

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRAHMA KUMARIS IN LENASIA (Pratiba Daya)

During the early 1980s, South African individuals were drawn to the teachings of the Brahma Kumaris in London. This led to the first center being opened by Dr Sloane (South African) based in Yeoville, who was accompanied by Sr Joy and Sr Nola of the UK.

During this time, Mr Jay Pema was introduced to the teachings of the Brahma Kumaris and subsequently after the English sisters returned to the UK, he requested for other teachers to come. Around 1983 and early 1984, sisters from Zimbabwe and Kenya had come and after several talks in various community halls and temples, a small congregation of interested people formed. This led to the first center being opened in Lenasia on Flamingo Street.



Although the Brahma Kumaris headquarters are in India, during the 1980s India had sanctions against South Africa. So, people with Indian passports could not visit South Africa.

The sisters from Zimbabwe and Kenya returned to continue the work of the Brahma Kumaris in other African countries. Two brothers from London, Paul Desmond and Peter Newman came early in 1984. South Africa was in such a state of political turmoil at that time, with the state of emergency and ongoing boycotts in the community.



The Brahma Kumaris was one of the first organisations in Lenasia to teach meditation. We offered a non-religious and spiritual approach where people of all traditions and races were welcomed to join in the practice and find inner peace in an increasingly turbulent world. The center in those early days particularly attracted many young people, who were looking for answers and trying to make meaning of all that was happening around them. The center in Lenasia soon became too small and in 1985 we moved to larger premises in Protea Road. By this time, we also had a small center in Hillbrow as well as Soweto.

It was very heartening to enter the centre, especially on a Sunday morning when all the members from Johannesburg gathered at the Lenasia branch. It was like an oasis of peace in a desert of fear and violence. Truly we were witnessing and living the rainbow dream. After Madiba was released from prison members of the Brahma Kumaris had the wonderful opportunity to meet him personally as well as the other liberation stalwarts like Mr Ahmed Kathrada and Mr 'Isu' Chiba.

In 1995, there had been a tragic car accident where five members of the Brahma Kumaris had passed away, and this included two of the brothers that were living

at the Lenasia centre, namely, Br Allan and Br Daya. This was indeed a shock to the community, but with the support of Sr Jayanti, the regional co-ordinator of our centres in Europe, who had come for the funeral, and the practice of the teachings, remained stable and moved forward.

Our center moved to the current premises in Rose Avenue in 1997 and it was at this time that Sister Shirley was asked to move into the center in Lenasia to co-ordinate the activities.

The teachings of the Brahma Kumaris are rooted in three fundamental principles. Firstly, the question of identity is explored from a spiritual perspective. We all come from various traditions, cultures, races, histories and positions in society. However, beneath these layers lies the identity of the self, which is the immortal soul.

The soul is defined as a spark of divine consciousness with the innate qualities of peace, love, purity, power and bliss. Meditation as taught by the Brahma Kumaris is called Raja Yoga and it is a process of awakening this innate and true nature of the self. This practice helps to create a deep awareness of a sense of self-rooted spirituality and a vision of respect for all beyond the superficial boundaries of race and religion.

Secondly, the teaching is rooted in the understanding that there is One God, that we call by many names. God the Supreme Soul is Light and is the Divine Parent of every soul. Meditation is the process of aligning my mind, intellect and heart to the Supreme Soul in a loving union. Through this loving union impressions of the past dissolve and the soul is renewed and filled with a sense of calm, which brings stability and inner joy. The Brahma Kumaris firmly believe that we can only effect transformation and change in our world through our own transformation of consciousness, perceptions and attitudes.

Thirdly, the Brahma Kumaris promotes all to live a non-violent life in all aspects from being vegetarian to the most subtle level of aggression that we may hold in our thoughts. Thoughts and actions are our energy and however we express it there is a return of that energy which we all will have to account for. Hence, treat the other as you wish to be treated. This spiritual awareness becomes the foundation for building harmony.



Over the years the Brahma Kumaris has supported and participated in many community-related events, especially faith-based initiatives. Annually we host a Raksha Bandan programme for the general community of Lenasia as this celebrates the spirit of brotherhood and harmony between us. Lenasia has had the fortune that we have hosted many senior international teachers like our late Dadi Prakashmani, Dadi Janki and Dadi Gulzar as well as the current heads of the University Sr Mohini and Sr Jayanti.

In 2025, we bid farewell to Sister Shirley as she passed away on the 1 January. After a brief illness with cancer she moved on, leaving a legacy of love, care and kindness. This was clearly seen with the outpouring of good wishes that came during and after the funeral. Sister Shirley had begun her journey with the Brahma Kumaris in her mid-twenties in 1985. She had a generous spirit and always welcomed people to the center offering a nourishment of a spiritual atmosphere. She is being missed in Lenasia and in the community.

As Lenasia celebrates its 70th anniversary the Brahma Kumaris are proud to have been part of the rich history of the community. We will continue to offer our services, helping people learn meditation and develop inner peace and calm.



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