

The Sambodh Society, Inc. Website History

Our website began, rudimentarily, in early 2000, when Sunder Hattangadi, M.D., as chairperson of the *Gayatri Maha Yajna*, volunteered to create a website for the September 30, 2000 event. With Sunder's technical ability and resourcefulness in gathering free illustrations from internet, and Ruth Haring supplying the text, between February and May 2000, Sunder designed our first website using ZyWeb. The Home page had a photo of Swami Bodhananda, courtesy of Amelia Falk, along with Swamiji's blessings and an Invitation, and a version of our Sambodh Symbol, the now familiar rainbow with the three birds in various stages of flight. *Gayatri Devi* along with the *Gayatri mantra*, its meaning and benefits comprised several pages. We also included a map to Leila Arboretum in Battle Creek MI, the Program Schedule, Registration Information and Instructions to Youth for the Yajna.

This 'taste' of a website was what initiated Ruth's '*sankalpa*' to have a full-fledged Sambodh Society website which would service and showcase Swamiji and his mission, make available his itinerary and programs to devotees world-wide, and present information about our growing organization in America.

During June 2000, Akilesh Ayyar (San Gabriel, CA), made a visit to Kalamazoo and, sitting beside Swamiji at Ruth's PC, registered the Sambodh domain names. Swamiji was eager that we register three domain names: www.Sambodh.com, for American use; www.Sambodh.org, which we offered to the Sambodh website in India; and, www.Sambodh.net, which is still in search of a purpose.

In September 2000, The Sambodh Society sponsored a spiritual retreat for the study of Ramana Maharshi's *Upadesa Saram*. The retreat took place at Pretty Lake Family Vacation Camp in Mattawan, Michigan. Towards the end of the retreat P.G. Madhavan asked to meet with Ruth about a proposal that he and his wife, Ann, wanted to offer Sambodh. Ann Madhavan had created another website and was now volunteering her services to Sambodh for the same purpose. So, a U.S. Sambodh "web-team" met for the first time on September 10, 2000, and discussed a new website format. Members included P.G. and Ann Madhavan (Cincinnati, OH), Vinu Gopalakrishnan (P.G.'s nephew, Palakkad, India) Suresh and Jyothi Pillai, and Chandra Prabha (Columbus, OH), Sunder Hattangadi (Battle Creek, MI), Ruth Haring (Portage, MI) and Erica Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI). Ann volunteered to design the website. Erika was asked to design some graphics. Ruth would compose the text and obtain photos. Suresh and Jyothi took responsibility for securing a website server. With background in OCLC, Chandra offered her data base services. With his technical abilities and knowledge of the internet, Sunder offered his valued counsel. We also sought the advice of Sangeetha Menon (NIAS, Bangalore, India) as she was in the process of designing the Sambodh website for India. We had a team!

The Web-team started an e-group, communicating regularly about the content and layout of the website. Ruth and Sunder engaged the e-group, developing and discussing ideas, and Ann began the creation of the pages. Swamiji suggested that we include several of his devotees and trustees from India. So, Padma Nayar, (Ernakulum), P.N. Subramanian (Trivandrum), Lt. Col. Mohan (Palakkad) and Naveen Budhraj (New Delhi) were also added to our email group.

Erika Jackson was given the task of creating a version of the Sambodh logo that Swamiji had initially designed. There were several versions in use: some monotone and some in color, but no standardized version. Swamiji had envisioned an inverted rainbow composed

of primary colors with three birds, each at a different level in relationship to the rainbow's interior. One bird had 'escaped,' symbolizing spiritual 'liberation,' *moksha*. The other two remained 'trapped' in *samsara*, inside the cup of the rainbow. Swamiji wrote the significance and meaning for both the symbol and the name of Sambodh. Both descriptions still appear on our website, if you just click on either of these graphics. By September 25, 2000, Erika had completed a version, with that 'famous,' slight left-slant in the inverted rainbow, adding just the right touch. Everyone was delighted with her idea and it was immediately adopted everywhere, including every brochure and publication since that time. Ruth suggested to Ann that we use the symbol as a wash for the background of our web pages. And the individual birds 'fly around' everywhere, lighting between other graphics and buttons, and now they appear in most all of Swamiji's books.

Sunder and Chandra suggested what became the final layout for our website pages (although some additional ideas they suggested have yet to be explored). Their list included a Home page (with the Sambodh Mission Statement), a page devoted to Swamiji, and additional Inspirations, Publications, Organizations (Contact) and Photo Gallery pages. By October 30, 2000, Ann Madhavan managed to complete the first full version of the Sambodh website for team review. In November, Ruth became the official website photographer. Amelia Falk's black and white photo of Swamiji (from *Gayatri Yajna* days) was retained for the 'Swami' page, while the Album page was filled with photos of Swamiji taken during his travels around the United States. By Spring 2001 the website was fully launched. And during the next few months, as Swamiji's itinerary developed, Ann added another page for Coming Events and Programs. She devised a US map graphic as a link to programs in various states. By the end of 2001 all the website essentials were in place.

As everyone knows, everything changes. In 2002, P.G and Ann moved. And, as Ann was immersed in completing her graduate degree, it was becoming more difficult for Ann to find time for the website. Fortunately, Katie O'Keefe (Grand Rapids, MI) one of our members, indicated her interest in helping. In early 2003, we were ready. Ruth asked Katie to start communicating with members of our website team, Suresh Pillai and Ann Madhavan. As the onrush of web-work began, Katie was asked to add Swamiji's itinerary and programs to our website, the most intensive part of our website work. She also was asked to add photographs of the 2002 *Bhumi Puja* at *Sambodh Aranya* to our Album. Katie contributed some photos, others were offered by Ruth, Mala Jeganathan, and Anil Patel. We continue to accept photos for our website from other Sambodh friends and devotees across the United States. Our most recent Home page displays a photo of Swamiji at the top of an 11,000 foot peak in Rocky Mountain National Park, contributed by Rukma Joshi (Colorado Springs, CO).

In March 2003, on behalf of Sambodh Society, Ruth Haring and the SCHE Board formally asked Katie to become Ann's assistant webmaster. Katie was proficient, interested, involved in Sambodh activities and lived in southwest Michigan, making it easy to conduct the business of website modifications. As a student in computer technology at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Katie had excellent background and skills for the task. And she had demonstrated her competence and personal initiative. Ann had moved again, this time to Seattle. Now fully immersed in completing her graduate program, Ann was ready to let go of any remaining duties for Sambodh.com. Ann had dedicated many, many hours to the creation and sustaining of the Sambodh website. Without P.G.'s and Ann's offer and their devotion to Swamiji, and Ann's website design background, her competence and dedicated service, our website may have never come to be.

On February 5, 2004, the local SCHE Board together with Ruth Haring, Trustee, representing The Sambodh Society, unanimously approved Katie's appointment as webmaster of Sambodh.com. Ann had served in this role for nearly four years, and, after Katie's year of 'internship,' we were confident that she could assume the role and responsibility of webmaster.

During Katie's term as webmaster, the Sambodh website underwent many improvements in design and 'behind-the-scenes' technical aspects. Katie dedicated herself to sprucing up the codes, tightening the layout, modifying the Sambodh logo wash-background to line up with the text, tweaking things here and there, changing photos on the Home page, Inspirations Page, Contact Pages, adding to the photos of books on the Publications page, and increasing the Photo Album to include the *Sri Rudra Mahayajna* and *Abhishekam*, using many of her own photos to enhance the website. Katie had an eye for improvement and detail. Consequently, during her leadership as webmaster, many aspects of the website were enhanced and every page showed signs of her touch. Katie performed exceptional service to The Sambodh Society, during her term. Seeking yet another horizon, Katie took her leave as webmaster in January 2005. In her place, Tarun Gupta, Engineering Professor (WMU) and SCHE Board Member, agreed to take up the baton and lead our website to yet another level of development.

This history is submitted to acknowledge our appreciation for all those who served, and to those who still serve, Swami Bodhananda Saraswati, our revered *guru*, The Sambodh Society, Inc., and Sambodh Center for Human Excellence, bringing our website to the standard in which it exists today.

Sincerely,

Ruth Haring
February 25, 2005