

# Vision

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## New Look for 2008 and Beyond

2007 was a year of great change in the governance of the School in Auckland. After many years of stable leadership under Mr John Russell, the advent of the new leader, Mr Barrie Preston (as reported in the previous issue of Vision), provided an opportunity to review some of the School's administrative arrangements.

A major innovation was the change from a three term format to four. The term structure will follow more closely the format of educational institutions, and should, on the face of it, make family life a little easier (when were term breaks ever easy for parents!).

Regular study of scriptures, both eastern and western, has always been a cornerstone of the work of the School and even more emphasis is being placed on it now. As part of his own preparation for leadership, Mr Preston studied the Upanishads in depth, along with the principles of adult education. He spoke to members last term about the latter, and the role that organisations play. He quoted Dr Malcolm S. Knowles, the author of several books on the subject:

*"If it's [the organisation's] purpose is to encourage its personnel or members to engage in a process of continuous change and growth, it is likely to succeed to the extent that it models the role of organisational change and growth. This proposition suggests, therefore, that an organisation must be innovative as well as democratic if it is to provide an environment conducive to learning."*

In keeping with the democratic principle, there was wide consultation with members on administrative changes and how best to meet the need to increase the membership of the School. As a result, the Introductory Course is being offered at more venues, with the aim of improving public access to the course. New advertisements have also been published.

In all this change, the essence of the work of the School remains unaltered. As His Holiness Sri Shantananda Saraswati said, "...great care must always be taken that spiritual work remains paramount and all material and organisational work remains secondary." (*Conversations*, 1989).

**The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself  
in the service of others.** - Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948)

# New Executive Committee



From left: Gary Nicholls, Kerrin Waterer, Lawrence Ames, Colin Craig, Alexa Michau, Paul Joass.

The members of the School's new Executive Committee elected last November are:

**Chairman: Paul Joass**

Paul is aged 56 and has a BA degree in history and anthropology. For the last 25 years he has worked in sales and marketing management roles in a number of industries. He has also served on a Primary and Intermediate School Board of Trustees for several years. During his 29 years in the School of Philosophy, he has tutored in the Sunday School and Youth Groups and been involved in the development of the parenting courses.

**Finance: Alexa Michau**

Alexa is a Chartered Accountant and is currently an Executive for New Zealand's leading independent investment bank, Grant Samuel & Associates. Before joining Grant Samuel in 2006 Alexa worked as a Manager in the Bank of New Zealand's Corporate and Institutional Banking division. Prior to moving to New Zealand in 2004, she was a Senior Consultant for Pricewaterhouse-Coopers in Sydney. She has attended the School for 25 years, mostly in Australia.

**Secretary: Kerrin Waterer**

Kerrin has been a member of the School for 32 years and has been School Manager of Ficino School for 6 years, where she is responsible for finances, property, purchasing, OSH, staffing and the computer network. She has previous experience in software development and accounts.

**Property: Colin Craig**

Colin Craig has been a School of Philosophy student for about 25 years and employee of Auckland City Council for about the same time. At the Council he has developed a knowledge of district planning matters and of the NZ Building Act and Building Regulations. He has also been involved in setting Council policies on noise, lighting, natural hazards and numerous other Council bylaws.

**Administration: Gary Nicholls**

Gary's career in recent years has been in the roles of Database Administrator and Systems Analyst. He is currently working for The University of Auckland. He developed and maintains the School's database, which is the source of all the registers and phone lists. Gary, who has been a member of the School for 25 years plus, has been assisting in the administration role for the last 5 years.

**Ficino School Liaison: Lawrence Ames**

Lawrence, who was a member of the previous Executive, has a B.Sc.(Hons) and MBA. Most of his career was spent in various management positions, followed by self-employment as a business consultant and quality systems auditor. For the past 8 years he has been a business analyst with Inland Revenue. Lawrence joined the School in 1973, is a founding Trustee of Ficino School and is Deputy Chairman of the Ficino Board.

# History of 268 West Tamaki Rd

**H**idden down a long driveway in the heart of suburban Glendowie lies one of Auckland's grand old estates on 1.514 hectares, with a rich and colourful history spanning 165 years.

Originally purchased in 1842 by a Scottish immigrant, Alexander Thomson and his wife Ellen and named "Water Yett", the land that is now partly occupied by a beautiful homestead started its journey as a farm allotment of 52 acres. Mr Thomson subdivided the land into five farms, and after his retirement, and a succession of owners, the estate was purchased by Sir Kenneth Myers in 1934.

Two years later, Sir Kenneth built a two-storied brick residence containing twelve bedrooms, a dining room, library, lounges, and four bathrooms – a building in beautiful American colonial style which commanded a magnificent view of the Tamaki River.

The Second World War saw the estate being used as a rest home, rent-free, for American officers and six months after the war with Japan ended, the home was offered as a recuperation centre for refugees, primarily women and young children, from the Dutch East Indies who had, to quote, *"...in addition to daily privations and hardships of life as internees, suffered vile tortures at the hands of the Japanese."* (The Weekly News, February 13th 1946).

Later in 1946 the property was sold to Sir Robert Kerridge of the Kerridge Odeon Corporation Ltd for \$20,000. Sir Robert, a noted philanthropist and entrepreneur, owned and controlled the largest theatre-entertainment organisation in the southern hemisphere, until its collapse during the



**268 from the Water**

property crash of the late 1980's.

In 1953 the homestead was purchased by two American nuns, who had been sent to Auckland for that purpose in May of that year, and 'The Cenacle', as it was commonly called, came into existence as a spiritual haven and place of rest for both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. But faced in later years with rising costs of maintaining the property, the Cenacle Sisters decided to sell and rebuild on a smaller scale in the Auckland diocese. Smart Group, the new owners, converted it into a rest home before on-selling it in 1989 to its current owners, Auckland's School of Philosophy.

Maggie Cameron, a member of the School, recalls visiting The Cenacle as a teenager. "We used to go there for 'retreats' run by the Jesuits. As an Onehunga girl, I found the homestead overwhelmingly beautiful, and the grounds with their coastal views, awe-inspiring. Now, some 45 years later, I still have a sense of grandeur and serenity when I return there for studies in Philosophy."

*(Maggie wrote this article based on existing research into the history of the property and her own recollections)*

# Plato Summer School 2008

by Tessa Stephens

**It is said that Tolstoy divided his life in two parts:  
the first, before he read 'The Symposium', the second, after.**

Between the 4th and 11th January, the Melbourne School hosted what has become an annual 'Plato Summer School'. It turned out to be a week of revelations and epiphanies. Perhaps this was partly due to the subject being 'The Symposium' with its theme of Love, though more probably, the major factor in the success of the occasion was the guidance of Mr David Horan, Plato scholar extraordinaire.

Mr Horan and his wife have now made three trips from Ireland to bring Plato to the Antipodes. Rarely does one have the good fortune to be exposed for a week to such vast knowledge and intellectual breadth and depth. His enthusiasm and brilliance as a speaker was most inspiring. Each meeting was a feast of fascinating material, spiritual insights, and great humour. I wonder about the magic ingredient in Irish water!

The whole programme contributed to the enjoyment. Much credit is due to the Melbourne School for their hospitality, innovative menu and splendid organisation.

Each morning after refreshments, we were given an introduction on the section for study, enhanced by skilled PowerPoint presentations. These were followed by a morning of group sessions, then a

sumptuous smorgasbord lunch, after which was a period of 'contemplation' when students were enjoined to study, reflect, or do some other useful activity on their own. Then came exercises in dialectic.

Later, the main meeting of the day was followed by dinner and then entertainment. Each evening we listened to guest speakers from inside and outside the School, such as professor Constant Mews, an historian specialising in religious studies at Monash University. His subject was 'Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres'. We also had an illustrated lecture from an art historian on the different artistic representations of Mary Magdalene through history, with particular emphasis on the Donatello. On these occasions we were also treated to the brilliantly witty introductions of Mr Jepsen, leader of the Melbourne School!

The highlight of these evening sessions came on the final night when Mr Horan showed us a film he had produced about a day in the life of Socrates. A director and actors had been hired and the movie shot at Townley Hall in Drogheda, Ireland. Although some of the incidents were telescoped, most of the words were straight from the Platonic dialogues. It was very exciting as a preview of what might be coming soon to the big screens of the movie world!

The focus of the week was Plato's Symposium, a work that Benjamin Jowett has described as "the most perfect in form, and may be truly thought to contain more than any commentator has ever dreamed of..."

This dialogue concerns a symposium<sup>1</sup> attended by Socrates and several other real historical figures.

It was hosted by the tragedian Agathon who was celebrating victory in his first dramatic competition. The assemblage decided to send away the flute girls, set aside the wine and then each in turn would present a speech in praise of Eros or 'Love'. Five of them speak before Socrates, each extolling various qualities and aspects of love, both serious and humorous. Agathon made an impressive and poetic speech in which he asserted that every good in heaven and earth sprang from love of the beautiful. This received much applause. However Socrates was unimpressed and admonished Agathon and the other speakers for only appearing to praise Love. He then recounted his own instruction on the subject of Love from the wise woman, Diotima of Mantinea.

Diotima said that Love is the bridge between the mortal and the divine. It has a dual nature and partakes of both poverty and plenty. Love springs from need and lack but has the possibility of inspiring great achievements. Thus Love is a creative force. It is the essential bridge between the world of becoming and the world of being.

One might expect the Symposium to end here. But no. The evening is interrupted by the arrival of a very drunk Alcibiades, a one-time student of Socrates. However he will not speak in praise of Eros, but rather relates tales about Socrates. The evening ends with all but Socrates asleep or departed. It is significant that at the end, he is the only one left awake.

So what is it exactly that makes this particular dialogue so special? There are so many possible answers here. Is it the characters? The dramatic structure? The ideas presented? Certainly all these things contribute, but there is more to it. It is the process involved in the reading that works some strange magic.

So what is this process? Words, words, words. Reading Platonic dialogues requires a level of attention that strains the brain! One struggles to follow the line of argument. The mind feels faint and dives off here and there. Again and again one came back to the words, and gradually began to realise why, every morning, Mr Horan was reading this extract from the 1973 Conversations:

*"So much use is made of the word these days, but nothing seems to mean anything. The meaning is in the action; action is the interaction of Samashti and Vyashiti. In this interaction is the universal or the meaning of the word."*<sup>2</sup>  
(Shri Shantananda Saraswati)

Striving to follow exactly what the text was saying was not the real issue. The issue was being there, grappling with the dilatory mind in the context of the ideas being revealed. The analogy of a pick-axe into concrete came to mind. That's just what it was like. The pointed blade cracked into the concrete and bits flew everywhere! Powerful ingredients in assisting this awakening were wise guidance and the strength of satsanga.

At the end of the week, one felt as if a new world had swum into view, and lost enthusiasms had been re-ignited. Not even a few days with temperatures in the 40s could take that away!

1. A 'symposium' was an ancient Greek drinking party, usually with music and philosophical discussion.

2. 1973 Conversations, Day 9

# The Medici Villa at Careggi

by Graham Soughtton

In January I went to Florence and Venice for the first time. As the aircraft touched down at Florence airport after the long flight from NZ, my watch stopped. The immediate thought was....*Fair enough, I've arrived somewhere timeless....*

There to meet me were two friends, Gabriele the Florentine, and Luigi the Venetian, waiting with a warm welcome and a fortnight's schedule that promised to be a ravishing romp through the Renaissance.

It was that and more. There is nothing like a personal, knowledgeable guide to shortcut through the usual bumbling torment of the first-time tourist.

Venice in winter was something close to Heaven. A sight beyond poetry and painting. That wondrous city rising through morning mist into the winter sun reflected on a mirror-still sea. There were many such gems during the Renaissance journey. Here is one.

In Florence I was taken to visit the Medici Villa at Careggi, where under the patronage of Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici, Marsilio Ficino conducted a Neoplatonic Academy in the second half of the 15th Century.

Careggi is on the periphery of Florence, and



**Villa de Medici**

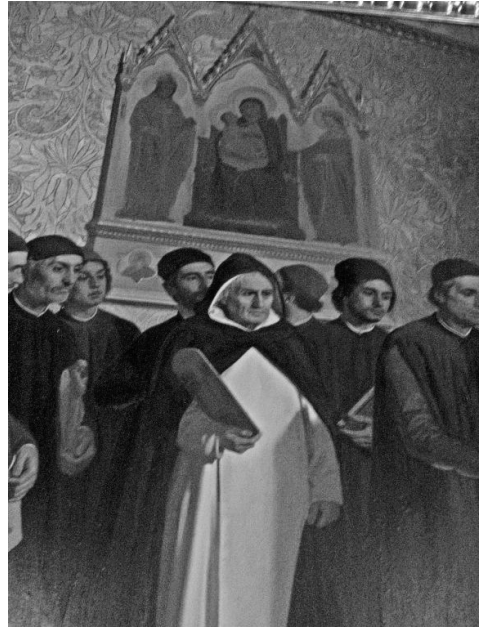
the Villa is currently partly in use for administrative functions by Careggi hospital. It is being restored for public viewing, but currently it is necessary to have a Florentine guide who can 'sweet talk' security personnel into granting access; and also into leaving the room while forbidden photographs are taken!

The Villa was built sometime in the 14th century, and acquired by Giovanni di Bicci (Cosimo de Medici's father) in 1417. At this time it had become fashionable for leading Florentine families to acquire and build sumptuous villas in the country, and this villa was one of many owned by the Medici. Cosimo dramatically extended the Medici's fortune by operating the Vatican bank, and by the late 15th Century the Medici were Europe's richest family.

After the death of Cosimo, Lorenzo de Medici (the Magnificent) transformed Careggi into a centre of culture and art, and the villa became a centre of cultural, philosophical and humanist knowledge, or in other words a 'school'. Undoubtedly Ficino's influence with the Medici inspired them to become the major source of patronage for the incredible revival of art, culture, science, and spiritual discovery in the period we now call the Renaissance.

Many leading artists, scholars, and philanthropists of the day attended the meetings held at the Medici Villa at Careggi, including Pico della Mirandola, whose work *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) is considered by many to be 'the manifesto of the Renaissance'.

When I found myself in the large drawing room where Ficino would have conducted his meetings over 500 years ago, it felt as if he had just left. There above a fireplace



**Ficino and fellow Academy members**



**Villa de Medici internal courtyard**

dated 1465 were two marble busts, of Cosimo and Lorenzo, and in between that, a large painting by Pulcinelli of Ficino surrounded by leading luminaries of the day. Ficino here looks more square-jawed and Florentine than his slim appearance as depicted in busts and other paintings.

From there we visited Lorenzo's tiny study, the room in which he died, and walked around the grounds and the outbuildings. I was very struck by how similar the Villa is to the way we set up our own 'schools' in large houses with their pleasing interiors, gardens and views. It is as though the spirit of this heartland of the Renaissance has sprung up again in many locations 500 years later.

With the death of Lorenzo in 1492, and Ficino in 1499, the Villa passed from the Medici through several owners and episodes, including a fire set by

republicans in 1529, and later on also a murder. The last owner sold it to the hospital in 1936.

I left this special place thinking .... *there is no School of Philosophy in Florence. If one were to start.... imagine coming to Part One here!*

# David



by Graham Soughtton

No visit to Florence could possibly be complete without going to the Galleria dell'Accademia to see Michelangelo's *David*.

I did – in January of this year. I looked for an hour, becoming also a statue, and had to be coaxed away. What I saw may well have been written about, by much more educated minds, and the available internet material would probably take ten lifetimes to read. So what was seen, and why write anything?

Simply this, David is relevant to our philosophic studies. Here in one work Michelangelo Buonarroti, a young man not yet thirty, captured the subtle essence of what it is to be a man.

David is a warrior. But not a muscle-bound, grizzled and gnarly killing machine. His physique is impressive, and at over 5 metres tall he does dominate, but in that slender frame there is also sensitivity, almost tenderness, as if he is also a musician and poet (which of course he was).

This man stands naked to the World. He has an openness, a frankness, but not vulnerability. There is no weakness here. His stance, demeanour, inner and outer attitude, are the very essence of fearlessness.

He is tense, but not anxious. He is utterly alert, but without strain. He gazes to a far horizon, slightly squinting, as if waiting for the inevitable foe, who may well be

fearsome, but David is all quiet determination. This quietness is a real feature. There is no agitation in his being. None. Despite being called to face a great foe, he is strangely relaxed. He is not even yet fully facing the way he is gazing, as if there is plenty of time, as if he will meet whatever his fate may be, detached from his own danger.

There is no pride here, no arrogance, no conceit, no malice. There is steadfastness, restraint, modesty, austerity, fortitude, great courage, and a gentle serenity in this warrior king.

He embodies the virtues the Renaissance humanist movement were seeking to develop, and when he first appeared outside the Town Hall in Florence in 1504 he was an instant hit. The people of Florence, surrounded as they were by larger enemy states on all sides, would have completely understood and appreciated the meaning and significance of this magnificent creation.

But he is much more than a potent expression of the will of a people in a time and place. David stands also to remind men of all times and in all places, of their own divine qualities. Qualities which seek outward expression, but which surely come from deep within, and which when uncovered, inspire and encourage all.

Walking away from David, I'm sure I was taller and straighter.



# Sanskrit 2008

by Elaine Kearney

## at Mahratta – A personal view

It was with some trepidation that I sent in my application to join the Sydney Sanskrit Week from January 5th to 12th, 2008. What would be expected of me?

More to the point, what do I know? The mind did a little panic, then reason kicked in. All I was doing was sending off an application! A little self-analysis, a quick connection with the here and now, and everything settled.

What a unique opportunity to be in the company of like-minded people, and to study and enjoy a subject which is both mysterious and magical. I remembered how at a 'Waterperry' Sanskrit Week, when studying with such company, there arose a feeling of bright, clear, intelligence. Not something completely foreign, but nonetheless, a gentle and slow awakening of pure delight in simply 'being' again. I was on my way.

In fact, about 50 others were also on their way. Mr Richard Elias and Mrs Annick Hardaker from London, Mrs Diane Kruger and Mrs Gai Kroczeck from Perth, Dr Gary Grohmann from Canberra and Mrs Elizabeth Rocheta from Sydney were our guides and mentors for the week.

There were students from all over Australia and three from New Zealand. The range of experience was enormous; some just starting the journey of discovery to those who had faced the challenge of many exams! In the end we seemed to arrive at the same place by different routes. The challenge was to follow the route given. Some enjoyed writing Sanskrit, some chanting, for some it was reading, and there were those whose grammar skills were a delight to behold.

Whichever way the interest went, it was met with encouragement and enthusiasm by the tutors.

Mrs Elizabeth Edmunds from the London School was visiting Australia and kindly came in to speak about how the concept of a day of meditation ('Just This Day' on 28 November last) arose in mind and eventually flowered, touching many parts of the globe. Her ease of speech and cool detachment enabled her words to convey how an idea can slowly take shape and blossom to the benefit of everyone.

Food glorious Food! Australia's display of organic produce, at its best: mangoes, cherries, watermelons, strawberries, avocados... I could go on. Measure certainly was needed as the eyes gazed upon the bounty. You just can't eat everything provided.

Friends! Who said that friendship needs time to grow? Who needs a name? The essence of friendship went far beyond all of that. Exchanges of e-mail addresses and invitations abound in such warm company.

The 'Week' flew by with hardly a movement. Some things seem timeless. The departure day was an opportunity to say farewell to Sydney and her Festival. John Schell, who looked after us for the day, patiently guided us to Sydney's famous sights. The day included a delicious lunch, surrounded by good company, in an atmosphere of ethereal beauty.

Would I again be filled with trepidation? Not likely! Will I return to a Sanskrit week? God willing and a fair wind behind me, Yes!

# Ficino School Celebrates 10th Anniversary

**A**t the end of last year, celebrations were held to mark the 10th anniversary of Ficino School, which began in January 1997 with 29 pupils and three teachers. Today, the roll stands at 120 in seven classes.

The school has come a long way since a 1996 pre-foundation class of nine pupils who began learning with Mrs Caroline Hanna while a property at 27 Esplanade Road in Mt Eden was purchased and made ready for the school to begin.

Events held to mark the school's first decade included a party on 30 November for Classes 0–5 and a barbeque for Classes 6–8 and former students. On Saturday, 1 December a reception was held at the School of Philosophy property at 268 West Tamaki Road. This was attended by Ficino staff and Headmaster, Board members, parents, families and friends.

The reception, which included opportunities to mix and mingle, sample delicious food and listen to some fine speeches, was enjoyed by everyone. In his address, former Ficino Trustee and now Leader of the School of Philosophy, Mr Barrie Preston, spoke of Ficino School's first ten years and also included a brief summary of the history of the School of Philosophy since it began in Auckland in 1960. This was necessary, he said, because without the School there would be no Ficino.

Mr Preston said that the School of Philosophy took “an extremely positive view of the capacity and nature of a child in relation to learning and education based on an



**Presentation of painting**

appreciation that the essential consciousness of the child has as one of its qualities the unlimited capacity to know.” He concluded with an expression of confidence in Ficino School for the next ten years and more.

The Headmaster, Mark Broadwith, spoke about Ficino School as it is today, followed by Digby Crompton, retiring Principal of the School of Philosophy, who spoke of the continued evolution of both schools into the future.

He said that the retiring Philosophy Executive wished to acknowledge Ficino School's 10th anniversary. As a result of discussions with the Headmaster it was decided that five panels in the Ficino school hall would be used for a representation of the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether (or space). As a result artist Ngaire Bennett, who cares for the School of Philosophy art group, would take up the challenge of expressing each element. “The intention is to stir the spirit of enquiry into the magical teaching of the elements through these five panels”, Mr Crompton said.

He then presented Mark with an architectural drawing by Graham McGregor, Ngaire's

assistant, proportioning these panels in line with the Golden Section or rectangle.

At the conclusion of his address, Mr Crompton presented as a gift from the School of Philosophy to Mark and his family a fine print of another of Ngaire's paintings - a view of the Tamaki Estuary as seen from the West Tamaki Road property.

Then congratulatory messages from other schools in the St James family of schools were read out by Mark's wife Elise, Margaret Brickland and Emilie Preston. In a message from London, David Boddy, the Headmaster of St James Boys' School, said that 10 years was a significant milestone and offered his hearty congratulations.

The Chairman of the Ficino Board of Trustees, David Farrelly, spoke of the Board's vision for

the next 10 years. He expressed confidence that Ficino School had now established its credentials in the Auckland educational community and said that the Board's vision for the next ten years "is to make Ficino's unique education available to as wide a socio-economic cross-section of Auckland's families as possible". To that end, funding, staff recruitment, training and welfare, and property enhancement and acquisition would be priorities.

"The Board is aware that until it establishes a Senior school to pave the way for graduates to move through to their tertiary education, the job that was started ten years ago will not be done. Whether or not a start can be made on this in the next ten years will depend on the success of taking the full primary school to financial maturity."

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# The School of Philosophy Cultural Weekend

by Shanti Gore

In January I attended a School of Philosophy cultural weekend. There, we studied culture and in one meeting it was described as a field where a farmer sows so that there will be crops in the future. If the field is dry, he will water it and tend to the crops so that they grow and flourish.

We looked at cultures and their beginnings. A sound is sent out to the universe; different sounds have different frequencies and vibrations. The sound is the seed (for example, Jesus was the seed sound of Christianity).

At the weekend there were four groups: the Shakespeare group, who studied speech and drama (they studied Nelson Mandela's speech), the Vedic Dance group, who learn

Vedic dance where symbols and hand movements mean different things and words, the Convivium Choir, who studied some music by New Zealand composer Cathy Dean, and the Art group.

In the Art group we studied how the elements fit into nature, for example, a flower's petals shaped upward like a flame or fire. We did oil painting of still life, focusing on the background rather than the vase and fruit. The background was a rich purple, symbolising the cosmos.

The School of Philosophy studies culture, who we are truly, and the part we play in the world.

*(13-year-old Shanti attends Junior Youth Group)*

# Branching out

by Jackie Bedford

Even by New Zealand standards Masterton is a small provincial centre, however philosophy classes have been offered in the town for 14 years now.

And this year the branch has achieved the milestone of having all-local tutors for the first time.

Before the branch began, some Wairarapa ladies attended the School of Philosophy in the city of Wellington, and they showed their enthusiasm for what was being offered, as the weekly drive took an hour and a half, including 45 minutes on the steep and winding road over the Rimutaka Ranges.

This keen group then asked if the Wellington School would consider starting up in Masterton, the largest centre of the Wairarapa. Richard Pointon, the Wellington Principal, responded that he would present Part 1 there if they could assemble a minimum of 12 people. They put out the word, and Richard's fate was sealed. There were 20 faces in front of him for the first term, and he has continued involvement with the School branch there throughout its existence. One of that first group, Judith Worsley, still attends.

The population of Masterton is 19,000 and the wider Wairarapa is home to around 42,000. The main economic activities are farming and forestry. From this mix, around 10 to 12 rural and urban folk enrol for Part 1 each term and include people from nearby towns such as Featherston.

Tribute should be paid to a number of Wellington students who took Masterton groups over the years, including David Kelly, Geoff Shepherd, Andrew Spence, and Terry

and Jenny Connor. Now, groups are being led by senior Masterton students Nick Crozier, Bruce Watkins and Sharon Parker.

Nick says the rural flavour gives a down-to-earth and direct approach to the material. "One student looked puzzled when people were talking about what goes on in their heads and the need to let the attention rest on what you're doing. 'But I always do that,' he said. He explained that he loves being out in the bush, working with the chainsaw."

Like any school, Masterton has its challenges. The group sessions are held in a local community centre. Materials are stored in a cupboard there and students set up for each session and then clear up afterwards. There are three rooms available for use and on occasion another group using the rooms has been quite noisy. "On one famous occasion there was a pregnant mothers' session going on next door and they were watching a video of a lady in labour while we were meditating," recalls Nick.

The Masterton branch is steadily building its experience and its confidence. The branch has a committee, holds a cultural day (a workshop day) every second year, has Sanskrit lessons (run by Julia Brady on Saturday mornings), is starting a library and is planning activities such as a visit to the nearby Stonehenge Aotearoa.

Nick says it's pleasing to note that while other, similar groups have come and gone, the School keeps going. He estimates around 360 people have now done at least the Part 1 course. "In the Wairarapa that represents a significant cohort of people who've been exposed to the ideas... The future is looking bright."

# Expressions of Wisdom

## Expressions of Wisdom

**Plunge boldly into the  
Beyond, then be free  
wherever you are.**

*Shoitsu (1202 - 1280)*  
Zen master

**Just as a deep lake is clear  
and still, even so,  
on hearing the teachings,  
the wise become exceedingly peaceful.**

*The Dhammapada*  
Buddhist text

**First keep the peace within yourself,  
then you can also bring peace to others.**

*Thomas á Kempis (c 1380 - 1471)*

**“How does one acquire learning?  
In the seventh century A.D. Adi Shankaracharya  
said, “One fifth is the inherent qualities of the  
student; one fifth is by discussion and study  
together with his fellow-students.  
One fifth by a teacher interested to teach;  
one fifth by his own hard work and efforts;  
and one fifth by experience.”**

Quoted in an address to  
Indian Congress of Plastic Surgeons in 2003

**Nothing external to you has any power over you.**

*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882)*  
American essayist, poet and philosopher

**Gracefulness has been defined to  
be the outward expression  
of the inward harmony of the soul.**

*William Hazlitt (1778 - 1830)*  
English Essayist

**Truth is nobody’s property; no  
race, no individual can lay  
any exclusive claim to it. Truth is  
the nature of all souls.**

*Swami Vivekananda (1863 - 1902)*  
Indian sage and mystic

# The Central Plateau – Land of the Gods

This year, New Zealanders enjoyed a halcyon summer of the kind we thought had long gone.

Not for decades, it seemed, had there been such a prolonged spell of hot weather, and the many Pohutukawa, the New Zealand “Christmas tree”, were unusually resplendent, thickly covered with red blossom. Also at their best were the three volcanoes of the North Island’s Central Plateau, an area known as Tongariro National Park.

The Park covers 800 square kilometres and its spectacular scenery attracts tourists from all over the world. It became New Zealand’s first national park when Te Heuheu Tukino IV, the Paramount Chief of the local tribe, Ngati Tuwharetoa, gifted the sacred peaks and surrounding land to the nation in 1887 for preservation as a reserve for all to enjoy. The three peaks are of deep spiritual significance to the Maori people.

At 2797, 2291 and 1968 metres respectively, Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro are in a line of volcanic activity that stretches across the Pacific Ocean as part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. They are often hidden behind shrouds of mist and cloud but on bright, clear days they tower over the landscape in a manner truly awe-inspiring. They appeared thus as we journeyed across the desert plateau. Ruapehu shone brilliantly with its coating of snow and ice, and even the black cone-shaped Mt Ngauruhoe appeared unusually benign. This mountain normally broods on the skyline, commanding respect for its latent power, for, like Ruapehu, it is an active volcano and is the vent for Mt Tongariro. In filming the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, New



**Mt Ngauruhoe**

Zealand director Peter Jackson took advantage of Ngauruhoe’s dark presence, digitally enhancing it to become Mt Doom.

Mt Tongariro, which is not a single volcano but a complex of craters that have been active at different periods, is a huge massif extending over 18 km in length. Viewed from the eastern side, it is less spectacular than the other two volcanoes. More visible from the western route, it was in fact the main player of the Maori legend of Tongariro.

According to this legend, the mountains were once gods and warriors of great strength. Originally, seven mountains stood next to each other around Lake Taupo in the centre of the North Island. All were male except for the beautiful Pihanga. One night the mountains fought fiercely for her attention. There were violent eruptions, smoke and fire as the land trembled under the violent battle.

In the morning Pihanga stood next to the victor, Tongariro, who became the supreme leader of the land. Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu stood a respectable distance behind but Tauhara – unable to completely leave his love - sat smouldering at the northern end of



**Mt Ruapehu from Waiouru**

the lake. Further north Putauaki (Mt Edgcumbe) slumped tired and defeated while Taranaki fled south to the shores of the Tasman Sea, gouging out the Wanganui River as it went. According to some versions of the legend, one day Taranaki will return to Pihanga and so it is unwise to live along the path between the two.

Seen at their best this summer, it was easy to connect with the god-like status of the three peaks remaining on the Central Plateau, and with the stark beauty of the volcanic landscape. On reaching Lake Taupo, there was an added bonus. From the northern end looking across the lake, Mt Ruapehu shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky, for once not obscured by haze and distance.

To conclude, it is worth recording in brief the spectacular history of Lake Taupo. Created by scores of eruptions both large and small, the lake itself is the crater of a giant long-dormant volcano with a history dating back about 300,000 years. A gigantic eruption 26,000 years ago is thought to be

responsible for the present-day shape of the lake and the most recent eruption, in 186 AD, was one of the most powerful in the world in the past 5000 years.

Such was the extent of the volcanic fallout, it is said that even the ancient Romans and Chinese experienced darkened skies. The debris was deposited some 30,000 square km wide to a depth of tens of metres thick in some places. The whole of the North Island was coated in a thick, toxic ash, which destroyed entire forests. Today, at 359m above sea level, the lake measures 616 square km and is 159m at its deepest. Although volcanic activity is still present in the lake bed, it is only experienced by swimmers as pockets of much warmer water

*- Marilyn Marshall*

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# Awakenings

**Don't forget the “Awakenings 2008” Day  
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Speakers from the Auckland school will present a variety of topics, including:

**“The Song Remains the Same”** – a journey through the ages of music

**“Building – the Builder’s View”** – building from antiquity until the present day

**“Substance and Shadow”** – ideas of appearance and reality in the works of Shakespeare

**“The Sound of Gregorian Chant”** - Gregorian Chant has stood the test of time.....What hunger does it satisfy, and how?

**“The Philosopher’s Apprentice”** – the ‘tricks of the trade’ which make philosophy so practical.

A popular speaker at these events, **Dr Gary Grohmann** from Canberra, will again be with us to present two sessions.

**KEEP THIS DAY FREE and watch the notices for details**