10,000 Rally in Wash. D.C. To Honor Vivekananda
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The Global Vision 2000 event held August 6th, 7th and 8th in Washington, D.C., did more than just honor the memory of Swami Vivekananda and mark the 100th anniversary of his arrival in America. Speakers boldly proclaimed that the spiritual concepts propounded by Vivekananda in the last century contain the solutions to the problems of the next. There were pressing appeals for spreading the ancient Hindu values, beginning with vasudhaiva kutumbakam--the world is a one family--the message that Swami Vivekananda brought to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

A Friday evening dinner inaugurated the three-day adult program. On Saturday, adults, youth and thousands of one-day participants --nearly 10,000 in all--were ferried by bus to Capital Center, a giant indoor 45,000-seat sports arena just outside of Washington, D.C. After a two-hour delay, the day's program proceeded relatively smoothly through a long list of speakers, a play on Swami Vivekananda, a colorful inaugural parade of delegates, an afternoon meeting of religious leaders and ended with a superb evening of music and dance which enthralled participants past midnight. Sunday's plenary sessions and work-shop meetings were less well attended by the now-exhausted delegates. Swami Iswarananda Giri gave the concluding address Sunday evening to 2,500. [See photos on pages 14-15, and youth report on page 16.]

As an event, Global Vision 2000 was more than a success--double the number of expected 3-day participants (4,000 in all) showed up, overwhelming the staff. Some adult delegates waited five hours to register the first day at the Washington Hilton. But that was a minor delay compared to the nearby concurrent youth conference, where the scene on Friday at the Omni Shoreham hotel was described as a "near riot" by one youth delegate and "utter chaos" by another. The student-run youth meeting was even less prepared than the adults for the onerous response. After some desperate replanning, students ended up sleeping eight to a room at the hotel. Fortunately the Hindu habit of discipline prevailed in the closely chaperoned

youth gathering--even the hotel's security guard said, "They were great!"

Despite some very difficult logistics, including the feeding of unexpectedly large numbers of people, the conference fulfilled all of its planned objectives: to bring together a large gathering of Hindus for a spiritual celebration of Swami Vivekananda's arrival in the West; to involve the youth in substantial numbers; and to bring eastern and western philosophers together to examine the idea of the wholeness of all creation.

Global Vision 2000 received generally unfavorable press in India and among the US ethnic papers, who characterized the event as politically motivated. Among the dozens of speakers, a few--Ashok Singhal and Murli Manohar Joshi in particular--did, in part, reiterate their well-known positions on Indian political issues. But to therefore denounce the whole event as "political" was incorrect and ignored the overwhelming spiritual and cultural content.

Dr. Mahesh Mehta, president of the sponsoring VHP of America and chairman of Global Vision 2000 said, "We planned this event three years ago, long before the current political situation in India developed." Only a part of the more than 50 speakers were associated with the VHP; and many of those attending were not VHP members, but came from the broader Hindu community. Jatinder Kumar told the Washington Post, "Bill Clinton goes to church. Does that make it politics?"

The conference's long-term impact--if there is to be any--will rest on the ideas expressed and the visions expanded, not in the statements, political or otherwise, of any one particular person. The true significance of this event lay on a level far above current politics. It lay in the crystallizing of a Hindu identity in America, and a clearer appreciation and realization of the true value of Hindu belief, tradition and customs as we enter the 21st century.

The Message of the Saints

The value of Hinduism was brought out most clearly at the "Sant Sammelan" on the afternoon of the second day. This was the largest gathering of Hindu swamis--the

spiritual leaders of Hinduism--ever held in America. Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists were also represented. Included among the saints were Swami Satchidananda, Swami Chidananda Saraswati (Muniji), Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Sant Rameshbhai Oza, Sant Morari Bapu, Acharya Sushilkumar Muni, Dada Vasvani, Swami Shantananda, Swami Brahmavidyananda, Swami Jyotirmayananda, Uma Bharti, Swami Shuddhananda, and representatives of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Yogi Bhajan and the Dalai Lama. Most spoke on the message of Swami Vivekananda, on the importance of religion and religious harmony. Young and old alike were struck with the collective wisdom of this rare group of holy men and women who had come to guide the gathered Hindus.

Muniji said, "I believe many of the creative ideas of Swami Vivekananda will flourish in the next century. Our spiritual insights and disciplines do not belong to Hindus alone, but to the whole world. No matter what has happened in the past, Hinduism stands for peace. Be proud of your culture. The whole world is a one family, the world is our home, that is Hinduism--peace, non-violence, harmony and compassion."

Swami Shuddananda, of Loknath Mission in Calcutta, addressed his remarks to the youth. "You have in your genes the blood of the rishis. Ask your parents the name of your gotra, that is the rishi whom you belong to." "Hinduism," he said, "is the religion that believes in the spiritual oneness."

Swami Dayananda Saraswati pointed out that Vivekananda was just one among the great masters of the Vedic tradition. "The Vedic tradition has never stopped producing masters, just as a potmaker shapes a pot," he noted.

J.P. Vasvani of Sadhu Vasvani Mission, stunning in his white robes, gave an eloquent oration in praise of Vivekananda, as well as an impassioned plea for vegetarianism and kindness to animals.

Swami Satchidananda taught the route to tolerance, "If you can understand the essence of any one religion, you can understand all religions."

In his message to the conference, the Dalai Lama said, "Interfaith understanding will bring about the unity necessary for all religions to work together. However, we must remember that there are no quick or easy solutions. Each religion has its own distinctive contributions to make, and each in its own way is suitable to a particular group of people as they understand life. The world needs them all. It is the spiritual duty of religious movements to acknowledge the variety of religious traditions in a world of interdependence; and that respect for the rights and sentiments of religious minorities is an essential part of this duty."

Sushil Muni, Jain leader and a founder of the VHP, said, "We are for nonviolence, and we are not for divisions of religions."

The Hinduism

Today Survey

With the assistance of the student delegation from South Africa, Hinduism Today conducted an informal survey of the conference attendees. [See page 16 for more excerpts.]

For the adults interviewed, the high point of the Capital Center event was the Sant Sammellan, and the most enjoyed speakers were Uma Bharti, Rameshbhai Oza and Swami Dayananda Saraswati. "The swamis were just wonderful. I never knew they were such sources of knowledge," said Rakesh Shreedhar of New York. The cultural shows and "lots of people" were also mentioned as valuable. A question on "personal impact" brought responses such as "Given me the attitude of having more faith in myself" (Vipul Kashyap of New Jersey), and "I will with all greatness call myself Hindu" (N.C. Desai of Bombay)--a main point of Uma Bharti's Hindi speech. Dr. Ved Kawatra of New York said the meeting had given her "moral support by seeing so many people of my own religion in a foreign land."

Useful criticism was also offered. N.C. Desai said, "The meeting discussed Swami Vivekananda and some ideals of Hinduism, but the main ideal of worshipping God was not stressed. Everybody talked about humanity." Vijay Shroff of South Carolina

said, "All swamis (without skipping) should have got opportunities to speak." A few criticized the youth for being "most interested in socializing," though the same could be said for some of the adults. One observer noted about one-third of the speakers spoke in Hindi--perhaps contributing to a exodus of youth during the Sant Sammelan as many did do not understand Hindi.

"The cultural program was excellent," said Sanjay Thakur of Rutgers University, New Jersey and many others. "The singers and dancers were too good. I loved Anuradha Paudwal!" Everyone had praise for the top-notch program of plays by the Prabhat Kala troupe from Bangalore, India. They performed dance dramas on the life of Vivekananda combining traditional Bharata Natyam dance with more modern methods of dramatic presentation, lighting and props. Nearly all of the cultural events and music were drawn from the Vaishnavite tradition.

Moon Astronaut's Cosmic Vision

One objective of the event was to bring together philosophers from East and West. One of those from the West--or more accurately, from outer space--was Astronaut Edgar Mitchell, the sixth man to walk on the moon. In his two major speeches, he had a unique impact on Global Vision 2000. The ultra-educated space explorer has found himself in the unlikely role of an evangelist working to temper the onrush of "scientific understanding" with religious insight. This transformation was the result of a transcendent experience, a kind of earthly samadhi. Upon his 1971 return voyage from the moon in the Apollo 12 spacecraft, he "suddenly experienced the universe as intelligent, loving and harmonious." "Looking inside," he recalls, "I saw that there is a greater reality than our physical experience." [See interview on page 26.]

His insights complemented the Hindu view of the world, especially the message of Vivekananda, and related well to the event's science-minded Hindu youth pondering how to integrate Hindu beliefs with their university educations. Mitchell said, "The science that has been the engine of our development has created technology, and that science has said to us that our consciousness is a byproduct of our biochemical makeup, that the universe is deterministic. That was the part of our science that I saw from space was flawed and incomplete. It does not address the spiritual side of our nature. The God of our universe is represented in our consciousness. Matter and spirit are two sides of the same coin. We must go forward in the vision of Swami Vivekananda that we are all one."

Reaffirmation of Hindu Values

The value of family, the power of women and the sense of duty were prominent among the Hindu traditions to be given renewed dignity at the conference. Dr. Madhu Jhaveri extolled the family, "Until I came to this country, I never heard the word 'rights.' Everything was 'duty.' Duty to father, to mother, to brother, to sister. Even under crushing poverty in India, the Hindu family system is intact. This is because of the harmony and sense of duty." K. S. Sudarshanji continued on the same theme, "In the duty of parents, the rights of the children are protected. In the duty of children, the rights of the parents are protected. Let us do our duty and become prosperous, and the nation will become prosperous." Swami Shuddhanada told the youth, "Ask your parents, 'How come you two are living together for the last twenty years, when our neighbors separate every two?'" The answer, he explained, lies in the Hindu family values.

The spirituality of women and their responsibility toward religion and society was an important but not deservingly prominent conference theme. Hindu women have long known the flaws in western feminism, which simply turns women into men, and are rediscovering their shakti, their spiritual power. The workshop on family concluded, "Women do not have to copy men. Women have to help men grow out of some of the wrong notions of dharma that they have." Dr. Lakshmi Kumari, president of Vivekananda Kendra, said, "Our women have forgotten to pray for the welfare of the universe. The poverty in our country is because women are not praying."

The Hindu Century?

Conference speaker David Frawley commented after the event, "Hinduism in this conference was awake, confident, strong and expansive. It revealed a power and a vision that the world must reckon with and may have to reform itself according to. Such a revitalized Hinduism is bound to be one of, if not the most important, cultural and spiritual forces for the coming century." There was no call for religious evangelism in the Western sense of building one religion at the expense of the other. K.S. Sudarshanji, Joint General Secretary of the RSS, put it aptly, "Hindus have to come forward and take the lead, go out and give a vision--replace the vision of matter with the vision of spirit."

Part of this Hindu assertiveness appears to be a kind of synergy with other movements. Hindus have taken note that their beliefs are regarded by others as a solution to the world's problems, in ecology, religious harmony, politics, education and even business management. Absent was any call to abandon the past or revise Hinduism to fit the modern times.

The vision of "Global Vision 2000" was Swami Vivekananda's perception of the whole world as a one family. Speaker after speaker reaffirmed the Hindu view of the oneness of all creation, and the Hindu tradition of tolerance and acceptance of all peoples and paths. Hindus and Hinduism came away with renewed self-respect.

Behind all the events in Washington DC swirled the forces--positive and not so positive--which have made the VHP an effective and sometimes controversial organization. Its active promotion and protection of Hinduism in many nations is applauded by many as a much-needed corrective to decades of general apathy and listlessness among Hindus. On the other hand, its proximity to India's BJP party and incursions into politics are criticized. The VHP of India has been banned by the government for kindling feelings of enmity and ill-will against Muslims. So far, the courts have upheld this ban.

Critics of Global Vision 2000 who claimed the event was intended as a political show are not entirely incorrect. Had BJP leaders L.K. Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee attended as planned, the politics might well have taken center stage. That didn't happen, and Global Vision 2000 will be remembered as an example of the dharma-centered efforts which represent the best of what the VHP is capable. Like any powerful force, they are also capable of less noble accomplishments. It can only be hoped they have learned the difference and will commit their considerable human resources toward a Hinduism that can hold its head high in all the world's assemblies.

Spectacular gathering of 10,000 Celebrates Vivekananda's Vision of oneness and religious tolerance

(Center Section Photo Essay)

In the pre-dawn hours of a new millenium, the excitement is palpable as spiritual

groups of every hue offer prayers for a new planetary thinking based on harmony not rivalry, cooperation not exploitation. Hindus, too, are eager to enter the year 2000 as loving brothers and sisters of all earth's peoples. For this, a deeper vision is needed--one that embraces, not divides. In Hinduism this vision is expressed as Vasudhaiva kutumbakam--"the entire creation is one family." In August the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America staged the unique Global Vision 2000. The five themes of the Washington event, eloquently summarized by chairman Dr. Mahesh Mehta, envision a planet: 1) where religions respect each other and matters of spirit and matter converge; 2) where man, nature and soul are viewed as expressions of the same blissful God-consciousness; 3) where children are raised with self-esteem and respect for the highest human values and excellence; 4) where societies allow individuals of both sexes and all strata the fullest expression of their potential and 5) where serving the disadvantaged is a spiritual duty.

It had a little of kumbha mela soul and serendipity. Though at the Hilton, not Haridwar and on the banks of the Potomac, not the Ganges, the saffron robes, soulful delegates and continuous stream of mountaintop consciousness all imbued it with magic.

After a Ganesha puja and lighting of the deepa, Indian-American Meeta Gajal sang the US national anthem. "The people next to me cried," her father later confided. Her powerful and youthful voice did momentarily stun the entire stadium. With the force flowing, the American and Indian flags flying and Swami Vivekananda's dominant presence radiating through a larger-than-life white statue, the avalanche of speeches began. Each prismed Vivekananda's call to "awake, arise." For one, that meant being vegetarian. For others it meant just being more proud of being Hindu. "I never knew our monks were so smart," one dumfounded 13-year-old confessed after hearing one yogi after another speak eloquently from the podium. Photos clockwise: Ganesha, Meeta Gajjar, Swami Shuddananda, Dada Vaswani, Swami Dayananda, Swami Satyanand, Swami Jyotiramayananda, Swami Satchidananda and Swami Uma Bharti beside Anjlee Pandya.

An astronaut, a Mayan shaman, a Sufi, a Unitarian, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindu religious leaders and par-liamentarians--what a quilt. Each expressed the overwhelming need that religious, political, ecological and social concerns become one wholistic concern, not four divisive ones. The Himalayas, Great Wall of China and Arabian desert no longer divide countries and belief systems. Satellite TV, CNN and 747's have closed the era of the happy ostrich with his head in the sand.

The contact of peoples with peoples, and beliefs with beliefs, will only increase, not abate. "If we start with the whole," pleaded Murli Joshi, "man and man, and man and environment, will be better friends."

Photos, clockwise: Hariya Dalmia, Murli Joshi, Dr. Lakshmi Kumari, Rameshbhai Oza, Sushil Jain Kumar, Dr. Edgar Mitchell, Dr. Mahesh Mehta and Ashok Singhal.

Culture reached out to every wavelength--from the frenetic energy of a Bangra troupe of musico-acrobats to the sky-like tranquility of classical singer Anuradha Paudwal, pure radiance of Odissi dance jewel Sonal Mansingh, enthralling choreography of Bangalore's Prabhat Kala troupe and ethereal cadence of flautist Chaurasia. Dancers Viji Prakash, Anjani Ambegaokar and daughters dazzled with speed and finesse.

Photos clockwise: Amrapali Ambegaokar, Anup Jalota, artist of Prabhat Kala troupe, Anuradha Paudwal, artists of Prabhat Kala troupe, Hariprasad Chaurasia, artist of Prabhat Kala troupe.

There were as many themes as streams running down a Kashmiri hillside in spring--oneness, India as a spiritual and scientific benefactor of humanity, inter-faith harmony, ecological stewardship and Hindu unity, to name only a few. Threaded through all of them was the paramount concern that today's youth be nurtured on the spiritual values, religious traditions and artistic refinements of culture that have been the Hindu life-breath for so long.

The theme of inter-faith harmony seemed to touch a chord in everyone. Hindu youth today especially abhor religious fighting--among sects, among faiths. They hope peoples of different beliefs can be friends and solve problems through negotiation. Thus the colorful presentation by a Mayan priest of a giant charter for the Dalai Lama, commending his example as a peace advocate with spiritual thinking very akin to Mayans, was one of the most moving and symbolic moments.

Photos clockwise: girl pledging allegiance to US flag, two youth, youth speaker Sonia Gandhi, folk dances during parade, painting of rishi/astronomer, Mayan

presentting charter for Dalai Lama.

2,000 Youth Swarm D.C.

I arrived at the Washington D.C. Hilton around 3:30pm on Friday , August 6th. Hinduism Today had asked me to attend and report on the VHP's 3-day Global Vision 2000 event, focusing especially on the Global Youth Conference. I am single and an attorney. I guess Hinduism Today figured I could draft a respectable "brief," also youngish enough to to tune into youth mode, but still old enough not to file a report in cryptic teen lingo like: "It was a totally bodacious happening, cool kids, uncool registration, good food/not, awesome artists, super soulful sadhus and overall, a total high." Young or old, or 'twixt, I was looking forward to this assignment, totally.

My first impression was a swell of saris, punjabis and kurtas in the hotel's limousine entrance way. With that clue, I wasn't surprised to find the elegant lobby taken over by hundreds of Indians, the sedate atmosphere transformed into a Delhi train station--women sitting on the floor, men frantically registering and children running all over, enjoying the pandemonium.

Then I quickly shot over to the Omni Shoreham, a separate hotel where the ambitious Hindu Students Council (HSC) were launching their colossal youth conference, dovetailed into the Global Vision 2000 event. What a scene! Two thousand and two hundred excited Hindu teens and university guys and girls cramming the lobby. It looked like a sardine-packed Tokyo subway stop at rush hour. I felt sorry for the HSC volunteer staff. They had expected between 1,200 to 1,500 at most. Then it seems the guy with all the room keys was missing. Lines got so long they twisted through each other into one mass of human spaghetti. Kids reacted two ways. For those from dead-pan, dried-up Midwest Bible-belt towns, where the only Hindu within a thousand miles is their sister, this human bathtub of Hindu teens was paradise. But for those from the New York area where there are thousands of Indians and where speed and efficiency are sacrosanct, this was not fun. After a "pilgrim's" modest dinnerfare served at a local school, the human sea drifted into a grand ballroom for a feast of fantastic cultural performances all staged by youth. By midnight, I heard all 2,200 got into a room "somewhere, somehow." Parents, note: girls were roomed on separate floors from boys with "security" posted at the stairwells.

Next day, Saturday, starting just after a bright sunrise, a non-stop stream of buses

shuttled 4,000 youth and adults from the two hotels to the gigantic Capital Center for the major event--a parade, talks by swamis and spiritual dignitaries and cultural show. Another 5,000-plus Hindus converged in cars from neighboring states. [See Global Vision 2,000 article page 1.] It was beautiful hearing Sanskrit slokas about God and oneness sonorously resonate through million-megawatt speakers that usually blast out near-savage squeals of "heavy metal" rock stars. Unfortunately, many of the youth didn't stay inside the main arena to hear all the spiritual talks, but rather circled around the walkway concourse, socializing. It was reminiscent of a custom in Latin America, where the boys and girls stroll around the town square in opposite directions, as parents sit inside on benches engrossed in more serious matters. Observing my almost motherly concerns, I appreciated the wise insight from a girl, Jyoti Pandya: "Sure a lot of kids were into socializing, but in the future, when they hear the name Swami Vivekananda, they will say, 'Yeah, I know him; he was great. I went to this big event honoring him.' That's still important. And how many parents were really interested in deep Vedantic things when they were teenagers?" And I have to add, hundreds of youths, some who I met and talked to, thoroughly took advantage of all the richness offered during the three potent days.

Dr. Lakshmi Kumari of the Vivekananda Kendra, India, inaugurated the youth conference, saying boldly: "I appreciate that a lady is inaugurating this Youth Conference, for Vivekananda had the highest respect for women. Our future is safer in the heart of the mother than in the mind of the father," subtly alluding to ages of masculine aggressiveness.

Sunday brought the youth back to Omni Shoreham for an engaging day of well set up "theme sessions." Topics covered all aspects of applying Vedanta in modern life from how quantum physics and Hinduism see eye-to-eye, to the role of women in Hindu society. Swamis, scholars, scientists and youth led the partly discussion-oriented sessions.

The day ended with upbeat messages from the HSC youth leaders to their peers to go back home proud of being Hindu and study the religion deeper! Suban Mehta jibed them: "Some of you figured: 'Three days in D.C., in a different hotel from your parents! Wow! What a place to party!' Others did come to learn. All be aware, you guys and girls are the Hindu future. Do you think you have enough knowledge to answer the questions your kids will ask?"

Then the kindly, and decidedly fatherly, VHP president Dr. Mahesh Mehta took the

podium. He looked like he wanted to hug the whole room of youth as he poured praise on the organizers and told even most fidgety pubescents with their baseball hats twisted on backwards how proud he was of all of them for being there in the name of dharma.

Kudos and Criticisms

Aside from the monstrous logistical and emotional challenges of bridling an end-of-the-summer herd of youth, I definitely felt too many of the speakers spoke in generalities. Our generation needs specifics, concrete explanations of ethereal truths. Also, what could have been very effective would have been to offer the youth opportunities to act: like making a commitment to doing volunteer work to demonstrate Vivekananda's selfless theme, or enroll in classes or courses for deeper study of Hinduism.

Also, one of the big assumptions made by organizers was that the youth really know what Hinduism is. That's a big, wrong assumption. Many of us know but bits and pieces about some customs and traditions, but not the real philosophical underpinnings. There's a big difference.

Another thing that bothered me was I kept hearing the message that "We are one" and "We are all brothers and sisters," but thinking in the back of my mind how many Hindu parents gracefully accept their child marrying "out of caste?" Also we cannot talk about being "one," when the caste system has evolved into such a blemish in Hindu society. This area should not have been neglected.

Also I kept hearing subtle attacks on the West. This "West" is my generation's birthplace and home and also the new home of our parents. I felt good finally when we showed our pride of being Americans by singing the National Anthem before the Indian one.

Overall, the magnitude of the youth conference was very impressive and deserves major recognition, especially the volunteers who I heard worked for months everyday on this event and didn't sleep for the three days while it was on. Also, the

vision it took to bring this together as an international forum for Hindu youth deserves resounding applause. By the way, there were youth delegates from 48 US states and countries as far away as South Africa, Nepal and Sweden. In fact, all the drawbacks of the conference were because sponsors didn't have the heart to turn kids away. The variety of speakers was great. I really liked the idea of bringing spiritual leaders from other faiths, like the Buddhist, Mayan shaman and Sufi and scientists as well. I liked the idea of emphasizing Vivekananda's words "Arise, Awake" calling for people to shrug off religious apathy, and be proud, active members of not only our society, but citizens of the universe as well. Inviting leaders of other faiths to say an interfaith prayer was an excellent way of demonstrating Hindus' sincere respect for all other paths to the One.

But above all, I have to say that what I enjoyed most was meeting other people who, like me, have grown up in this country and are striving to preserve their Hindu identity. Seeing so many Hindus at once gives one the courage to make a commitment to the Hindu vision of the world.

--By Shuba Krishnan (above),

Washington D.C., along with other reports compiled by Hinduism Today staff

Youth Feedback

"I came with a delegation of nine from the National Hindu Youth Federation of South Africa to attend this event and the Chicago Parliament. We immensely enjoyed the whole gathering and especially the opportnity to befriend members of the Hindu Students Council who graciously hosted us in D.C."

--Pravesh Hurdeen, South Africa

"What these events do is like make us feel more 'Oh yeah, everyone here is bonding' and makes you feel that you should have more pride in your culture and when you have more pride others are inclined to respect you more." --Amish Patel,

15, Illinois

"I am from India. I had no idea Indian American youth were interested in Hinduism. What really struck me was that many really were. That really changed my perception of them. Now I want to contribute rather than criticize."--Sanjay Thakur, New Jersey

"Dharma--I finally learned the meaning of this and how to live it. The event made me jump from a 1 to 10, on a scale of 10. Honestly, this program has increased my understanding of Hinduism. Coming from a very sparsely populated town where there is not any Indian or Hindu influence, this experience made me realize and appreciate my religion and culture. I am proud that I am a Hindu. Also now I feel a special bond with U.S. Hindu youth as my brothers and sisters." --Jenny Parmar, 16, born in India

"I benefitted just from the general atmosphere, because it was an atmosphere of spiritual growth." --Sonia Gandhi, 17, New Jersey

"It gave me hope for world peace. I could see people cared. I found a common thread between us all. Astronaut Edgar Mitchell was the best speaker. He has a lot of wisdom."--Manisha Shroff, South Carolina

"The greatest part of the whole program was meeting other youth from all over the world that are living in a generation where the fashion is to deny being a Hindu, where just calling yourself a Hindu runs the risk of being called a fanatic. One of the major objectives of this conference was not to teach fanaticism but rather spread the healthy pride of being a Hindu. This is important especially living in a society famous for being a melting pot and melting away the identities of individuals." --Rakhi Israni, 17, Texas

"The most interesting thing was the discussion on family in the 21st century, because it reinforced my basic values of being a Hindu--e.g. vegetarianism, extended family etc. The Swamijis' and Sants' speeches were a great enlightenment. I think these youth meetings have really helped keep our Hindu

values strong."

--Hetal Vashi, 22, Connecticut

"The importance of sacrifice and selflessness struck me. Our religion is based on doing without wanting something back. This whole program gave me a broader outlook of my religion. The Saturday program was very interesting because I got to listen to so many gurus. I think the youth are starting to realize that they need to know about their culture and their heritage and that they don't need to be ashamed or quiet about being a Hindu. Also we need to know the significance of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The youth do not know how or why the stories are so important."

--Kavita Vashi, 16, Connecticut

"We came to meet our future wives."

--Pratin Shah, Massachussets

"We all enjoyed the discussion theme sessions, e.g. The Cosmos is One Family"--Niharika Gupta, 17, Texas

Adult Reactions To Main Event

"The Global Vision 2000 event helped show me the correlation between Hinduism and other religious systems, thereby showing how everything can evolve and function together. It had a very positive effect. It gave me the attitude of having more faith in oneself. Dada Vaswani made the deepest impression on me. Dr. Mitchell's speech about how science and spirituality complement each other was also inspiring." --Vipul Kashyap, New Jersey

"This meeting has made me understand Hinduism in a much broader way and made me be proud to be a Hindu and work for my religion. The swamis were just wonderful.

--Rakesh Shrudh, New York

"This meeting has had a great personal impact on me. It has greatly added to the little I have known about Hinduism. Also, the calibre of the event has itself brought me to a period in my life for a careful examination of my own spirituality." -- In Ho Lee

"This conference has affected our family by recognizing that Hinduism is a way of life.

The overall highest point of the program was the bringing together of a large Hindu community to make them aware of the pride of being a Hindu--despite a lack of good organization of the conference."

--Dr. Mahendra Kawatra, New York

"This meeting advanced Hinduism by teaching people to learn from Vivekananda and to be a Hindu without being ashamed of it." --Vijay Shroff, South Carolina