



Initiatives of Change

AfL Encounters

News from the Road of Action for Life 3
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Asia Plateau, Panchgani, India:

Beneath fireworks exploding like spiders across the stars, our first week at Asia Plateau has come to an end. Forty-seven members of the third Action for Life (AfL3) have descended on the town of Panchgani over the last week, filling Asia Plateau with the warmth and good cheer of twenty-seven nations. It has been a rich week, and we have been left wondering how it is that we arrived here only eight or nine days ago.

Our dynamic community is built of people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, and many of us have had to jump great hurdles en route. Fundraising was a major issue, as was dealing with stolen passports, lost luggage, and leaving the comforts of our homes. As we write to you, we are still awaiting the arrival of our last four participants, including three from Indonesia who have not yet been given Indian visas.

With them in mind, AfL3 began on the afternoon of October 31st with a ceremony in the foyer of Asia Plateau. After meeting our support team, participants from each of the continents represented together lit an oil lamp that signified the beginning of our nine-month journey. We began our program with songs and dancing, and by remembering Mahatma Gandhi's words, "Be the change you want to see in the world."

Under starry skies at five o'clock the next morning, we arose to gather on the plateau above Panchgani. We sat on rocky cliffs in silence, watching the sun rise. With the sky red behind us, we shared prayers and devotions from many nations. This spirit has been echoed throughout the program thus far; sharing our diverse traditions has been a major success of the first week.

Our time at Asia Plateau has been devoted to two major subjects. Group process has been central in our workshops, and by sharing our stories and our vision, we have begun to build community. Our other major focus has been India. Amidst Hindi lessons and curry for breakfast, we have begun to gather the cultural knowledge that we will require for outreach. Through discussions with leading economists, journalists, climatologists, and sociologists, we are beginning to form a local knowledge of this region.

Highlights of the last week have included celebrations of Chavang Kut, Diwali, and Eid, and visits to local villages, farms, and the town of Wai. While in town, the flashing neon lights and bright orange paint of Ganesh's temple welcomed us into the contrasting culture that we have come to experience. The next morning, many of us had the opportunity to perform a service project with a local Buddhist community. Some of us shared the tasks of digging toilet pits and preparing homes for septic tanks, while others worked alongside youth from the community to promote cleanliness in the village.

We want to heartily thank everyone who has made it possible for us to take part in AfL. This program offers an excellent opportunity for all of us to develop a deeper understanding of our inner and outer worlds, and we would not be here without your support. To all of the thousands of people who have made this program a reality, from all of us, our deepest thank you.

*Magdalena Johansson (Sweden) and Justin Walford (Canada),
on behalf of the Action for Life Team*