

The Sarvodaya Shramadana: Peace Activities

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is the largest people's organization in Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya is Sanskrit for 'Awakening of All' and Shramadana means to donate effort. It began in one village and has grown to more than 15,000. In addition to the island-wide integrated community development programme we implement in those villages, we are currently involved in resettlement, reconstruction and reconciliation activities in the war affected North and East of Sri Lanka, and "Deshodaya", National Reawakening programme which aims to promote good governance and democracy

Sarvodaya is Sri Lanka's largest people's organisation. Over the last 50 years we have become a network of over 15,000 villages. Today we are engaged in relief efforts in the war-torn north as well as ongoing development projects.

Sarvodaya's organization includes 345 divisional units, 34 district offices; 10 specialist Development Education Institutes; over 100,000 youth mobilised for peace building under Shantisena; the country's largest micro-credit organization with a cumulative loan portfolio of over US\$1million (through SEEDS, Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services); a major welfare service organisation serving over 1,000 orphaned and destitute children, underage mothers and elders (Sarvodaya Suwa Setha); and 4,335 pre-schools serving over 98,000 children.

Sarvodaya's total budget exceeds USD 5 million with 1,500 full-time employees. When combined with numerous volunteer workers, this yields a full time equivalent of approximately 200,000, which places Sarvodaya on a par with the entire plantation sector in Sri Lanka.

Sarvodaya (formally known as Lanka Jatika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya) is an organisation developed around a set of coherent **philosophical tenets** drawn from Buddhism and Gandhian thought; it has been operational for almost 50 years. It has been described as an international role model by international bodies. Its founder and charismatic leader, Dr A.T. Ariyaratne, whose visionary contributions have been recognised in multiple countries, continues to provide ideological and inspirational leadership to the organisation while the day-to-day operations are in the hands of a new generation, receptive to modern forms of management that are compatible with the overall vision of this volunteer-based peoples' organisation.

History

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement started 47 years ago. Sarvodaya is Sanskrit for "Awakening of All", and Shramadana means to donate effort. Beginning in just one village and extending the movement to a total of more than 15,000 has been a fascinating adventure. Initially it involved an education program aimed at enabling students and teachers to live and work with the most remote village communities in Sri Lanka to lend a hand and develop self help initiatives. Within nine years, however, the "service learning programme" had expanded into a full-fledged development movement in hundreds of villages, with the goal of a comprehensive and nonviolent social transformation.

During its first 15 years, Sarvodaya grew with hardly any foreign aid or state support, relying on volunteer labour, mostly from the beneficiaries themselves.

By the late 1970s, the Sarvodaya Movement, with support from partner organisations in more prosperous countries, became capable of reaching nearly every part of Sri Lanka. The programme of self-reliance, community participation and an holistic approach to community “awakening” appealed not only to the people in poor communities, but also to donors. Thousands of young women and men learned how to motivate and organise people in their own villages to meet the ten basic human needs, ranging from a clean and adequate drinking-water supply to simple housing and sanitation, communications facilities, an energy supply, education and ways of satisfying spiritual and cultural needs.

During its first three decades, the Sarvodaya Movement was able – initially without any assistance, and later within a framework of development cooperation with like-minded organisations – to become one of the largest participatory organisations in this region if not the world.

The momentum of the movement was such that by the early 1990s, in spite of harassment by the government and political violence, Sarvodaya had achieved an enormous outreach. The movement’s work now included peace building, conflict resolution, appropriate technology and programmes for children at risk, elders and those with disabilities all the while focusing on a holistic approach to social mobilisation through empowerment of people beyond mere economic development.

At around the same time, international priorities changed, switching to economic development strategies. Large projects and macro-interventions began to dominate the scene amongst donors, and Sarvodaya, which had originally attracted attention due to its broader based philosophy, became the victim of its own success. In 1991, when 85% of its external aid dried up, the movement was forced to go back to its roots. From then on, we relied on so-called pioneer villages to provide support for the surrounding communities still requiring development. In addition, we reduced the numbers of paid staff and counted on the commitment of Sarvodaya’s long-term supporters to keep the movement on course.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement has now become stronger than ever before. A new administrative management at national level is supporting a motivated group of emerging leaders at the village and district levels. Although almost one-third of the districts supported by Sarvodaya is not financed by outside partners, they are nevertheless surviving in the knowledge that in the long term, progress for them will result from partnership and self-sustaining development activities rather than from charity. Our important role in peacemaking, community building, and securing a certain quality of life in Sri Lanka is undiminished, and our will to achieve innovation in the social, ethical, cultural,

spiritual and economic fields is constantly nourished by partners who have the confidence that our 47 years of experience – including periods of hardship – have a certain value.

Recent History

In the aftermath of the riots in 1983, Sarvodaya convened a gathering of community leaders in Colombo which led to the Peoples Declaration on Peace and National Harmony. In the same year, Sarvodaya formed its 5R Unit to address the development needs of communities in the North and East. On 29 August 1999, Sarvodaya began a new phase of peace initiatives with a Peace Meditation that drew 170,000 participants.

This new phase recognised that the war was the result of more than political causes and required more than political solutions. The Sarvodaya People's Peace Initiative of 2000 articulated a long-term plan to seek a solution to the problem of violence in Sri Lanka. The 2001 plan of action, 90 Days to Stop the Violence, initiated specific activities, both local and national, that gave voice to the people's desire for peace and promoted an environment in which the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) could be implemented.

We had hoped that after the CFA, the parties would engage in meaningful discussion to move the country toward a lasting peace. Instead, the CFA was accepted as an acceptable status quo, the underlying causes of the war were not addressed, and the country began its gradual slide into a "proxy war" with a recent escalation of violence in the North and East.

Economics and social consciousness are closely linked with the conflict. To this end, Sarvodaya has worked successfully for more than four decades to create change in villages throughout Sri Lanka. Through our Peace Meditation programme we began to focus on raising the consciousness of Sri Lanka. Since our first Peace Meditation in 1999, additional meditations have involved more than a million Sri Lankans from all ethnic groups and religions.

Sarvodaya has also sought to support the development of a peaceful solution through political action. Beginning with low-level contacts with all parties in 2000, Sarvodaya's effort, led by Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, has been directed at developing trust and consensus among all parties, regardless of ethnicity, religion or regional location.

Our Vision

'We build the peace, peace builds the nation'

Sarvodaya's 2006 Peace Action Plan is a vision for peace which encompasses four specific areas:

1. To move beyond the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) to a permanent end to the war.
2. To identify an acceptable political framework that devolves power to the most local level.
3. To continue working towards economic transformation in Sri Lanka, specifically to eliminate poverty
4. To engage Sri Lankan grassroots to forge a national identity that transcends ethnic or religious

identity and recognises Sri Lanka's unique multi-ethnic, multi-religious character; to create a sense of 'one nation, many cultures'.

A political solution in itself will not be peace. Sarvodaya also recognises the necessity of continuing to work for changed consciousness, national identity, and economic structure. Sarvodaya is committed to using its resources and influence to bring about a lasting solution.

We seek the participation of all Sri Lankans (and the support of our friends internationally), and we hope that all will join us in walking the '**Last Mile for Peace**'.

Objectives

Sarvodaya recognises that the development of a true national identity may take decades; however in the course of this initiative we are implementing activities that will help build a common national identity and move the nation toward that goal.

1. All parties to cease all violence
2. Devolve power to the lowest possible level under a central national government
3. Develop a declaration of our common beliefs, visions and aspirations
4. Convene a people's constitutional convention that will lead to a constitution that works for all people on this island. This will include a "Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

Activities

Through its The Last Mile for Peace: Sarvodaya Initiative for a Peoples Constitution, Sarvodaya will capitalise on its position as a representative of the grassroots and a trusted apolitical movement, to facilitate a holistic, non-adversarial process in which all parties are free to express their 'bottom line' needs in order to discuss ideas and seek innovative, effective solutions.

1. CONSULTATION: Face to face meetings with all political parties, religious leaders, the business community, peace groups, academics, women's groups and grassroots leaders. A Vision Statement from each group will be agreed. (January to March)
2. INTEGRATION: A Declaration of Common Vision will be formed, based on the individual Vision Statements (May to July)
3. PUBLIC SUPPORT: announce the Declaration of Common Vision publicly (August) and seek popular support. This campaign will last for several months. It will be highlighted by one million people joining Dr A.T. Ariyaratne and Dr Deepak Chopra to meditate in Anuradhapura at the Spiritual Gathering for Universal Peace on 2nd October 2006. Although the Meditation is not directly related to the constitutional process, it will nevertheless call attention to, and generate support for, our efforts to create an acceptable settlement.
4. PEOPLE'S CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION: From 2nd December, 300-400 delegates from all ethnic groups, religions and levels of society will join the convention at the same time as the acceleration of the support campaign, to create a groundswell of public demand for peace.

5. ENGAGING SRI LANKAN YOUTH: A host of other activities will support the Last Mile for Peace, mostly engaging rural youth in conflict resolution and inter-ethnic understanding through village-to-village networking, peace camps, multi-ethnic workshops, cross-cultural activities, sports and the training of additional Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade) youth leaders.

One Million People Meditate for Peace

Sarvodaya is convening a peace meditation on **2nd October 2006**. Called the **Spiritual Gathering for Universal Peace**, this unique and record-breaking event involving one million participants will be held in the sacred city of Anuradhapura, in cooperation with Alliance for New Humanity led by Dr. Deepak Chopra.

People throughout the world will be invited to participate (details are being prepared).

The goal is to create a critical mass of spiritual consciousness to influence the people of the world toward inner and outer peace.

Sarvodaya Shanthi Sena (Peace Brigade) is Sri Lanka's largest peace organisation with the largest participation of youth. It has established over 8,000 units throughout Sri Lanka, enrolling over 86,000 male and female youths aged 15 to 30 years from all ethnic groups.

The main objective is to develop youth leadership to help encourage a disciplined society free of violence and suffering.

Shanthi Sena is also engaged in changing the prevailing environment of war to that of peace through efforts to promote cooperation between ethnic and religious communities.

Shanthi Sena Movement holds events and gatherings which promote national unity and inter religious cooperation. Amity Camps, Peace Dialogues, district-to-district youth exchange programmes, Peace Education, meditation, Youth Leader Programmes on conflict resolution and Pen Pal programmes are proven and effective means of achieving our objectives.

The long-established team at Shanthi Sena offers years of experience in the field of inter-religious dialogue coupled with a nationwide network of communities in the north, south, east and west. In addition to a full-time Director, there are six permanent members on the staff and 34 District Volunteer Coordinators, supported by the Shanthi Sena Board which is made up of distinguished Sri Lankan university lecturers, lawyers, accountants and counsellors.

Shanthi Sena welcomes your support to help it continue its work in bringing about a lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

Vishva Niketan Peace Centre

The Vision

Vishva Niketan is a peace centre: a place for all nations to pursue the ideal of inner and outer peace. The name Vishva Niketan in Sanskrit means "Universal Abode" and is symbolic of the Centre's desire to include all nations, religions, and ethnicities in its vision of world peace. Vishva Niketan has been established in the firm belief that enduring peace can only be attained when individuals achieve

inner peace – cessation of conflict within themselves. In creating an atmosphere of tranquility and serenity close to nature, Vishva Niketan aims to awaken people to their inner spirituality so that they may return to the world beyond to create constructive change.

Unlike many places of worship and mind-training, Vishva Niketan is focused outward as well as inward. Its holistic approach to healing the mind, healing the society and healing the environment reflects the Vishva Niketan's unique peace message.

Objectives

To contribute to the spiritual revival of human kind in Sri Lanka and throughout the world, Vishva Niketan promotes the learning, teaching and practicing of the universal teachings of the Buddha, in a spirit of loving kindness to all living beings.

To promote inter-faith, inter-racial, inter-communal, inter-political and inter-state understanding

To train peace corps in activities and functions relating to peace building, crisis intervention and non-violent dispute resolution

To assert human rights as the basis of peace and justice in every community of the world. It promotes inter-faith, inter-racial, inter-political and inter-state understanding.

To sponsor actions that promotes mutual understanding and amity between communities and religious denominations

To provide a neutral ground for the resolution of disputes arising within communities in any particular country or among nations

Participation at programmes

Individuals and groups from all walks of life are welcome at Vishva Niketan. Business leaders and professionals participate in Vishva Niketan programmes over week ends and return to their desks refreshed in mind, ready to face challenges with better composure of mind. School children and youth come to focus on the values that help them make right choices. Advocates on the opposite sides of political and ethnic conflicts discover common ground. Even "hardcore" prisoners and guards have found that meditation here helps them find mental equanimity.

Prison Programme

MIND is responsible for all virtue and evil. At dawn, a group of men dressed in white silently walked into Vishva Niketan premises. One could notice certain numbers marked on their clothes and their faces heavy with emotion – regret, fear, confusion, hatred and sorrow so vividly expressed. One moment in time an 'evil mind' led these men to deprive a fellow human being of his life, steal the innocence of a woman's virtue, possess dangerous drugs or rob others of their possessions.

Thus, convicted for murder, rape, robbery and drug dealing, these inmates of Welikada prison were all out on a journey to transform themselves. They were yearning to be forgiven, to be accepted and most of all to 'break free' with minds of compassion.

Vishva Niketan offered them a unique opportunity to explore their inner selves and take charge of their own transformation through a meditation retreat. As they walked out of Vishva Niketan back to their prison cells after three days of this exercise, their eyes were glittering with hope and promise and the determination to move on a forward march towards righteousness. Some of these convicts will be released back to the society in a couple of years. However, they appeared very confident and determined that they will not get back to their old destructive habits. Following are a few thoughts of the inmates who experienced the blessing of a wonderful retreat at Vishva Niketan:

"I committed murder. My mind was not at rest. Feelings of remorse and disgust filled my mind. I had no idea about any form of meditation. But within a very short period of three days of meditation at Vishva Niketan, I understood what life is. I shall practise meditation within the prison and when I am released I shall walk into the society with the determination to lead a righteous life."

"The joy I received through meditation practice is beyond words. I vow not to commit any crime in future."

"I am now in prison because my village had no personality moulding mechanism like the meditation programmes that I underwent at Vishva Niketan. When I get back to my village I shall continue practicing meditation and make sure that I do not enter prison again."

"I was under enormous mental agony before I entered this place. I just can't believe the way I can take charge of my mind now. For me to have this experience I've got to be truly so lucky. I was planning to take revenge from some people when I am released. But those thoughts have now vanished. I will continue my meditation in the prison and also when I am released. I will do my best to teach others through my experience and help them refrain from all evil."

"I am going to teach my fellow inmates how to ease their minds and be happy through meditation."

"I learnt how to be 'free' behind bars."

Spiritual Health Programmes

Spiritual health protects a person's physical and mental health by empowering that person to be mindful of his/her thoughts, feelings and emotions and help identifying wholesome and unwholesome thoughts, feelings and emotions without suppressing them. At the same time spiritual health helps the individual to cultivate wholesome thoughts, feelings and emotions such as love, compassion, joy, patience, contentment, forgiveness, equanimity and the like. These in turn will contribute to a healthy body.

An individual who is unable to be mindful of these unwholesome states of mind is a threat to self as well as the society. Spiritual health programmes help individuals to develop wholesome states of mind. The programmes include meditation practices such as breath by breath meditation (anapana sati), meditation on loving kindness, walking meditation and exercises on mindfulness. The programme also promotes the application of wholesome cultural and religious practices such as chanting of pirith, chanting of hymns, prayers and singing lullabies and the like.

Holistic Approach to Motherhood Programme

Holistic Approach to Motherhood is one of the main programmes initiated and implemented by Vishva Niketan Peace Centre to promote spiritual health. It aims at promoting the spiritual, mental and physical health of the unborn baby, the expectant mother and the prospective father.

Objectives of the Programme

- * To make way for a physically, mentally and emotionally blessed healthy baby
- * To enhance the spiritual, mental and physical health of the mother
- * To promote wholesome daily habits, practices and behavioural patterns that would help the mental and physical growth process of the unborn baby
- * To help establish the prospective father's role in creating a conducive, vibrant environment for the health and well-being of the mother and the unborn baby
- * To help create a family unit fortified with love, happiness and understanding
- * To create public awareness so that the community will create a peaceful environment that promotes health and well-being of the mother and the unborn baby
- * To revive wholesome cultural and religious customs and practices attached to pregnancy and child birth

Programme Content

- * Awareness creation about mind-body connection
- * Awareness creation about medical and scientific evidence about mother-child connection
- * Spiritual practices such as loving kindness meditation, walking meditation, breath- by-breath meditation and exercises on mindfulness
- * Awareness creation about wholesome daily habits, practices and behavioural patterns
- * Awareness creation about wholesome cultural and religious customs practices (eg.chanting of pirth, reciting of hymns, prayers and singing of lullabies) attached to pregnancy and pre-natal care

From the moment of conception, the unborn baby experiences the thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions of its mother. This is because mother's and the unborn baby's mind and body are inseparably one. Wherever a thought goes, a molecule follows. The impulses in the mother's mind are instantly translated into a palette of neuro-chemicals. These chemicals communicate with cells and tissues throughout the body. The unborn baby is part of its mother's body. Therefore, a mother's thoughts, emotions and feelings translate into molecules that enter into the body of the fetus. If the expectant mother is unable to deal with her thoughts, feelings and emotions appropriately, especially, when unwholesome states of mind pervade her being, the fetus too will be affected finally bringing into this world a physically and mentally sick human being.

The unborn baby's sense of self-awareness dawns early as the baby grows inside the mother's watery womb. As soon as the baby's sensory awareness develops, it perceives and responds to subtle sounds, sensations, sights, tastes and smells from inside the mother's body. The warmth and security given by

the expectant parents helps strengthen the genetic structure of the unborn. During the past 2 – 3 decades plenty of research has been done and it has been scientifically established that the tiny being inside the mother's womb begins to develop heart beat at 18 days, starts limb movements at 12 weeks, responding to external stimuli like needle pricks and pressing of the abdomen. The fetus starts developing brain cells from the initial pregnancy stage and very speedily it multiplies more cells culminating into billions just before it enters the world as a new born.

Being mindful of the importance of the mother's thoughts, feelings and emotions, the father is expected to create an environment of peace, love, harmony and understanding so that the mother and baby are kept protected without being exposed to dangers of unwholesome thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions, as they are nurtured in a peaceful environment. When the expectant mother/father sends messages to the baby inside through soft music, words of loving kindness, respecting and accepting the tiny being these wholesome thoughts, feelings and emotions get lodged in the infant inside and he/she will enter the world as a physically and mentally healthy human being. Spiritual health programme helps him/her by introducing the techniques required.

Spiritual resources for responsible corporate management

We host spiritual resources workshops for corporate managers, business personnel and youth leaders.

Retreat Goals

- * To experience firsthand a deep degree of stillness of mind and body
- * To learn how to reliably cultivate and sustain spiritual resources under many different conditions
- * To taste your own timeless capacity to generate imaginative, effective, and authentic solutions along the path of a company, an organization, or for yourself

Spiritual web of Compassionate minds "Meth Sith Sambediyo"

This is a programme implemented by Vishva Niketan International Peace Centre to awaken the people's consciousness through a series of spiritually-oriented activities to be carried out at village, district and national levels. Through the formation of volunteer groups of Meth Sith Sambediyo (compassionate minds) this programme will help creating a spiritual web of compassionate minds island-wide to reawaken the communities in Tsunami affected and non-Tsunami affected areas. Meth Sith Sambediyo will act as catalysts to strengthen the capacities of communities to respond collectively to natural as well as man-made disasters with a spiritually matured mind-set.

Spiritual Practice

The meditation conducted at Vishva Niketan is based on Buddhist practice of Anapana Sathi, Metta and Vipassana. However, our purpose is not to promote any one form of religion. Those who wish may practice any other forms of meditation.

A.T Ariyaratne Charitable Trust

The Peace Centre is the vision of Dr. A.T.Ariyaratne, the founder and president of Sarvodaya Shramadana, a grass-roots humanitarian organization that has been active throughout Sri Lanka over 48 years.

Vishva Niketan was formed by the A T Ariyaratne Charitable Trust using funds from the Niwano Peace Award Dr Ariyaratne received in 1994 and the Gandhi Peace Award he received in 1997. It was his vision to convert the recognitions given to him into seeds for further cultivation of inner and outer peace through spiritual awakening.

The Centre

The heart of the Peace Centre consists of a series of indoor and outdoor meeting places where people can gather to discuss ways of achieving peace and resolving conflicts, receive training in the form of seminars and workshops, or engage in group or individual meditation. There are platforms beneath shady trees, informal seats on rock outcroppings as well as covered verandahs and a large meeting hall, "Samadhi", for more formal gatherings.

Accommodation

Kutis

The Peace Centre has 14 Kutis (accommodation retreats with attached toilets) in four buildings known as "Metta" (Loving Kindness), "Karuna" (Compassion), "Muditha" (Altruistic joy), and "Upekkha" (equanimity). These can accommodate 20 guests.

Dormitories

As many as 30 guests can stay in a dormitory-style facility.

Samma Vasa

Samma Vasa consists of two self-contained apartments. Each has two bedrooms fully equipped kitchen facilities. Labrenth

Meals

Simple vegetarian food cooked in Sri Lankan style is served three times daily at the main dining hall.

Code of Conduct

While at Vishva Niektn we shall

- * Observe Noble Silence
- * Take every step with mindfulness
- * Speak every word with awareness
- * Learn to look at every thought with mindfulness
- * Keep the buildings and premises clean
- * Keep the environment clean
- * Look after the plants as living beings
- * Refrain from smoking, consuming alcohol and non-vegetarian food

We shall

- Not take arms of any form inside Vishva Niketan premises
- Use water and electricity with due concern thus avoiding waste
- Be attired in white
- Be barefooted
- Always keep the rooms and toilets clean and wash the crockery and cutlery after personal use
- Maintain the surroundings clean

The Peace Garden

The layout and realization of the Centre has been carefully designed to be conducive to the purification of the mind, with great attention paid to all the details, both aesthetic and practical.

The Peace Garden has three elements – the Sand Garden, the Water Garden and the Meditation Garden.

Sand Garden

The entrance to the Peace Centre is through the Sand garden which shows a rough surface to depict the negative thoughts such as hatred, greed, ignorance, jealousy etc. that are generally prevalent in the minds of human beings.

Water Garden

The nearby Water Garden has three curving ponds with flowering lotus plants behind which are miniature waterfalls flowing down small man-made hillocks. The path to the Samadhi Hall, the main meditation hall is over “the bridge of mindfulness” – a series of raised stones in water, necessitating mindful walking promoting focused thinking.

Meditation Garden

The dense jungle-like corner at the north of the site houses a meditation garden containing the Bodhi Tree, a Buddha statue in Samadhi pose (Padmasana) and specially designed gravel paths for walking meditation. A sapling from the Bodhi Tree at Anuradhapura has been planted.