings of Swami Sivananda, thanks to our Guruji who gave us the opportunity to do so. Swamiji, as requested, also delivered an address to the devotees of the ashram.

The following afternoon, we traveled to Haridwar and stayed at the ashram for the night and attended the famous Maha Aarti at the Haridwar's *Har-ki-Pauri*. The same evening, a concluding ceremony was done for the sadhana camp presided by our Guruji and Jyotsana garu. The devotees performed gurupuja and thanked Guruji for presenting the opportunity to attend the spiritual camp and for his continual blessings that he showered on us for the duration of the trip. Sri.Srinivas, Sri. Sambasiva Rao, Sri & Smt. Janardhana Sarma and Sri. C.V.Krishnamurthy garu expressed their gratitude and shared their experiences of the trip with Guruji and sought out for his blessings on behalf of all of us. Guruji, then concluded the ceremony by explaining to us the benefit of each activity that we had performed during the course of the camp and urged everyone to devote themselves to Atma Jnana sadhana and to continue with the good practices that we were introduced to during the course of the trip.

That concluded the sadhana camp and all of us returned to Delhi the following morning and soon left for our respective homes, but not before reflecting on the teachings of Guruji and with a strengthened determination of the noble pursuit and path that that we have been graced with by God.

This camp certainly proved to be an extremely beneficial and a most important landmark in the lives of all the disciples, filled with experiences that will certainly prove as stepping stones leading us in our sadhana.

We bow down humbly and offer our prostrations to the lotus feet of God, our beloved Guru, the holy Himalayas and Maa Ganga, in whose lap, we have successfully accomplished this blessed sadhana camp.

Hari Om