

Volume 1, Issue 1
March 2006

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From the Editor ...

It is a great pleasure and privilege to bring you the inaugural edition of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Queensland's newsletter, **AWAKE! ARISE!**

The name is essentially derived from the clarion call of Swami Vivekananda's mantra for the modern age. Swamiji placed great emphasis on awakening to the beauty of our inner self.

Beauty is the total impact of physical, mental emotional and spiritual balance. Mind and body are inter-related ; the state of one reflects on the other. Yet another dimension is the inner beauty. It forms a more essential part of us than mere body and mind, for it is indestructible. Therefore, working on the external beauty alone isn't enough. In order to be a complete human, we have to work on our innate beauty, viz. our innermost self— the **atman**.

But then, in the humdrum of modern life, when we are forced to fulfill the never-ending obligations, and when responsibilities and burdens weigh on us with all force, how can we even think of realising the indwelling spirit?

The answer lies in realising the fleeting nature (or temporal nature) of worldly objects. When we realise that what we do is momentary and will not lead to real happiness, the burdens will cease to hold weight any further.

Awakening to the inner beauty commands much determination and perseverance. By realising the temporariness of the physical world, and identifying and uniting ourselves with Brahman through the paths of knowledge (*jnana*), service (*karma*) and/or devotion (*bhakti*), the path can be paved. As the path is tread on, all that we seek in life is attained in its infinite fullness in the experience of Self-Realisation.

Thus, real awakening as expounded by Swami Vivekananda is when we wake up to the beauties of our own inner self. It is the realisation that our body is a temporary "shell" and the real self, the "inner self," is Atman (soul).

Only with Self Realisation can we arise to the challenges that require high degree of tolerance, deep humanity, humility and selflessness. These essential elements will be the torch bearers in our pursuit to live by the highest ideals as prescribed by Vedanta.

The Upanishads say, "Get up, awake, arise", time is fleeting fast. Seize the moment while it is available, for the best of uses, the awareness of the Divine in one and all.

So let's **Arise! Awake! Arise! and Stop not till the Goal is Reached.**

HARI OM, TAT SAT.

Aims of the Newsletter

The newsletter aspires to be an inspirational and information tool to the followers of the Vedanta Movement and the general public. It endeavours to inspire its readers through the lives of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, his divine consort, Sri Sarada Devi and his illustrious disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Words of wisdom, articles, inspirational and philosophical quotes from the Holy Trinity, as well as from other sources will be included to encourage every one in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideals, and strive at the same time to reach his potential to realise his goals and visions. One of the major highlights of the newsletter is to update the readers of the latest happenings and the upcoming events of the movement.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Vedanta In Queensland

The Vedanta Movement in Brisbane began its early operation in 1978, with yearly visits by Swami Ranganathanandaji. The movement continued with visits from Swami Damodarandaji and others who held satsangs and discussions on Vedanta for the devotees.

The official start of the Vedanta Movement began in February 1986 with the initiative of Mr and Mrs Mahalingam Sinnathamby, family and friends who were committed to expanding the movement. With the registration of the society, a formal committee was established, and fortnightly meetings and prayers began to be conducted at SWARA and at the Theosophical Society in Spring Hill. Reading from the Ramakrishna Gospel and discussions pertaining to Vedanta were part of its activity. With the guidance of Pravarjika Ayaprana Mataji, President of Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society, NSW, the monthly prayer meetings began to take place at the residence of the devotees. The Revered Mataji guided the group by making regular visits to Brisbane and holding talks and retreats.

Due to the growing number of devotees, an official ashram was deemed necessary, and year 2005 saw the fruition of the vision. It was unanimously decided that the society acquire a temporary dwelling to continue its aims and objectives which include:

- Promoting the study, practice and teachings of Vedanta Philosophy and the concept of Universal Religion as expounded by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.
- Promoting harmony between Eastern and Western thoughts.
- Setting up of educational programme for teaching philosophy, comparative study of religions, cultural, moral and spiritual education and yoga lessons; and
- Developing programmes of philanthropic and benevolent nature to assist the poor, the needy, the aged, the lowly, the afflicted and the sick.

61, Northbrooke Street, Sinnamon Park was identified as the official location for the ashram and was auspiciously opened by Swamis Sridharanandaji and Atmeshanandaji from Sydney. The movement, since then has had the privilege of Swami Sridharanandaji visiting on specific occasions and Swami Atmeshanandaji making monthly visits to ensure the continued development and prosperity of the centre.

Today, the movement conducts various activities which include:

- Daily morning and evening poojas
- Fortnightly prayer and discussions
- Organising of public lectures and talks for visiting swamis
- Library and distribution of books
- Monthly classes on the Bhagavad Gita and Religious classes for Children; and
- Teaching the universal principles of Hinduism at Brisbane State High and McGregor Primary Schools.

The birthdays of the Holy Trinities i.e. Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda form part of the special celebrations at the ashram. Celebrations for Christmas, Easter, the birthdays of Buddha and Sri Krishna, Durga Pooja, Guru Purnima, and Sivaratri are also held.

Plans to acquire a permanent ashram are currently in the pipeline and initial works towards achieving this has been launched. With the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, the movement hopes to establish an ashram to call its own and expand its spiritual and benevolent activities for the benefit of all, irrespective of their caste, colour or creed.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Origin of the Ramakrishna Order

The Ramakrishna Order (in the west the order is known as the Vedanta Centre/ Society) was founded by Swami Vivekananda (1863 –1902) in 1899.

An understanding of the history of the Vedanta Movement can only be gained through first grasping a knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna's life. Sri Ramakrishna did not claim to find a new path to salvation or to have found a cult but, rather, created a sort of melting pot of all religions. The nineteenth century was a time when religious foundations were continuously shaken by worldly forces such as materialism and doubt. Sri Ramakrishna did not find a religious movement, but his beliefs and revelations became the foundation for movements that others would create.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal, India on February 17, 1836. He was born and raised in a poor family with strict Hindu values. Although he was a normal, rambunctious child for the most part, he showed at an early age that he had a great understanding for the spiritual realm of Hinduism. One of his first revelations was that the soul is key to all learning, but that it is hindered by ignorance.

At the young age of nine, Sri Ramakrishna lost his father. This stimulated even more thought processes and drew him very close to his mother. The most life-changing event however was when he was a priest at a temple that worshipped Kali, the Divine Mother or female manifestation of God, as their deity. At this point, Sri Ramakrishna began to view God as the "Eternal Mother." He saw The Eternal Mother as wanting to give everyone Her divine wisdom in exchange for turning our backs to our materialistic environment.

At this point Sri Ramakrishna longed to see a vision of God. He spent days and nights pleading with the Divine Mother to make Herself visible to him. When She finally did, much to Sri Ramakrishna's surprise, The Divine Mother revealed Herself as the inner presence of all beings. This proved to Sri Ramakrishna that a particular religious affiliation was not important, and that all religions had similar goals but chose different methods of getting there. Using the Hindu methods and rituals he was raised with, he made it his goal in life to continually experience the presence of God in everything. He gave up nearly everything in the process of achieving this--food, water, sleep, etc. His family and friends did not understand what he was going through and concluded he was going insane. They wanted to arrange a marriage to which he agreed but viewed his bride, Sri Sarada Devi (as he viewed all women) as the manifestation of the Divine Mother. Astonishingly, she too wanted him to guide her in the spiritual path and assist him in his life's mission.

Sri Ramakrishna firmly believed "**that the bees come of their own accord in search of honey when the flower is in full bloom.**" One of Sri Ramakrishna's greatest disciples was Swami Vivekananda. He later became the leader of a group that dedicated their lives to realizing Truth and serving humanity. Swami Vivekananda brought the Vedanta religion to the U.S. at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Because of his dynamism, dedication and his exposition on the universalism of the Vedanta Philosophy, Vedanta movement began to grow in America. In 1899 he founded, with brother disciples, the **Ramakrishna Order and Mission of India** with centres in the U.S.A. and other countries. The outlook of the Ramakrishna Order is best summed by Swami Vivekananda as follows.

*"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his own identity and grow according to his own law of growth. I hope that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance, **help** and not **fight**, **assimilation** and not **destruction**, **harmony** and **peace** and not **dissension**."*

The Emblem



The emblem of the Ramakrishna Order is envisioned and explained by Swami Vivekananda.

The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of work, and lotus, of devotion, and the rising sun, of knowledge. The encircling serpent is indicative of yoga and the awakened power dormant in us, while the swan in the picture stands for God. Therefore, the idea of the picture is that by the union of work, knowledge, devotion, and yoga, the vision of God is obtained.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Activities

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held in December 2005. The agenda included the election of office bearers for the year 2005/ 6. Swami Atmeshanandaji presided over the meeting. The committee currently comprises of a team of devoted, enthusiastic members.

Kalpataru Day and Swami Vivekananda's birthday were celebrated on the 1st and 8th January respectively. This was followed by a visit from Revered Swami Atmaghanananda, the Vice-President of Ramakrishna Mission in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 9 - 13 February, 2006. Swamiji's devotional songs and spiritual talks at the ashram, public gathering and homes of devotees were highly stimulating and thought provoking. Swamiji was accompanied by Swami Atmeshanandaji. On 5th March the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated with devotees participating in the worship, chanting, singing of hymns and songs, creating a serene atmosphere.

Regular programmes of the centre include:

- Daily morning meditation (6.30—7.15 a. m)
- Daily evening vesper service (7. 00—7.30 p. m) followed by readings fro the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.
- Satsangs at the residence of devotees once every month.

The following classes are held by Swami Atmeshanandaji when he visits Brisbane once a month:

- During the first Saturday of every month, classes for children are conducted (5.00—6.00 p. m) at the ashram. Children are taught the basic principles of Hinduism and invited to participate in an informal discussion to exchange views and express their understanding of the day's lesson.
- Classes on Srimad Bhagavad Gita (currently on chapter 2) are held on the first Sunday of every month from 3. 00—4.00 p. m at the ashram.
- Hinduism Classes for students of Brisbane State High (11.00 a. m—12.00 noon) are conducted on the Monday, following the first Sunday of every month.
- Classes on Srimad Bhagavad Gita (on Mondays as above) from 7.30—8.30 p. m at Sridi Sai Mandir, Virginia.
- Satsang on the Tuesday, following the first Sunday of every month from 7.30—8.30 p.m at 13, Parsons Blvd. Deception Bay, QLD.

All are cordially invited to attend these programmes.

The devotees in Brisbane and the Gold Coast are looking forward to Pravrajika Ajayaprana Mataji's visit in May/ June, 2006.

The Holy Trinity



The Holy Trinity in the Sri Ramakrishna Movement essentially refers to the three spiritual personalities of **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa**, his Holy consort **Sri Sarada Devi**, who is also referred to as the Holy Mother and their outstanding disciple, **Swami Vivekananda**. Embodiments of all Vedanta and the essence of Hinduism, this holy trinity lived their lives in our contemporary times in a way that continues to inspire all.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Reason to Live—an anecdote

GOOD DAYS GIVE YOU HAPPINESS, BAD DAYS GIVE YOU EXPERIENCES. BOTH ARE ESSENTIAL TO LIFE!

One day I decided to quit...I quit my job, my relationship, my Spirituality. I wanted to quit my life.

I went to the woods to have one last talk with God. "God", I said. "Can you give me one good reason not to quit?"

His answer surprised me..."Look around", He said. "Do you see the fern and the bamboo?"

"Yes", I replied.

"When I planted the fern and the bamboo seeds, I took very good care of them. I gave them light. I gave them water. The fern quickly grew from the earth. Its brilliant green covered the floor. Yet, nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo. In the second year the fern grew more vibrant and plentiful. And again, nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo." He said. "In year three there was still nothing from the bamboo seed. But I would not quit. In year four, again, there was nothing from the bamboo seed. I would not quit." He said.

"Then in the fifth year a tiny sprout emerged from the earth. Compared to the fern it was seemingly small and insignificant.. but just 6 months later the bamboo rose to over 100 feet tall. It had spent the five years growing roots. Those roots made it strong and gave it what it needed to survive.

I would not give any of my creations a challenge it could not handle." He said to me.

"Did you know, my child, that all this time you have been struggling, you have actually been growing roots?" "I would not quit on the bamboo. I will never quit on you. Don't compare yourself to others."

He said. "The bamboo had a different purpose than the fern. Yet they both make the forest beautiful."

"Your time will come", God said to me. "You will rise high"

"How high should I rise?" I asked.

"How high will the bamboo rise?" He asked in return.

"As high as it can?" I questioned.

"Yes." He said, "Give me glory by rising as high as you can."

I left the forest and bring back this story. I hope these words can help you see that God will never give up on you. Never regret a day in your life. Good days give you happiness; bad days give you experiences; both are essential to life.

Peace & Harmony

"Don't find fault in anyone, not even with an insect. As you pray to God for devotion, so also pray that you may not find fault with anyone."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"The aim of life is to realize God and remain immersed in contemplation of Him."

- Sri Sarada Devi

All Religions are True. God can be reached by different religions. Many rivers flow by many ways but they fall into the sea. They are all one."

- Swami Vivekananda

"God is everywhere but He is most manifest in man. So serve man as God. That is as good as worshipping God."

- Sri Ramakrishna