


The Sambodh Society, Inc.
A Non-Profit Organization for the teaching of Vedanta and Meditation

Food for Thought – and Action! Sowing Seeds of Change Seminar
Saturday, April 24, 2010

Sambodh Center for Human Excellence
6363 N. 24th Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49004

On Saturday, April 24th, 2010, **The Sambodh Society, Inc.**, a spiritual center on the NE side of Kalamazoo, sponsored a seminar titled, **“Food for Thought and Action: Sowing Seeds of Change.”** The seminar focused upon the current trend in industrialized food production and the crisis this trend presents for our physical and spiritual well-being. Its purpose was to create awareness not only of this issue, but awareness of solutions and available local resources that provide opportunities for us to take action, making healthier food choices. We felt that informed choice-making promotes positive changes in our own health as well as



that of our community and the environment. The seminar was intended to provide food for the mind and nourish the body and spirit, as well. So, once we had our goals in place and speakers identified, it was natural that we invited **Kurry Guru**, a local Indian cuisine caterer, to provide what we couldn't – delicious and fresh food to both delight and please the palate.

We began the day by offering those who had never seen the movie, *Food, Inc.*, the opportunity to view this Academy Award nominated documentary on our 60" closed-circuit TV on the lower level of the Sambodh Center. About 25 people attended the viewing. When I returned to the “theater” near the end of the viewing, the somber atmosphere was palpable. And the message that the film carried was obvious – that we have a responsibility to do something to improve our food sources and personal eating habits. Later that morning we showed a shorter, locally- produced film “What Will We Eat?” by director, Chris Bedford, Muskegon, MI, which carried a more positive message, that as individuals we can achieve our goal in changing the market. These two films set the stage for the afternoon seminar and follow-up discussion. Visit their websites: <http://www.chrisbedfordfilms.com/> and <http://www.foodincmovie.com/>

Sambodh Center's intent with the seminar was to both create an awareness of the problem as well as to highlight some of our local resources, people and organizations in the Kalamazoo community. We wanted to provide a forum for local organizations and businesses to discuss both their perspective of the current food crisis and relay what they were doing as a counterpoint to the problem. Among this group were representatives from **Fair Food Matters**, **People's Food Co-op**, **Natural Health Food Center**, and **Eater's Guild**, a near-by organic farm.

The role of these individuals and leaders, who are active in “food” careers, was to share, as speakers and panelists, what part they play in the Kalamazoo community to provide positive alternatives to the present mega-trend in food production and distribution. As part of the solution to the present food

crisis, we asked them discuss their perspective on the problem, giving the community an opportunity to hear about their local services and resources that promote healthy food and sustain a healthy lifestyle.



While the Sambodh Society provided food for thought, local Indian food caterer, **Kurry Guru** provided food for both the stomach and the soul. Guests were delighted with its freshness along with its home-cooked flavors and colorful appearance. **Mukta Joshi**, the owner, and her chief assistant in this enterprise, her husband, **Himanshu Pant**, are delightful to work with, very accommodating and creative. Mukta came up with a great menu: cumin-scented Basmati rice, chickpea curry, tadka daal (yellow lentils cooked with onions and tomatoes), kachumber salad (diced cucumber, tomato, onions) with fresh cilantro and lemon pepper dressing. The

lunch was tasty, light, filling, and easily digested – perfect for our 70-some seminar participant who needed to remain alert through the afternoon program. Incidentally, Kurry Guru manages its cooking at **Can Do Kitchen**, a kitchen space located near downtown Kalamazoo, MI, that **Fair Food Matters** provides to food entrepreneurs trying to get food-related businesses off the ground. For information visit their website: www.fairfoodmatters.org

Here are some highlights from each of five afternoon speakers and their presentations:

Paul Stermer, Executive Director of **Fair Food Matters**, and former journalist, grew up in Paw Paw on a part-time farm. Fair Food Matters is a non-profit organization, stemming from Kalamazoo’s People’s Food Co-op in 2001. With a Power Point Presentation Paul gave the audience thorough coverage of Fair Food Matters’ programs. Fair Food Matters works with growers, processors, restaurants, etc. and promotes locally grown food. It maintains two organic gardens in Kalamazoo: **Growing Matters Garden** on N. Westnedge, and another at Woodward Elementary School. Through its **Can Do Kitchen**, Fair Food Matters provides kitchen space to food entrepreneurs trying to get food-related businesses off the ground. Its other programs include: **Eat Local Kalamazoo**, the **Garden Resource Network**, **Future Chefs** (for teens), and **Farms to K College** (bringing local food to school cafeterias). The reach and breadth of this organization in just a few short years is amazing, and so is its Director, Paul Stermer. One can’t help but admire him for taking up such a cause that positively affects so many people in this fortunate city. For more information it’s best to visit their website: www.fairfoodmatters.org, and sign up for their newsletter, or contact Paul directly at paul@fairfoodmatters.org.

Elizabeth Forest has been a part of People’s Food Co-op’s staff since 1997. The Co-op is a full-service, natural food grocery and is membership owned. You can now buy a share in the store, which now boasts 838 owners, 100 of which bought shares just since January 1, 2010. This year, People’s Food Co-op is celebrating its 40th birthday. For 33 of those years, it has been located on South Burdick Street, Kalamazoo. Though physically cramped in its current space of only 800 square feet, the Co-op is planning a new building and location on Harrison Street, east of downtown Kalamazoo. The



store's mission is to provide healthy, whole food at reasonable prices. Recently, it extended its mission to provide local food while paying producers a living wage. In 2001, **Fair Food Matters** was created as the Co-op's education arm. Elizabeth holds cooking classes through People's Food Co-op and Fair Food Matters. One of the store's more successful ventures was to enable consumers to use their food stamps and EBT cards at the local farmers' market. Setting up a "100-Mile Market" in the parking lot next door to the store, people were able to buy not only fresh produce but the plants and seeds to grow their own, thus stretching their food dollar even further. In year one, the 100-Mile Market did \$6,000 in sales; in just year two, sales increased to \$16,000. For information, visit: www.peoplesfoodco-op.org



Evan Groendyk, a youthful and exuberant supplement specialist at the **Natural Health Food Center**, described himself as "something of a troublemaker" in high school, lacking focus and direction. Then one auspicious day his life changed, when he saw the movie, "Who Killed the Electric Car." He became "militantly" interested in the environment and all that the word "environment" implies. He's also a full-time student in Environmental Studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI. His work at the Natural Health Center in Kalamazoo, serving customers by providing them with information

they need to better understand the products they buy. He also comes up with innovative ideas that add value to the store itself. His personality and dry wit doubtless provide his co-workers and customers with much humor, as well. As he said himself, tongue-in cheek, he was "glad to see a group of people here today 'fightin' the man."

Both **Katie Wunderlin**, and her parents, **Mike and Kay Wunderlin**, owners of the **Natural Health Food Center**, played a major role in the success of the Seminar. The Natural Health Food Center has been a family-owned business for more that 40 years. And, when you enter the store, you can tell that they "love what they do." Katie's effervescence provides a dynamic engine behind NHC, and her cheery and helpful nature sustains the pleasant atmosphere that pervades the Natural Health Food Center. Katie shared wonderful ideas with us, e.g., door prizes, providing books and videos for sale, etc., which we took up. And she enthusiastically helped spread the word about the Food for Thought and Action seminar through NHC's newsletters and printed handouts. **Mike Wunderlin** acted as MC for seminar, providing both wisdom and wit that set the tone for an upbeat and engaging afternoon. Participants mentioned how grateful they were (especially after viewing the sobering film, Food, Inc.), relieved by both Mike's humor and the fact that there were plenty of "things they could do" to improve present circumstances in the food market. Mike's intermittent commentary added buoyancy to the seminar and charged the audience with the enthusiasm to "do the right thing." For information about NHC, visit: www.naturalhealthfoodcenter.com

Lee and Laurie Arboreal established the **Eaters Guild Community Support Agricultural (CSA)** farm in 2003. CSAs work on the principle that those who own a share own the operation and replace the bank and spread out risk. Those who don't own a cash share work on the farm or in the fields, thereby cutting labor costs. Laurie studied Zoology in college, teaches yoga, holds certification in homeopathy, and has a background in art, while Lee studied Religion and Biology. They are the parents of two beautiful children, and together they manage Eater's Guild. Lee calmly, and with penetrating wisdom, raised thought-provoking comments and questions, such as his opening to their presentation: "What does it mean for the body to be *unable* to breakdown a factory-created non-food product?" Lee pressed the

audience to consider this as they decide what to eat and where to buy their food. He noted that, like themselves, an amazing number of small farmers in southwest Michigan are new-generation farmers, having to relearn all the skills of their parents' and grandparents' generations. Laurie's story illustrated this point with humor: Once, she decided to buy chickens for egg production and bought not 10 or 20 or even 50, but 500 of them, right up front. Then she put the chickens out to graze in a movable enclosure. At the end of the day, when she checked on the chickens, they had escaped and had to be collected, one-at-a-time! Another lesson the Arboreals learned was that farmers need to grow what their market will bear. Initially, they wanted to grow exotic vegetables, but no one was interested in buying them; they started growing what people wanted. In their refreshing presentation, it was more than apparent that the Arboreals enjoyed their work and chosen lifestyle. Now, don't you sense that food grown and cared for, as the Arboreals do, in happiness and with love, will also be healthy food? **Eaters Guild's produce** can be found at farmers markets within about a 50-75 mile radius of their Bangor farm. Contact: contact@eatersguild.com Web: www.eatersguild.com

Dr. Aparna Bapat, BAMS, has been practicing Ayurvedic Medicine, including pulse diagnosis and panchakarma, in the U.S. since 1999. She has her own thriving practice in New York City, called **Ayurspirit, Inc.** She currently is on faculty for Ayurvedic medicine in Miami, Florida, and has taught courses at Bastyr University in Washington. She has been coming to Kalamazoo since August 2009 and wishes to continue spreading Ayurvedic knowledge in the Kalamazoo area. Dr. Aparna explained many interesting facts about Ayurveda and gave the audience a practical lesson in "kitchen pharmacy," how food serves as medicine. The word "ayurveda" means the "science of life." It is a holistic



and relational system of medicine based on the five universal elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth. Though it may sound simplistic when we say, "We are food, and we become food," Ayurveda is a science that has systematic knowledge of healing through the use of foods, spices and herbs that suit a particular individual's constitution. An ayurvedic doctor can ascertain one's constitution (vata, pitta or kapha, or a combination of these). Ayurvedic practices prevent disease through eating a balanced diet and observing certain dietary rules. Some of these are: 1) eat locally, because your body is used to your locale; 2) cook fresh every day; no leftovers older than 24 hours; and, 3) certain herbs and spices have medicinal qualities, most of which are in seed form; use them to enhance your food. Some healing herbs and spices Dr. Bapat spoke about specifically are: mustard seed, cumin seed, coriander seed, cardamom seed, fennel seed, turmeric (a wonderful anti-bacterial), fresh ginger, fresh garlic, and black pepper. Dr. Bapat plans to return to The Sambodh Society, Inc. for their fall retreat and workshop on Vedanta, Ayurveda and Yoga, slated for October 1-3, 2010. You may contact Dr. Bapat through The Sambodh Center (269) 492-0544 or her website, www.ayurspirit.mirrorz.com.

Through this seminar Sambodh Center members saw themselves as sowing "seeds of change," encouraging people to take positive action, changing themselves and their food habits, and to become more aware of local resources, organizations that are taking positive steps towards the direction we want in our food production and availability.

And, as participants wrote out evaluations, they confirmed what we hoped for: that they left the seminar a bit wiser and with greater awareness of a number of options and resources at hand, right in their own

“backyard,” so to speak. Many of them shared thoughtful and appreciative comments in the seminar evaluations, frequently writing, “thanks,” or expressing their “enjoyment” of the day’s events. Seminar participants summed the day up with these words: “Loved, loved, loved this;” “Awesome! I learned so much;” “Great speakers, great food, very good energy.” We need these programs more often.” and, “Awesome speakers, reasonably priced, lots of info, great energy, ideas and people, lovely food – an exceptional event. Thank you!”

At Sambodh Center, we couldn’t be more delighted, and we thank everyone – participants, speakers, caterer, co-sponsors, and volunteers – for their involvement and for helping this seminar to be a success. We especially wish to thank **Natural Health Food Center**, **People’s Food Co-op**, **Fair Food Matters**, and **Harding’s Market** for providing door prizes for the event.



Our gratitude and a toast (with special vegetable and fruit juices, concocted by the team in this photo) to Kalamazoo professional photographer, Tom Hansen, for providing The Sambodh Society, Inc. with photographs of the Food For Thought and Action Seminar and for this article. You may reach **Tom Hansen Photography at (269) 381-6288**.

Photos, in order of appearance in this article:

1. Mike Wunderlin, Seminar MC; 2. Mukta Joshi & Himanshu Pant, owners of Kurry Guru Indian Cuisine catering; 3. Speakers and Panelists, from left to right: Evan Groendyk, Elizabeth Forest, Paul Stermer, and Laurie & Lee Arboreal; 4. Food for Thought Seminar participants; 5. Dr. Aparna Bapat, Ayurvedic Doctor, and Ruth Haring, Seminar Coordinator; and, 6. Bonnie Farmer, M.S. R.D., with assisting WMU Students, Liz and Doug, Caroline Webber, Ph.D., R.D., offering this toast and enjoying the juice they produced for seminar participants during our afternoon break.

Co-sponsors for the event included the **Natural Health Food Center**, Westwood Plaza:, 4610 West Main St, Kalamazoo, MI 49006 or www.naturalhealthfoodcenter.com, and the **Southwest Michigan Wellness Directory** www.wellness-swmi.com.