

May 2025, Retreat Report

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago held its first retreat of the year at its Retreat Center in Ganges, Michigan, from May 16 to 18, 2025. On Friday night, Swami Ishatmananda led the invocation and introduced the speaker. Swami Sarvasthananda, Head, Vedanta Centre in the UK, conducted the retreat titled "Four Pathways to Divinity." Around 50 spiritual aspirants gathered for a spiritually nourishing weekend centered on the integration of the Four Yogas — Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, and Raja Yoga. Surrounded by the quietude of forests and the vast blue expanse of Lake Michigan, the retreat offered a rare opportunity to deepen spiritual understanding through both study and practice, in the spirit of Swami Vivekananda's teachings. Each day began in sacred silence with early morning meditation, light yoga, and prayer, allowing participants to turn inward before breakfast. This practice set the tone for contemplative awareness throughout the day. The heart of the retreat was a series of in-depth discourses by Sarvasthanandaji. Each lecture was clear, engaging, and rooted in classical texts as well as the lived tradition of Vedanta. The talks emphasized the harmonious integration of all four yogas in daily life. On Saturday afternoon, during an informal Q&A session over tea, devotees sat with the Swamis in a relaxed setting, sharing personal questions, reflections, and challenges. Participants also engaged in Karma Yoga, helping with tasks such as meal preparation, gardening, and general upkeep of the retreat center. These activities were done in silence or mindful speech, transforming ordinary work into conscious spiritual offering. That same evening, the group witnessed a breathtaking sunset on the shores of Lake Michigan. On Sunday morning, the Swami spoke on "Vedanta as a Science of Human Possibilities." The retreat served as a powerful reminder that spiritual life is not merely about study or ritual, but about living with awareness, love, discipline, and self-offering. We offer our heartfelt gratitude to the Swami, the volunteers, and all attendees who helped make this gathering a vibrant expression of living Vedanta. On Sunday evening, Swami Sarvasthananda also delivered a public lecture on "Globalizing Indian Thought" at the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont.

