



VOL 14 (1), SEPTEMBER 2003-JANUARY 2004

CHANGING TIMES- SMRITHI GOES ON-LINE!

Change is inevitable: That is what we have been taught and that is what we have seen in Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional Center. Our activities, especially in our flagstaff center in Silver Spring, MD, have seen phenomenal expansion. We have also witnessed several administrative changes that followed to accommodate this growth.

Fiduciary responsibilities have also grown significantly what with the major increases in our assets, liabilities and operating expenses. We are most encouraged that the generosity of our contributing members has kept pace with the increasing financial support needed to sustain the all-round growth. We are pleased to present a summary financial report elsewhere in this issue which illustrates this with key numbers.

Smrithi is also facing the challenges of change, the big IT revolution of our times being a major reason. In earlier years, CMWRC relied to a great extent on this newsletter to reach out to the members with the latest news and announcements. This need has been largely eliminated in the last two years as electronic communication through e-mail has gained wide spread use. Transmission via e-mail is nearly instantaneous and at almost no cost, whereas it takes several weeks and a thousand dollars or more to produce a single issue of printed newsletter. The new technology is therefore a blessing for a non-profit organization like CMWRC and, as you are well aware, we have adopted IT wholeheartedly!

The big change is that Smrithi will be going online from this issue on . The on-line version will be soon available to you at our website www.chinmayadc.org and will be frequently updated with current news and announcements. It will also feature articles and color photographs. However, we are not doing away with the printed format totally. A printed version of Smrithi will be published annually, capturing in hard copy the more memorable events of the year. Special issues may also be released from time to time to mark a Yajna or other landmark event. We believe this way we can satisfy best many different goals: timeliness in communication, reducing costs, making available to our members and volunteers a forum to express their views, and documenting for posterity all of this electronically and in colorful printed annual memoirs.

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IS ADVAITA VEDANTA THE TRUTH?

Strictly speaking, no, it is not. But it will be unwise to give up on it for that or any other reason.

Advaita philosophy is dearer than life to many of us in this Mission. We see in the Advaitic teaching of Gurudev our only true hope for sanity here and salvation hereafter. But we have been cautioned that, in the final analysis, Vedanta also must be counted as one among the many worldly pursuits. In his commentary on Vivekachudamani, Gurudev, with characteristic bluntness, puts down Vedanta along with all other mental projections as “*prajalpamatra*.”, mere prattle of the mind! Shocking, but true.

Everything involving mind no doubt is finally a *prajalpa*. The question however is: Are all *prajalpas* created equal? We intuitively feel that *in some way* Advaita Vedanta measures up higher than other projections of the mind - intellect complex. If so, what could be this measure?

To base the merits of Advaita on the authority of scriptural revelations may not by itself entirely satisfy everyone, especially the questioning mind of an Advaitin. Also, as we know, there are many competing ideologies laying claim to the same scriptural authority. What we need as a guide to compare bodies of knowledge (- be they scientific theories or theological doctrines-) is a measure that has an intuitive appeal and acceptability to us as objective, fair-minded people. One such measure is the *comprehensiveness of understanding* a body of knowledge is capable of producing.

I will illustrate what I mean by that term. A hilltop view of the valley is more comprehensive than the view from any point in the valley itself. You may see the hilltop from the valley, but you do not see the all-encompassing view you have from that vantage point. In a similar sense, a body of knowledge is considered more comprehensive than another if, from the standpoint of the former, one can appreciate the views of the latter, but not vice versa. A good example comes from science: Relativity physics is more comprehensive (and hence “higher”) than Newtonian mechanics, not because the latter is less useful, but because we can understand using Relativity why Newtonian theory works in the everyday world. But Relativity theory cannot be appreciated by one bound to the Newtonian perspectives on time and space.

This brings us to a strong point of Hinduism in general and Advaita in particular. Hinduism affords its practitioners the vision to understand and appreciate other religions. Indeed, Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated that as a Hindu one can live and experience God as a Christian or Moslem might. In contrast, historically Hinduism has been misunderstood and mischaracterized by others with a narrower view of spirituality. Hinduism’s appreciation for other religions is not its weakness, as some Hindus tend to see it, but a mark of its superior understanding.

Advaita epitomizes Hinduism's all-encompassing view. Advaita is to Hinduism what Hinduism is to other religions. It is perfectly easy to understand from the point of view of Advaita the rationale and values behind dvaita; this is exemplified by Shankara himself through his hymns laden with *bhakti*. But *dvaitins* seem to have greater difficulty in appreciating Advaita. Obviously, Advaita is capable of conferring a more comprehensive understanding on those who are beholden to its way of thinking. Even the strange world of Quantum Mechanics, which frequently baffles physicists themselves, is taken in stride by the advaitin, as was pointed out in Prof. Amit Goswami's keynote speech at our recent Annual Banquet.

It is the grand vision and comprehensive understanding capable of being brought on by Advaita that is the secret behind its strong appeal to many generations of thinkers in all corners of the globe. Why, you may ask, one should attach such importance to comprehensive understanding? Because, it is from a genuine, comprehensive understanding of others that compassion of the heart and calmness of mind arise, and it is to a calm mind and loving heart that the Absolute Truth reveals itself. On the contrary, narrow understanding and outright ignorance incite agitations or *prajalpas* in the mind that become a breeding ground for intolerance. What we fail to comprehend, we recoil from in fear or attack in fury. Flight or fight.

This answers the riddle posed at the beginning: If Advaita Vedanta is also a *prajalpa*, why is it better than other *prajalpas*? It is better because it embodies an understanding, a vision, which can end all *prajalpas*, including itself. Or, as one Advaita text puts it: Advaita Vedanta is no doubt part of the dream-like world; but then it comes into that world as the roar of the dream-lion that shakes one out of the dream.

True, Vedanta is not *the* Truth- no *prajalpa* can be. All science and all religions are theories *about* Truth, but not Truth itself. Vedas, says the Mundaka Upanishad, are lower knowledge like any other worldly- knowledge. Beyond all conceivable sciences, religions and Vedas is the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Knowledge. It is Supreme, says the Upanishad, because *by knowing That everything else is known*. In other words, in our scale of comprehensiveness of understanding, Supreme Truth indeed ranks as the Highest, most exalted knowledge. Advaita, arguably, is foremost among all the rest. Let us hold on to it.

- **Raju Chidambaram**

N. VA Chapter of CMWRC -A Year in Perspective

- **Vijay Kumar**

The N.VA Chapter of the CMWRC concluded its 2002-03 BalaVihar year with a glorious Annual Day program held at the West Springfield High School on Sunday, June 1. A lot of hard work went into putting together the annual day program by all the children, the parents, the teachers and coordinators. The weekend practices by the children and hard work of the coordinators paid off, this being one the best annual day presentations. Thanks are due to one and all, parents, teachers and participants alike. The program started with recognition of some outstanding students, followed by skits and dances by the BalaVihar children. Everyone enjoyed a sumptuous pot luck lunch after which there were two hours of fun and games with prizes for the winners.

The annual day was a culmination of a wonderful year for the N.VA Chinmaya Family, which grew from eighty families in 2001-2002 to over a hundred families

in the 2002-2003. That is a substantial growth. Of these 100 families, a substantial number were first year members, reflecting the transient nature of the region. But more than that, it also shows the resiliency of the Mission programs to attract new families and the spirit of “Chinmaya family”.

It is a credit to our Chinmaya Family, and to Gurudev’s blessings, that we were able to so seamlessly assimilate new family members. We put in practice the pledge we took every Sunday: “We stand as one family bound to each other with love and respect”! One family with common goals and aspirations, that our children grow and prosper in America with a rich set of values, and that they are comfortable with their individual identities.

We also pledge, that “We know our responsibilities; that God, give us the ability and courage to fulfill them”. We thank you God, for you gave us plenty of courage to fulfill our responsibilities, as parents, as teachers, as coordinators and of course as children. Our teachers and coordinators are “karma yogis”, dedicating their service to our mission in the spirit of Vedanta. Our educational programs coordinator, Vanita Venugopal received great help from Brahamcharini Arpitaji, in directing our BalaVihar program. We thank you, Arpita ji, for sharing your wisdom and experience with our teachers last year.

As our membership grew, so did our pool of teachers and coordinators. For, they are parents who realize that the program is “for the family and by the family”. The teachers and coordinators who completed their first full year are Prema Nair, Mani Sriram, Lata Venkat, RajyaLakshmi, Smaran Gollamudi, Madhuri Dasari, and Raghu Nath. They join the ranks of our more experienced teachers and coordinators who have been volunteering for years.

As the N.VA program matures, we will dedicate ourselves to building on our current success. Our goal has been to align our BalaVihar program with Maryland’s. We will complete that goal in this coming year by creating the Tapovanam class, after a realignment of the existing classes. This will bring uniformity in the program in both centers, so teachers from both centers can work together to develop a strong program. This past year we added a vocal music class and a tabla class. In the coming year we will work on further improving our Language and Arts programs. We celebrated key Indian festivals. Members have shared with me ideas on incorporating some community outreach and information sharing within our program. We will try to do that in the coming year.

As we grow, we will seek more volunteers from within the family, to become teachers and coordinators. If you are interested, you may contact me at (703)323-6111 or vkumar3@aol.com. Also, if you know of families who can benefit from our program, do pass the word and we will welcome them within our family.

The Positive Possibilities in His Presence

-Aziza Meer

We sing and joke together for full one hour—my children and I—every morning, as we prepare to leave home for the day. We wake up early and beat the sun to it. We watch the Sunrise as we drive to school, we chat and make some decisions for the day. I work only 6-hour days for three days and on Fridays make up to complete 40 hours for the week. Since it is a long day, I add an hour's lunch to it and go out with one of my friends at work. I love those lunches and we always have a good time. I take several more breaks in the day and get to inch through the different verses of Geeta. Since I inch through them, I have more time to think about each. I love the fact that my children are at a private school that does not provide busing. I love the fact that I could not get into any carpool situation. I love the fact that my husband is able to do only a couple of rides in a week. I love the fact that I cannot put in 8 hours a day at work. I love the fact that I have a very long day on Friday. I love the fact that I cannot leave home early enough to beat the traffic because....

This morning, to begin with it was the beautiful pink sunrise, lovely breeze, and a slight rustle of the leaves. Then it was several light, white clouds on a rich blue sky. Then it was the blue sky with green treetops. Then there was a little heat as the light of the sun brightened the sky. That is when I reached my work. I started from home at 7 AM, dropped two of my children in two school campuses and reached work by 8:30 AM. I gathered steady images of the beauty of the sky, the clouds and the trees, because I could drive with my eyes on the sky. The traffic was slow enough. I could do *Hanuman Chalisa* five or six times. It is strange how the mind drifts away from Hanuman as I go along my day's work outside of my car. It takes a few mindless repetitions of *Hanuman Chalisa* before I do the rest mindfully. What a chance to be able to chant as many so I can keep mind in track. I love my commute and the traffic.

Faith

-Aziza Meer



In a movie theater in India: The lights are out and the audience is immersed in the movie. On the screen, there is a man who held a woman captive so he can escape from the police. The woman is screaming as he holds her tightly wrapped in his arms and tries to drag her along so he can escape. A child is watching the movie with her parents. She is very troubled that the woman is screaming, and keeps asking the parents why the woman is screaming. The mother tells the child that the woman is scared because the man held her tight and is running with her. The mother reassured the child not to worry because nothing will happen to the woman and the man will soon let go of her. The child screamed out to the woman on the screen, "Don't worry, nothing will happen to you!! You will be alright, don't scream, you will be alright." The child was earnestly trying to reassure the screaming woman on the screen. The audience wondered at the child's outburst, parents tried to shush her, but the child persisted. Since the woman did not stop screaming, the child realized that the woman could not hear her. She tried to get to the screen so she could have the woman actually hear what she was saying.

What do we see in this situation? There is innocence in the child, and how did this innocence work? She connected closely with the woman, and her experience. She believed what she saw, she believed that she can make a difference. She earnestly wanted to help. She had faith. Why was she unable to communicate with the woman on the screen? Because she was speaking with a different media; speech does not reach that media; only technical elements can put things behind a movie screen. But this media is not unreachable to those who know how to handle it. The same way, God is in a slightly different media than humans and once you learn to communicate, you can reach that media. Later in life, this child grew to be a writer, learning how to reach out in a different media, a media that is different from regular human communication.

This little child did not know the technical aspects of how to, or even aware that there is a difference between her way of communication and the one which will make a difference in the behavior of that woman on the screen. But she believed that she can reach this media. The child's belief led her to approach the screen with trust and confidence. From her experience at the theater, she asked questions and from the answers she got, she asked more questions, and so on, till she laid herself a track to reach a different media—being a writer. Have trust and faith that you can reach God and that it is just a matter of plucking enough flowers of knowledge and enquiring enough about how to get there that will lay your path to Him. There is a path, and it is true that you can reach Him.

Writing does not use the same media as film production. Nevertheless both are communications of different forms, and they are different from day-to-day communication. For one person, it may be film making, and for another, it is writing for publications. The paths are different but the goal is the same—communication to reach out to something. Path that every seeker takes is different from that of another, and yet the destination is the same.

Absolute faith and trust with not even a shade of doubt are the basis to it all. Go with the trust and faith of a child—that you will reach God and God is within your reach. Don't even question that fact. And the path will lay itself in front of you.

Diwali Function at CMWRC

- Bhadra Durgabakshi

The Chinmayam building was reverberating with the vibrant rhythms of folk music and dances, from the different states across India, during CMWRC's Diwali celebrations held on October 25th 2003.



Who would have imagined that they would be getting a glimpse and flavor of the traditional dance forms from various states in India, while sitting in an auditorium in Silver Spring, MD? These dances captured the essence of the rich cultural diversity that

India has to offer. Adorned in traditional dresses of brilliant colors and accompanied by melodious music, these dancers, young and young-at-heart, performed a range of dynamic movements, from the graceful to the vigorous.

Some of the highlights of the evening's performance were dance forms from Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Orissa, Bollywood (- yes! it has almost attained statehood-), Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Kerala. The grand finale was the much-awaited (and talked about) dance from Nagaland. The coordinator had a hard time recruiting dancers as many were skeptical about the attire (or lack thereof) for this item. The audience watched in baited breath as the dancers pranced (*see below*) to war beats, attired in novel (and decent) outfits, complete with headgear and horns.

The Diwali celebrations started with Lakshmi puja conducted by Vinay Mallikaarjun and Amol Mehta, followed by bhajans rendered by Raghav and Bhargav Murali. The evening's program ended with the audience joining in the Raas and Garba dances. Chandresh Mamlatadarna and his group provided the live music accompaniment.

No Diwali celebration is complete without rangoli and lights. The decorations committee had ensured that the place was spruced up with festive decorations, sans the fear of a fire hazard. And like all good programs this one too ended with a sumptuous dinner, provided courtesy of dedicated volunteers.

The coordinator, Chandrika Sriram, and volunteers worked hard to put this quality program together in a very short period. It was a program like none seen before. I left with a smile in my heart, a bounce in my step and a light in my mind. I believe that the others too felt the same.

Diwali Celebrations –More Accolades!

- Meera Kirkire

With the blessings of the Lord, Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Tejomayananda and Swami Dheerananda (we love our resident Swamiji), the Diwali celebrations at Chinmayam were scheduled for Saturday, the 25th of October, or so I thought. My mind raced ahead trying to plan the evening as efficiently as I could. No, I was neither a volunteer nor an organizer for the function (lucky escape for the mission!) I have a 5 and half month old baby and wanted to make her as comfortable as possible.



The opening program was Ganesha Pancharatnam by the kids.. sounded beautiful as usual.. thanks to Swamiji for training and inspiring these kids. This was followed by the Lakshmi pooja, also performed beautifully by the kids who were trained to perfection by none other than Swamiji. People continued to stream in. Meanwhile at Kailas Niwas, there were some very busy folks getting dinner ready and I am pretty sure they did not get much of a chance to actually enjoy the evening. That's an example of devotion to the task at hand.

The highlight of the evening was the multi-cultural dance performances.

The MC had a short explanation preceding each item and a word of praise for every performer. Each and every item was well performed. One did not get the feeling of déjà vu while sitting through the different dances. The performances highlighted the great and different cultures and traditions of India with that underlying thread of unity... .

The very, very nice touch was the appropriate words of praise used for each performer without getting monotonous or sounding hollow. I wonder if that was done impromptu or rehearsed. Either way, good job!!!

By this time there were so many people that space was at a premium. The dance performances set the tone for some more dancing but this time was a free-for-all *Gaarbha* with live music and singing. All that dancing and clapping got people in a mood for good food and there was no disappointment in that area either. Every thing was thought of and executed to a precision. There was enough of delicious food for all.

All this was made possible by the planning, hard work and enthusiasm of the participants and the volunteers (both inside and outside Chinmayam). A great, big hand to those wonderful and selfless folks.

As an aside, I thoroughly enjoyed the lovely outfits and jewelry. Everyone looked “so well put together” and “so Indian”. Thank you all for a warm and wonderful evening. ... Pleasant memories linger..... .

SMRITHI WISHES ITS READERS A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR

UPCOMING EVENTS*

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| February 18, 2004 | Maha Shivaratri |
| March 27-28, 2004 | Ram Navami Celebration (by session) |
| April 17, 2004 | “Bharat Sambhavam” at Kennedy Center** |
| May 8, 2004 | Chinmaya Jayanthi (Seva Day) |
| June 12-13, 2004 | Balavihar Annual Day (by session) |
| June 20, 2004 | Father’s Day Picnic |
| June 21, 2004 | Children’s Summer Camp begins |

** *Kuchipudi dance drama presented by Mrinalini Sadananda and her Kalamandapam students- Please mark your calendar- More details to follow soon.*

* *All events in Chinmayam unless otherwise*

indicated

ANNUAL BANQUET 11-22-2003 WAS A HUGE SUCCESS!
(Pictures on printed version, will be updated here at a later date)

Left to right; top to bottom : 1. Jay Sriram emceeding the evening 2. Some 250 of our members packed the Marriott Conference Center in Uinv of Maryland 3. Balavihar children inaugurating the evening with invocation 4. The keynote speaker Prof.Amit Goswami (seated second from right with cap on) with other invited guests. His talk on “Consciousness and Quantum Physics” was received enthusiastically by the audience. 5. Lining up for making their pledges- the fund raising banquet raised more than \$90,000 6. Swami Dheerananda presenting Sucharitra and Sethuraman Balan (hidden from view) with Gurudev’s portrait. S.Balan, CMWRC Secretary, was recognized for outstanding service to the organization over the years.

CMWRC FINANCIAL REPORT

-Prakash Soman

The following is a report of CMWRC’s income and expenses. Year 2003 was the first full year of operations in our new Chinmayam. Increase in expenses is inevitable with the growth in membership and services and the cost of financing the new building. We have however strived and succeeded in containing the cost increases to a minimum. The invaluable free service provided by a large number of volunteer teachers and other workers is a major factor in keeping our costs manageable while providing increased services to our members. Thanks to the strong support of our members, CMWRC continues to operate from a financially sound basis. Please contact Prakash Soman for any additional information.

CHINMAYA MISSION WASHINGTON REGIONAL CENTER

Treasurer’s Report:

By the grace of Sri Gurudev, blessings of Sri Guruji and the efforts of our membership as well as the well wishers of the Mission we had successful past years. Summary of Revenue and Expenditures for 2001, 2002 and YTD 11-30-2003 is presented below.

| <u>Revenue and Expenditures</u> | <u>2001</u> | <u>2002</u> | Year 2003 through November 30, 2003 | Year-to-date |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--|---------------------|
| Membership | \$119,225.0 | \$148,450.0 | \$159,182.00 | |
| | 0 | 0 | | |
| Donations and Gurudakshina etc | 25,930.00 | 38,259.00 | 43,375.10 | |
| Chinmayam Donations | 126,688.00 | 130,824.00 | 80,860.26 | |

| | | | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Interest Earned (see note 1) | 30,194.00 | 6,090.00 | 2,178.27 | |
| Camps and Yajnas (Includes Summer Camp) (Net) | 13,363.00 | 52,270.00 | 21,296.78 | |
| Other Events and Programs | 14,126.00 | 1,338.00 | 21,529.65 | |
| Total Revenue | \$329,526.00 | \$377,231.00 | \$328,422.06 | |
| | 0 | 0 | | |
| Interest Paid | 22,358.00 | 67,802.00 | 57,071.16 * | * See Note 3. |
| Operating Expenses | 95,074.00 | 98,072.00 | 112,000.28 | |
| Total Expenditures | \$117,432.00 | \$165,874.00 | \$169,071.44 | |
| | 0 | 0 | | |
| Excess of Revenue before Depreciation | \$212,094.00 | \$211,357.00 | \$159,350.62 * | |
| | 0 | 0 | | |
| Depreciation (see note 2) | -96,040.00 (2) | -35,321.00 (2) | -75,290.00 (2) | |
| Net Excess of Revenue over Expenditures * | \$116,054.00 | \$176,036.00 | \$84,060.62 * | * See Note 3. |
| | 0 | 0 | | |

Note 1: Reduction in interest income was due to Utilization of funds for Construction of Chinmayam and a drop in interest rates in general

Note 2: 2001 includes YTD catch up Depreciation for Kailas Niwas - For 2002 includes only partial year's depreciation on Chinmayam as it was still under construction. For 2003 includes depreciation for Kailas Niwas and Chinmayam for full year.

* **Note 3:** Does not include Interest payable in the amount of \$48,610.20 on Loans from Members (to be booked in December 2003)

Condensed Balance Sheet

As of November 30, 2003

(in Thousands)

Assets

| | | |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| Cash and Bank Balance | \$ | 507 |
| Buildings and Land (Net of Depreciation) | | 2708 |
| Deposits and Prepaid Expenses | | 31 |
| Total Assets | \$ | 3,246 |

Liabilities and Fund Balances

| | | |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| Current Liabilities - Accounts Payable | \$ | 18 |
| Loan from Potomac Valley Bank | | 664 |
| Loans from Members | | 1001 |
| Total Liabilities | \$ | 1,683 |
| Fund Balance | | 1479 |
| Net excess of Revenue through November 30, 2003 (see note 3 above) | | 84 * |

Total Liabilities and Fund Balances

\$ 3,246

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Contact Prakash Soman at 703-532-6829 for any additional information

** All events in Chinmayam unless otherwise indicated*

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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