

THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER:

Ramakrishna Order was founded by the legendary Indian monk and philosopher Swami Vivekananda¹ in 1897. The Ramakrishna Order is headquartered at Belur Math, West Bengal, India. This bicameral order has two branches – 1) The Ramakrishna Math which is dedicated to spiritual development and 2) The Ramakrishna Mission which is dedicated to social service (<http://vedanta.org/the-ramakrishna-order/>). Together, they form the core of a worldwide spiritual movement (known as Ramakrishna Movement or Vedanta Movement), which aims at the harmony of religions, harmony of the East and the West, harmony of the ancient and the modern, spiritual fulfillment, all-round development of human faculties, social equality, and peace for all humanity, without any distinctions of creed, caste, race or nationality (<http://www.belurmath.org/>).

The Ramakrishna Order is guided by the eternal principles of Vedanta and is inspired by the motto – “Liberation for oneself and service to mankind.” It has three characteristics: it is *modern* in the sense that the ancient principles of Vedanta have been expressed in the modern idiom; it is *universal*, that is, it is meant for the whole humanity; it is *practical* in the sense that its principles can be applied in day-to-day life to solve the problems of life (<http://www.belurmath.org/Ideology.htm>). The ideology of the Ramakrishna Order is manifest through its various service-oriented activities embracing different areas of human need and social welfare such as education, health, rural development, self-employment, women's welfare, inter-faith understanding, moral life, spiritual guidance, and relief to victims of calamities. All these activities are conducted as service, service to God in man (<http://www.belurmath.org/service.htm>). This is in keeping with Swami Vivekananda's deep conviction that “They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive”.

VEDAS AND VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

The Indian civilization, more than 6000 years old, has always been known for its deep spiritual ways of life and teachings. In spite of the innumerable regional, social and linguistic diversities of the country, there has always been a basic unity in Indian culture. This indestructible unity and unbroken continuity of Indian culture are derived from its deep spiritual foundations. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out that every civilization or culture has a particular life-centre, a dominant characteristic or trend. According to him the life-centre of Indian culture is spirituality.

The Vedas are the oldest and most authoritative scriptures of Hinduism. They were not composed by anybody but were ‘revealed’ to the Rishis; hence they are also called ‘Shruti’, ‘that which is heard’. There are four Vedas - Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda each of which is comprised of a collection of hymns (Samhita), Brahmana (rituals), Aranyaka (meditative rites) and the Upanishads (records of the transcendental experiences) gained by Rishis by following different contemplative techniques. These experiences are actually revelations about Atman, Brahman and other eternal, universal truths regarding the ultimate Reality

¹ Mahatma Gandhi was highly influenced by Swami Vivekananda and made the following remark: “I have gone through his (Vivekananda's) works very thoroughly, and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became a thousand-fold.”

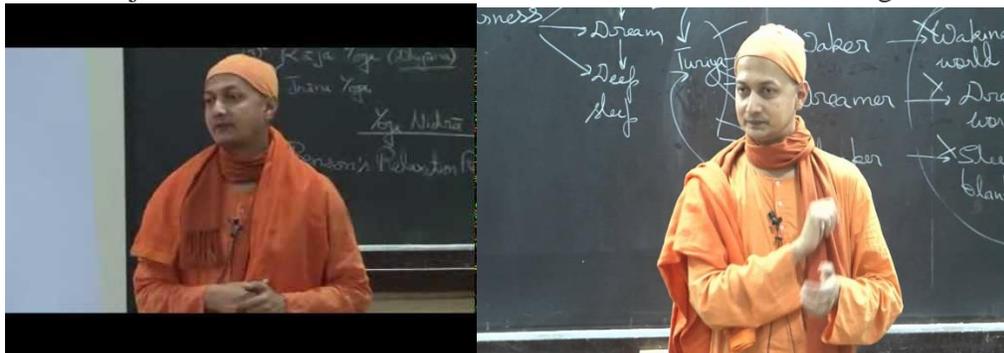
(<http://www.belurmath.org/vedantaindianculture.htm>). The eternal truths and principles of the spiritual world were codified in the form of aphorisms (sutras) and these sutras form the bedrock of the system of philosophy known as Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda elucidated that all his teachings are based on the quintessential Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe (<http://www.belurmath.org/swamivivekananda.htm#Teachings>). The Vedanta philosophy believes not only in universal toleration, it accepts all religions to be true. Vedantic philosophy is a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the one of the key Vedantic texts- *Gita*: “Whosoever comes to Me (God), through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me.” It also fervently suggests “As the different streams having their sources in different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee (God).”

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. Vedanta philosophy fervently suggests a path that may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

INTRODUCTION TO SWAMI SARVAPRIYANANDA

Swami Sarvapriyananda is one of the most brilliant Vedanta philosophers/monks of present India. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1994. He has been serving the Ramakrishna Order for



over 20 years now in various capacities including Vice Principal of the Deoghar Vidyapith Higher Secondary School, Principal of the Sikshana Mandira Teachers' Training College at Belur Math, and the first Registrar of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University at Belur Math. He has been an “Acharya” (teacher) at the monastic probationer’s training center at Belur Math recently. Presently he has been ordained Assistant Minister, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA.

Swami Sarvapriyananda has been a speaker at a prestigious TEDx lecture. He has also successfully spread the idea of Vedanta philosophy in premier Indian institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He has also

delivered lectures on Vedanta extensively across the USA, Australia and New Zealand including in such noted universities such as the University of Queensland, University of Sydney, University of Adelaide, Victoria University, and University of North Texas etc. Following are some of the links of his lectures:



1. Spiritualizing the whole life (TEDx Talk)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qA9x0JyUis>
2. Happiness - Vedanta and Positive Psychology (at IIT, Kanpur, India)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXUsxSX2QPI>
3. "Who Am I?" according to Mandukya Upanishad-Part 1(at IIT, Kanpur, India)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGKFTUuJppU>
4. "Who Am I?" according to Mandukya Upanishad-Part 2(at IIT, Kanpur, India)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0dugc4TrIE>
5. Introduction to Vedanta (at Los Angeles, California, USA)
<http://media.belurmath.org/introduction-vedanta-swami-sarpriyananda-727>
6. Defining God (at Austin, Texas, USA)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16VWfc-H4y0>

To sum up, the Ramakrishna Order represents the core values of Vedanta Philosophy - namely universal acceptance, brotherhood and harmony. In these days of violence, intolerance and bigotry it is becoming increasingly necessary to spread the true message of universal harmony through Vedanta philosophy. In that regard, Swami Sarvapriyananda's presentation will be an extremely valuable intellectual addition to Fargo-Moorhead community.