



Ananda Kutir Ashrama

serve . love . give . purify . meditate . realise

It is the objective of this Ashrama to disseminate the Teachings of
H.H. Swami Sivananda Maharaj
according to H.H. Swami Venkatesananda Maharaj

November 2025 - February 2026

News on Recent Events

Dear Friends,
Hari OM. Loving Greetings!

2025 witnessed another year in which the ashrama continued to share Swami Sivananda's and Swami Venkatesananda's teachings of Yoga in all its aspects. This entailed regular meditation classes, talks on texts such as Narada Bhakti Sutras and Yoga Vasishtha, satsangs, courses and yoga classes. In addition various religious observances provide opportunities for contemplation and renewal.



The month of November began with the Mahasamadhi Anniversary of Swami Venkatesananda on 7 November. As is tradition at the

ashrama we offered kirtans, puja and talk. The puja especially is a powerful way of reconnecting with the Guru, a necessary requirement for a disciple, as the teaching is truly of a subtle nature and beyond words. We were blessed with the visit of Rukmini Mataji from USA, who talked about her experiences with Sri Swami Venkatesananda Ji in a very personal manner, which was highly inspiring. Swami Vidyananda shared some of Sri Swami Venkatesananda Ji's insights into the famous Katha Upanishad: a text that deals with death, not merely physical death but the death of the ego, which leads to self-realisation.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba was a well-known Saint who is regarded by



his devotees as a Divine Incarnation, who inspired millions of people into the spiritual life and also initiated a tremendous amount of social welfare projects. Every year the organisation hosts the worldwide 24-hour Global Peace Prayers. The Cape Town Branch also hosted the Global Prayers, which took place on 8 November, and invited various organisations to participate and offer their prayers or songs of devotion. Ananda Kutir Ashrama also offered kirtans. 2025 also marked the Birth Centenary of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and a special function was held on 23 November at which Ananda Kutir Ashrama also took part. It was wonderful to see the deep devotion and wonderful service projects that the local devotees offer.

An Ashrama hike was organised for 9 November in the Good Hope Nature Reserve. Evelyn Holtzhausen kindly guided a group from Buffels Bay to a

small hill called Kanonkop and back. The circular route was indeed beautiful and allowed time for a short meditation on the hill.

Swami Vidyananda was requested to give a talk on whether Artificial Intelligence could help with Yoga. This talk was given on 24 November. After Swami Vidyananda had consulted with some friends who work with AI, it became clear that AI at best could be utilized as a good search engine provided one ensured that the data sources were good. But AI lacks experience of a seeker, and of course God-Realisation. So it cannot give any personal insights as it is unable to perform any of the yoga practices in a meaningful manner. It can imitate but we cannot truly learn from an imitation. So, if one wants to use it as an aid to research material, it may be useful but the sources should be verified.

Furthermore AI cannot become intelligent in the true sense. There is a lot of hype in the media, but this may be simply to make humans accept AI as an authority to govern our lives. We must continue to use our God-given gifts, especially in the pursuit of enlightenment.

2 December always marks the Mahasamadhi of Swami Venkatesananda according to the Western calendar, and the ashram usually has an Interfaith Satsang. This time the theme was “God is Truth”. We were blessed with the presence of Geoff Barkley from USA, who shared some of Swami Venkatesananda’s teachings on the above topic. Devotees of the ashrama also gave brief presentations on the theme from the perspective of various religious traditions. The presentations were interspersed with the beautiful songs of the faith traditions.



Geoff Barkley is furthest right whilst Swami Venkatesananda is giving a talk at Seven Hills Ashram in Canada

Being Brave is a wonderful organisation established by our friend Radha Conway, a disciple of Amritananda Mayi Ma, that assists survivors of serious physical trauma. Mother Yogeshwari and Swami Parvathiananda were part of the opening ceremony of the



organisation 20 years ago. Swami Vidyananda attended the 20th Anniversary on 7 December. It was an informal gathering at which we offered special prayers for the continuation of this sacred work of healing.



A special guest yoga teacher gave a Iyengar Yoga Class on 13 December. Ann Barkley, wife of Geoff Barkley, from the USA, shared an invigorating class that all who attended thoroughly enjoyed.



Christmas Eve was celebrated on 24 December with a special flower offering to Jesus Christ in the Hindu way of worship. Sri Swami Krishnananda Ji, a disciple of Sri Swami Sivananda Ji had composed

an adoration of Jesus Christ in Sanskrit enumerating 108 special characteristics of Jesus the Christ in the form of mantras. With each mantra we offer a flower to Baby Jesus. This is the physical aspect of the worship but in our hearts the worship is of the Omnipresent Infinite Being. Swami Vidyananda also gave a talk and Vani Mataji led all in the carols. Prior to the Satsang we had a communal supper with all who attended the satsang, thereby enjoying ‘ashram family’ time.



Swami Venkatesananda’s Birth Anniversary was celebrated on the morning of 29 December with the usual Yajna for World Peace, Puja (Worship) and Kirtan. Swami Vidyananda also gave a talk on the theme “The Trust

That Liberates”. This was the theme of the Christmas Retreat held at Sivanandashram. Swami Vidyananda’s talk was simultaneously streamed live to the retreatants at Sivanandashram as part of the retreat there.

At the beginning of his talk Swami Vidyananda humorously remarked that the trust that liberates is the Divine Life Society Trust that Gurudev Swami Sivananda created, because its purpose is the spiritual liberation of mankind. The actual talk centered around Swami Venkatesananda’s teachings of faith, which is more than mere belief but is based on some glimpse. We often overlook our experiences, not recognising their significance due to their ordinariness. If we would, we all would have steady faith in the path of Yoga.

The new year began with a Seva (Selfless Service) Day. A new boundary wall was erected at the end of last year. This required painting. Also all the wooden structures needed varnishing. Under the able supervision of Etienne Ji a group of willing Karma Yogis painted with great love and enthusiasm on 13 January. Is it not wonderful to start the year with some service?

The Integral Yoga Course started this year on 17 January. This is a 30-week course in which seekers are introduced into the fundamentals of Integral Yoga as taught by Swami Sivananda and

Swami Venkatesananda. At the end of the course, students will have sufficient knowledge and practices to enable them to live a meaningful spiritual life.

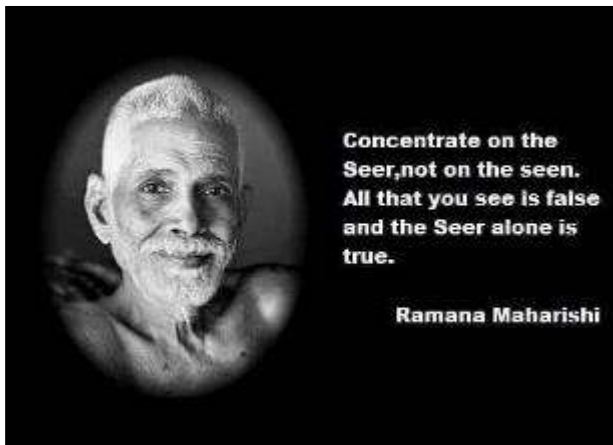
Swami Vidyananda's and Vani Mataji's Birthdays were celebrated at the respective Saturday Satsangs. There was joyous kirtan singing and after the satsang a little indulgence in delicious cakes thanks to loving bakers.



This year the Maha Shivaratri Vigil fell on 15 February. This is a night of constant kirtan interspersed with Pujas. The great Yogis are able to

stay awake at will in their deep meditations. Seekers on the path emulate this discipline, but since meditation for 12 hours throughout the night is beyond the capacity of most of us, we sing instead. Since the songs are themselves a form of meditation (as they adore the Supreme Reality in the form of Shiva), the vigil brings tremendous unseen spiritual benefits, one of them being endurance.

May our lives be a constant remembrance of the Divine.



**Concentrate on the
Seer, not on the seen.
All that you see is false
and the Seer alone is
true.**

Ramana Maharishi

Cosmic Links

“If you have the insight of non-self, if you have the insight of impermanence, you should make that insight into a concentration that you keep alive throughout the day. Then what you say, what you think, and what you do will then be in the light of that wisdom and you will avoid making mistakes and creating suffering.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

“Concentration is the secret of strength.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Each man is capable of doing one thing well. If he attempts several, he will fail to achieve distinction in any.”

Plato

“Intelligence is the door to freedom and alert attention is the mother of intelligence.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

“I never could have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time...”

Charles Dickens

“The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and the degree of concentration on a single thought are the measures to gauge spiritual progress.”

Ramana Maharshi

“Normally, we do not so much look at things as overlook them.”

Alan Watts

“Don’t dissipate your powers; strive to concentrate them.”

Goethe

“To be concentrated means to live fully in the present.”

Erich Fromm

“To be able to concentrate for a considerable time is essential to difficult achievement.”

Bertrand Russell

“Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun’s rays do not burn until brought to a focus.”

Alexander Graham Bell

Creating the Atmosphere

By Swami Venkatesananda

In the *Yoga Sutras* we are given three words which together mean meditation - dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Dharana is focusing the mind. If we hold a magnifying glass either very close to or very far away from the ground,



the glass is transparent. It is just a glass and the light which passes through that glass is spread out. In our case the mind functions like that - the rays of the mind are dissipated, the attention is spread out. But when you hold a magnifying glass in such a way that the light is concentrated and there is a pin point of light on that spot under the glass, we find that there is tremendous light at one point and all around it is dark.

That is what Patanjali refers to as dharana. The attention is completely and totally focussed upon the meditation subject. When it comes to the use of a mantra in japa, you make sure that the whole of your attention is listening to this mantra. The space around is completely 'dark', and the attention is not dissipated, wasted.

We are not unfamiliar with concentration, but in our case the concentration is brought about by external circumstances, attraction and repulsion. When you see an interesting face you are terribly concentrated. Your concentration is triggered by that external object, the 'switch' is not with you. The yogi merely wants to make sure that the switch is with him - not because he thinks he can meditate, but because he *can* avoid the distraction. I want to have the switch in my hands so that I can avoid distraction.

When I prevent distractions from arising, then I have created the atmosphere or field conducive to meditation. In that favourable atmosphere it is possible for meditation to happen.

YOGASARA-UPANISHAD MANTRA 11

Dharana (concentration) is fixing the mind on an idea or a point or object either internal or external.

NOTES AND COMMENTARY

By Sri Swami Sivananda

It is very difficult to say where concentration ends and meditation begins. Meditation follows concentration. Purify the mind first through the practice of yama (self-control) and niyama (discipline). Then take to the practice of dharana. Concentration without purity is of no use. There are some occultists who are much advanced in concentration. But they have no good character. That is the reason why they do not make any progress in the spiritual path. Some foolish, impatient yogic students take to dharana at once without undergoing the preliminary ethical training. They want to have a long jump. They break their legs and fall down. This is a serious blunder. Ethical perfection is of paramount importance.

Concentration is steadfastness of mind. If you remove all causes of distraction, your power of concentration will increase. A true brahmachari (celibate) who has preserved his virya (vitality) will have wonderful concentration. Attention plays a prominent part in concentration. He who has developed his power of attention will have good concentration. You

should be able to visualise very clearly the object of concentration even in its absence. You must call up the mental picture in a moment's notice. If you have good practice in concentration you can do this without difficulty. He who has gained success in pratyahara (abstraction) by withdrawing the indriyas (senses) from the various objects will have good concentration. You will have to march in the spiritual path step by step, stage by stage. Lay the foundation of yama (right conduct), niyama, asana (posture), pranayama and pratyahara to start with. The super-structure of dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi will be successful then only.

Asana is bahiranga sadhana (external practice); dhyana is antaranga sadhana (internal). When compared with dhyana and samadhi, even dharana is bahiranga sadhana. He who has steady asana and has purified the yoga-nadis and the pranamaya kosa (vital sheath) through pranayama will be able to concentrate easily.

You can concentrate internally on any of the seven plexus or cakras or centres of

spiritual energy, or at the tip of the nose, or tip of the tongue or externally on the picture of any devata (deity), Hari, Hara, Krishna or Devi. You can concentrate on the tick-tick sound of a watch or the flame of a candle, or on a black point on a wall, or on a pencil or rose flower or any pleasing object. This is concrete concentration. There can be no concentration without something upon which the mind may rest. The mind can be fixed easily on a pleasing object such as jasmine flower, mango, orange or a loving friend. It is difficult to fix the mind in the beginning on any object which it dislikes such as faecal matter, cobra, enemy, ugly face, etc. Practise concentration till the mind is well established on the object of concentration. When the mind runs away from the object of concentration, bring it back again and again to the object. Lord Krishna says: "As often as the wavering and unsteady mind goes forth, so often reining it in, let him bring it under the control of the self". (Gita Ch. VI - 26.)

If you want to increase your power of concentration you will have to reduce your worldly activities. You will have to observe mauna (vow of silence) for two hours daily. A man whose mind is filled with passion and all sorts of fantastic desires can hardly concentrate on any object even for a second. His mind will be

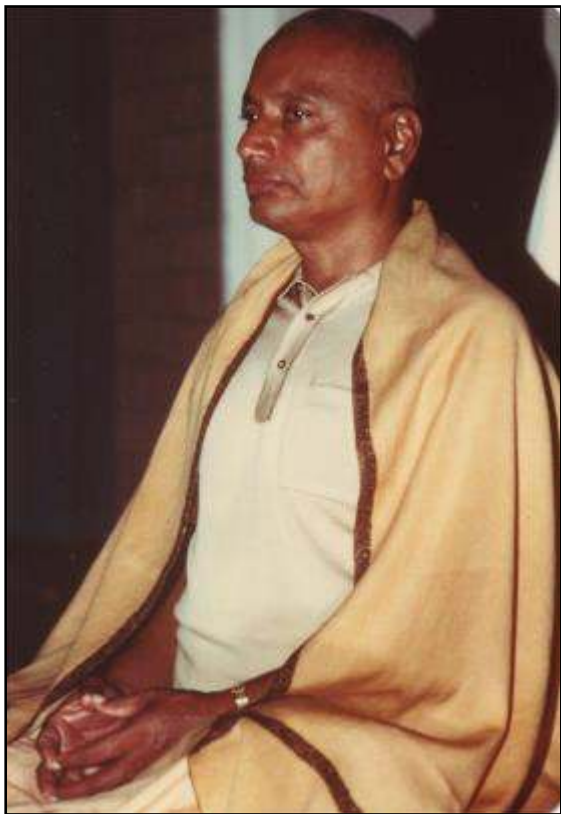
oscillating like a balloon. Regulate and master the breath. Subdue the senses and then fix the mind on any pleasing object. Associate the ideas of holiness and purity with the object.

You can concentrate on the space between the two eyebrows (trikuti). You can concentrate on the mystic sounds (anahata dhvani) that you hear from your right ear. You can concentrate on Om picture. The picture of Lord Krishna with flute in hand and the picture of Lord Vishnu with conch, discus, mace and lotus are very good for concentration. You can concentrate on the picture of your guru or any saint also. Vedantins try to fix the mind on atman, the inner self. This is their dharana.

Dharana is the sixth stage or limb of astanga yoga or raja yoga of Patanjali Maharsi. In dharana you will have only one vritti or wave in the mind-lake. The mind assumes the form of only one object. All other operations of the mind are suspended or stopped. He who can practise real concentration for half or one hour will have tremendous psychic powers. His 'will' also will be very powerful.

Concentration Meditation Samadhi

By Swami Venkatesananda



These are again all words - which I hope do not mean much to you. When these three, concentration, meditation and samadhi, are practised simultaneously, there is intense inner awareness, illumination or enlightenment.

We can dispose of one more question that people ask. "Is yoga, especially meditation, like hypnosis?" The yogi replies, "No." In this ocean of one cosmic being the wave has already hypnotised itself into an independent entity. You really are the cosmic being but you have hypnotised yourself into a self-limited personality. Therefore the yoga of meditation is not self-hypnotism but self-dehypnotism.

When the attention is absorbed, it is meditation. For example when I keep on looking at you, it is concentration. When I am completely absorbed in looking at you, it is meditation. And when I go deeper and these three (I-looking-you) become one, so that it is as though you alone are the reality and 'I' is non-existent, that is samadhi.

But there is a danger in being promised any reward for the serious practice of meditation in that we may be caught in a hunt for results. This is due to a basic insincerity. If the fundamental sincerity is not there, then one's life on the path of yoga is full of difficulties from day to day.

Key To Perfection

By Swami Sivananda

Meditate on the atman; you will enjoy peace and bliss. The more you grow in aspiration and meditation the more God-like you grow, for in meditation is the light of the Lord. Meditate and charge your battery by contact with God. Dive deep into the chambers of your heart through profound and silent meditation and bring up the pearl of truth. Meditate and retire to your innermost centre. Abide now in perfect serenity and the peace that passeth all understanding.

Fear, distress, worry, temptation and despair will assail you during meditation. Repeat the Lord's name vigorously and sincerely - all will vanish. Meditate amidst noise, study amidst noise. Discipline and again discipline. There will be no tossing of the mind for you. You will have a strong unperturbed mind. If purity increases, the body becomes light and the mind becomes cheerful. One attains greater balance of mind and the power of concentration increases. You enter into deep meditation. If for one day you do not practise meditation, you will lose much; you will not be able to reach the original spiritual height the next day. Therefore always be regular in your meditation. Enquire, "Who



am I?" Find the seer, find the knower. Meditate on satcidananda atman, the inner ruler, the indweller.

Meditate on Brahman as support, greatness, wisdom, bliss and existence. The light which never fails is the light of meditation. You experience samadhi (the vision of truth) through the light of meditation. Moksa (emancipation) is very near to him who is perfect in meditation. Connect your mind with the mind of God through meditation or yoga. Your life will become divine, your life will be transformed.

News from Children Of Light Educare

COLT GARDENING PROJECT 2025

Our gardening project this year continued to focus on growing vegetables, fragrant herbs and plants; and the worm farm. A very successful long-term activity for the children has been propagating succulent plants, and over the past 7 months these succulents have been used to create six beautiful pot plants.

Our planned end of year project was to visit the elderly and gift them the pot plants for Christmas.

COLT visits Rosebank House

The date was confirmed – 1st December, and our list of 10 children was confirmed for the outing, but as the COLT bus collected the children from their communities an additional very enthusiastic child hopped in with the others. He couldn't bear to see his COLT friends going without him! Luckily there was an extra green T-shirt for him to wear. The, now 11 children held hands as we were guided through the buildings and grounds to the central garden. The residents and staff were so excited when we greeted them when walking through.

Our pots were placed on a table in a beautiful treed place of the garden where the children performed and sang; 'are you



sleeping little seed', 'Sally goes round the sun', 'oats and beans and barley grows'. The residents seated on benches around the table couldn't wait to hug and talk to the children! The children did not hesitate and confidently sat and chatted, answering questions about themselves.

Then we were taken through to the thriving vegetable garden that some of the residents started 12 months ago. The ceramic garden gnome in amongst the vegetables caused much excitement and laughter! We ended the morning with a fun picnic in Rondebosch Park.



From tiny seeds to Bright futures - COLT 2025 Graduation ceremony



On a bright sun-kissed morning Children of Light celebrated the 17 bright graduates heading to Grade R in 2026. Caps tilted just right, tiny hands clutching certificates, the air buzzed with excitement and trembling pride.

Each child's smile told a story of love, laughter and lessons learned – playful games in the garden, curious experiments in the class and garden and quiet moments of sharing stories. Yet, as the names were called tears glistened at the corners of their eyes. They were leaving the place that felt like a second home, where friendships were forged to last a lifetime.

Teachers watched, hearts full, remembering the first day each child stepped through the gates, shy and curious. Now, they were stepping forward, ready for the next chapter, carrying with them the warmth, fun and bonds that will stay with them forever.

Congratulations, class of 2025 – may the road ahead be as bright as the light you have always followed.

End of year Christmas party – Children of Light Educare



The hall at the Lansdowne Civic glowed with twinkling strings of brightly vibrant tinsel, a tall Christmas tree dripping with tinsel and lights and all the Christmas decorations. Present learners all excited to see all the Christmas cheer while past pupils – now a little taller, some already in school uniform – returned for the first time in years.

Volunteers came out and poured their hearts into cooking a warm, hearty meal, their love shimmering in every pot and plate for the celebration. A deep, jolly “Ho-ho-ho!” echoed as Santa – white beard and a loving smile, none other than our beloved teacher Juliet stepped through the door. Each Santa shoebox carefully and lovingly wrapped under the tree from generous donors far and near wanting to bring a smile to these deserving children. When Santa called the first name, the children were excited with eyes wide open, eager to stand up and join in the line to receive their very own Christmas gifts.

For those few hours, the hall was not just a building, it was a sanctuary of love, laughter and belonging. The children, young and old, danced, played and shared sweets.

In that glowing hall, the community's love wrapped around every child, reminding them that hope shines brightest when hearts gather, and that with faith anything is possible.



Starting the Year Strong

Stretching our bodies, calming our minds and mentally preparing ourselves for the year ahead is how the team at COLT kicked off 2026 with an Integral Yoga retreat. After a well-deserved break, the retreat gave us the time to reset, reflect and reconnect, slowly easing everyone back into the rhythm of the year. While the two

days followed a similar structure, each activity embodied COLT's core values, learning through philosophy talks given by the Swami, focusing through meditation, loving through shared presence, and preparing ourselves to serve the children with renewed clarity and intention.



With school starting, we headed to the communities to confirm the number of children who were to start the new term and to invite parents to attend a parent-teacher meeting. After speaking with one of the parents, we learned that one of COLT's previous children did not have a proper school uniform for Grade R. A quick run to PEP later, and he now has a full uniform and is ready to start school. A small moment that reminded us just how important this work truly is.

New Faces and Familiar Smiles

For our new children, the start of this term was expected to be a little daunting, a new place, new faces, and new routines. Yet after only two weeks, one look at these students and you would think they

have been attending COLT for years. From getting on and off the bus to exploring the classrooms and discovering all the corners of their new environment, they are already making COLT feel like home. And they're not the only ones bringing life to COLT this term. Our returning children brought their usual sparkle, and together, old and new quickly filled the space with laughter, curiosity, and friendship.

they are their child's first teachers and that learning begins at home. These discussions focused not on blaming children for their behaviour, but on supporting parents to recognise how changes in their actions and responses can make a meaningful difference in their child's growth and wellbeing. The meeting ended on a thoughtful note, with families receiving food parcels to take home.



Adding to the excitement, we hosted a truly successful parent-teacher meeting. It was a wonderful opportunity to introduce families to the vision of COLT and our approach to educating their children. For the first time, parents were separated into groups with their respective child's teacher, allowing for more focused and meaningful conversations. The meeting also created space to remind parents that

We are also thrilled to announce that COLT has formed a new partnership with The Learning Initiative, which will bring occupational therapists (OTs) to support our children. The OTs will begin by working with all students and will then identify a selected group for more focused support. We are looking forward to seeing the positive impact this will have on our learners.

Exciting New Steps for Our Children

Following our recent partnership with The Learning Initiative, we are thrilled to share what is in store for our children.

They led a fantastic session with staff and parents, giving everyone a first look at the Blocks for Growth programme and the difference it can make for our learners. The programme is designed to understand how each child learns, thinks, and develops. Every child is unique, and this initiative helps identify their strengths as well as any areas where extra academic support may be needed. The goal isn't to label anyone, but to equip each child with the tools they need to succeed. Importantly, the insights gained from the programme are shared with our teachers, ensuring that all children benefit from strengthened teaching strategies and support.

During the session, parents also got the chance to ask questions and give consent for their children to participate. It was inspiring to hear them share openly about their children, celebrating where they are thriving and honestly discussing areas where extra support can help. Their openness and commitment to their children's growth was truly heartwarming.

Meanwhile, our Youth Programme has kicked off again with wonderful momentum. The children enjoyed a full day of Yoga



and Vedic chanting. They were wonderfully receptive to the sacred vibrations and are already making excellent progress in their chanting.

A Look at Our Recent Activities

Tuesdays are now known as “Gardening Day” at the Educare, where our gardening group comes together for meaningful, hands-on learning. It has quickly become one of the most anticipated days of the week, filled with discovery, excitement, and teamwork.

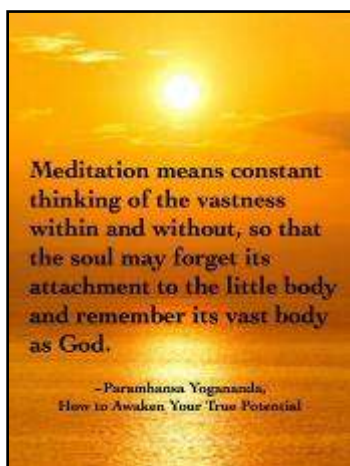
By growing vegetables such as spinach and beetroot in the garden, our children are introduced to healthy and sustainable choices from an early age. Through this experience, they learn how to care for the environment and develop an



understanding of the responsibility that comes with nurturing living things. Building on this, their main project has become the worm farm, where they feed and water the worms, learning how small actions can support nature.

Alongside our vegetable garden and worm farm, we are also preparing for a meaningful end-of-year activity. Throughout the year, the children help care for our succulents by watering them and observing their growth. At the end of the year, each child will decorate their own pot and take home a succulent they have nurtured themselves. This small plant serves as a beautiful symbol of their own growth, a reminder of the care, patience, and responsibility they have developed throughout the year.

In addition to our gardening activities, the children recently experienced an exciting milestone, their first outing together. They took a train ride to the beach, an adventure that was new to most of them. It was a day full of sand and laughter and we look forward to many more adventures like this one in the future.



Wisdom from Mother Yogeshwari

WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG

When you're young, you'll never know
Just how quickly life can go
You think you'll be young forever,
Getting old? Me? Oh, no never!

Ah, you make a big mistake
But with luck, you'll get a shake,
Which wakes you up without a sound
Yet, it turns your life around!

Practise how to concentrate
Later on to meditate
You'll need inner strength for this –
But you'll gain in peace and bliss.

So much reason then for living
Always joyful, always giving,
Then help restore our precious planet
Like it was when God began it

Thoughts are
giant powers. They
are more powerful
than electricity.
They control your
life, mould your
character, and
shape your destiny.

SWAMI SIVANANDA SARASWATI

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Ananda Kutir Ashrama Membership Application Form

Students who are keenly involved in the Ashrama and who are actively supportive of its objectives can become members. A member receives a copy of Swami Sivananda's 20 Spiritual Instructions and Swami Venkatesananda's Prayer. A member can vote at the AGM and can serve on the management committee.

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

R250 valid for the financial year March-February. R350 for married couples.

Name _____

Postal Address _____

Phone _____

Cellphone _____

E-mail _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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