

Reflective journal

Word count – 1,993

The beginning

Starting the build up to Skanda vale, through weeks of discussions within our group we spoke about our feelings of Skanda vale and what was expected of us throughout the full journey and experience. With only 2 hours of class time with our lecturer a week, and the trip quickly approaching us I felt slightly anxious reason being, was the fact I was going within a totally different environment, will I accidentally insult the nuns and monks without even realising, will the way I have been taught, brought up really come to light and be noticed within a place so different to what I am use too? Even though the slight anxiety stuck with me through the build up, that was soon a blurred thought as this was an opportunity I was more eager to be a part of than not, at this point my own worries were put to one side. After all this is why I choose this course I want to be amongst different communities I want to experience more than what I am use too if I am able to live amongst other groups of people, and learn to appreciate and respect other ways in which we could choose to live. Personally this whole experience to me is too live like other people, how would I know where I am suppose to be with in my own life if I do not experience other ways. And if not to do this for myself, to just be made aware that there are so many other communities out there I feel we need to become more open minded to this, the more knowledge and understanding we have, the more we can teach. If I was to ever start my own family I would want them to grow up knowing they have choice and options, I am sure to not agree with everything I get to see and get involved with in, but I am certain to walk into this open minded to disagree and not get involved how will we ever get the data or information we are looking to collect.

The journey into the unknown

So here it is the day we have all been waiting for, this is the day we get to feel something totally different to what we are use too. Who would have ever thought id ever live amongst monks and nuns, if I had ever imagined id be putting myself within the lives of different peoples when I was younger I would have certainly disagreed. Growing up in small towns you never really think of the outside world, or of how spectacular we really are as humans, and how interesting it is that there are ways in which people choose to live that we may have thought never possible, or would have never imagined.

Personal plan

Whilst going into this whole experience I needed to find something to focus on, even though 24 hours seems like a short period of time, that's a lot of contact time. Concentrating on the journey as a whole seemed to be quite a lot of information, and I tend to scatter a lot, as I find as a person I am very busy minded and I cannot focus totally on one thing, without looking at way too many other outlooks around me. So with in my journal I have tried my best to keep it to a few pointers of what it is they actually believe in without going down every possible path. This is something I am hoping to discuss more with in my other journal where I can go more into detail about what it is they actually do at Skanda vale. Being someone who struggles to narrow down information I found it such a struggle to not explore many outlooks, on a positive note though its really helped me to at least try and force myself to focus slowly and surely I am sure to get there.

It was clear to me that food seemed to be a clear importance both before heading to Skanda Vale and throughout the time we spent amongst the community. Previously knowing as a group that the nuns and monks appreciated gifts in exchange for staying in the accommodations and seeing how they lived for free, we came with the idea of each getting some food/product significant to what they used within Skanda Vale knowing that this is important to them made me feel good, as I was a bit sceptical of going with in a community where they allow you to stay for free, allow you to see their personal day to day lives without expecting anything in return, there was no doubt in my mind at all that I would not give something in return.

The connections within Skanda Vale

Firstly let's touch on the fact that with in Skanda Vale they have Pooja's a places in which they pray to their god they did this a number of times a day, from the first one being 5 o'clock in the morning, yea that's right a time that no one should witness, but they do it and I respect them for that. Along with the morning prey they proceed to have prey another 4 times a day on top of that, again a full commitment to what the believed in, whilst being there this gave me a strong feeling of belonging, having that same connection whilst being around a group of people who become your family there your support, I was only there 24 hours and I already felt as if I was welcomed and felt that sense of being a part of something, it made me emotional and it made me feel a sense of worth, something I do not seem to get that often with in my own life. That sort of emotion I felt was something I believed to get from my own family, yet for some reason I felt a closer connection with people I did not personally know, I guess that proves just how significant it is to them, and made me imagine how that was probably the same awakening they all had when they decided to become part of the community.

From a number of discussions with the monks, I realised that the majority came around the same age, this being within their 20s it seemed this was a time with in their life that I guess they started questioning about themselves, sort of like what I have done really, I mean up until I hit the 20s I was care free just doing whatever it was I wanted to do, and didn't really care about the consequence, now that I am almost 23, its sort of like I woke up one day realised I should adult and started hunting for the most adult thing I could do. Now these men and woman choose a religion amongst a community where they felt as one, a freedom that by their own words was almost addictive really, to move within a community in which they give up everything they where ever use to, to find themselves now if that is not a perfect example of bravery then I don't know what is. I have always told myself to find yourself you have to challenge yourself, and these peoples are doing this on a daily basis, but along with the support of their family around them, and the inner energy they feel just by being committed to their guru and their prays the energy that comes from within these people is honestly one of the most empowering feelings I have been amongst.

The pooja's

One of my first impressions of Skanda vale was that they worked with no money, they didn't have the typical system I was use to, so I was super intrigued to find out if the way in which their system is used works for them, and if it was perhaps actually a better system than what we may use ourselves I have always argued the idea of a different system as money is clearly an evil hold on society in a massive way.

Working with in the warehouse they have with in Skanda vale, its clear to me they get a lot of donations sent to them, from food to clothes etc they live by the use of what others give them, they don't ask for nothing and just take what they get, they work for themselves and have many job roles

they all take part in, whilst I was there I helped unload food donations, just got on with it exactly the same way they did without question, why? because I felt a part of what was going on, I wasn't there long enough to appreciate the donations that came in, but I could see they did, so I respected that with respecting it I did exactly what was needed of me work without question.

So here it seems food is important, as donations to help feed themselves they also send it off elsewhere for charities etc this shows me again one of their main purpose which is to be free, be kind and be pure and in every aspect of the term they seem to really try their best to do everything within a system where they are just trying to do the good within themselves

Here I find myself kneeled against a pillow on the floor, amongst me are my group from university and many other people from both Skanda Vale and other visitors, but here we are connecting in ways we wasn't use too, connecting through the power this prey has on us, but what about that process we take at the end of every prey session? The one we all soon realised was the way to figuring out that the pray session was nearly over, not that I was hoping for that anyway but you sort of just get into patters, the fire? The yogurt? The markings we put on our forehead, their process to their god. Particularly the yogurt after all I was so interested with all the ways food has an impact on Skanda Vale. After discussions with one of the monks at the end of our trip, I politely asked him the significance into why it was yogurt they used particularly other than using any other forms of food, or changing it up. His response to this was that it's a pure food, to use this sort of food along with a small number of other foods used in different pooja's helps purify you, helps get rid of any negative feelings, it seems this was very important to the people's there.

Aftermath felt from trip

Well if this wasn't an awakening, I don't know what was. There is a lot of times with in my own life I have put myself in situations to feel something different to what I was use too, but nothing could compare to the way I felt after this trip, who knows why I felt so connected but I did, there was many situations through out the day that made me really wonder if things did happen for a reason, take the fact I had already spoken to one of the monks a year previously to the trip before I even knew I was going to end up going to university, sort of like a sign it was a frightening feeling but it was almost like a relief, finally I am going somewhere, and doing something that will hopefully one day help me make a difference in some sort of way. I already believed this was something I needed to do before the trip, but it sort of put everything in to perspective made it feel real, and made me understand that I am practising something I could have only ever imagined previously.