

Hari OM

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“This world and worldly objects are all momentary and not real, and such momentary worldly objects cannot give us Eternal Bliss. Eternal Bliss is *Brahman*, and not this dream-like momentary Universe.”

Source: Preface to Commentary on *Mandukya Upanishad*

“By the discovery of the Self, it will be realized that the world of objects is only a delusion and that the Self alone is that which is all in the ‘within’ and in the ‘without’ To such a God-man, the source of joy cannot, naturally, be from any sensuous object, because to him the world of sensuous objects is but a great dream.”

Source: Commentary on *Mandukya Upanishad*

“A sincere, perseverant, patient and cheerful practitioner finally realizes *Brahman*, the infinite as his own Self. To such a *ajnani*, the highest form of everlasting happiness becomes evident. It effortlessly manifests in his heart. He sees the same Self in All. He maintains an attitude of sameness towards all beings and objects of the world.”

Source: *You Ask, He Answers*

SPIRITUAL TRAILS

Gurus, Teachers, and Preceptors

by Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda

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Need for a Guru

Is a guru essential for one to enter the spiritual path and attain the goal? How does one choose a guru?

The very fact that you are asking these questions clearly shows that we need teachers to teach us. Think for a moment. Is there anything that we do well today with confidence or any amount of mastery that has not been taught to us? If for every perfect act in the world, in any activity, we need the guidance of an instructor, we can very well understand the need for a guru in the spiritual path; for there we have to deal with the subtlest forces and the enormous confusions of the vehicle called the mind, with its moods called delusions.

The guru-disciple relationship is unavoidable. Every great master has been under the guidance of a teacher. It is not true to say that we can reach the goal just through books. A teacher IS necessary.

But you have to understand very carefully. To say the guru is necessary does not mean that the guru will take the responsibility—that all you have to do is meet the guru and thereafter he will carry you to the goal.

The relationship between the teacher and the taught is exactly like the relationship of the gardener and the flowers on the bush. The gardener does not create the flowers from the soil and the manure. The flowers themselves come from the bush. The gardener can only tend its roots, water it, protect it, see that it has the correct amount of sunlight, and shade; all these externals he can provide. But no mere gardener can guarantee the blossom; it can come only from the bush itself.

Similarly, the teacher's job is to nurture the student with right thoughts. The student must be given a conducive and protective environment where he or she need not overstrain to live. But the blossoming, the real fragrance and beauty of the personality, must come from within. There are some gurus who will say that they will carry you to the goal. Those are all mule gurus. You can ride on them. But the true gurus only show you the way and encourage you.

As the student advances, and the mind becomes quiet and concentrated, its subtler powers, called *siddhis*, come to manifest themselves. If you revel in the play of these psychic powers, you may never reach the goal. Here, too, the guru is needed to knock you down: "Why are you lingering here? You may enjoy such fascinations in passing, but don't stay and play with these toys, for you are still only playing with the mind. Go forward!"

You ask, "How does one choose a guru?" It is not a question of the disciple selecting the guru. He gravitates toward a guru, and he will find exactly the guru he needs for his present state of mental development. So, choose whatever guru comes to you, but understand that the only guru is He, the Lord, who expresses in many forms.

What about the current Hindu pantheon of gurus and god-men who run their private industries often suggesting completely different, and sometimes contradictory, routes to salvation?

Have you watched the followers? They all come voluntarily. They are all free; no one forces them. They follow these masters because they find some consolation. So, at different levels, all of the gurus are valid. I know that there are too many teachers, too many masters, too many gurus. But I would wish there were more.

Sure, as long as they are teachers, not quack healers or exploiters of the innocent.

Don't think that all teachers will teach only at the undergraduate level. Or that the graduate level teacher can teach everybody. There are students who must be taught the alphabet, only addition and subtraction. Isn't this true? In education, there are various levels and various teachers. If the graduate teacher is given an elementary class to teach, he will become confused, go screaming mad. The elementary teacher cannot, similarly, teach graduate classes. So, at different levels, different teachers are valid. They do not know beyond their levels; just as their students cannot understand beyond the levels at which they speak.

The True Preceptor

What are the qualifications of a true preceptor?

From the *Bhagavad Gita's* descriptions of a man of Perfection (Chapter 2), we know that a man firmly established in wisdom is tranquil, and his equipoise is never disturbed even when he is investing his entire energies in the service of mankind.

The Upanishads summarize the qualifications of a teacher in two terms: *Shrotriya* (one who is a master of the scriptures) and *Brahma-nishtha* (one who is well established in the experience of Truth). Without the knowledge of the scriptures, the teacher will not be able to convey his wisdom to the disciples. But mere book knowledge is not sufficient. The words coming from an individual can gather wings only when they spring from a heart soaked with sincere subjective experience.

However, to be a preceptor, he must have two more qualifications. His behavior in the world must be perfect, since we as students, when admiring the teacher, will be tempted to imitate him in all his external habits. If his behavior is not perfect, it is possible that we will copy his bad habits and thus ruin our chances.

Secondly, a preceptor must have large-heartedness flowing with kindness and patience. This is necessary since in the early stages, the students will revolt against new concepts that conflict with their present understanding. To weed out the mind and to replant new ideas is a most painful operation, and this can be achieved only when the teacher has infinite patience, endless love, and supreme affection.

When these qualifications are not there, the preceptor is not a true one. In the last analysis, a preceptor is known by his own disciples, just as a good musician is known only by the true students of music. Students who have a spiritual urge and have practiced a little will instinctively recognize a teacher. Our preceptor is he who inspires us to a nobler life, and in whose presence we feel elevated. When we compare our life with his, we feel ashamed of our own weaknesses; at times of burning passion, by remembering him, we feel cooled down.

In fact, the true preceptor to all of us is the Lord. The Lord of our heart talks to us very often through His chosen deputy among us, and we revere and worship Him as manifesting through the individual. No individual mortal is ever a preceptor. The Lord alone is the Teacher, everywhere, at all times.

On Progress

Why has the world made no true progress despite the coming of so many prophets, incarnations, and saints?

The answer is obvious. For eons, waves have been coming and lashing against the shores and still there are waves in the ocean. When will they end?

For centuries, politicians have been arriving and giving us political philosophies. Believing them, successive generations have sacrificed themselves; yet, where are we today?

Medical science has progressed over time. Hospitals are built; doctors are trained. Yet, is there no illness now in the world? Would you say, therefore, that the world has not progressed? If in these known realms, there is progress in spite of imperfections, can you say that man has not progressed in spite of prophets and religion?

No doubt the ideal world has not yet been reached, even with the valiant contributions of politicians, doctors, scientists, and economists. But please consider what our condition would be had these mighty intellectuals not served the world.

In spite of prophets and preceptors, man has not given up lust and has not learned the art of living in tranquil joy. But consider what our condition would have been had these benign influences not taken place in our evolution to present civilization?

How much food is in restaurants and stores? And yet, how many die of starvation? The existence of food in the world is no guarantee against people starving. Even when food is in front of us, unless we take it in, it is not going to help us. Even if we take it, unless we have the strength to assimilate and make the essence of the food our own, health is never improved.

The religious masters lay down rules of conduct and explain the greater Reality in life. We have to digest these ideas and assimilate them to make them our own. Religion is a subjective science.

In the generations in which many recognized and lived these values, there was more peace and progress. But when, as in our times, moral virtues are discarded and religion is shunned on the false and stupid argument of secularism, we find immorality, corruption, and faithlessness in all departments of activity. Yet, when we look around us, we see how religion and prophets are still serving the world. We need not have another demonstration of how effective they are. Evidences of their contributions are everywhere aglow.

Krtajnata: Gratitude

by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda

Transcription of talk given at Powai Ashram, Mumbai, 2007

*samasta-jana-kalyane niratam karunamayam
namami chinmayayam devam sadgurum brahmavidvaram*

*samskrtervikshya hanim ca bharatasya ca duhsthitim
dravitam hrdayam yasya vande'ham tam mahamunim*

The translation of this verse is: "I bow down to that great *maha-muni* whose heart melted on seeing the decline in noble values and culture, and the sad plight of India" that was under foreign rule for so many years.

We have heard that *santa-hrdaya* (a saint's heart) is like butter, but it is not true, because butter melts only when it is heated, but *santa-hrdaya* melts even on seeing the sorrows of others. Pujya Gurudev's heart melted with compassion. Sometimes our heart also melts and we also feel pity for someone, but our compassion is of no use because it is so passive, and passive compassion doesn't help much.

*nishkriya karuna kvapi saphala na bhavishyati
iti matva sarva-daiva karmani vartate yatih*

He is an ascetic, a *sannyasi*, yet always striving only for the welfare of others, because passive compassion (*nishkriya karuna*) is not purposeful, meaningful, or effective anywhere. If I say I feel for you, but can't do something to help you, it is meaningless. Or, if sometimes I can do something to help you, but I feel nothing, it is just as meaningless.

Pujya Gurudev remained ever engaged in karmas to help alleviate the suffering of people. Some people do whatever they can out of compassion, but are they able to inspire and motivate others, to organize? Individually, we do whatever can be done, and that is good. But there is something higher.

*svayam kurvan-karayamscha karmani vividhani yah
asaktah sarva-karyeshu vartate sarvada cha sah*

Pujya Gurudev himself did, but he also made, inspired, and motivated others to do various kinds of karmas according to their capabilities. As *Bhagavad Gita* says, "*Joshayat sarva-karmani vidvan yukta samacharan,*" a wise man is a leader who does himself, but motivates and guides other people to do as well. A beauty and quality in Pujya Gurudev was his ability to organize singlehandedly.

Someone may motivate us to organize, but we get attached to our work. And if the results do not come as expected, we often get frustrated. But the wise man is *asaktah-sarvakaryeshu*—totally unattached in all *karma-phalas*, without any insistence regarding the results. Pujya Gurudev's life is a direct demonstration of what is said in *Bhagavad Gita*. What are the *vividhani karmani* that Pujya Gurudev did and motivated others to do?

jnana-yajna-pracharam cha brahmachari-prashikshanam

shruti-smrti-puranadi-vyakhyagrantha-prakashanam

The next three *shlokas* tell what types of karmas Pujya Gurudev engaged in and what types he motivated others to perform.

First, he conducted *jnana yajnas*. He propagated *Upanishad jnana yajnas* and then *Gita jnana yajnas*, bringing awareness among people about the greatness of Vedic literature and the *Upanishads' pramanas*, which are the authority and foundation of Hindu religion and culture. The glory of the Vedas was brought to people's notice and recognition. From that, so many seekers were inspired to take up Vedantic studies.

This, in turn, led to the formation of *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya*, which now has continuous *brahmachari prashikshanam* [intensive, two- to three-year residential Vedanta courses]. Providing students with all the facilities needed so they can intensively study *Brahma Vidya*[Self-knowledge] is something so highly significant. Now these *brahmacharis* are becoming *swamis* and so much work is going on in different fields—spiritual, cultural, religious, educational, and social services. All the inspiration is only from Pujya Gurudev.

And there is *prakashanam*, or publishing, of so many *granthas* (books) of *vakyas* (commentaries) on the *Shrutis* (*Upanishads*), *Smrtis* (*Bhagavad Gita*), *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, introductory texts, and new spiritual compositions. In addition, so many of these works have been published different languages.

*balakeshu cha samskaro vicharo yuvakeshu cha
dharma-nishtha desha-bhaktih loka-seva tathaiva cha*

Indeed, such books are most precious. But if you only publish books without people knowing their value, there is no point. These publications have to be propagated also, and this work has to begin with children. You can't teach children *Brahma Sutras*; most important is to first inculcate in them noble values, virtues, and *samskaras*. To give *samskaras* to children, and the right *vichara*(inquiry, reasoning) to youth, is the aim. Thus, CHYK is *vichara-pradhan* and Chinmaya Bala Vihar is *samskara-pradhan*.

Through these alone can there be *dharma-nistha* in one's life—adherence to dharma, righteousness. There must be steadfastness and pride in following our dharma. We should not ask to what dharma we belong. Ours is Vedic *Sanatana Dharma*. Dharma also means there must be righteous conduct in one's life.

And there must be *desha-bhakti* (love for one's country). Patriotism does not mean hatred toward any other nation. It means only that we are proud to belong to our nation. India has produced most wonderful and great masters not only in spiritual field—although that is the number one priority—but in all other fields as well, including science, art, fine arts, and politics. So many great leaders have been produced by this great nation.

Another karma Pujya Gurudev performed and motivated others to perform is *loka-seva*. This is clearly seen in Chinmaya Mission's rural development, medical, educational, and many other types of service projects. Pujya Gurudev strived for this throughout his life.

*yatha vrddhim prapnuvanti tatha yatnam karoti sah
sarvada sarva-bhavena sadgururno yatishvarah*

He constantly sought ways to encourage the propagation of spiritual knowledge and expansion of *seva* projects—how they can spread, how more and more people can come to know the glory of their own Self and their own culture. He went on doing, and even now He alone is doing, functioning through all of us for these goals. Wholeheartedly, in thought, word, and deed, at the cost of his own physical health, he continued striving—*sarvada, sarva-bhavena*.

*ye gunah sarva-shastreshu varnyante brahma-jnaninam
tairayam sarvada purno rajate sarva-yoginam*

All those virtues that are mentioned in all *Shastras*—all the hallmarks and characteristics of the knower

of *Brahman*, the *sthitha-prajna*, the *jivan-mukta*—all are in our Pujya Gurudev. Our great Master is complete, perfect, and full of all these virtues. He has always shown all these. In all assemblies, his presence was the most special and it was felt by one and all.

*nirgune nischala nistha sagune sarasa ratih
sangamo madhurashchayam deshike no mahatmani*

Our great Vedantic master, a mahatma, was such a *madhura-sangama*, or “sweet confluence” of firm abidance in *nirguna-svarupa* (formless Self), and yet he revelled in *saguna rasa*. How he used to love that *bhajan* of Lord Krishna saying, “O Mother, I did not eat the butter.” In the song, little Krishna says where was the time for him to eat and he gives a list of other arguments. Any number of times that Pandit Purushottamas Jalota came to sing, his *bhajan* program would never be complete without that one *bhajan*. And every time Pujya Gurudev would enjoy it.

Pujya Gurudev revelled in *saguna bhakti* as much as *nirguna*. It was he who co-wrote *Bala Ramayana* and *Bala Bhagavatam*—it was his inspiration. He alone asked me to speak and write on *Ramayana*.

*aneka-janmarjita punya-praptah
maya gururyo jagati prasiddhah
yasya prasadena manah prashantam
babhuva me tam sirasa namami*

“That great Guru, by whose grace my mind became peaceful, before that Guru I bow down my head.” We get such a guru as a result of who knows what and how many meritorious deeds we did! We don’t remember, but it is not by mistake that we get such a Guru. It is God’s grace and *aneka, aneka, aneka-janma punya-praptah* (the results of good deeds of countless lives).

*krtajnata ya cha hrdis sthita me
vaktum na shakya khalu yatnato’pi
guro prasida krpaya vidhehi
tvat-pada-bhaktim paramanuraktim*

The feeling of gratitude that is in the heart cannot be fully described in words, but O Guru, please be gracious and shower your grace on me, and bless me with devotion to your lotus feet—that devotion of the nature of supreme Love and *paramanurakti*, devotion to God.

How does it start? One must first feel strongly, long for this. Only when you feel very strongly, intensely, deeply about something—not shallow and superficial—can you attain or achieve it. When compassion for people, and simultaneous reverence for knowledge and for our entire heritage, come together, then alone is splendid work executed and made possible. Our reverence for knowledge should reach everywhere.

Last year, we had a camp in Sidhabari on the second canto of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. In it is an elaborate description—more elaborate than given anywhere in the *Upanishads* or *Gita*—of the Lord as *Virata Purusha* (Cosmic Being). From there Tulasidas-ji has taken a description about Bhagavan Rama’s *virata-rupa*. When I was speaking on this *Virata Purusha*, suddenly a thought came. As far as our Chinmaya Mission is concerned, our Pujya Gurudev is the whole Mission for us. At that camp, I said, “Our prostrations to Pujya Gurudev, the *Virata Purusha* of Chinmaya Mission. The centres in Australia and New Zealand are His feet. His head spans all the Mission centers in North America.” Some people felt very sad and asked, “What about India? India is not the head?” But the centers in India form His heart. The other centers across the globe are His different limbs. The Mission’s regional heads are His crown. The *acharyas* are His eyes and ears.

The Mission workers are His hands and legs. Our children and youth are the ornaments that adorn His person. The Vedas are His speech, and the multifarious activities of the Mission, with its *seva* projects, *Vidyalyas*, ashrams, temples, and research centers are His vital breath, His *pranas*.

Chinmaya Mission is His *vibhuti*, or glory.

But don't think that He is only what Chinmaya Mission is, for the Mission is only His *vibhuti*. He is much, much, much greater than that. He extends across all these and beyond our comprehension. He is verily *Brahman*. Let us meditate on His cosmic form and realize our Oneness with Him.

When we are serving the Mission, that *bhava* and understanding has to come that we are serving the *Virata Pursusha* alone. Then see what happens to you. After all, all efforts in the Mission are only so that, "You change!" This was Pujya Gurudev's message. All these various activities are conducted and all these projects are undertaken for what? So that all individuals who participate grow spiritually, and their work blesses other people, benefits other people—so that their own life is also enriched, and the nation, its heritage, and the world are also served.

We may not understand the effects of this great work immediately. When there is a bomb blast somewhere, destruction is immediate, but with any true creation or evolution, it is all very steady and silent. No amount of such destructive powers can permanently destroy the world. So many destructive powers and forces have come into this world, natural calamities and manmade, along with the atrocities of many dictators and terrorist acts, but have they been able to destroy this world? They cannot! Therefore, we must, without getting excited or agitated, with a calm and quiet mind, go on doing our work consistently. This alone will bring change.

REFLECTIONS

A Dialogue by Anonymous

Why do the scriptures and masters say that it is important to have a living guru to guide you on the spiritual path?

Pujya Guruji says, for the same reason you need schoolteachers, not just textbooks, to teach you academics. With a living guru, we can: Ask questions to clear our doubts; see, hear, and learn first-hand, by example; tune in by making him our role model; go to him to express and get love, understanding, and guidance. Because we do not yet know how to perceive the subtler; we need to still see, feel, understand in person, not with eyes closed. This is why God himself comes in the form of the Guru.

To a certain extent, to come to terms with the fact that ultimately the guru is a *tattva* (principle) rather than a form, you have to find that connection within yourself. And the guru principle in the universe guides you along.

These are all nice intellectualisms, but one has to be quite highly evolved to connect to an abstract *tattva* that we have never truly understood, because that *tattva* in itself is infinite and beyond the mind. Faith to walk the spiritual path, no matter what, is key. Just to become highly evolved to be able to "connect"—just for the evolution—one needs a physical guru because we are still gross-minded, "physical" people at this stage.

The mind that is finite cannot connect with *tattva* that is infinite, so actually it is your true self alone that connects with the guru *tattva*. Your true self is *Atman*, and Guru *tattva* is *Brahman*, and *Atman* is *Brahman* alone. The rest is just mind games.

You know that Paramahansa Yogananda-ji, Swami Vivekananda-ji, our Pujya Gurudev—all had a physical guru.

But I must confess that the thought of being left orphaned on this path pains me a lot. Didn't providence think of me as a worthy seeker to be guided by a teacher?

If you have so much faith in Pujya Gurudev, do you think Guru/God would ever leave his child heartlessly orphaned? Would you worship, revere, believe in a Guru/God who would do this to you?

But you do worship and revere, because you know deep down in your heart that Guru/God would never abandon you. It cannot be, because Guru/God is your very essence, which whom you cannot breathe. He who is infinite and all-pervading—to where can he go or leave? Does he not know that thru one's spiritual journey, every seeker needs a physical guru? Does the guru not say this himself, as a master and as a scripture in himself? Yes, then how can you think yourself as an orphan? For he must take care of you—you are his beloved child.

You are saying now about being an orphan, your pain, and your worthiness only because you are in need of TLC [tender loving care] right now. And this is okay. We all need different things at different stages. But have no doubt—the guru will provide what you need. Always.

And if you have faith in Pujya Gurudev, then you must have faith that he has himself chosen the right person to continue guiding all his children. This is the greatness and beauty of the principle of *guru parampara*. You have Pujya Guruji right under your very nose. Don't miss the boat by looking in every other direction but the right one.

I keep reading that the *guru-shishya* relationship is absolutely vital for spiritual progress. Will my progress be taken care of in the absence of a living master?

Your progress can be taken care of even in the physical absence of a master. Just as Pujya Gurudev did, and continues to do, the caretaking of all his children. But he knows that his children will need help, solace, succor, and guidance at different times and stages in their lives, and for this, he made Pujya Guruji in his own image. This is the magic of a guru—that he lifts you and makes you into his own Self, and nothing short of it.

For all that Pujya Gurudev is, how can we doubt that he would not give us a living master to continue the *parampara* and our spiritual growth? Now, it is up to you—will you reach out and try to connect and see for yourself the treasure that he has left for you?

The path ahead feels uncertain, and in such times, having the solace that you are indeed being looked after would feel so much more empowering.

You may not see, hear, or understand Pujya Gurudev when he says, "I am always with you; I will never leave you," yet, know it for sure that you are always in his lap and being cared for; this is where you must keep the faith and build it—in such uncertain times.

Seekers go through this stage of feeling helpless and without control because it is part of the journey. This is needed for the ego to melt. So, don't be afraid, but rejoice, that you are on the right path. And just like in that famous "footprints" poem, the guru is carrying you in his arms 24/7/365. Surrender and don't lose faith—that is all.

The sun/guru is before you. You keep pulling the blanket over your eyes for security, but then say it is dark. The guru will keep trying to pull off your blanket of mind (for your security should be guru/truth alone, and none else). And your mind will revolt because it does not want to feel insecure or see its own death. Here, you must keep the faith, even though your mind is trying to trick you into feeling like there is no one looking after you, which it does in order to try to stay alive.

Is it important that your guru figure is a living form?

Yes, because it is our need to see a living form. If we had the ability to connect to the abstract instantly, and abide in that truth, a form would not be required. like Shri Ramana Maharshi says, form is not required, but it does help. Again, this is because of the stage we are at.

What does Gurudev not being in his physical form mean in your seeking?

I attended Pujya Gurudev's camps for six years, and during this time, I had no idea what is chinmaya mission. I knew only Pujya Gurudev and didn't care for anything or anyone else. After his *mahasamadhi*, not once did I think I should pursue the goal he taught; not once did I feel he is "gone." I cried a lot at his *mahasamadhi* ceremonies in Sidhabari, like everyone, because I would miss his physical presence that was full of love and magic. But never did I feel that he was not with me or looking after me—to date.

Do you feel that you now get the required guidance from Guruji?

Absolutely, without a doubt. When Pujya Gurudev has handpicked him, as Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa handpicked Swami Vivekananda-ji, there is no question. The more you spend time in Pujya Guruji's presence, you can see for yourself.

The ethos within Chinmaya Mission seems to be that we have been provided with the knowledge and it is up to us to decide what our *sadhanas* are meant to be once we have decided where our goal lies.

The people drawn to the path of knowledge, like in Chinmaya Mission, are primarily intellectuals. Teaching them straight off about surrender and doing as you are told by guru, etc. will send them packing. Slowly they come to see greatness of guru because first they need to value and find sense in what the guru is teaching. And the guru waits patiently for a listener to become a follower, for a follower to become a devotee, for a devotee to become a disciple. The disciple's journey is complete only upon 100% surrender. Then, the guru gives all of himself to the disciple, to make the disciple one with him. The guru gave before, in doses that the listener/follower/devotee/disciple could handle, but now the disciple sees it all and cries in gratitude.

How can a parent send a baby to find his own way in life from birth itself? Even animals take care of their young up to a point. When ordinary parents do this, imagine what the guru does.

Pujya Gurudev never imposed teachings on anyone, because the Vedas and Hinduism, and any true religion, does not impose. But if you read between the lines and hear his talks, or read his writings on the glory of the guru, you will see Pujya Gurudev's reverence for his guru and how he always said until the very end that all is the grace of his guru alone. Just as Pujya Guruji says today.

And this is true. These are not mere words, though we can appreciate them only to a certain level. Guru is God; Guru is *shastra* [scripture]; Guru is *Brahman*; Guru alone is.

If we want to decide our own *sadhana*, we can, but it is like a kindergarten child trying to teach himself to read. If we are smart, we will approach the guru with all humility and pray to be guided, instead of allowing our mind to blindly guide us per its own likes and dislikes. He will not fail us.

Some masters suggest a tailored *sadhana* for each student and guide him through each stage of his evolution. Is this what it means to have a living guru?

Yes, this is what the living guru does, and much more. Those subtle layers that you cannot even sense, much less see, even those have to be washed off. And the guru's grace is such that he continues to do this for you even without your knowing or recognizing. But this kind of tailored *sadhana* he can give you even if not in physical presence.

The importance of the guru's physical presence is so you can see for yourself the truth of the scriptures living right in front of your eyes. You need the role model, the relation, the connection, the love, the words—tangbily—because our mind doesn't have the ability to hold on to anything abstract for too long.

Just because you have not received “tailored *sadhana*” doesn't mean you are not being guided. When tailored *sadhana* is needed, your guru may have you meet a friend who will show you the remote white house where you will end up visiting to practice meditation there for the next 20 years. The ways of the Divine are mystical, and therefore, mysterious for most of us.

Pujya Guruji says that we say God's grace is on all, but do we realize and recognize that grace at every moment in our lives? He says that our prayer should be to recognize that this grace is already so full in our lives at all times.

My Heart Lay Conquered by Prarthna Saran

It was the summer of 1987 and I was at a camp in Sidhabari with Pujya Gurudev. But this camp was very different from the rest. Four days of the camp were already over and I had not done my *pranam* to Gurudev or gone anywhere close to him. Having recently experienced a helpless “fall” in my *sadhna*, I was suffering guilt pangs. I felt somehow that my mind was not clean enough to even touch Gurudev's shadow. So I kept to a routine of listening to his talks, and then, before he could come out of the *satsang* hall, I would slink out from the side entrance, run to my room, and resurface only after Gurudev had retired to his cottage.

That day, as I was scurrying out of the left entrance, I suddenly stood still. Pinned down, as though, at the entrance steps. Gurudev had miraculously come out before me and was standing tall and splendid, and directly looking at me! There is no hope in hell for me, I thought.

Suddenly, he stretched out one arm and called, “Come here, my child. Where have you been all these days?”

I just ran to him and touched his feet. He put his arm around me, brought me close to his heart, and said so lovingly, “Doesn't matter, doesn't matter. Where can you fall? From His shoulder into His lap? It will be alright.”

And he patted my head as a father would. The floodgates of my heart burst open. Gratitude and love for my compassionate Guru rolled down my cheeks. My heart lay conquered.

Unfading Memories by Acharya Geetha Raghu

I had seen Pujya Gurudev once when I was in high school in 1962 and then in 1989 at the CM Orlando Family Camp. Pujya Gurudev took *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 11, and I realized how little I knew about Hindu scriptures and culture. There were *upanayanam* celebrations also, and I vividly remember gurudev straightening each child's dhoti. These precious memories are still green in my mind.

pujya guruji has made sure gurudev's memories will never fade from the minds of devotees. He has been showing what is *guru-bhakti* through his actions. It is not that pujya gurudev's presence is not felt now. I have never felt his physical absence in my life. He is alive in my heart.

Finding Fulfillment in CORD Seva by Meera Parat

Volunteering at CORD Sidhabari in June 2011 was a memorable and amazing first-ever experience that exposed me to village life in India, rural societal issues and challenges, and the beautiful scenery of Himachal Pradesh.

The women of the villages work in the fields from sunrise until much after sunset, after which they go home to take care of their family. Indeed, it was inspiring to make us, as volunteers, work harder and appreciate all the additional comforts we have.

We five volunteers also got the chance to interact with special education kids from time to time, by helping them walk with their walking sticks, sit up straight, strengthen their muscles, and speak.

We heard stories about women who have motivated each other to become empowered, increased their prominence in village societies, and benefited through the many services of CORD. CORD Sidhabari's outreach to improve the lives of villagers spans across hundreds of villages, where CORD has made significant, tangible, visible differences to better their standard of life.

Indeed, the beauty of the Himalayan mountain tops and river gorges made cannot be matched anywhere in the world and truly left an indelible mark on me.

An Incomplete Game by Chetana Neerchal

This is a trick
You play on me,
my Friend
So that this game
of hide-and-seek
will never end

A trick where
I catch a
glimpse of You
Only to lose it in
a spider's web
strung in an
archway

on a morning walk
in my garden
Sidetracked now,
compelled
to pen these
thoughts, for sleep
does not come
By then You have

moved away,
too far away
to be reached
But the trick
You played is true
You will be in
my thoughts
through dawn

FEATURE

Have You Met . . . Swami Dhyanananda?

by Anonymous



Hara Hara Gange! When I got the chance to interview Swami Dhyanananda-ji at the Powai ashram during our brahmachari course, the most powerful and outpouring sentiment was gratitude. Gratitude for meeting Pujya Gurudev's devotees and disciples, who are the rarest and most blissful kind. These brief encounters with Swamiji gave me a glimpse of the brightness and lightness of the spiritual path. My pranaams to Swamiji, who attained mahasamadhi in September 2011.

In his association spanning over 42 years (since 1965), in different capacities, Swamiji has seen Chinmaya Mission as it has evolved. Swamiji was based at Tapovan Kutir in Uttarkashi since January 1986, and considered himself to be the most blessed in Chinmaya Mission for being able to reside at the mula-sthana (place of origin) of the Chinmaya Mission—the place where Pujya Gurudev did His sadhana and studies, at the holy feet of Param Pujya Swami Tapovan Maharaj. Despite expanded facilities, Uttarkashi remains difficult to access even now, and its altitude makes it a challenge to reside in during the cold winter months of Northern India.

Why and how did Swamiji turn to Vedanta?

I cannot say that I was spiritual as a youth. Actually, I was rather wary of swamis. During my student years, Communism was rampant in Kerala and a lot of young minds were under its influence.

My introduction to Chinmaya Mission was in 1965. Having completed my formal education, I was working for the Madras State Electricity Board in Chennai. On my way home one evening, I happened to see an advertisement of Pujya Gurudev's *Gita jnana yajna* and decided to go there out of sheer curiosity.

In those days, Pujya Gurudev's introduction to the *Gita* in his talks used to last 3-4 days. I was convinced to a certain extent about *Gita* teachings just with the way Pujya Gurudev expounded the text. I was unable to attend the full *yajna* for work reasons, but was deeply impressed by Gurudev's logical exposition.

Life continued as it was and I moved to Mumbai in 1970, where I was working with a legal consulting firm. Aside from a lot of travel, this job involved some unethical money transfers, and this bothered me.

Toward the end of 1972, I saw a promotional display for Pujya Gurudev's *Gita jnana yajna* in Wadala. I went to attend and enrolled at the counter there as a Study Group member. With this, my interest in movies and friends and so-called worldly things decreased to a large extent, and I started getting more involved in Mission activities. I assisted in organizing area *yajnas* and even became a Study Group *sevak*.

Could Swamiji please share some memorable experiences as a new person in Chinmaya Mission?

My Study Group *sevak* was residing at the *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya* ashram in Powai, and after several invitations from him, a few of us Study Group members visited the ashram one day. This was a turning point in my association with Chinmaya Mission, as I was drawn to the Lord Jagadishvara idol at the temple. I felt the Lord was smiling at me, and as I sat there for a while, I started chanting the *panchakshara* mantra of *Om namah Shivaya*. Thereafter, I was a regular visitor at the ashram. Even after a hectic work schedule during the week, I would make it a point to attend the temple *aarti* every Sunday evening.

My involvement in Mission activities grew steadily. In 1975, we worked on collecting for a corpus fund and I became a committee member for organizing *jnana yajnas*. I was a volunteer during *Shivaratri*, when Pujya Gurudev gave *sannyasi diksha* to Pujya Swami Purushottamananda and Pujya Swamini Saradapriyananda. I also participated in the 1978 program when Chinmaya Mission released its first documentary video, *The Indivisible Truth*, at Shanmukhananda Hall.

During one of Pujya Gurudev's brief stays at *Sandeepany* in 1975, I sought his permission to visit *Shri Tapovan Kutir* for 15 days, and Pujya Gurudev kindly consented. In those days, Uttarkashi did not have many conveniences and the ashram could accommodate a maximum of 30 people at a time. From Uttarkashi I joined Pujya Gurudev in Hyderabad, along with the students of the ongoing batch of the Vedanta Course in Mumbai.

After returning to Mumbai, I continued my profession, but also got permission to attend classes along with the Vedanta Course students. It was then that I studied texts such as *Ishavasya Upanishad*, *Shri Dakshinamurti Stotram*, and *Atma Bodha*.

Overwhelmed with a desire to visit Kedarnath, and quite troubled by the dishonest practices at my workplace, I left my job and set out on the pilgrimage with no money, dressed in white. After *darshan* of the Lord at Badrinath and Kedarnath, still with no funds, I waited at a railway station with a desire to go to Benares. I had heard about a temple of Lord Kedarnath at Benares that was maintained by a South Indian *matha*. Inspired by a wandering monk, who seemed to be a regular "ticket-less" traveler, I boarded the train to Benares. My honest confession to the ticket conductor, that I had no money, got me a gentle "Hmmm" and a free ride to Benares!

The *matha* was accommodating, and I spent ten months in Benares at that ashram, helping out at the temple. Each day would begin at 4 a.m. with a chilling dip in the holy Ganga, and in the infamous North Indian winters, it was not easy.

Pujya Swamini Saradapriyananda and visited the temple one morning, along with three *brahmacharis*. I went and introduced myself, and on hearing of my association with the Mission, as well as my stay at Benares with a desire to study, Amma said I could attend her classes on *Kenopanishad* over the next 15 days. Thereafter, I accompanied her and the students to Uttarkashi, where we stayed for 3 months. We were taught *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* and had to give a written examination on the completion of each chapter.

Pujya Gurudev came to Uttarkashi toward the end of Amma's camp. This was my second meeting with him, and he graced me by telling me to stay on at Uttarkashi and assist the swami in-charge of the *kutir* with correspondence, accounts, etc. About 8 months later, unable to bear a rebuke of that swami in-charge, one day, I said, "I will not work." News of this reached Pujya Gurudev and he wrote back saying, "Now let Br. Gopinath be independent," which meant I was to leave the Ashram. So, I did.

This led me to my second trip to Badrinath and Kedarnath, on foot. This time, I had to sell my wristwatch to get train fare to Benares. At Benares, I took refuge at the sacred ashram of Swami Sreedharananda, who personally did *upasana* of the ashram's presiding deity. Lord Narasimha. Plagued by malaria and jaundice, I was nursed by Swami Rhytananda, once a homeopathic doctor. When my condition worsened, I was admitted to a local Ayurvedic hospital.

The less that is said about this hospital, the better. It was hell. Attacked by fits of shivering around 8 p.m. every evening left me perspiring and thirsty. With no ward boys to assist, I was compelled to make my way to get water holding on to the walls for support, and finally had to resort to drinking water from the bathroom.

Thereafter, with very little physical capacity, and the lack of an opportunity to do serious study at Benares, Swami Rhytananda got me a railway ticket to Chennai. I reached Chennai and stayed for a month with my elder brother. Having recouped a little, I set out again on a pilgrimage to Kanyakumari. Within a span of one year and 11 months, I made three trips between Kanyakumari and Chennai via different routes, on foot. I lived on *madhukari bhiksha* (collected food from various householders).

As a young, wandering *brahmachari*, there were many times that aged swamis asked me to stay and take charge of their ashrams. But it was deeply ingrained in my mind that Pujya Gurudev's service alone was for me. My faith in Shri Gurudev never wavered because of his grace alone.

It was during my third Kanyakumari pilgrimage that I met Pujya Swamini Saradapriyananda again. When Pujya Gurudev came for the conclusion of Amma's camp for unemployed graduates at Tirupati, he asked me to join Amma at the *Chinmayaranyam* ashram and study under her tutelage. Thus, toward the end of 1981, I joined *Chinmayaranyam* and was the first Treasurer there. The three and a half years that I spent there were a great learning experience and Amma was a strict disciplinarian.

And what was it like learning from Pujya Swamini Saradapriyananda?

With funds being sparse, and construction work in progress, Amma wanted accounts every night. Even if there was a difference of one rupee in the account, we would sit up until midnight on some days to trace the error. She would stay up late and be up at 4 a.m. the next morning. Having had a late night, in case I was late for Amma's 5 a.m. class, I would not get my morning cup of coffee!

Once, I purchased two pillows to give a little comfort to the guests who would have to sleep on the cement platforms (we usually slept with just a mat as bedding). Amma's love and care was limitless toward each and every one, but she took me to task and reminded me that funds were tough to get and such indulgences were to be avoided.

In three and a half years, the ashram developed, and barren land was transformed into a lush green pasture with trees, paddy fields, and vegetable gardens. Pujya Gurudev used to send funds from various camps, and when he saw the ashram, he was very pleased. By then, I understood that my time at *Chinmayaranyam* was up, and I left one day, again as a wandering mendicant, after taking Amma's blessings.

I walked to Mukambika in Karnataka and stayed there for nine months. Thereafter, I went to the Swami Abhedananda Ashram in Trivandrum, where I started holding *satsangs*. On receiving my first *guru dakshina*, I was keen to send it to Pujya Gurudev. On hearing of his *yajna* in Chennai, I went to get his blessings and make the offering. He was staying with Nambiar Amma then, and he received the *dakshina* with much joy, and immediately wrote to Sarada Amma to "receive and bless him." He also wrote to the Swami Abhedananda Ashram: "Make my *brahmachari* a Trustee."

I went with the *Acharya* of the Swami Abhedananda Ashram to attend a *Bhagavat Saptah* in Palakkad, Kerala. I decided to stay on for Pujya Gurudev's *yajna* on the outskirts of Palakkad. Gurudev permitted me to stay and I was accommodated in the house of the president of Chinmaya Mission Palakkad. During one of the informal *satsangs*, Pujya Gurudev asked me, "Will you go to Uttarkashi?" I responded, "If Gurudev says, I will go."

The next evening, Gurudev returned early from a discourse and handed me an envelope with sufficient money to go to Uttarkashi, and instructions to look after *Shri Tapovan Kutir*. "See what can be done," he said. The resourceful host managed to get me a train ticket to Delhi that same night. Thus, in less than six hours, I was on my way to Uttarkashi. In those days, I used to wear an upper cloth wrapped around, not a *kurta*. I shivered as I reached Delhi in the winter, but I could bear all this by the grace of Pujya Gurudev.

Uttarkashi then and now—what has it been like?

On reaching Uttarkashi, I noticed that *Tapovan Kutir* was not being looked after as it should have been. It was the *mula-sthana* (the place of origin) Chinmaya Mission, which was growing worldwide, and yet it was not well maintained. My first and immediate action was getting the entire place whitewashed. At that time, Pujya Gurudev used to send Rs. 3,000 per month toward expenses for the *kutir*.

Within the next few months Pujya Swami Purushottamananda held a camp at the *kutir* with over 80 participants. In early 1987, another camp was held with 140 participants, for whom we had to construct wooden bathrooms in a short span of time. It may have been due to Pujya Gurudev's *sankalpa* that there were 8-9 camps held at the ashram that year. Noticing that the kitchen was small and vessels were inadequate, we designed the current kitchen and dining hall, and thus, the building as it stands today, was constructed.

After Pujya Gurudev's *mahasamadhi*, Pujya Guruji suggested we make a permanent structure, in place of the GI Sheet (temporary) structure that we had, to accommodate the increasing devotees visiting over the years. The new building was inaugurated in 1995.

In 1998, we received a piece of land donated by a Mission devotee from Los Angeles, and Pujya Guruji directed us to construct a hall with some rooms. "*Tapovan Chinmayam*" was thus inaugurated by Guruji in 2005.

What is it living in Uttarkashi like?

Uttarkashi is a sacred place and there is a mention of it in *Skanda Purana*. Geographically, it is similar to Kashi (Benares), with two tributaries that flow and join Mother Ganga. The holy Ganga flows northward in a part of Uttarkashi also, where She is known as "Uttaravahini." The name is symbolic of man's turning away from the material world and toward his own higher Source, the Supreme divine.

A place gains religious importance due to any of the following three reasons: *sthal mahima* (glory of the place), *tirtha mahima* (glory of its sacredness as an altar or place of pilgrimage), or *murti mahima* (glory of its idol or presiding deity). Uttarkashi has all the three. It is highly sacred and sought after by sincere seekers and saints from time immemorial. It has seen the *samadhi* of great and revered devotees from our scriptures, such as Mandavi, Bhrngi, Parashara Rishi, Jamadagni Rishi, and Uddalaka. As a pilgrimage center, there cannot be a *tirtha* nobler than the holy Ganga. The presence of its main deity, Lord Vishwanath, can be experienced by a person of *shraddha* even today. It is a *jnana bhumi* (land of knowledge) and a favorite of serious *sadhakas*.

Uttarkashi is prone to natural calamities, such as earthquakes and landslides, and the winters are severe. But with Swami Tapovan Maharaj's grace, there is no difficulty or suffering—only joy! The reverence that the local villagers have for the holy Ganga and Lord Vishwanath make them [the villagers] very amiable, and thus, they help create a highly conducive environment for *sadhakas*.

As far as the Chinmaya Mission is concerned, Uttarkashi is highly significant, for it is the abode of our Param Guru Swami Tapovan-ji Maharaj, and where Pujya Gurudev did penance and scriptural study.

Swami Tapovanji Maharaj is still in Uttarkashi. Pujya Gurudev wrote to me once, "For those who want, Shri Gurudev is still there. I have seen him standing in the verandah, looking out at the holy Ganges." Even today we can see Param Pujya Swamiji, but we do not approach him with humility! We look for comforts even as Mission devotees. The sad part is that we do not visit the *kutir* with *shraddha* in our *Param Guru*. We only see the *kutir* and do not feel his presence.

Some people do recognize. I remember an American came here with five other people and sought permission from me to sit outside the *kutir* and meditate. Fifteen minutes later, he came with a

request that we keep the *kutir* open for *sadhakas* from all over the world, as he felt great “spiritual power” there. He even wrote to Pujya Guruji with this request.

NEWS

Chinmaya Vibhooti Virtual Tour

Watch the latest updated video presentation on *Chinmaya Vibhooti*, the vision, learning, and resource center for all Chinmaya Mission activities worldwide. Click [here](#) and view on YouTube.

New from Chinmaya Publications

New Chinmaya Bala Vihar Tote Bags in bright red, orange, lime green, and blue are now available for only \$6 each. The imprinted and durable poly canvas tote bag has a large front pocket for smaller items. Specs:

- Bag Size 13”H x 14” L x 4” W
- Reinforced Straps 26.25” L, 1.25” W
- Front Pocket 11” W x 9.75” H
- Open Main compartment
- Hand Wash only



The new tote bags for Chinmaya Study Group members and Chinmaya Bala Vihar Sevaks are a larger size, with a zipper pocket, and available for \$7 each, in pink, red, orange, and lime green.



Do away with plastic with the new go-green CP bag, now available for only \$2 each.



The new colorful and illustrated My Prayers book, with complimentary audio CD of over 170 mp3 tracks, is now available for only \$15 each.



Place your order [online](#) or e-mail [CP](#).

CHYK West on Facebook and with New Website by Nikita Kathuria

By Pujya Gurudev's grace and Pujya Guruji's blessings, on *Ganesha Chaturthi* in 2011, CHYK West launched its newly improved website, chykwest.com. The CHYK web *sevak* team included Megha Davalath (CM Los Angeles), Sushma Parmar (CM Austin), Pritesh Kot (CM Toronto), and Ashwin Subramanian (CM New York). CHYK West will now focus on its second phase for this project, namely, adding new features, such as *bhajan* downloads and weekly Podcasts of various CM *acharyas'* discourses.

CHYK West also launched its new Facebook page, facebook.com/chykwest, on August 15, and currently has almost 200 followers.

Navaratri Garba-Raas at CM Houston by Shalini Somraj and Sreedevi Gundamaraju; photos by Jayesh Mistry

CM Houston (CMH) celebrated the much-awaited festive event of *Navaratri garba-raas* on October 9, 2011 at the Berry Center. CMH families and invited guests arrived at 7 p.m. to live vocal music by CM devotees. The circular altar of Divine Mother was decorated in beautiful red and white silks, and the immediate, center of attraction. Adorning the room's altar in the center of the room was the intricate *Batukamma* floral arrangement, a harmonious blend of traditional North and South Indian *Navaratri* celebrations.

The celebrations commenced with an invocation to Mother Durga by the children of the *Chinmaya Swaranjali* group. As soon as the *garba* beats and singing began, everyone came to dance through the night. The evening also featured a surprise birthday celebration for CMH's Acharya Gaurang Nanavaty, as well as a dinner and dessert feast that included ice cream and cake.

After the break, *Dandiya-raas* brought in a frenzy of color and movement. The scintillating and tireless singers drew everyone to the dance floor. Chairs set along the walls gave respite for needed breaks. Everyone gathered for the concluding closing prayers, and went home with ringing music and devotion in their hearts.



New Ashram for Lord Shiva in Toronto

by Ranu Ramraj

It was with immense joy that Chinmaya Mission Toronto celebrated the inauguration of its new ashram in Brampton, Ontario in August 2011, in the august presence of Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda.

A congregation of nearly 500 devotees delighted in, and savored, the divine presence and message of Pujya Guruji. In his opening address, he expounded on the meaning of Vedanta and on Pujya Gurudev's vision of oneness. Guruji's words resonated in the hearts of all, as the CM Toronto family marveled at the power of the *yajna* spirit that brought everyone together and synchronized all collective efforts.

Pujya Guruji says, "Action without vision creates division. Vision without action is mere imagination. Action with vision creates transformation." With this move, Pujya Gurudev bestowed on CM Toronto a most precious opportunity for the transformation of a community, and in an atmosphere that was nothing short of a grand festival, Chinmaya family members worked side by side and hand in hand. The experience nurtured the sense of belonging and community, and fortified everyone.

Pujya Guruji's comment on Lord Shiva's spirit of *sannyasa* playfully alluded to His wanderings from His first and second ashrams to this final and lasting abode, which is the largest of the three ashrams.

On Saturday, August 6, Guruji masterfully led in the chanting of *Hanuman Chalisa* seven times, each in a different *raga*. In between each *raga*, he narrated a story or expounded on teachings from the *Chalisa*. The auditorium was spiritually charged, with hearts reveling on Lord Hanuman's glories, and everyone radiated joy.

The *murti* of Lord Shiva, with Ganga-ji trickling through His sacred locks, gazed down at one and all. Indeed, the morning's melody and harmony of divine music was deeply rooted in His stillness and pervasive silence. These inaugural days that were so blessed because of Pujya Guruji's visit, will be forever cherished by the CM Toronto family.



Successful CORD Work Continues

by Subha Pathial

Local humanitarian service work being done at CMW regional centers include the following, in descending order: Feeding the homeless, distributing winter blankets/coats, serving the elderly, mentoring/tutoring children, helping international crisis victims, collecting and distributing school supplies, distributing sandwich bags, offering professional services pro bono, and creating holiday baskets.

CORD fundraisers held at CMW regional centers include the following, in descending order: Walk for CORD, CORD Readathon, cultural events, special occasion gift collections, and kite festivals.

CM Washington's DC's annual summer camp in Virginia featured a "Love in Action" series of service projects that included a sandwich drive, toiletries drive, and greeting card drive for the sick and needy.

CORD fundraisers conducted in October 2011 included CM Minneapolis's Walk for CORD, CHYK Austin's "Joy of Service" seva retreat, and CM Halton's special fundraiser for CORD Sri Lanka.

CORD's quarterly reports posted under News/Events on CORDUSA.org and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CORDUSA). Featured below are some of news briefs:

CORD Deuladhiha is promoting the conservation of medicinal herbs by training local farmers to plant and conserve herbs in danger of becoming extinct due to environmental destruction.

A new Mahila Mandal with 40 tribal women was formed in the village of Tamanga. CORD Deuladiha now has 23 Mahila Mandals with 868 members.

This center's CORD Self-Help Group, raised over Rs.4.8 million, benefiting 200 households, by cultivating watermelon, which was harvested, transported, and sold in distant places.

CORD Lathikata's three-month Computer Literacy Course has welcomed its fourth batch of students, a total of 18 youth from Lathikata and a nearby village. The course is conducted by a software professional for three hours daily, five days a week.

CORD Lathikata also offered a special "tree-t" in honor of Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda's birthday in June 2011 by distributing a variety of *neem*, *karanja*, guava, papaya, lemon, *ashoka*, *amla*, etc. plants to village orchards in Lohadar and Budhikudar. A simultaneous awareness program was also conducted on children's education, the negative effects of alcohol, and the preparation of herbal medicines.

As part of their fight against social injustice, CORD Lathikata organized a signature campaign on April 8, 2011 in support of Anna Hazare's fast for the enactment of the *Jana Lokpal* Bill, and staged a one-day *Dharana* in the main market of Lathikata.

CORD Sidhabari is booming with 1,311 Self-Help Groups, composed of 17,520 members.

In its effort to detect, prevent, and cure anemia, CORD Sidhabari arranged for hemoglobin testing of 358 village girls, of whom 70% were diagnosed with anemia. They were given iron supplements and advised on a new diet that includes jaggery, gram, and peanuts.

CORD Siruvani (Coimbatore) celebrated World Anti-Tobacco Day on May 31, 2011, by visiting various areas and showing the villagers visual presentations to raise awareness on the hazards of tobacco use and options available to stop tobacco use.

CORD Thamarapakkam encouraged students to start thinking about career choices through its workshop entitled, *Vizhithidu*, which means "Wake Up" in Tamil. A total of 17 experts in various fields, such as law, education, and armed services, guided and inspired 150 students on different career opportunities.

To cool off the hot summer, CORD Thamarapakkam hosted a four-day, residential "COOL Camp" for rural children. Spirituality and patriotism were taught to 350 students through interactive sessions, folk arts, games, etc.

CORD Sri Lanka is expanding its outreach to provide counseling and help to the troubled and war-torn men, women, and children of Jaffna, Killinochi, and Batticaloa. Over 600 women in various parts of Jaffna and Killinochi were trained to form Self-Help Groups, which have now also formed Mahila Mandals groups, in an effort to empower them to help rebuild their family lives.

CM New York's Summer Celebration of *Adi Shankara Mahotsava* by Bina Mahabir

CM New York celebrated *Adi Shankara Mahotsava*, Pujya Gurudev's *jayanti*, and *Guru Purnima* with "123 to AUM," a special series of talks by Acharya Krishna Moorthy that were offered July-August 2011.

The three discourses, which included visual PowerPoint presentations, focused on Adi Shankaracharya's life and teachings, and his lofty contributions toward the revival of *Advaita Vedanta* in his day. Acharya Krishna Moorthy's in-depth knowledge and articulation of Vedanta helped reveal and explain Adi Shankaracharya's teachings and accomplishments in simple terms for easy understanding. A documentary film on Adi Shankaracharya was screened on the first day, after which Acharyaji explained various verses from Adi Shankara's world-renowned composition, *Bhaja Govindam*.

Chinmaya Naada Bindu Programs in Winter 2011 Based on a report by Pramodini Rao

Chinmaya Naada Bindu, Chinmaya Mission's residential school of music and dance, featured "*Rama Darshan*," its 2nd Festival for the Arts on October 1-2, 2011. This multi-layered feast for art, music, and dance lovers celebrated the story and spirit of the *Ramayana*, and was held this year at CM Chennai's Chinmaya Heritage Center.

"*Aao Saare Gaayen Sa Re . . .*" was the first family music camp conducted by three directors of Chinmaya Naada Bindu (CNB) during the weekend of October 15-16. The camp featured fun-filled classes and activities prepared by CNB's Vocal Music Director Pramodini Rao, Instrumental Music Director Himanshu Nanda, and Dance Director Ramaa Bharadvaj.

A unique non-residential workshop on Carnatic music by the renowned Malladi Brothers is November's most eagerly awaited event. CNB will host this program at the *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya* ashram in Powai, Mumbai, November 6-8. For details, click [here](#).

CNB will also offer its second one-week course in Hindustani vocal and flute at *Chinmaya Vibhooti*, November 19-25. The course will be conducted by CNB Directors. For details, click [here](#).

CM Ann Arbor's Walk for CORD by Sangita Shivakumar

CM Ann Arbor held its Walk for CORD on Saturday, August 13, 2011, at picturesque Kensington Park in Milford, Michigan. Despite the rainy forecast, over 200 people came to participate.

The event began promptly at 10 a.m. with a prayer. All the participants were given an orange silicone wristband engraved with "Walk for CORD - CMAA." After the three-mile walk was completed, everyone was treated to simple lunch and refreshments that included hot tea, *samosas*, lemonade, and watermelon. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the participants and volunteers, the event raised \$35,000 for CORD.

CM Vancouver's Colorful Navaratri Report submitted by CM Vancouver

Navaratri 2011 at CM Vancouver was filled with knowledge and artistic fun. After learning about the

significance of the festival, and completing their Chinmaya Bala Vihar classes, children and parents gathered for the eagerly awaited *rangoli* contest, which was a family versus family competition over 45 minutes.

There were numerous materials and designs. The final array of colors featured birds made of *rangoli* powder, triangles made of coloured rice, circles made of grated and diced vegetables, flowers made of grains and flower petals, and even stars made from building blocks and Play Doh. There was a burst of creativity in every pattern.

The two judges picked two winners: First Place and Runner Up. The Runner Up design was a colourful and vibrant symmetrical design made of colored rice. First Place went to a circular design that was made entirely out of diced and grated purple and white cabbages, carrots, pumpkins, and radishes, and adorned with a corn on the cob in the middle.

A delicious lunch brought the celebrations to a joyful close, and everyone went home having grown in devotion for Divine Mother and Her colourful creations.



Chinmaya Bala Vihar at CM Houston by Uma Aggarwal; photos by Nilesh Shah

The *satsanga* hall of CM Houston's *Chinmaya Prabha* ashram was filled to capacity on September 11, 2011, which marked the first day of classes of the Chinmaya Bala Vihar 2011-2012 year.

The children sat in neat rows, according to their grade, as the chanting of the Vedic *aarti* and *Vishnu Sahasranama* marked the commencement. All the children lined up with their teachers to offer *pranams* to Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda, and then walked to the *Saumyakashi Shivalaya* temple to receive the Lord's blessings for an auspicious year of spiritual learning and growth.

With new students joining each year, as graduating students take leave, CM Houston's Chinmaya Bala Vihar program continues to grow beautifully. With Pujya Gurudev's blessings, the current year's student enrollment has almost reached 1,000, a new milestone.

The Chinmaya Bala Vihar program continues to flourish under the guidance of Acharya Darshana Nanavaty, who has developed an amazing curriculum, administers the program, and continuously trains over 65 dedicated *sevaks* and *sevikas* to teach the children in a fun and thought-provoking way.

CM Houston also offers language, *Shlokathon*, Gita chanting, *bhajan*, and orchestra classes. In addition to regular Sunday *satsanga*, Acharya Gaurang Nanavaty conducts five study groups on a weekly basis.



CHYKs Run for CORD

CHYKs ran a 13-mile marathon to benefit CORD USA and raised \$1,600 on September 11, 2011. While six Chicago CHYKs ran the Half Marathon, another CHYK ran the same in solidarity in Washington, DC. The participating CHYKs were Seema Kamath, Pooja Merai, Supriya Nair, Shivam Gosai, Varun Kaushal, Nikhil Aggarwal, and Krishna Bhamidipati. Shivam Gosai wrote about his experience as follows:

Every Sunday at Chinmaya Mission centers around the world, we pledge that we will, “stand as one family, bound to each other with love and respect.” On September 11, 2011, and the months prior to the date, I had a unique experience of catching glimpses of this glorious vision.

On September 11, a few fellow CHYKs and I had crossed the finish line at the Chicago Half-Marathon, to benefit CORD (Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development). Never had I thought of myself as an athlete capable of running 13.1 miles, so this opportunity challenged me to push myself beyond my limitations in the name of service. By the time I had signed up for the race, I had six weeks to train (most runners take 15) and was nervous of my ability to accomplish such a task. However, the love and support from my friends and family pushed me to train harder than I ever had, and on race day, I was inspired to express my gratitude to them by running faster than ever, without breaking for more than sixty seconds. I now plan to run a full marathon in Spring 2012, as well as other races throughout the year, to raise money for CORD. This experience has made me more conscious of the Chinmaya Pledge and taught me that love can run further than you can!



In Memoriam: Sheela Sharma by Anjali Singh

Sheela Sharma, a long-time devotee of Pujya Gurudev and senior member of Chinmaya Mission, passed away on July 23, 2011 in New Delhi, India. She had organized Pujya Gurudev’s first *jnana yajnas* in Rewa, Allahabad, Kanpur, and Agra. She was an acclaimed writer in Hindi, but when Pujya Gurudev asked her to translate his Upanishad commentaries, she left her own writing ambitions, and served him by translating most of his commentaries into Hindi.

In his *Vedanta through Letters* book, Pujya Gurudev reminisces about the wonderful memories spent with Sheela Sharma’s family in Rewa. In her later years, when she lived in Delhi, there was never a time that she did not visit Pujya Gurudev in the early hours of the morning, during his in transit visits to Delhi. Pujya Gurudev also stayed at her residence many times. Her devotion was transparent and expressive through her *seva* of translating books, organizing *yajnas*, knitting socks, cooking food, etc. In fact, Pujya Gurudev’s last meal in Delhi was offered to him by Sheela Sharma at Delhi Airport on June 7, 1993.

CM Delhi acknowledges her deep devotion to Pujya Gurudev, and her physical presence will be missed at all functions.

