

Hari OM
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“Am I this body? Or am I different from this body? How was I plunged into this terrible worldliness? The seeker of Truth should constantly enquire into these truths. I am not the body, nor the senses, nor yet the mind. All these are objects seen. The seer is the Self, eternal and unchanging. I am the auspicious One, witness to all states and duties. ”

Source: *Ishvara Darshan*

“The three types of equipment—body, mind, and intellect (BMI)—constitute the matter envelopments around our inner Self. The mind and intellect are but subtler forms of matter. By itself, the BMI are inert and insentient. The divine Principle, the Self or Spirit, is what animates the equipment and causes it to function. The pure Self, without such equipment, has no expression of Its own. It is the marriage of the two, Spirit (*purusha*) and matter (*prakrti*), that enables the manifestation of life as birth, activity, and growth.”

Source: *Self-Unfoldment*

“When we wake up to our true Self, all our sufferings end, and we become totally different persons. At present, we are living under a spell of ignorance and wrong understanding. Our [current system of] education is strengthening these false concepts instead of removing them. . . . What are these wrong concepts? They are many, but the main one is thinking oneself to be the physical body. When I talk about myself or introduce myself, if I refer to myself as being the physical body, this is the greatest blunder that anyone can commit.”

Source: *Right Thinking*

SPIRITUAL TRAILS

Devotion, Grace, Truth, and/on the Spiritual Quest

by Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda

Q&A originally printed in the Mananam Series, Devotion: Loving God

What is devotion?

Devotion is defined in various ways by various teachers, but the one thing that is common is the element of love. A mind totally turned toward God in love, demanding nothing—not even liberation—is a mind filled with devotion. A constant flow of thoughts in love toward the Supreme is devotion. Longing for no one else, nothing else but the Lord, this attitude of the heart is love. This state is called exclusive love (*ananya prema*) and this total love for the Lord is devotion according to Sage Narada, the author of *Narada Bhakti Sutras*.

Does divine grace act when we reach the limit of the finite and try to attain the Infinite?

The Lord—the Divine—and His grace are not two separate things; they are one and the same. The sun and sunlight can never be two different things; sunlight is the very nature of the sun. Sweetness is the nature of sugar. Heat is the nature of fire. The Lord *is* divine Grace.

Therefore, God cannot give grace until you allow Him to enter your life. To invoke Him is to invite His Grace. To the extent the heart is open for the inflow of the Higher, to that extent we are under the grace of the Lord. When we try to reach the outer limits of the finite and enter the realm of the Infinite, it is God's grace alone that functions in those dark and dreary moments before the cheerful dawn.

What is the highest Moral Truth?

Love is the greatest morality given to man, and hence, "Love thyself" is the greatest moral injunction that all scriptures and Vedas tirelessly repeat. Unless the student is prepared to receive this great advice, however, he is apt to misunderstand the great Vedic injunction as an advice to love the body, and to cater to all low thoughts and ideas. "Love thyself" does not mean loving the body or meekly obeying the mind and intellect. The body, mind, and intellect are gross matter envelopments that seemingly limit the illimitable supreme Consciousness, which is the real Self in us all. By identifying with our false matter envelopments, we have projected ourselves into the world as a separate ego, and all our doubts on morality and spirituality have come to confuse us.

The shifting of our identification to the real Self is automatically living the highest moral and spiritual life. This is accomplished through love, in love, as love. Love alone is the law and the life of the Self. Self-Realization is the experience of love in its absolute nature. You have loved yourself the most. "Realize thyself." And thereafter you know nothing but love for the outside world. There is no greater moral truth than Love.

When the devotee's mind melts at the contemplation of the loving form and the infinite qualities of the Lord, in the warmth of His supreme single-pointed love, the sublime fusion of finite with the Infinite takes place. At that supreme moment of bliss in the dynamic experience of the Whole, there is no

individualistic part beyond the Whole that can converse with It. At the time of God-consciousness, that is, during the vision of the Lord, in the infinite embrace of the Reality, the unreal totally fades away.

It is ignorance that gives the devotee . . . the false notion that he is merely a part of the whole and that he is the seeker. With *Ishwara darshan* comes the real Knowledge that God alone is, that the I-concept is false. The devotee, in a flash of illumination, realizes that it was only the Lord of his heart within him that played the great divine play of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching the world of objects, which, in themselves, are also nothing but the Lord's manifestations. When the ego dies away, what remains is nothing but an infinite, homogeneous Bliss experience that is God. Where there is God, there the I-sense cannot be. Where the I-sense is, there, God is indeed far away.

How can an aspirant attain transparent sincerity and earnestness in the quest for God?

Sincerity and earnestness are the flowers of the Love plant that grows in the garden of the heart. In cultivating these flowers, the gardener has to prepare the soil, sow the seed, water the plant, and protect the crop. Then, it will blossom forth in the thrills of the springtime.

The imperfections in the world of objects provide us with the sorrows and despairs of life, which plough the field of the heart. *Japa*, the repetition of the Lord's names, is the sowing of the right seed. With regular and intense meditation upon the form of the Lord of his heart, the seeker waters the seedlings. Truthfulness (*satyam*), non-injury (*ahimsa*) and celibacy (*brahmacharya*) constitute three posts around the plant. Truthfulness is at the intellectual level, non-injury is at the mental level, and celibacy is at the physical level. Living up to these principles constitutes the right conduct of life. Along with these principles, the fence of *dharma* (the rules of moral and ethical living) should be put up to guard it from the ravages of grazing animals!

In time, the plant grows, and in its own maturity, in the springtime (as the heart gains in the Lord's grace) it blooms forth with noble flowers of sweet-scented sincerity and earnestness. The buzzing bee of *mumukshutvam* (an all-consuming eagerness to break the chains of limitations and reach the freedom of the Beyond) would then kiss these glorious flowers into their pregnant fulfillment, their fruits. Verily, there is nothing nobler than these fruits, which represents Bliss absolute.

Who is better: A man who strives for Self-realization (*samadhi*), or one who serves society thinking of every being as a visible form of God?

This question is exhaustively answered in *Ishavasyopanishad*. The tragedy of humanity today is that too many people serve the world thinking that they are helping their generation. Unfortunately, one of the curses of the world is the so-called service rendered by men who are unfit to serve.

Selfless, dedicated service to the world in an attitude of worship is the way and the path. To bring out the faculties that have been given to us, fully and entirely, to serve [all] . . . is the greatest adoration that man can pay to his Creator. Thus, in the beginning, the seeker discovers in selfless activity a means to purify himself, whereby his mind expands to accommodate the whole universe of creatures. By this process, his ego, with its vanities, lusts, greed, and selfishness, are all removed. A mind so purified comes to manifest its powers of contemplation, and thus the seeker enhances his capacity to meditate.

Meditating under this stepped-up momentum, the person rises into new heights of self-discovery of the Oneness of life, and this, in turn, makes him more and more a dedicated servant of mankind.

In short, truly selfless actions help one's meditation, and successful meditation makes the meditator more and more selfless and loving. In this mutual synthesis, the seeker marches ahead into the portals of the Self, wherein he experiences *samadhi*. After this Self-realization, service of the world is not a

means to an end, but the fulfillment of wisdom. He cannot but act, as the birds cannot but sing in springtime. Such great men alone have ever successfully served society. All others in the name of service pour out but death and disaster, sorrow and destitution into society with their so-called schemes and plans.

Why should we serve society and the nation? Why should we share our earnings with the downtrodden? The answer, as discovered by our rishis, is because action is inevitable; we cannot keep quiet for even a moment. Every living organism must work. When we apply for leave and stay at home, we still do a lot of work, such as disciplining the children, quarreling with our spouse, and so on. Even when lying in bed, our mind wanders everywhere, seething with activity. When we are asleep, we are dreaming, breathing, pulsating with life. There is absolutely no escape from work. But we have a choice in selecting the nature of work, either good or bad. It is here that we have to exercise our faculty of discrimination.

. . . Our rishis considered the whole cosmos as one, and all things in it as limbs of this cosmos. Though all of us belong to different castes, colors, states and nations, and though we differ physically, intellectually, and emotionally, the presence of life is in all. So when we serve others, we are merely serving ourselves! What we do to others will come back to us.

The world is giving us so much, so many comforts, and so many facilities. How can we repay this debt? Whatever we may do to repay, still we will be deeply indebted to society. Our attitude should be that even if we have to suffer, everyone else should be joyous. With this spirit of service, life will be full. Whatever we have must be shared with others.

What are the three conditions necessary for devotion?

In Verse 20 of Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna points out three conditions that are absolutely necessary for devotion to yield its promised dividend.

"Fixing their thought on Me:" Thought is the content of our subtle body. Both the mind and intellect are nothing but thoughts. It is not sufficient if they leisurely wander around the concept of the Lord, but they have actually to penetrate, delve into, merge, and ultimately dissolve themselves to become the very ideal perfection that the Lord represents. The word used in this verse indicates not merely a thought contact, but an actual thought penetration. In fact, human thought takes the form of, gathers the fragrance of, and even puts on the glow of the qualities in the objects of its contemplation. Thus, when a devotee's thoughts gush forward in sincerity, in a newly found urge of irrepressible love toward the Lord, the devotee, as a personality, ends for the time being, and he himself acquires the glow and beauty of the Lord of his heart.

"Ever self-controlled, worship Me:" The second condition necessary for a devotee to accomplish his evolution through the path of devotion is that he must have sufficient balance in himself to exercise regular self-control while worshipping the Lord. The mind, by its very nature, will always try to run away, and the art of keeping thoughts balanced at a point of concentration is called self-control.

The Sanskrit word *upasana*, though it can be translated as worship, should not be misunderstood by the superficial suggestion that automatically comes to us when we hear the word worship. True *upasana* is an inward act of attunement with the higher Principle, so as to get ourselves completely merged with It.

"With supreme faith:" Faith is generally understood as blind belief, but blind belief is not *shraddha*. *Shraddha* is a belief in something I do not know, so that I may come to know what I believe. Without

developing this faculty, a devotee may not succeed sufficiently in bringing about the divinity in himself even after years of practice.

Thus, three main conditions are enumerated in this stanza as essential and unavoidable for one to become a true devotee: 1) perfect faith, 2) steadfastness in worship, and 3) merging one's mind totally in the concept of the Lord. If these are accomplished in anyone, the Lord considers him as a most steadfast devotee.

What should be the attitude of a devotee when offering gifts to the Lord?

An offering can be efficient only when it is accompanied by two required conditions: a) devotion and b) purity of mind. To the extent these conditions are absent, all offerings are mere economic waste and superstition-breeding false beliefs. If properly done, making offerings to the Lord can serve as a good vehicle to tread the spiritual path of self-development.

How can we remember God throughout our everyday activities?

Lord Krishna says in the *Gita*, "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practice as austerity, O Kaunteya, do it as an offering to Me" (9.27).

Through all activities of life, one can constantly live in the spirit of devout offering unto the Supreme. Throughout the *Gita*, it has been consistently insisted upon that one's mental attitude is of supreme importance, much more than the mere physical act. This is a fact that ordinarily seekers forget. All acts of perception and our reactions to the perceived—be they on the physical, mental, or intellectual levels—can be devout offerings unto Him. This is not an unnecessary make belief or a mere fancied exaggeration, nor is it in any way difficult for an individual to practice. The one Self revels everywhere—in the teacher, the devotee, and the Lord. In all of life's transactions, we behave, act, and deal with names and forms; all of them are upheld only by the Self. To remember the Self during all transactions of life is to remember the Substratum.

In a cloth shop where there are cotton clothes of different colors and sizes, textures and prices, the shopkeeper is advised always to remember that he is dealing with cotton clothing. This cannot be very difficult for any good shopkeeper, and it will be safe and profitable for him to remember this fact, for it would prevent him from entertaining misconceptions and thereby either charging the exorbitant prices of woolens, or selling off his goods too cheaply!

Just as cotton is in all cloth, gold in all ornaments, the Self is the essential Substance in all names and forms. A devotee who can constantly remember the Divine in all his contacts in life alone is the one who can give to life the reverence it deserves.

It is a law that as you give unto life, so shall life give unto you. Smile at life and life smiles at you; frown at life and life frowns at you. Approach life with due reverence and respect, born out of cognition of the divine Essence in it, and life shall respect and revere you. When all activities are performed in this spirit of offering, not only does our love for the Supreme increase, but our entire life also becomes sanctified with a noble purpose and a divine aim.

In the context of the *Gita's* insistence on single-pointedness of mind, and devoted contemplation of the Self, seekers are provided with an efficient and secret method by which they can remember the Supreme constantly, not in the deep jungles or secret caves, but right in the field of life's contentions.

How can we reconcile the apparently conflicting ideas of self-surrender and self-assertion, the former of the *bhaktas* and the latter of the Vedantins?

The apparent conflicts need not be reconciled; the apparent has to be rejected. Self-surrender and self-assertion are merely two sides of the same coin. The *bhakta* surrenders his self: the ego. The Vedantin asserts his Self: the divine Light within him.

Thus, a devotee grows in his God-love to ultimately become a true Vedantin, and a Vedantin starts his career in *bhakti*. It is self-surrender alone that can evolve us to the state of self-assertion. Hence, there is no conflict at all between self-surrender and self-assertion, as you suspect.

By surrendering the delusory sense of separateness, the yogi in his perfection realizes the true nature of the Self in him. The principles of self-surrender and self-assertion seem as conflicting ideas only to the novice uninitiated into the Creed of Love, which is the natural and the logical process in the noble science of *Brahma Vidya*. Negate the ego through surrender, and once this is achieved, the Super-man so born necessarily comes to assert his divine nature.

Om Upasana
by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda

Please explain the term "*upasana*."

The literal meaning of *upasana* is sitting near: *upa* (near) and *asana* (sitting). Sitting near doesn't mean physically sitting near someone; *upasana* is done only by the mind. When we sit near someone, there is the possibility of imbibing the qualities of that person, just as wood kept near a fire catches fire. So, meditation on a particular deity or ideal should result in the meditator imbibing the qualities of that ideal. If we succeed in that, only then can we say that we have done real *upasana*.

Upasanas can have different forms. If, for example, we do *upasana* of Shri Ramachandraji, then we should imbibe His qualities, particularly those of abidance and steadfastness in *dharma*.

What is *guru upasana*?

Literally, *guru upasana* means sitting near a [spiritual] teacher. If you think of it in a physical way; when a guru sits, he looks out at the world. Since the students are seated facing the teacher, they do not see what he sees in front of him. Suppose a student gets up and sits next to the teacher. What will happen? From a physical standpoint, he will see what the teacher sees. *Guru upasana* means to tune our minds to the vision of the teacher so that we are able to look at the world as the teacher does. It is our attunement with the ideal that is the real purpose of *upasana*.

How can we practice *upasana* for our spiritual growth?

Upasana can be a spiritual practice, a kind of exercise. This kind of *upasana* has a particular meaning and purpose—to maintain a steady and single-pointed flow of thought toward the ideal. Here, sitting

near is done with the mind. The mind constantly dwells upon the ideal, excluding all other thoughts. Like a stream of oil being poured, the flow is continuous, steady, unbroken. In the same way, to maintain that one thought of our deity or ideal is called *upasana*. Through this we achieve not only single-pointedness and concentration but also purity of mind because we are thinking of the Lord.

A person can practice this kind of *upasana* every day for a definite period of time, say, 20 minutes, half an hour, or one hour, depending on one's capacity. Usually our mind is distracted; to bring it to a single point and to think steadily along only one particular line of thought for a long period of time is called *upasana*.

Are there different types of *upasanas*?

Upasana can be of two kinds, *saguna* (with attributes) and *nirguna* (devoid of attributes). In *saguna upasana*, we take an object and superimpose a lofty ideal on it, and then meditate on it. The symbol may be an ordinary object made of stone or wood, but we do not regard it as stone or wood. We may see the idol is an object, but we don't think of it as an object; we think only of the Lord.

Our mind is not able to immediately comprehend the formless, nameless, and attributeless. Thus, in *saguna upasana*, there is a deliberate superimposition of a lofty ideal on an ordinary object. Here duality of the meditator, and that which is meditated upon, remains.

In *nirguna upasana* that which is meditated upon is my own Self, my own true nature. This *upasana* is done only with the sense of identity with the Self and is really of the nature of knowledge.

What is the difference between knowledge and *upasana*?

Knowledge is a matter of fact, whereas *upasana* is a matter of faith. If we take the object as the Lord, then it is based on faith, isn't it? In *saguna upasana* we are deliberately hold on to the superimposition. The scriptures describe the deity in this or that form, and that is how we have to meditate upon it; we cannot create our own version. Thus, this *upasana* depends on faith. The result of *upasana* occurs after some time.

In knowledge we have to know the object as it is; a stone is to be known as stone. Knowledge depends upon the means of knowledge, and the result of knowledge is immediate. For example, when we open our eyes and see an object we immediately have knowledge of it, as both the object and the means of knowledge (our eyes) are there. This is the difference between knowledge and *upasana*.

Why is *Om* also known as *pranava*?

Om represents both *saguna* as well as *nirguna*, Reality. There is the absolute Reality, which is nameless, formless, and attributeless. And That alone manifests as the cause of this entire world, which in Vedic language is called as *saguna Brahman*. The absolute Reality is called *nirguna Brahman*. *Om* represents both these aspects and that is why it is called as *pranava*.

Please explain the meaning of *pranava*.

The word *pranava* comes from the Sanskrit root, *nu*. *Nu* means to salute, to praise. With the help of *pranava*, one can praise or meditate on the deity of one's own choice—the manifested aspect of Reality that is *saguna*, or the absolute Reality that is *nirguna*.

How does *Om* represent both the manifest and the unmanifest?

This entire world is manifest as gross, subtle, or both. It is experienced by us as various names and forms. All these names are nothing but words; words are nothing but alphabets; alphabets are nothing but sounds; and sounds are only vowels and consonants.

Of the alphabets, the first letter is A. According to the science of phonetics, the sounds that we produce all start from the throat and range between the throat and the lips. In this way, the first sound is A (parting of the lips) and the last sound is M (closing of the lips). A stands for the vowels, and M stands for the consonants. And different modifications of that A are pointed out by the sound U.

The Upanishads say that all words are nothing but A. And given different modifications, they become U. Per Sanskrit rules, A and U combine to sound as O. Thus, AUM [the basic, all-inclusive] sound becomes *Om*. The entire world is nothing but names, and all names are nothing but words. And words consist only of these vowels and consonants that are represented by A, U, M.

Thus, when we chant *Om*, it represents the entire manifested world. When one chanting is over, what remains is silence. That silence represents the *nirguna*, the attributeless Reality. From that silence alone is sound produced, and again, when the sound is gone, silence remains. Against the background or canvas of silence alone is sound heard. This silence is therefore there all the time, when we speak and when we don't speak. This is why *Om* represents both *nirguna* and *saguna*.

REFLECTIONS

Satsang
Swami Ishwarananda

Fill yourself with showers of satsang.
The clouds are the saints.

Follow them as they move about,
For they shower only
His grace upon you.
Receive it with faith.
Dive within in deep contemplation.

Like the scorching heat of the sun,
ignore not the life situations
that bring sorrows and setbacks.
Face them squarely
as they attempt to dry up your knowledge.

Fill yourself again, again, and again.
Dive deeper and deeper
Until you reach the depth of Peace
that passeth all understanding.

A Cleansing by Chetana Neerchal

A pile of dated magazines unread, but not recycled	Cases of trinkets and garments seldom worn, but not donated	for the moments to fill my pen,
Boxes of stale cookies little tasted, but not trashed	Emotions never flushed . . . how can they be cleansed?	waiting and wanting to be cleansed.
	This part of me that waits,	

Essence of Spiritual Life

Based on a Q&A session with Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda

A Vedantic student once asked Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda, "What is spirituality?" Guruji replied:

All of you are seekers on the spiritual path and students of Vedanta, so you must understand this clearly. There are three very important points to remember. All of us see the world with our eyes, and we see the plurality and the variety in it. We see the differences among things. However, there is one thing that is common to all; and seen from this angle, everything is one and non-different.

Plants, animals, birds and human beings seem to be different from one another, but the life principle, the Consciousness factor in them, is one and the same. We should remain aware of this oneness (*ekata*) and retain it in our vision of the world. If we see someone as different from us, we may have attachment, aversion, or fear, but if we have the vision of oneness we will see the other as our own, and fear or hatred will not arise. Hence, in spiritual life, we should have the vision of oneness. Though our gross eyes may see the differences, our spiritual vision will show our own Self in all.

In worldly transactions, we have to cognize differences such as mother, father, friend, etc., but from the spiritual point of view, we must remember that they are all none but our own Self. This knowledge and awareness of Oneness should be retained through all our activities. This is the first point to remember.

Our life is full of activities. We have to work. The *Bhagavad Gita* points out that no one can remain without working even for a second. The problem is that while doing the work we get caught up in it. So the second point to remember is that there should be detachment while doing any work. There should be oneness (*ekata*) in vision and detachment (*asangata*) in action.

We should not have likes or dislikes in our activities. We should perform whatever duties come our way with a calm mind, without labeling them as pleasant or unpleasant. A judge has to perform his duty, whether it is to release a prisoner or give him the death penalty. We should not let our personal likes and dislikes interfere with the performance of our duty. In military life one simply obeys orders; there is no question of likes or dislikes. If you are posted in Ladakh, you have to go there without a murmur.

So we should go ahead with the work in hand, with the thought that this is our duty at the moment; this is our worship of the Lord. This is called detachment in action.

Whatever activities we undertake will produce results. In accepting the results, we should have an attitude of *samata*, or mental equipoise. We should not become unduly happy or unhappy with the results of action. We often tend to react intensely. A man won a half a million through the lottery. He managed to maintain balance, but he became worried about how to disclose it to his wife, thinking she might faint or have a heart attack out of sheer joy. A friend offered to help him.

He went and playfully asked the man's wife, "*Bhabhi-ji*, what will you do if you win half a million in the lottery?"

She also replied playfully, "I will give half of it to you." The friend reeled in shock and fainted!

The *Gita* says we should practice the yoga of keeping an equipoised mind. This is the third point to remember.

In our vision we should have *ekata* (oneness); in our actions, *asangata* (detachment); in receiving the results of action, *samata* (equipoise). If we have all these, we will find *prasannata* (happiness). This is the essence of *adhyatmikata* (spiritual life).

Gita Reveals Freedom from Dependency

Talk for senior citizens by Brahmachari Prabodh Chaitanya; transcribed by David Brown; edited for print

Absorbing and living the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* can be likened to strengthening one's immune system. In order to maintain good health, we need to take care of our body's immunity. For this, we take precautions to not get sick from germs or poor hygiene and we take flu shots. Studying the *Gita* can be seen as taking care of our inner equipment so that we do not get infected by outer events and our responses to them.

One reason for Arjuna's distraught state was that he could not imagine his life without his relatives and friends with whom he would be fighting against on the battlefield. Like Arjuna, we have to learn the very important lesson that our happiness does not lie with others—our children, other family members, and friends, for example. A *sadhu's* life is only fulfilled by abiding in his own Self. Arjuna had become dependent on the presence of loved ones in his life. Through the teachings of the *Gita*, we can free ourselves from such dependencies.

To achieve independence, freedom from being disturbed by the ever-changing conditions of the world, we first need to know that "I," our true Self, is not the body. There is no arrival or departure for the Self. Secondly, we need to understand that even without any expression through a body-mind-intellect, I am always present. Thirdly, we need to understand that I am merely a witness of life's changing experiences; the seer is independent of the seen. These points help us see the Self as *nityam*, *satyam*, and *sakshi*.

The *Gita* teaches that the cause of all sorrow, anger, and other emotions unsettling the mind is attachment, which is born of ignorance. The Self is ever pure and free from attachments, karmas, and their effects. Identified with the body, one is bound in the karmic cycle. Established in the Self, one sees one's true nature as Joy. The essential teaching of the *Gita* is Freedom, wherein one remains established as the Self.

FEATURE

50 Years of Sandeepany

by Acharya Vivek Gupta

Based on the article originally printed in Hinduism Today, January 2010; edited for print herein

Chinmaya Mission's Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Mumbai will celebrate its 50th anniversary on January 9, 2013 with a special day of ceremonies. The 300+ Chinmaya Mission Acharyas will all be invited to attend this event to celebrate Pujya Gurudev's exemplary and astounding vision, and the knowledge, solace, and blessings received by one and all from this sacred institute of spiritual learning.

Some great men try to improve the world by changing the outer settings of economic and societal conditions. A few greater men try to change the processes and the vision of the masses. The very greatest achieve a complete and lasting transformation, one individual at a time. This was Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda's vision when he formed *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya* in 1963.

Sandeepany was the name of Lord Krishna's guru; *Sadhanalaya* means "place of *sadhana*," or disciplined spiritual practice. Here, the *acharyas* (teachers) of Chinmaya Mission are made. The two-year residential course begins and ends on *Ganesha Chaturthi*, and includes rigorous training and scriptural studies. A year later, a new course begins. I was honored to join the 13th Course that commenced in 2005 and was taught by none other than Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda.

I was one applicant among 700. Of these, 160 were interviewed, and 70 were selected. In August of 2005, 60 of us arrived at the Mumbai ashram. We were a perfect sampling of the global diaspora, within seven countries, ranging five decades in age, and almost all unmarried. We were dispatched to our assigned buildings—unmarried men (*brahmacharis*) in *Vivekalaya* and unmarried women in *Yashodalaya* (*brahmacharinis*). Householders and older participants were termed as guest students.

Cauvery Bhalla of Mumbai said, "It is our common experience to get an object only to figure out that's not what we truly wanted. It is also common to come across people who know exactly what they don't want, yet are unable to point out what it is they do want. So, life goes on, endlessly chasing one object after another, yet feeling no satisfaction. This has been the problem of humanity since time immemorial."

Brahmachari Atharvana Chaitanya (CM Ahmedabad) told me his initial impression of *Sandeepany*: "This holy institute of Vedantic studies offers just the right environment for any seeker of knowledge to blossom. Everyone is given enough space in a non-judgmental atmosphere" to be able to drop all conditionings and strive toward the highest goal of Being.

The Day Begins

Our first day of classes was September 7, and I was rattled. Never had I witnessed such oppressive heat and rain as Mumbai had to offer during this monsoon season. Never had I lived in a place where everyone seemed to know what they were doing, except me.

Sudha Shastry from Sydney, Australia, I found out, was equally lost, sighing, "I did not know what I had signed up for." We gathered in our freshly donned white outfits for the inauguration ceremony. Pujya Swami Purushottamananda, Pujya Swami Brahmananda, and other senior *acharyas* welcomed and blessed the class. Swami Purushottamananda declared, "It is time to forget about your dress and your address."

Ring, ring, ring, went the 4am bell—for 750 consecutive mornings. Although I had no problem with this discipline, some of us found it a hardship even after two years. Our first class of the day was Vedic chanting, at 5:30 a.m. with Brahmachari Samvid. Born in Kerala, Samvidji spent many years as a wandering monk in the Himalayas, and eventually found himself at *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya*.

We were fortunate that Pujya Guruji had selected an experienced Samvidji to live among us and guide us through our challenges. “A scholar and teacher par excellence,” said Shibani Khorana of Delhi, “Samvidji kept us engaged with his innovative teaching style and approachable nature.”

Lacking any previous voice training, I found the Sanskrit chanting with its high and low pitches quite a struggle. Vedic chanting was a *sadhana* I had never been exposed to in the West, but eventually, I came to love it as a fine art.

The chanting set the mood for the next class of Vedantic philosophy. Like all classes during the course, it was taught in English. Having casually grown up within Chinmaya Mission, I arrogantly thought I knew what Vedanta is and who a guru is. In retrospect, I knew nothing. I joined *Sandeepany* to study spirituality. Yet, at the time, I had no idea what was special about Vedanta versus what I had learned in high school or university. Soon, though, I came to understand that every class I had ever taken, at any level of schooling, was objective science—a study of the outside world. What I was now studying in the ashram was subjective science—a study of myself. I was humbled by the realization that I knew so much about the world and so little about my body, mind, and soul.

Cauvery had said to me, “Imagine walking into a city of mirrors—a city where every inch, the roads we walk on, the walls that surround us, are covered with mirrors. Every step in that city would be an effortless discovery of a new facet about oneself. Some facets would reveal beauty, and others ugliness. *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya* is such a city of mirrors.”

Delving into Vedantic Scriptures

Every morning at 7 a.m. and every afternoon at 4 p.m., Pujya Guruji plunged us into the mystical language of Vedic scriptures, breaking our habits of limited thinking in the process. Mentally and intellectually raised to heights I had never imagined, I was ready to listen to him all day, every day. Swamiji personally taught 80% of our Vedanta classes over the two years, an extraordinary commitment.

The first text we studied was Adi Shankaracharya’s *Tattva Bodha*. Our journey continued with Vidyaranya Swami’s *Panchadashi*, Ramana Maharishi’s *Saddarshanam*, *Mandukya Upanishad* with Gaudapada’s *Karika*, and dozens more. Finally, we took up Adi Shankaracharya’s *Jivanmuktananda Lahari*, which describes the enlightened Master.

Through Pujya Guruji’s devotion to India’s great saints, I was able to catch a glimpse of their greatness. This was especially true for Veda Vyasa Rishi and his role in *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*. With tears in his eyes, Guruji would bring tears to my eyes as he lovingly taught what Lord Krishna taught Prince Arjuna in the *Gita*. I am filled with reverence knowing that the scripture dates back over 5,000 years, yet its message of serving and surrendering is as relevant today as ever.

When I was a youth, Pujya Guruji would stay at our home whenever he visited Niagara Falls. Devotees from all over would flock by the hundreds to be in his presence; to me, the whole scene seemed boring. He was just another swami, only with a cool title of Head of Chinmaya Mission Worldwide. Only after I actually listened to him explain the subtlest of texts, like the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras*, did I come to appreciate his rare brilliance. Truly, there are very few *acharyas* in the whole world who can teach what he can the way he can.

Sanskrit, Language of the Gods

After an hour's discourse and breakfast, Sanskrit class commenced at 9:30 a.m. When I had first mentioned to Guruji that I was interested in joining the Vedanta Course, he had laughed and told me to learn as much Sanskrit as possible before coming to *Sandeepany*. Determined, I started setting aside an hour a day to learn this language of the gods. Within a month I had to give up, as I struggled to even write the script. A teacher would be necessary for me to ever learn Sanskrit. But here, thanks to Samvidji, I not only learned the alphabet, but how to read *shlokas*, write exams, and interpret spiritual works. Shibani said of Samvidji, "Not only did he get us to learn Sanskrit, he also instilled a deep love for the language."

Knowing Sanskrit was a great aid in chanting the Lord's names, which was our next session. I had never been a ritual-oriented person, as they seemed irrational and insubstantial to me. Hence, when informed that we were to chant *Vishnusahasranama* at noon every day, I had the same initial reaction as toward Sanskrit study—an inefficient use of time. But this seemingly mindless chanting eventually took on great meaning for me as Pujya Guruji took the time to explain each of Lord Vishnu's 1,000 names and how one nurtures His divine qualities by remembering Him.

Practical Classes

We had periodic "organizational classes," in which we learned how to conduct the Chinmaya Bala Vihar classes and camps, how to facilitate a Study Group, and how the Chinmaya Vidyalaya (schools) are run. These classes were not on Vedanta, but on how to spread it. And they brought *sadhana* to practice. Another class was on the *Vanaprastha Samsthan*, Chinmaya Mission's retirement communities. As a personal devotional practice, we were taught *Guru Paduka Puja*.

Evening *Satsanga*

After lunch, rest, and our 4 p.m. Vedanta class, it was time for *arti* and evening *satsanga* at 6:25 p.m. All day, my head was stretched to its limit. Tired, I welcomed this class that focused on the heart. Filled with devotional singing, every evening was restful and memorable. The highlight of our *satsangas* was Guruji's line-by-line explanation of Sant Tulsidasji's entire *Shri Ramacharitramanasa*—the first time he had ever done this in a Vedanta Course.

After the evening class, we had dinner and retired for the night, only to wake again at 4 a.m.—a schedule we maintained nearly every day for the two-plus years. The exceptions came for truly exceptional events—the celebration of unforgettable festivals and pilgrimages to sacred places. Words cannot describe what I experienced seeing and serving the 100,000 devotees paying homage at the ashram temple on *Mahashivaratri*. The line formed at 3 a.m. and did not clear until 3 a.m. the following day. I will forever cherish the delight I saw in the eyes of believers as they prostrated before Lord Shiva.

Our Days of Pilgrimage

After a year of study at *Sandeepany*, we set out on pilgrimage to Uttarkashi, to visit *Tapovan Kuti*, the abode of Param Pujya Swami Tapovan Maharaj, Pujya Gurudev's guru. I was ecstatic about the adventure. En route we visited many holy places and stayed at several monasteries. Eventually we reached *Tapovan Kuti*, and this became home for a month. Our studies never ceased; only the surroundings changed—heat to cold, plains to mountains. While in Uttarkashi, we had a chance to have *darshan* at glorious temples like Kashi Vishvanath and Ganga Mata. Our month passed in a moment.

I had visited *Tapovan Kuti* with two friends in the year 2000. At that time, it was just a cool place in the Himalayas. The experience at *Tapovan Kuti* during the Vedanta Course was completely different. Pujya Swami Tapovanji was a majestic and revered ascetic who believed in deep *sadhana*, and at Uttarkashi we were naturally inspired for the same. Many took up disciplines such as maintaining silence or fasting. The atmosphere was powerful and purifying.

On our way home, we paid our respects at the ashrams of other gurus of Hinduism, including Shri Anandamayi Ma in Haridwar, Pujya Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, and Swami Narayan in Delhi. Truly, the religious wealth of Bharat is immeasurable.

Challenges and Fulfillment

When I lived in a university residence, I often heard students complain about how difficult it is to live in close quarters with others. I also heard some of my married friends whine endlessly about living with their spouse. Both these situations are trying, but there is always a chance to escape, and this is what we always do. We try to run away from our mind via entertainment, relationships, even work.

Living in *Sandeepany* was a thousand times more challenging. All that I had ever depended on was taken away—cell phone, television, restaurants, friends. I was left only with my mind and forced to live with the minimum. If I could not handle this, I suffered. And there was no escape from this suffering—it had to be either faced or transcended.

For some, the experience was too much. Of the 60 enrolled students, ten left before completion for various reasons, including being dismissed.

Returning to the World

After returning to Canada, I quickly realized that nothing had changed. The people were the same, the places were the same, the things were the same. What had changed was my vision of life and its purpose. Enlightenment was no longer a foreign concept to me; it had become the entire focus of my life. I grew closer to those who recognized and understood this change in me, and more distant from those who did not. Now, seeing the mundane world as another form of God, interacting with it became simply one form of *sadhana*.

Sandeepany Sadhanalaya calls out to the spirited who are ready to question the feeble sense of contentment that the material world has to offer. Those who heed this call are those who are ready to do what it takes to discover that contentment comes from within. They depart from *Sandeepany* blessed by their guru with the strength to face the challenges of living.

Chinmaya Mission's next Vedanta Course will commence in 2015, which is Pujya Gurudev's birth centenary year.

NEWS

Pranav Ganesh Mandir Consecrated at Chinmaya Vibhooti

On the auspicious occasion of *Shri Ganesh Jayanti*, Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda and Pujya Swami Brahmananda presided over the temple consecration and *prana pratishtha* at the new Pranav Ganesh Mandir at *Chinmaya Vibhooti* in Kolwan (Maharashtra, India). For three days, from sunrise to sunset, elaborate Vedic rituals were conducted, including *havans*, *kalasha abhishekam*, a festive procession to place thousands of *likhita japa* books below the sanctum, and breathing life (*prana pratishtha*) into the majestic Lord Ganesh idol.

The main priest, Vaze Guruji, and his team of 12 Vedic *pandits*, performed countless ceremonies meticulously and thoroughly throughout the program. *Mukhya Yajamans* Ravi and Nandini Nene, both of whom have been serving at *Chinmaya Vibhooti* for over ten years, performed the main *pujas* and made

havan offerings on behalf of all the *yajmans* gathered. The final day of *kalasha* and *murti abhishekam* saw over 1,000 devotees of the Chinmaya Family and from the neighboring areas.

Planning and logistics for the grand and intricate rituals were made under the able leadership of R.K. Krishnamoorthy, who successfully and resourcefully directed countless volunteers.

The Pranav Ganesh Mandir consecration was the culmination of the four-day spiritual camp conducted by Pujya Guruji on *Shri Ganapati Atharvashirsha*. Each day, Pujya Guruji's English talks were translated through a Hindi discourse on the same topic by Swami Advaitananda, resident *acharya* at *Chinmaya Vibhooti*. The camp was attended by more than 600 Chinmaya devotees, 40 *brahmacharins*, and 20 *swamins* from around the world.

To view all photos, visit Chinmaya Mission on [Facebook](#). To view event highlights on YouTube, [click here](#).



Sannyasa Diksha and Mahashivaratri at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Powai

On the auspicious occasion of *Mahashivaratri*, on February 20, 2012, 13 *brahmacharins* of Chinmaya Mission were initiated into the monastic order of *sannyasa* with the blessings of Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda at the *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya* ashram in Powai, Mumbai.

Brahmachari Samvit, *upacharya* of the current two-year residential Vedanta course at *Sandeepany*, conducted and guided the rigorous and intense *sannyasa diksha* rituals that lasted three days, and included strict fasting, silence, *japa*, and *puja* requirements for the initiates.

Pujya Guruji blessed each *swamin* with a new name, indicating to them a new purpose and vision in life, their ochre robes signifying a milestone in their journey toward Self-realization. Shown in the photograph (left to right) with Pujya Guruji (center), are the new initiates (new name/previous name):

Swami Deveshananda (Brahmachari Suveda Chaitanya)
Swamini Pramitananda (Brahmacharini Medha Chaitanya)
Swami Adityananda (Brahmachari Rishabh Chaitanya)
Swamini Prajnananda (Brahmacharini Shraddha Chaitanya)
Swamini Aaradhanananda (Brahmacharini Vividisha Chaitanya)
Swami Prabuddhananda (Brahmachari Keshav Chaitanya)
Swamini Ujjwalananda (Brahmacharini Kirti Chaitanya)
Swami Prabhavananda (Brahmachari Siddharth Chaitanya)
Swami Pratyayananda (Brahmachari Akshar Chaitanya)
Swamini Kashikananda (Brahmacharini Deepti Chaitanya)
Swami Krishnapremananda (Brahmachari Shridhar Chaitanya)
Swami Siddheshananda (Brahmachari Shailesh Chaitanya)
Swami Paratmananda (Brahmachari Bhasa Chaitanya)

Mahashivaratri celebrations at the ashram's famous Jagadishvara Temple brought in over 100,000 devotees from all parts. Throngs of devotees came in and out of the temple in organized and disciplined lines that kept moving throughout the day with the help of dozens of CM volunteers. As early as 4 a.m., devotees had started lining up along the ramp leading to the ashram gates, and they kept coming even past midnight.

The lines stopped moving only at the stroke of midnight, when *maha aarti* for Lord Shiva was performed to the euphoric harmonies of chanting, oil lamps, conches, and bells. The monastic robes of orange and yellow, and *brahmachari* student robes of white, graced the ashram in multitudes on this holy day and night, the temple resounding with the amplified chanting of "*Om namah Shivaya*" by all, from 6 a.m. to 12 a.m. The *maha aarti* was offered by Brahmachari Samvit. Samvitji also performed a *chatur-vidhi Mahashivaratri puja* for Lord Jagadishvara, offered at 7 p.m., 10 p.m., 1:30 a.m., and 4 a.m., on February 20-21.



Bombay Jayashri Performs at *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Powai*

Renowned classical and contemporary singer, Bombay Jayashri, performed in concert before Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda and a house-full hall of CM devotees at the *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya* ashram on Sunday, February 19, 2012. In the introduction by Pramodini Rao, Director of Music of the Chinmaya Naada Bindu residential school of Indian classical music and dance, Bombay Jayashri was welcomed as one of the most sought after Carnatic music artists today, who both sings and composes. But first and foremost, she was welcomed as a Chinmaya Bala Vihar student of 13 years.

Having dived directly into a classical hymn to Lord Jagadishvara, Bombay Jayashri reminisced in her own words, with love and reverence, about her regular Sunday Bala Vihar classes at the *Sandeepany* ashram. She humbly dedicated her talent, inspiration, and creativity to the Divine and to the wealth she had gained through her Chinmaya Bala Vihar teachings.

Amassing high accolades and awards in her professional career of concerts, compositions, and albums, both classical and contemporary, Bombay Jayashri's semiclassical *bhajans* included a popular Bala Vihar Krishna *bhajan*, all of which were appreciated by a devoted audience. She was accompanied by instrumentalists on violin, mrdangam, and tanpura, as well as young student vocalists.



CORD Sidhabari Youth Service Project 2012 by Subha Pathial

CORD USA announces its service project for youth to CORD Sidhabari, July 8-August 3, 2012. The project, open to Chinmaya Bala Vihar students in grades 9-12, consists of traveling to India serving the needy in and around the village of Sidhabari, which is situated in the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh. Services will be in the comprehensive and integrated rural development program and

women's empowerment program, both of which were initiated with the blessings of Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda in 1985.

Admittance to the service project is on a first-come, first-served basis. The application deadline is February 28, 2012. Download all required details and guidelines [here](#). For additional information about CORD USA and the Sidhabari project, click [here](#).

Similar service project visits have been highly successful, benefiting all the participants in various ways. The project also allows high school students to practice their Bala Vihar teachings and list community service on their college applications. For more information, contact: Vijaya Cherukuri, vijaya@cordusa.org, (866) 580-5508 (toll free).

Chinmaya *Yatris* Explore Hinduism in Southeast Asia by Nimmi Raj

Chinmaya *yatris* from CM Los Angeles, Bakersfield, San Diego, Chicago, Michigan, Niagara Falls, and Toronto left the shores of North America on Nov. 23, on a tour led by Swami Ishwarananda (CM Los Angeles) through the Southeast Asian nations of Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

The two-week long trip was at once a visit to renowned historical sites in cities like Bangkok, as much as an appointment with the history of Hinduism. While it's one thing to read and hear about the pervading influence of Hinduism in a region, it was quite another experience to actually encounter it.

The 50 tourists participated in devotional rituals at ancient Bali temples, observed the renderings of the *Ramayana* in Thailand, ogled at the deities of Lord Indra and Lord Ganesha on Bangkok street corners, watched enthralling cultural shows in Bali and Bangkok, and marveled at the beauty of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

At several points in the *yatra*, Swamiji gave talks on the spread of Hinduism in the region and the study of Buddhism that flourishes there now. He deftly compared and contrasted Hindu and Buddhist thought, allowing *yatris* to grasp the lingering influence of Hindu philosophy in Southeast Asia even today. The *yatris* were also able to meet and listen to Buddhist monks who discussed their faith with Swamiji. At various spots, Swamiji also led the *yatris* in meditation sessions and communing with Nature and enjoying the rich flora, spectacular volcanoes, emerald green vistas, and meticulously laid out gardens at various resorts.

Anecdotes and pictures of smiling *yatris* that were shared with other Chinmaya members on their return to the U.S. bespoke of the good times and learning that had happened in the *yatra*.



2011 Autumn CORD Walk Raises \$40K in New Jersey

by Ram Ramachandran

It was a sea of orange on a pleasant autumn day at Mercer County Park in New Jersey, where over 500 walkers gathered to help raise funds for CORD (Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development) on October 23, 2011.

In the pristine, natural beauty of the park, participants of all ages walked the five-mile trek amid tall trees in fall colors, a beautiful lake, and a playground featuring a cricket match. CM Princeton's walkathon raised \$40,000 and included a cool online website for Chinmaya Bala Vihar students and other patrons to set up a personal page to help collect contributions from friends and family. Some children made innovative and attractive web pages to motivate viewers to join the walkathon.

The CORD Walk team released a souvenir booklet containing an inspiring letter from Swami Shantananda (CM Princeton), memorable quotes by Pujya Gurudev, and CORD news around the globe. Some patrons set up stalls at the Walk. Some walkers received bright orange t-shirts with Pujya Gurudev's quote: "Happiness depends on what you give, not what you get!"

The event was a grand success through the untiring efforts of the volunteers. Intense planning and publicity ran months prior to the event, and some Chinmaya Bala Vihar students even campaigned in their neighborhoods to increase participation and awareness. Volunteers obtained sponsorships from local businesses, which helped in the offering of a sumptuous breakfast before the walk and tasty lunch thereafter. Prizes for highest and most collections were awarded.

With increased awareness in the Tri-state area, there is greater anticipation for future CORD events in the community.



Winter Activities at CM Minneapolis

by Manu Madhok

CM Minneapolis's overnight camp at the *Chinmaya Ganapati* ashram over Thanksgiving weekend was full of fun and action. Teams of children participated in games and activities that included pulling a minivan and a tug of war. Their creativity in music and *bhajans* included some contemporary beats and melodious tunes. The bonfire, singing, dancing, and hot cocoa kept them warm and going strong.

Chinmaya Ganapati celebrated *Gita Jayanti* and *Tapovan Jayanti* on December 10, 2011 with the chanting of the entire *Gita* and *Tapovan Shatakam*. The New Year was welcomed with the chanting of *Vishnu Sahasranama* on January 1.

Swami Siddhananda (CM Philadelphia) brought warmth in the cold Minnesota weather through his talks on *Shiva Manasa Puja*. His melodious devotional *bhajans* enchanted adults and children, alike.



New Year Celebrations at *Chinmaya Vrindavan* by Prasad Akavoor

The *Chinmaya Vrindavan* ashram of CM Princeton was the meeting ground at 5:30 p.m. on January 1, 2012 for nearly 200 devotees who had gathered to perform or observe *Satyanarayana Puja*. With the belief that this *puja* grants devotion, material wealth, and spiritual joy, devotees reveled in the *Satyanarayana katha* (stories extolling Lord Vishnu as Satyanarayana), which is mentioned in *Skanda Purana*.

The *puja* was followed by the inspiring and melodious chanting of *Shri Vishnu Sahasranama*, filling the air with purity and devotion.

The New Year's Day celebrations concluded with the sacred chanting of *Namakam* and *Chamakam*, and *Rudrabhishekam*, which, incidentally, was performed by Lord Rama at Rameshwaram before crossing the sea to reach Lanka. Additionally, the Chinmaya Bala Swaranjali group of Chinmaya Bala Vihar students offered *bhajans*, which were greatly appreciated and enhanced the beautiful, devotional atmosphere for one and all. *Prasadam* consisted of a sumptuous meal that was cooked and served by volunteer Study Group members.



Ayyappa Puja at Kedar by Swami Siddhananda

Chinmaya Mission Philadelphia celebrated *Makara Vilakku Maholtsavam* on the auspicious day of *Sankranti* on January 14, 2012 at the *Kedar* ashram. Devotees replicated the atmosphere of Sabarimala with Lord Ayyappa's *vigraha* (idol) in the *chin-mudra* (meditative) posture atop the traditional and holy 18-tiered structure. The deity and the tiers were decorated beautifully to create a festive atmosphere. Pujya Gurudev's grace beautified the lit traditional oil lamps, floral and sandalwood aromas, sacred prayers, and holy *panchamritam*, leaving over 150 devotees feeling greatly blessed. The memorable event included a *puja* conducted by CM Kedar's priest, *bhajans* led by resident *acharya*, Swami Siddhananda, and *mahaprasadam*.



Significance of Makara Sankranti Presentation by the 3rd Graders at Chinmaya Vrindavan Bala vihar

Chinmaya Bala Vihar students (grade 3) of CM Princeton gave a cultural performance on the significance of *Makara Sankranti* on January 8, 2012. Practicing laboriously at home with supportive, encouraging parents and an audio sample sent by the teachers, the children showcased the meaning of dedication and diligence, and chanted beautifully on the day of the performance.

At the dress rehearsal, the teachers spoke about the festival and, on conclusion, asked the children to say in one sentence what they remembered. As each child spoke, the teachers lined them up, connecting their ideas like a string of pearls.

On the day of the event, the children presented their lines perfectly and confidently, and gave greetings in various languages. Through a Sanskrit *shloka*, they wished everyone a happy *Sankranti* in unison: "May the mind be affectionate like sesame seeds. May there be sweetness in your words as in jaggery. May there be goodness in your relations like the relation of sesame and jaggery in a *laddu*. May there be in your thoughts a concurrence toward auspicious glory. We always wish that the festival of *Sankranti* prove to be blessed and auspicious for one and all. Happy *Sankranti!*" It was a memorable experience for children, teachers, and parents alike.



Ctrl + Alt + Del by Akalka Barath

Swami Sarveshananda (CM Dallas), National Director of CHYK West, conducted "Ctrl + Alt + Del," a unique three-day camp at the end of November 2012 for CHYKs and Junior CHYKs at CM San Diego.

In computer terminology Ctrl + Alt + Del is a command that shuts down tasks instantly, which is helpful particularly when those tasks slow down our computer, exert the battery, or expend energy needlessly. We may often feel fatigued or trapped in life though we have all the needed food, clothing, and shelter to be physically comfortable. So, what are the mental roadblocks to our peace of mind and happiness?

In this search, Swamiji gave exercises to reveal how we picture ourselves, what traits we hold prominent, how the world sees us, and how we want to be seen by the world. Often ruled by how we want others to see us or how we want to see ourselves, we get trapped by doubt and indecision, widening the disconnection between how we act or think, and how we want to project ourselves to the world. This lack of integration is a roadblock to happiness, for an integrated soul has no mental fatigue, and abides in a joy that has no room for internal or external falsehood in thoughts or actions.

These concepts were illustrated through activities, discussions, and a film analysis of *The Dark Knight*. The camp was not just finding about finding flaws, but more about applying solutions. With Swamiji's vibrant sense of humor and straightforward approach, we evaluated our lives and how to learn to live as integrated personalities. We analyzed the intricate connections of what we eat, what we speak, and how we act, and how mindfulness helps us grow conscious of every action so that we improve and walk steadily on the path to Self-realization.

To better train our thinking and other systematic patterns, Swamiji stressed the importance of doing worthwhile actions without getting unduly influenced through contacts with the world. By using life's challenges and opportunities to help hone our mind so that it is clearer and more equipoised, we can create, in technical terms, active filing patterns in the brain. The ego is like a virus that identifies with a process and feeds off it to strengthen itself. When we strive to dissolve the ego, overcome negative tendencies, we move toward a much needed, healthier lifestyle.

All the campers left with a renewed conviction toward the Vedantic goal of enlightenment. Swamiji, with his keen insights and striking sense of humor, made it clear that developing an integrated

physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual personality steeped in the truth of Vedanta is our duty; in this, there can be no excuses.



CM Vancouver Students Chant *Gita*

CM Vancouver's Bala Vihar students participated in the *Gita Shloka Pratiyogita* event held in Vancouver on January 14, 2012. More than 200 people attended the program hosted by the Samskrita Veena Foundation. Of the ten winners in the 5-20 years age groups, seven were Chinmaya Bala Vihar students.



In Memoriam: Sharada Rao, CM Calgary by Susan Ramsundarsingh

It is with great sadness that CM Calgary shares the news of the passing of Sharada Rao on February 16, 2012 in India. Sharada Amma, as she was fondly known to the CM Calgary family, founded CM Calgary over 20 years ago with a Bhagavad Gita Study Group in her basement. The small group of four devotees, inspired by Sharada Amma's energy and determination, were encouraged to keep learning Vedanta as she taught them to read in Sanskrit, one line at a time. She carefully coached the students to offer *seva* in planning activities and this led to the slow growth of the Mission. A dedicated student herself, she worked tirelessly to bring Pujya Gurudev to Calgary in 1989 for CM Calgary's first *yajna*.

The small team she had built took over when she moved back to India, where she continued to incorporate her Vedantic studies in daily life. In her kind and welcoming way she acknowledged God in all. With discipline and compassion, she challenged the Study Group members to live what was being studied. CM Calgary is honored to have had the opportunity to learn from and serve alongside her.

In Memoriam: Rakesh Chawla, CM New York by Aditi Malhotra

CM New York mourned the loss of a dear and earnest member, Rakesh Chawla, who passed away on December 20, 2011 in a tragic plane crash in New Jersey. Rakesh was 36 years old and is survived by his wife, Cathleen, and three daughters—Asha, Anamika, and Alia (ages 7, 5, and 2 respectively). Asha and Anamika have been dedicated students at Chinmaya Bala Vihar in Manhattan for the past two years.

Rakesh will be remembered as a kind and jovial person who was always willing to help people. He fondly participated in CM New York's *bhajan* sessions, *Diwali* celebrations, and Holi *pujas*. The entire CM New York family offers to him and his family prayers of love, strength, and peace.

