

Hari OM

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“God abides in all living beings and at all times as a luminous presence, so one can realize Him only in the cave of one’s mind and nowhere else. . . . By realizing Him, man becomes birthless and deathless. This direct perception of God is the supreme object of human life. It is the supreme bliss, the supreme goal.”

Source: *Ishvara Darshan*

“. . . Understand the goal of the contemplative student. What is he seeking? Where is It to be sought? Not as something unknown, not as some mighty mysterious Power dwelling out there in Heaven, Vaikuntha or Kailasa, but right here in your own bosom, expressing as the very spring of all life. [This] silent and mysterious power called Life expresses through every one of us”

Source: *Art of Contemplation*

“If man is, by nature, Infinite, why does he strive to gain infinitude? One does not need to strive to gain what is already one’s own. And if he does, the only reason for this could be ignorance (of the gained thing). Man strives to be complete and infinite due to ignorance of his true nature. Ignorance can be removed only by knowledge. . . . and the valid means for Self-knowledge is Vedanta.”

Source: Commentary on *Upadesha Sara*

SPIRITUAL TRAILS

Reflections on Life and Death

by Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda

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There are some schools of thinkers who have established that death is the end of everything and there is nothing beyond it. There are others who accept, argue, and heartily proclaim that there is existence even beyond the grave.

Most of us also show a keen interest in wanting to know what lies beyond. But only few of us apply ourselves to the practice of how to make our lives more fulfilling in the present moment. Yet, understanding our present life is much more important than trying to discover what is after death. How to experience undisturbed peace and happiness in ourselves, and how to bring this newfound peace and harmony back to the world, is of vital importance to us all. Nevertheless, in this modern era, where people consider themselves highly intellectual, there is great curiosity and preoccupation to know what lies beyond the death experience. This shows that what we cannot see or experience has significantly greater attraction for us. Before entering into the subject, we should first analyze the following questions: What is life? What is death? And who dies?

What is life?

From the point of view of the materialist, life is an illogical and meaningless procession from birth to death. One who is constantly engaged in the pursuit of earning, procuring, and hoarding material wealth cannot have the required subtlety of mind to inquire into the possibilities of the hereafter. As long as the mind and intellect are drowned in the baser values of life, which are built upon thoughtless conclusions and instinctive identification with one's body, one shall not easily entertain the urge to go beyond the shackles of mortal limitations. The materialistic person seems convinced that there is nothing after death, and firmly believes that death is the end, as no one has ever come back to talk about it.

But for spiritual students, life is a continuous process with a great purpose, a glorious pattern, and full of meaning. They understand that the life they are living today is an effect, and since every effect must have a cause, their lives must have their independent causes, even though these causes may not be visible today. Spiritual life is a continuous attempt to live a divine life. Thus, the spiritual student tries to live up to certain higher values, such as tolerance, love, kindness, and mercy.

What is death?

Viewed from a scientific perspective, a person is considered to be alive when he is able to respond to certain stimuli that he receives through the sense organs. When an individual stops responding to the stimuli, we say he/she is dead. . . . Analyze this. Who exactly is dead? We see that the body is still there; no part of it has gone away. The same body is lying there which was there before death. Yet, when we say Mr. X has died, what we really mean is that the mind and intellect that were receiving and responding to outer stimuli have left the body. Hence, we conclude that Mr. X, the person who called himself "I" or "me," is other than the body.

This physical body is composed of the five great elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth. It is the nature of the body to merge back with the same five elements when it is dead, meaning, when the mind and intellect have left it. Therefore, I must conclude that I am the possessor of, or the indweller in, the body. The body is just like a tenement for which I pay rent in the form of food, three to four times a day. If I forget to pay the rent, you can imagine what a tragedy I will have to meet with!

Similarly, this "dwelling" is but an instrument through which I express myself in this world, just like my car. If my car is destroyed, why should I think that I am destroyed? I am not the car. I am only the owner of the car. In the same way, if the body is destroyed, I am not destroyed. I am other than the body. My senses are only those instruments through which I receive stimuli from the outer world. Therefore, it is the mind and intellect that comprise the real individuality of a person. When we say we must develop the personality, we denote that the mind and intellect are to be developed. A truly cultured or civilized person is one who has a sharp and integrated mind and intellect. Due to our unintelligent ways of thinking, however, we do not look beyond the body.

What is the difference between life and death? Matter activated by Consciousness is a living body. If Consciousness is not activated in a dead body, what happens to that Consciousness? Is it all-pervading? But if Consciousness is not present in a dead body, how can we say it is all-pervading?

Consciousness reflected in the mind and intellect (subtle body) is the consciousness of things. When the mind and intellect leave the gross body, it is the condition of death of the gross body. Since the subtle body alone can reflect infinite Consciousness, there is no apparent feeling, thinking, or perception for a dead physical body.

When, with a mirror, we reflect a pool of sunlight at Point A on the wall, and then tip the mirror, the specific pool of light A moves to Point B. We can now say the specific individuality at A has gone (at death) and a specific individuality has come (to be born) at B. But remember, the general sunlight that is on the wall has never really come or gone; only the reflected light created by the mirror at point A has moved away. So too, though the subtle and causal bodies leave the physical body and reflected Consciousness no longer manifests in the dead body, pure Existence (*Sat*)—like the sunlight on the wall—still pervades the dead body.

The sages proclaim that death is an easy and simple process, that it does not demand any effort on the part of the dying. They have told us that it is like going from one place to another. However, if this is so, why do we feel so sorry for an impending death, which is but going from one body to another?

This sorrow is due to our attachments for the objects of the world that we do not want to leave behind. Suppose I am sitting in the dining room and I tie myself to the table, chairs, and cupboards with a rope. If I then leave the dining room for the bedroom, I naturally invite discomfort, pain, and sorrow for myself.

One can frequently observe scenes of attachment at railway stations just before the time of the train's departure. A few persons will have tears rolling down their cheeks, some will have melancholy faces, and you may even see some of them running along with the train shouting, "Please write every day." This is all because of attachment.

Possessiveness or attachment is due to identification. In the waking state, you identify yourself with the gross body. Therefore, you are conscious of it, and you think that happiness and sorrow of the body are your happiness and sorrow.

When you withdraw your identification from the gross body and identify with the subtle body, you are in the dream state. You do not experience any happiness or sorrow of the gross body, but you are happy or unhappy in the dream world of experience, which was created by your mind and intellect.

When you have withdrawn your identification from the gross as well as the subtle body, and have identified with your causal body, you are in the deep sleep state, not experiencing any happiness or sorrow of the gross or subtle bodies. There, you experience undisturbed peace and bliss, but you are not conscious of your experience of peace and happiness. When you reach the fourth state of consciousness, called *Turiya*, you have conscious experience of Happiness, which is your own nature.

When the subtle body takes the pilgrimage from a given physical body to another, we say that the person has died. Yet, each will continue to go on to such bodies as controlled by their desires, demands, or cravings. We remain in a certain place until our particular demands are met, and afterwards, we leave that place and go to another where our next predominant desires are to be fulfilled.

You could say that the relationship of the mind and intellect with the body is something like that of a bird and its nest. The nest is safe as long as the bird continues to visit the nest to feed its young. But as soon as its purpose to visit is over, it flies away, never thinking about the nest. And without the bird, the nest perishes. There is no sense of possession or ownership in this.

Similarly, until the subtle body exhausts its desires, loves, and hatreds, and likes and dislikes, the physical body is safe. When the purpose of the subtle body is exhausted, it leaves its physical frame. Without the subtle body, the physical body must perish. But actually we have not perished, for we are something other than the body.

Why do we fear death?

Whatever be the span of life allotted, there is death lurking at the end of it all. Death is equally painful today or a thousand years from now. Everything that one has gathered, for which one has worked many hours each day, 365 days of the year—the house, wife, children, name, and fame—we must leave one day. Because we lack correct knowledge of our real nature, we unintelligently create wrong relationships with the objects of the world. These relationships are called attachments.

But suppose there had been no death and only birth. What a tragedy! There would have been no more space available on the earth. An increase of only a few million people creates a headache for the government. Whether we like it or not, it is the benevolent law of nature that brings death. When we agree that death must come, why should we fear it?

We fear death because of our identification with the gross body and of gathering the qualities of the body on our Self. Our identification with the body is so strong that we apprehend destruction of ourselves whenever we think of the death of the body. Now the question is, can the mind and intellect remain without the body?

Let us take the example of the bullet and the gun. A bullet or gun alone cannot frighten or kill us because by themselves they do not have any power. But when the bullet is in the gun, it certainly can frighten us; and when fired from the gun, it can bring death. A bullet can only travel in the direction in which the gun is pointed. As long as the bullet is in the gun, the gun has control as to which direction the bullet will travel. Once the bullet is shot or has left the gun, the gun has no control over it.

Similarly, while our mind is in the body, we have control over the mind. But once the mind and intellect have left the body, the body has no control over it. The mind will be shot in the direction decided by the sum total of our thoughts and activities of our entire lifetime.

Why should we not indulge in the objects of the world during our lifetime and contemplate upon the Lord only at the time of death?

This proves impossible, for how can we think of God in our final hours after focusing a lifetime of thoughts on the external world? It is therefore suggested that we should begin to contemplate upon God right here and now, for it is not certain when death will come. It is necessary for us to think of the Lord at the time of death because these thoughts provide us with a certain atmosphere and a proper vehicle to accomplish our voyage to Perfection.

Therefore, to the intelligent person, death is not painful, but a new experience. If a candle is burned, nothing is lost. There is only a change in name and form. Similarly, nothing is lost in death to the person of wisdom. For him it is but a change of body, place, and time.

Is there an interval between the departure from one body and entry into another?

This can be explained by the following example. When an officer is transferred from one city to another, say from Bombay to Delhi, he must first give up his charge and leave Bombay, and then reach Delhi in order to take up his new appointment. He has handed over his duties at Bombay and is on his way to Delhi. If he is asked on the way if he is an officer, he will certainly confirm that, but when he is asked if he is an officer of Bombay or Delhi, he cannot answer, for, at that moment, he is neither in Bombay nor in Delhi. Yet he is still an officer inasmuch as he is getting paid for the interval period also. Therefore, the interval can be called the joining time.

Similarly, when the subtle body leaves a given physical body in order to assume a new one, there must be an interval between the two events. The duration of this interval depends on the relationship you have with the body that you are shedding and the urgency you feel for the next embodiment.

Can we contact the dead?

In our scriptures, it is said that we can contact the dead, but the rishis strongly advise against it. They say that by calling our loved ones back here, we are perhaps asking them to come down into a lower world. If, at that time, our loved ones are at higher realms of experience, we stop their pilgrimage by calling them down, and instead of sending their blessings they will curse us.

In this world also, no one wants to come down from a higher to a lower state. If one is forced to come down from a higher state, he will be cursing those responsible for his fall. Similarly, why should the spirits respond to our call when they are in a higher realm? They do so because they are overpowered by their love and attachment for us. Some spirits, however, refuse to come down because they are not overpowered; thus they continue their pilgrimage to a higher plane.

We can observe similar incidents right here on earth. For example, some parents sacrifice their own principles in order to make their children happier. Say a young man wants to marry a particular girl, but his parents do not like the match. If, after much persuasion, the son still wants to marry the girl, the parents, though not happy, will sacrifice their happiness in preference to that of their son. This is because of their attachment to him.

Therefore, by calling the spirit of a dead person, we are not going to do any good for our dear ones. If we are not able to do something good for them, at least we should not harm them. It is now left up to each individual to think these ideas over and act intelligently.

Worshipping the Divine, Seen and Unseen by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda

Nature Is Our Own Echo

This theme is very dear to my heart. It is the need of the hour; a topic discussed at length in various forums.

We learn from the media, as well as our own experiences, a great deal about the high level of pollution in the world today. Even in advanced societies like America, there are a few places where people find it difficult to breathe. The water in our rivers is not clean or potable. The levels of noise pollution are

on the increase. Our cities today are concrete jungles giving rise to phenomena such as rising temperatures and depletion of the ozone layer. Mother Nature is being exploited without mercy.

Today, people the world over are becoming conscious of the many environmental crises. Efforts are being undertaken to reverse the degradation of Nature. Unfortunately, due to the lethargy and delay in reacting to such problems, they have reached mammoth proportions. Though a beginning has been made, unfortunately, enough has not been done.

Through the ancient culture of the Hindus came the message of living in harmony with Mother Earth, following the inherent melody and rhythm present therein. In present day, the message is one of aggression—how to win over Nature and subjugate her. We should, however, know that progress can be made by obeying the laws of Nature. It is not necessary to plunder and decimate at will. If we follow the latter route, then suffering is very much in the cards. One cannot go against the laws of Nature and escape scot-free. The price of plundering and looting must be paid.

Our culture is one that worships Nature and lives in total harmony with her. In the final analysis, it is this attitude that will be the winner. The message is very clear. Do not exploit Nature. Give back to her what you take from her. If we do not follow this policy, we will have to pay for our sins. Nature brooks no denials; compensation will have to be made. The more aggression, the greater will be her retribution.

In any sphere, it is the vision that is important. The Vedas have a vision: the Lord. Heaven is His head, the earth His feet, the sun and moon His eyes, and the Vedas His speech. The scriptures have found it fit to see and venerate the Lord everywhere. Today's man tends to take things for granted. We have developed unnatural habits of eating, incorrectly sleeping, and wrongly thinking, in patterns that are not in keeping with Nature's way. Our minds are filled with greed, hatred, and jealousy; cutthroat competition prevails everywhere. In the marketplace today, it is each man for himself. All these negativities contribute to the mental pollution prevalent in society today. And it is this pollution that leads to outer pollution. Our vision needs correction.

When a person identifies with a small thing, his vision is small. When his scope of identity is enlarged, the Divinity in him becomes greater and more evident. Man identifies with the physical body most naturally, this being the closest to him. Slightly more distant are his family members, with whom he feels a sense of oneness. He is willing to make sacrifices for his children. If he can identify with the society around him, the level of selfishness is reduced. At the national level, by feeling one with the nation and having a wider scope of vision, the level of selfishness drops even further. Expanded more, if the mind realizes its Oneness with the totality of the universe, mental pollution fades away completely.

How can one who feels oneness with the totality cause harm to anyone? When mental pollution fades, there is no one left with whom to quarrel. Everywhere he sees only the reflection of his own Self. The *Bhagavad Gita* reiterates that when we take care of Nature, she blesses us. If we exploit her, then we have to combat her unleashed fury. Nature is our very own echo. By leading a life in keeping with Nature's norms and being graced by her blessings, we can all grow harmoniously and prosper together.

Singing the Lord's Glories

If we revert to the Vedas, we find the roots of our ancient culture steeped in the adoration and veneration of Mother Nature. From pre-Vedic times, from far back in recorded history, the Hindus have worshipped trees, rivers, and the elements. We have sought, and continue to seek, the forgiveness of Mother Nature for the atrocities we heap on her.

Why do Hindus worship the various forms of Nature? By and large, the spiritual context of this has not been understood and the worship of Nature has been taken to be mere superstition, an act of cowardice at times. The Hindu worship of Mother Nature is the acknowledgement of the presence of the Lord everywhere and at all times. We see the Lord in all beings, all forms—animate and inanimate—and worship Him in all of them.

Stuti literally means “praise.” A *stotram* is a hymn or song of praise. The scriptures abound with passages sung in praise of the Lord. Our saints and sages have written and sung passages glorifying different aspects of the Lord. Sanskrit literature is full of *stotrams* written by famous personages, such as Shri Gaudapadacharya, Adi Shankaracharya, and others.

We may well ask, “Is it necessary to praise the Lord? Would He be affected by our praises and does He need them?” And lastly, “What are the benefits that accrue from singing His glory?”

From our experiences in the empirical world, we understand and are aware of the need for applauding an action well done. It is natural for accolades to be heaped on someone who has performed well. Even though the person may not have worked for recognition, it is incumbent on us to acknowledge an achievement or offer our thanks if we have gained or benefited from someone’s actions.

If we receive a gold ring from someone, would we not instantly thank the giver? How is it, then, that we forget to thank the giver of the finger, without which we would not be able to enjoy the wearing the ring? Sant Tulsidasji says, “*Hari tum bahut anugraha keene,*” or, “Lord, you have graced [me] with so much.”

We can well argue that the Lord is not affected by our expressions of gratitude or lack of them. He just does what He has to, without expecting any rewards or hoping to have His praises sung. Yet, though He remains unaffected, we greatly benefit from singing His glories.

When we build a house, the walls do not expect us to beautify them. They are not affected by our efforts at interior decoration. We do not decorate our homes for the sake of the walls; we do it because it brings us pleasure.

God is not gratified, pleased, or overjoyed by our worship. He is happy that we want to do something to show our appreciation. His devotees have felt the need to express their sentiments; therefore, our literature abounds with the many *stutis* (hymns) that have been written to glorify Him. Each of His devotees has a special relationship with Him and sees His glories differently. Therefore, each devotee seeks his gratification through glorifying that aspect or quality which appeals most to him.

Devotees gain in a variety of ways when they praise the Lord. Firstly, we become aware of the many blessings we have received from Him. Secondly, we wish to express our gratitude for what we have received. Lastly, through the flowering of our humane qualities, we develop respect for His gifts and use them well and efficiently. Pujya Gurudev said, “What we have is His gift to us and what we do with what we have is our gift to Him!”

When we praise someone, there is normally an element of exaggeration. This is true when we speak of human beings. But in the case of God, no praise can ever be enough. Tulsidasji has said that even with thousands of mouths we cannot adequately describe His glories. It is something like saying that the light of the sun equals the light of billions of glowworms. This is no praise. It is an insult to the sun, because no comparison can dare to describe its light. Likewise, any praise showered on God, the Guru, or the Lord’s devotees, remains inadequate.

We act in the world after fully understanding the benefits that may accrue from the actions we undertake. We always need to know the reason for doing something. Similarly, we need to know the reason for singing the Lord's glories. Why is it that for centuries together devotees have extolled His virtues? Singing His glory cleanses the heart, removing from it the accumulated dross and impurities. This is the greatest benefit we get. Like a mantra, it protects the person taking the name. *Mantra* means "that which protects." The Lord's name protects the devotee and purifies his mind and heart. In such a clean and sanctified heart, devotion takes birth. And through this, we are led to the Guru, who finally eliminates the darkness from within us. And through such understanding, we are finally liberated. . . .

It is a well-known fact that all of us want to be happy in life. Is there any exception? Pujya Gurudev once asked our Vedanta course students, "Is there anyone who does not want happiness?"

One student raised his hand and said, "I want sorrow."

Swamiji asked, "Why?"

The student responded, "It makes me feel good."

Even the student wanted sorrow because it made him happy.

Many of us have problems. A man went to a psychiatrist and said, "Doctor, everyone ignores me." The doctor replied, "Next!"

Everyone wants some attention. When you are not well or you have a cold or cough, you want attention. We feel happy when the person attending to us asks, "Can I get you water? Would you like orange juice?" Some people get sick simply because they want attention.

We want to be happy. We want financial security, so we work for it. But what is the point of financial security if you do not have any comfort or pleasure? Suppose I gave you one million dollars but told you that you could not spend it. What is the use? We have to work for security, pleasure, and so on, but in spite of all that we obtain, we still have one worry: What will happen to me after death? Because after death also I should be comfortable.

There was a man who asked a priest, "If I give you \$50,000 for your temple, can you reserve a seat for me in heaven?" The priest was in a dilemma. If he said, "Yes," that meant that he would be challenging God. If he said, "No," he would not get his donation. The priest said, "You give me the money and your name will be waitlisted."

We do so many meritorious deeds, and we may even fast day and night, but where is the guarantee that if you work hard here during this lifetime that you will be happy in heaven? Others may feel that it is better to enjoy here since there is no guarantee that you will have any enjoyment hereafter.

People who read scriptures realize that you have to put in effort to be free. Life is peculiar—when one thing is available, another is not. For example, when you have teeth, there may be no nuts to eat. And when you don't have any teeth, there may be nuts or you may go nuts!

How do we become happy in the midst of all these changes and ups and downs? Is there a solution? It appears that if we want to be happy, we have to do so many things. The question is: Is there something by doing which we can get all this? Can we get joy, freedom, liberation, security all in one?

Yes, there is such a thing. It is not available in any supermarket and it can be obtained without any purchase. It is popularly known as "God." What is God? If you turn on the tap in your washbasin, you will see lots of water coming out. The presence of this water indicates that there is an ocean somewhere. When we see an electric machine at work, you know there is some power source. Similarly, if you see light, energy, power, knowledge, it indicates that there is an infinite Source at work.

Consciousness, Knowledge, Bliss is what we call God. If you have that inner knowledge that God is with you, you are secure. We seek security by buying things and think we will be protected, but sometimes that which we buy to protect us does not protect us at all.

For example, there was a rich man who kept bodyguards. The bodyguards kidnapped him! What can you do? That which we think will protect us is not dependable. Whatever effort you put forth to protect something is in vain, for nothing can be protected forever.

Devotees, saints, and sages are totally fearless. Where do they get this fearlessness from? That one Source. We keep searching for joy, thinking, "Now, I will be happy." No, you cannot be happy with these temporary objects. You can be happy only when you find the Source. There is no joy in finite things. Our happiness will be time-bound if it is based on finite things. That which is Infinite will give you happiness. The Source is infinite. Only there will you find happiness.

Punya karmas (meritorious deeds) will take us to heaven, but even the *shastras* say this is not permanent. You have to come back; the visa is not extended. And when you return, you will still face the same problems, the same cycle of birth and death, the same four *purusharthas* of *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. If you know the one, underlying Source, you can get all four. We hear the phrase, "Buy one, get one free." Here you get all four in one.

Once, a man heard that a sage had a stone to convert iron into gold. He approached the sage and asked for the stone. The sage said, "Yes, of course, it is available. It is in the bushes."

The man went into the bushes and saw a stone that looked different from the others. He picked it up and rubbed it hard against iron. It became gold. The man then wondered, "Why would this sage give me this valuable stone? He must have something even more valuable that he is not sharing with me."

The man confronted the sage: "I'm sure you have something more precious than this. May I have it?"

The sage said, "If you throw away this stone, you can get it."

The man asked, "What is it that is more precious than this stone?"

"The name of the Lord, *Krishna-nama*." Indeed, the name of the Lord is more precious than the philosopher's stone. The man understood and he too meditated on the name of the Lord and became a great sage himself.

The name of the Lord has made people fearless. Mirabai was fearless. In chanting His name, and singing His glories, she got all the security she ever needed. All happiness gained from worldly goods is only a short-lived pleasure—momentary. Bondage appears permanent. Mirabai got permanent happiness by singing the Lord's name, and obtained *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha* all from the one Source. *Bhagavat darshan* (vision of the Lord) is greater than anything else. Bondage is experienced in the form of stress, depression, sadness, anxiety, fear. Liberation (*moksha*) is *ananda svarupa*.

Artha, kama, dharma, moksha are very difficult to achieve separately. But if we integrate our focus and strive for the one Source, we will be successful in gaining happiness surely and quickly. The greatest *dharma* is being the servant of the Lord. The Lord alone is the greatest wealth (*artha*), the greatest desire (*kama*), and true liberation (*moksha*). Seek security in the Lord, for this will give you liberation. *Moksha* is gained by *Hari-smaran* (chanting the name of the Lord). In this way, you do not have to strive for each separately. The All-in-one gives you completeness.

In *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, it says one should turn all of one's desires into the one desire for God. If you are angry, be angry with God: "O Lord, how many times I have called you and you still have not come! How long must I wait?" If you have greed, be greedy to count the names of the Lord. Turn all your actions, emotions, and everything toward the Lord. Make your life God-centered.

Bhakti is not temporary and it does not consist of chanting the name of the Lord for five minutes. It is an attitude or state of mind. Our entire personality must be fully involved. Our ears should hear all about God, whether they are songs, discussions, lectures, talks. Our eyes should see Him in the form of pictures, words, sages, saints, etc. Our speech should be focused on speaking about the Lord. Our hands should be used to serve the Lord, for service is worship of the Lord. Drench yourself in His service and in your love for Him. Live in the abode of *Bhagavan* as His servant.

Even after repeated failures, we refuse to understand why we fail. Even under the sledgehammer of misery and sorrow, we are blind to our own false values. A thousand repeated disappointments do not teach us how to use our productive intelligence more efficiently. In short, man refuses to learn, although Mother Nature and Father Life, day in and day out, tirelessly give us wise tuitions!
- Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda

REFLECTIONS

Many in One
by Chetana Neerchal

I write to
weave these
scattered thoughts
into one stream

Like

Tresses of
a schoolgirl
held in
a well-oiled braid

Jasmine
strung into a
single fragrance

Colors of
the evensong
trilling
in crickets' unison

Mix of
juices in a
perfect punch

Voices in
a gathering
heard as a hum

My many
emotions
caught in
one struggle:
to be happy.

Significance of Diwali by George Romney

Many stories are told
when the lamp is lit on *Diwali* day;
The wise, however, with inward gaze,
discover the Light by which all sustains.

Though mirrored in many a mind,
like reflected moonlight in night's embrace,
only in Heart's reality does It glow,
the sun of Consciousness alone remains.

Gurudev, who taught us
how to think with the head
but live from the heart,
erased the personal limits that keep us apart.

By actualizing the Self in this very life
where I is Thou, in Knowledge supreme;
He kindled the flame of non-otherness
in love's objectless Bliss.

Bala Vihar teachers, here they come!
Holding burning candles in their hands;
Inspired by the highest values
They light up these tiny lamps!

Say, what else is there to celebrate
on this glorious *Diwali* day
except Greatness beholding Greatness,
the smokeless Fire that never ends.

The Empty Pot by Sanjay Patil

Hasten but slowly,
with patience abound;
Light up and burn,
but without a sound.

Neither do I remember my birth
nor can I think of my death.
Drifting like a lost shadow,
how far can I really go?

I may drink all the seven oceans
and pull up the blanket of skies,
but cold and thirsty,
dreams still disturb me,
life after life,
with silly new hopes.

To behold Eternity,
my pot needs to be empty.
But can it be fully clean
if it is filled with even one need:

Evolving in Awareness by Brahmachari Prabodh Chaitanya

Continued from CMW News, May 2011

In the methodology of superimposition and desuperimposition (of gradually moving our understanding to the ultimate teaching), the first step when is to recognize that the world is an effect (*karyam*). Once we understand that the world is an effect, a question arises: If the world is an effect, then what is the cause?

Take the classic example of a clay pot. Is the pot created or not? It is created. Therefore, it is an effect. Then the question arises: What is the cause of this effect? Clay is the cause.

Naturally, the effect cannot remain without the cause, because the cause is always present in the effect. In fact, the effect is nothing but the cause in a different form. There is no pot (effect) if the clay (cause) is removed. So now it seems like we have two things—clay and pot.

Seeing the effect and identifying its cause are both superimpositions. The third step is de-superimposition. Are there really two things—clay and pot? Start analyzing. Postulate a deal. One person says, "I'll keep the clay. You keep the pot." Or, in another example, in a fight between a husband and a wife, the wiser one says, "I'll keep the gold. You keep the ornaments." In essence, there aren't two things: the clay and the clay pot, the gold and the gold ornament. There is only the cause in these examples—clay or gold. The elimination of the effect is called *apavada*, or de-superimposition.

Step 1: Recognize creation as an effect (superimposition).

Step 2: Find the cause of the effect (superimposition).

Step 3: In the first stage of de-superimposition, acknowledge that there is no effect and the cause alone is.

Step 4: In the second stage of de-superimposition, one understands that if there is no effect, how can there be a cause? The realization is that clay merely is, not as a cause or an effect.

Take an example of a father and son, where the father is in the waking state and the son is in the dream state—a dream son. Their relationship is one of cause (father) and effect (son). But when the sleeper wakes up, just as the son disappears, so does the father. So, too, there is only clay, because other than the clay, there is no "separate" pot. There is no effect and thus, no cause; the essence alone is. This elimination of the effect and cause is de-superimposition (negation), or *apavada*.

Now, consider the universe as a pot, a big pot. If the universe is a pot, is it created? Yes. So, it is an effect. If the universe is an effect, then it has to have a cause. What is the cause? The scriptures tell us the cause of this universe is *Brahman* with the creative power called *maya*. Scripture has to tell us because nobody can see the cause of creation. The cause is beyond the knowledge of the organs of perception and mind. Therefore, only the scriptures are valid means of such knowledge. Of course, enlightened spiritual masters who have directly experienced the Truth go beyond all cause and effect.

In our analysis, we can see that there is the world, and so, it must have a cause—*Brahman* with the power of *maya*. [*Brahman*, when associated as the wielder of *maya*, is also known as *Ishvara*.] But the question is, are there two separate entities? The world and *Brahman*? No, because the effect (world) is nothing but the cause itself (*Brahman* with *maya*). So, actually, there is no world, only *Brahman* with

maya. This negation or de-superimposition is what is meant by *jagan-mithya*, or “false/apparent world.”

If there is no effect (the world), then there is no creative power either. Here, the cause-hood, or *maya*, of *Brahman* is eliminated. This leaves pure *Brahman—nitya shuddha buddha mukta satya svabhava Brahma*—which is Truth, ever free Existence (*Vedanta Sara*). This is the technique of *adhyaropa-apavada*: superimposition and de-superimposition.

Brahman is also known as *Sat*, or Existence. Now, what is the essence outside *Sat* and inside *Sat*? It is *Chit*, or Consciousness. Scriptures say that *Sat* is *Chit*. Existence is Consciousness. Through superimposition and de-superimposition, the scriptures take us step by step to the understanding of the highest Reality and show us the paths to Enlightenment.

A student of Vedanta needs to be very clear about the teachings of *Advaita Vedanta* (non-dualism). *Brahman* alone is; there is no *jiva* as an independent entity, and no *jagat* as an independent entity. This is *Advaita*. The three direct means to know the Truth are known as *shravanam* (listening), *mananam* (reflection), and *nididhyasanam* (meditation).

FEATURE

Have You Met Brahmacharini Robyn Thompson? by Dipali Trivedi



Brahmacharini Robyn Thompson traveled with Pujya Gurudev across North America as his personal secretary and nurse for over six years. She completed the two-year brahmachari Vedanta Course at “Sandeepany Sadhanalaya” in Powai, Mumbai in the mid-1980s, under the tutelage of Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda. Her love and caring are as bountiful as her stories. Robyn-ji resides on Canada’s Vancouver Island, works as a nurse, and is active as the residential acharya and director of Chinmaya Mission Vancouver.

How did you first meet Pujya Gurudev?

I first met Pujya Gurudev in the summer of 1981. He was staying with the Naimpally family in Los Angeles.

He had arrived from Asia, and had had a recent heart problem. I had come down to Los Angeles from Piercy, where I was attending a few months of the Vedanta Course being conducted by Swami Dayananda.

I entered the Naimpallys’ house. The door was open. Gurudev was about to get up at the end of *satsang*.

The lights were off, the room slightly darkened, as it was evening. I saw him sitting in an armchair halfway across the room and I had the overwhelming experience that I was in the presence of a very holy person. I did not meet Gurudev at that time, but the next day, I met him in a wondrous way.

I was staying nearby and in the community swimming pool when I suddenly had the strong thought, "He is sitting out. I have to go back." I literally ran to the house, half wet, opened the door, and Gurudev was sitting all by himself in the living room. He told me, "Come and sit here."

He talked with me, made me feel relaxed and welcome. I asked questions about the spiritual path and told my experiences. A few days later, I was asked to help with an EKG test because I was a nursing student at the time. I was fortunate to thus accompany Gurudev closely during that *yajna*, recording information about the test.

Please tell us of some experiences when you traveled with Pujya Gurudev and served as his nurse and secretary.

I traveled with Gurudev regularly, mostly during the summer months, when he was in Canada and the U.S., from 1987 to 1993. It was the most blessed and amazing time of my life. Looking back, I wonder how it was possible, by what grace. Gurudev was always so kind.

Whether serving in the capacity of a nurse, or as his secretary, the experience was the same. He brought out the best in you. He made you alert and single-pointed in the work at hand. He lifted you up to work at a level of excellence beyond your usual capacity.

When your time with him was over for that period of travel, and someone else was taking over, Gurudev would gently counsel you not to think about who would now do the work or how it would be done. "Let go of it."

Is there any story about your time together that you can share?

As mentioned in Rudite Emir's book, *At Every Breath, a Teaching*, Gurudev was always teaching through daily actions. We all realized this when our mind was quiet and we could "see."

One moment of powerful teaching for me took place in Vancouver in 1986. I had been ironing one of Gurudev's shirts and I singed a small area. Of course, I felt terrible. I came to Gurudev and quietly said, "I am sorry. The shirt has a burned spot." He roared with laughter, and a wave of love flooded over me as he replied, "The shirt may be burned, but the Swami is not burned. What does it matter?" This made me remember the *Gita* teaching that the Self cannot be touched by any worldly means of destruction.

I would sometimes be asked to chant the *Gita* verses at a *yajna*. I never really had any fear about doing it, as I had the conviction that "He was doing it" and I only had to get out of the way.

Gurudev graciously worked on effacing our ego. Once, a large volume of letters from the day's office work was accidentally dropped in a mailbox without stamps. That night, from the podium of the *yajna* hall, speaking on a *Gita* verse, Gurudev said "some fools" thoughtlessly posted mail without stamps. Only I knew to whom he was referring and the lesson was learned.

Gurudev would go to bed late and be up very early to start his office work. These long hours of work were a joy—there was no greater joy. His presence allowed one to function with hardly any sleep. We were sleeping only 3-4 hours a night, as you had to be ready—showered and dressed—by 3:30 a.m. in case he was up early.

I learned the truth of the devotional teaching that the "joy of the lover is in the joy of the Beloved." Serving Gurudev, you never thought of your own needs—whether you ate or slept, it did not matter, as

long as he was served to the best of your ability. Of course, all your needs were very much taken care of by the people caring for Gurudev.

In the detailed beauty of his work—whether writing or dictating letters, or in his daily conduct and personal bearing—he made one aware of the beauty to be instilled in one’s own work at hand. He was ever-loving, whether that love manifested as a hug or as a healthy blow to one’s ego.

I was made very much aware of the play of the ego, of how we hang on to past situations or future fears, and how this hanging on blinds us to the present moment and its beauty. If my mind was disturbed, I neither could see Gurudev for who he was, a sage of Realization, nor properly see the events around me. He once wrote to me about a particular camp: “The Lord’s play was glorious, but you did not see it, as your mind was agitated.”

Gurudev truly lived as the Truth at every moment. It was up to us to see That. In his love, he would lift us up, as though to peep above a fence, to see him as Divinity embodied.

Who is your *ishta deva*?

Pujya Gurudev is my *ishta*. He is *saguna* and *nirguna Brahman*. He was a *sthita-prajna purusha* 24/7, and now, as then, He shines ever in one’s heart as pure, infinite Consciousness.

What can you share with beginning spiritual seekers to help them on the path?

Keep the goal of Self-knowledge, of spiritual unfoldment, ever in your heart as the core of your life. Holding the pole star of Truth, the Lord will guide us and bring what is needed to help us grow into qualified, mature seekers. In this, I have absolute conviction, for I have seen it clearly in my own life. I know the Lord and Guru will surely unfold our lives as needed, perhaps in ways never imagined! Just hold on to that vision with devotion and knowledge. Be good and do good.

If we can firmly be regular with just one spiritual discipline, it is of great benefit. As Pujya Guruji has often told us, the unflinching commitment to even one single practice gives rise to an abundance of virtues in our character. Guruji has said that we need purity and clarity—purity of the heart and mind, and clarity of intellectual vision. Pujya Gurudev spoke of the two wings we need to “fly” when in the seat of meditation—a fully developed head and heart. This summarizes the path.

Is there a particular *shloka* or quote that keeps you inspired in your spiritual *sadhana*?

There are several verses from a number of Vedantic texts that are very sacred to me. I have regularly contemplated on these verses over the years, both in the meditation seat and during daily work. It is so true that a memorized verse that inspires one greatly is a treasure. You can carry it with you wherever you go to re-center you and lift you toward the Higher. This keeps you balanced in the hectic ups and downs of day-to-day events.

My most loved verses are from *Vivekachudamani*, *Kenopanishad*, and *Ishavasya Upanishad*. These are on teachings of the play of Consciousness in the micro and macrocosm, and on remembering that the organs of sense and action function only because of the touch of the Divine playing through matter.

I often mentally repeat the ten well-known meditation verses from *Vivekachudamani* during a quiet moment in the day. The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi and Verses 500-502 of *Vivekachudamani* are also dear and significant to me for frequent reflection and upliftment.

NEWS

Televised Release of *Upanishad Ganga*

By the grace of God and the blessings of our *Guru Parampara*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, the apex body of Chinmaya Mission worldwide, is pleased to announce the eagerly awaited televised airing of *Upanishad Ganga* on India's national Doordarshan channel, starting February 2012.

Conceived and inspired by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda, the *Upanishad Ganga* series is directed by Dr. Chandraprakash Dwivedi of *Chanakya* fame. Actors include Mukesh Tiwari, Abhimanyu Singh, Zakir Hussain, Ila Arun, K.K. Raina, Vrijesh Hirjee, Mona Ambegaonkar, Jaya Bhattacharya, Vishwa Vadola, Sai Deodhar, and Amit Behl. The series features four-time national award-winner Nitin Desai's art direction, with art and costume design by Muneesh Sappel. Renowned singers in the series include Asit Desai and Shekhar Sen.



Celebrations at *Yamunotri* by Shubi Mansukhani

By the Lord's grace and Pujya Gurudev's blessings, CM Chicago also celebrated the 12th anniversary of the *Yamunotri* center on October 2, 2011. Concurrently in 2011, the *Yamunotri* Chinmaya Family also celebrated *Gandhi Jayanti* on October 2 with a re-enactment of Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March held in the village of Dandi in Gujarat, India, on March 12, 1930. The *Satyagraha* protest rally was a milestone, a tax resistance campaign of nonviolent defiance against the British salt monopoly in colonial India. The orchestrated display of resistance triggered the wider Civil Disobedience Movement.

Over 100 CM members gathered on a bright, sunny day, dressed in traditional white clothes with Gandhian hats. Featured was an extraordinary collection of Gandhi memorabilia, graciously exhibited by the Nateshan Family, with over 50 display boards, newspaper article albums, postcards, letters, and numerous countries' postage stamps depicting Mahatma Gandhi and India's Freedom Movement.

Yamunotri's Chinmaya Bala Vihar children aptly performed a remarkable drama on Gandhiji's life and legacy. *Yamunotri's* music students delighted everyone with Gandhiji's favorite hymns, taught to them by Pramila Bhatia.

The spiritual activities of the *Yamunotri* group had been initiated in Libertyville, with Swami Sharanananda's support and assistance from CM Chicago *Badri* center's *sevaks*. Within a year, activities shifted to a large school. The congregation expanded further within a couple of years and activities were relocated to a larger school. Finally, in December 2007, the Chinmaya Family moved into its newly constructed home of *Yamunotri*. From the humble beginning of 25 children and 20 adults, the *Yamunotri* center now has over 450 Chinmaya Bala Vihar students and 200 adults in Study Group. All the activities in the dynamic, spirited, well-structured, and well-attended program continue to grow.



CM New York's *Diwali Utsav* 2011 by Bina Mahabir and Aditi Malhotra

Chinmaya Mission New York (CM NY) celebrated *Diwali Utsav* 2011 at the impressive Akbar Restaurant in Long Island on Sunday, October 16, 2011. The turnout was beyond expectations, with a packed hall of nearly 300 people.

CM NY's *Diwali Utsav* is not only an event that showcases the talent of Chinmaya Bala Vihar children from the different locations in New York, but it is also a time when the CM NY family comes together to celebrate *Diwali* in festivity and joy. Parents are thrilled to watch their children offer performances based on what they have learned in Chinmaya Bala Vihar.

This year's cultural program consisted of chanting, *bhajans*, and skits presented by students from Long Island and Manhattan. The event commenced with a welcome address delivered by CM NY President, Dr. Jatin Kapadia. During the ceremonious lighting of the lamp by Acharya Krishnamoorthy, select children chanted *shlokas* and read their meanings.

Emcee Jagdish Rao invited Acharya Krishnamoorthy to present a visual overview of Chinmaya Mission Worldwide with commentary. The presentation included a summary of various projects undertaken by different branches of global Chinmaya Mission.

George Romney, a senior member of CM NY, recited a beautiful poem on the significance of Diwali [see the [Reflections](#) section]. Another highlight of the evening was the children's portrayal of the enchanting *Vishvarupa* form of Lord Krishna shown to Arjuna on the *Mahabharata* battlefield.

Students of ages 3-10 shone with their opening of lighting the lamp while chanting the invocation. The six-year olds exhibited confidence and reverence as they placed colorful flowers at the altar, seeking Pujya Gurudev's blessings to commence the festivities. Tiny tots of age three dressed up as Goddess Lakshmi, Lord Ganesha, Lord Rama, and Mother Sita, and chanted a few verses of the *arti*. Proud parents, teachers, and guests applauded with great enthusiasm for all the performances, including *bhajans* such as "*Hare Rama Hare Krishna*," "*Ganesha Here, Ganesha There*," and "*My God is So Great*." A skit entitled "*Super Hanuman*" included the *bhajan* "*Vira Hanumana*" and brought a smile to everyone's face.

Chinmaya Study Group members from Richmond Hill participated in the *Utsav* for the first time and melodiously chanted the first ten stanzas of *Bhaja Govindam* with the accompaniment of tabla and harmonium.

CHYK NY was dynamically represented by Ankur Gandhi, who talked about the various successful activities throughout the year and future plans. A *kirtan* of "*Raghupati Raghava*" was led by Sandhya Simhan.

Scrumptious appetizers, lunch, and dessert completed the feast. A raffle was also conducted, and prizes included a NOOK e-reader, Nikon camera, gift hamper, Chinmaya Publications books assortment, and a free annual subscription to *Balvihar* magazine.

CM NY's *Diwali Utsav* 2011 was an astounding success that brought together dedicated and diligent teamwork, fun entertainment, delicious food, and good company.



CM Birmingham Inaugurates 2011-2012 Programs by Raman Krishnan

The year of 2011 marked a milestone in CM Birmingham's history as the first year of activities being offered as an official CMW satellite center. CM Birmingham invited Acharya Vilasini Balakrishnan (CM Washington DC) as the Chief Guest to inaugurate the Chinmaya Bala Vihar and Study Group programs for the academic year.

Vilasiniji commenced CM Birmingham's activities on August 20 with an amazing Chinmaya Bala Vihar Day Camp that was an eye-opener to all Mission members, young and old, and an erudite afternoon *satsang* for adults on *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2. Many parents chose to sit and listen with the children as Vilasiniji interwove *bhajans*, yoga, and delightful stories to educate and entertain. In her afternoon *Gita satsang*, she spoke on the Man of Steady Wisdom, teaching about dispassion and non-attachment as the prime qualities of a spiritual seeker.

Acharya Vilasini has been a guiding light for CM Birmingham since its inception. Her advice and well wishes continue to help with the center's steady growth.



Chinmaya Prabha Shines at Diwali by Padmashree Rao; photos by Jay Deshmukh

Dipavali at CM Houston's *Chinmaya Prabha* ashram was celebrated with a shining spirit of prayer, gratitude, love, and light on October 30, 2011. The event welcomed community members to join the festivities. Nearly 600 families came together to invoke the blessings of Mother Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu.

The ashram's *Chinmaya Smrti* hall sparkled with bright, festive decorations that had been aesthetically arranged in a style that has become CM Houston's hallmark. The beautifully adorned idols of Lord Vishnu and Mother Lakshmi had a commanding appearance on the stage amid an elaborate *puja* setting with flowers. The *pratima* of Pujya Gurudev glowed in the light of numerous lamps exquisitely arranged at his holy feet. The temple deities of *Shri Saumyakashi Shivalaya* shone across the courtyard.

Pervading everywhere was the sheer joy of *Diwali*. Young and old, dressed in their festive best, sat in orderly rows with their lamps, decorated *arti* plates, and other puja essentials, singing *bhajans* as they awaited the start of the *puja*.

CM Houston's Acharya Gaurang Nanavaty spoke in his address on *Diwali* being a time to seek inward to find the true light of understanding. "If we each observe our life closely this past year, sometimes things went well, and in some instances we had to face difficult and trying times. While facing trying times, we may find it painful. Yet if we look closely these are the times that give us the opportunity to introspect, grow within, and emerge stronger. These are the situations that . . . smooth out the sharp corners of our personality." He reminded how a Guru lights up the disciple's path to God and asked the Chinmaya Family to walk on the spiritual path laid out by Pujya Gurudev and Pujya Guruji.

The *puja*, conducted by the *Shivalaya* priest, began with the invocation of Lord Ganesha, after which devotees performed *Lakshmi Puja* and chanted Her 108 names. The divine atmosphere and energy was palpable as the *Vishnu Sahasranama* was chanted, voices blending in devotion and harmony. The beautiful celebration of *Diwali* came to fruition as everyone rose with their lighted *arti* plates and offered their prayers.

In annual tradition, *Diwali* concluded at CM Houston with a brighter glow, filled with gratitude and reverence, as each family offered their *Guru Dakshina*. As always it was a fulfilling *Diwali* to see the Chinmaya Family come together to cherish blessings and celebrate a resolve of illumining spiritual goodness in all hearts.



Vidyarambham

Report submitted by CM Philadelphia

Vidyarambham, a ceremony wherein children are initiated into learning, was performed by resident *acharya* Swami Siddhananda on October 2 and 6, 2011 at CM Philadelphia's *Kedar* ashram. With a gold ring, Swamiji made the Om symbol on each child's tongue, and then held each child's finger to draw on a bed of rice "*Hari Shri Ganapataye Namaha*." Thereafter, each child repeated the *Sarasvati Mantra* as he recited it. Parents and grandparents appreciated and enjoyed watching the playful, obedient, and

curious children get initiated into the world of knowledge. The ceremonies concluded with a *Saraswati Puja*.

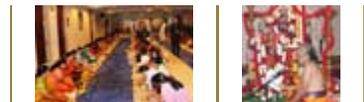
The *Kedar* ashram also hosted *raas-garba* on all nine nights of *Navaratri* and conducted *Vijaya Dashami Puja*. This year saw the first *Annakut*, where over 84 delicious dishes were cooked by CM families to celebrate *Diwali* and welcome the New Year (2068 by the lunar calendar).

CM Boston's *Diwali* Celebrations by Shashi Dwarakanath

CM Boston celebrated *Dipavali* with great joy and devotion on October 26, 2011. Many Hindus of the local community came to the *Chinmaya Maruti* ashram to attend the specially organized *puja* that welcomed Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya and offered prayers to the Lord to lead one and all from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge.

Diwali, also celebrated as the Hindu New Year, marks the beginning of a new financial year. Local business owners and their families also flocked to the *Chinmaya Maruti* temple to make their offerings and seek blessings from Mother Lakshmi. The evening event concluded with sparklers for all the children.

A special *dipa puja* was performed by 150 ladies on October 28, wherein each was given a *puja* plate with a lit lamp that symbolized Goddess Lakshmi. The resident priest at *Chinmaya Maruti* conducted the *puja* and led in the chanting of *Shri Lakshmi Sahasranama* (1,008 names of Mother Lakshmi) as the ladies offered their *kumkum archana*. The altar was beautifully decorated with lamps, fresh flowers, fruits, and *prasad*. All devotees basked in the powerful vibrations that strengthened as the chanting progressed. As always, *Diwali* was a time for all devotees to thank the Lord for all the blessings in their lives, and offer prayers for peace and fulfillment.



Chinmaya Rameshwaram in a Deluge of Laughter by Nimmi Raj

Chinmaya Rameshwaram was filled with mirth during the CM Los Angeles (CM LA) annual fundraiser, "*Sevanjali*," held on November 5-6, 2011.

Famed ventriloquist Kevin Johnson was a runaway smash as he regaled CM LA families with his humorous take on various subjects. What brought the house down were his Vedanta-centric comedic lines, which he had taken the time to understand through the study material received from CM LA's resident *acharya*, Swami Ishwarananda. Based on *Mundaka Upanishad*, Swamiji had crafted a script on the joys and sorrows of *samsara*, and on how the *jiva* can remain untouched by the vagaries of life.

In his address, Swamiji quoted *Mundaka Upanishad* and painted its picture of two birds sitting on a tree, one tasting the sweet and bitter fruits, and the other merely observing without tasting. The former typifies the person suffering and lost in the world, and the latter is the picture of the wise man who has identified with, and is content in, the Self alone.

Kevin Johnson's contemporary and masterful performance starring his two feathered friends, a buzzard and a cockatoo, painted the traditional story with comic dialogue and an Indian-American slant. The children enjoyed the event as much as the adults, lining up for pictures and autographs at the end.

The event was peppered with speeches by various CM LA officers and committee members. Lalita Bala narrated her experience as a Chinmaya Bala Vihar parent. She spoke on how the teachings of the program impacted her children and prompted her to give back by serving as a committee member.

CM LA's Acharya Mahadevan acknowledged various individuals for their continuing support in recent years. He also recognized the immense *seva* offered by volunteers who supervised ticket sales, pledges, decorations, food, and the myriad other tasks that went into the success of this event.

All attendees were served a boxed dinner.



CM Atlanta 2011 Labor Day Camp by Vijay Nikore

With the mast of Shri Rama's grace flying high, and the favorable winds of Pujya Gurudev's blessings, CM Atlanta organized its second annual overnight family camp over Labor Day Weekend in September 2011. Swami Prakashananda (CM Trinidad), Brahmacharini Arpita Ayers (CM St. Augustine), Acharya Vivek Gupta (CM Niagara), and Lakshmi Sukumar (CM San Diego) graced the event and kept the 150 camp attendees enthralled.

The camp was filled with thought-provoking lectures, meditation, yoga, delicious food, and programs for the children and teenagers. Swamiji's daily discourses were on *Kenopanishad* and *Navidha Bhakti* from *Ramacharitamansa*. Arpitaji and Vivekji each gave a *satsang* on overcoming obstacles and purifying the mind, respectively. Lakshmi Sukumar taught the camp attendees *Shri Ramaraksha Stotram*. The latter three also taught the children's classes, which included discussions, activities, and songs. Swamiji gave the attendees a wonderful treat with two *bhajan*-filled evenings of music and devotion.

The successful family camp was a labor of love organized through the dedicated and tireless *seva* of CM Atlanta's Acharyas G.V. and Geetha Raghu, and various dedicated volunteers.



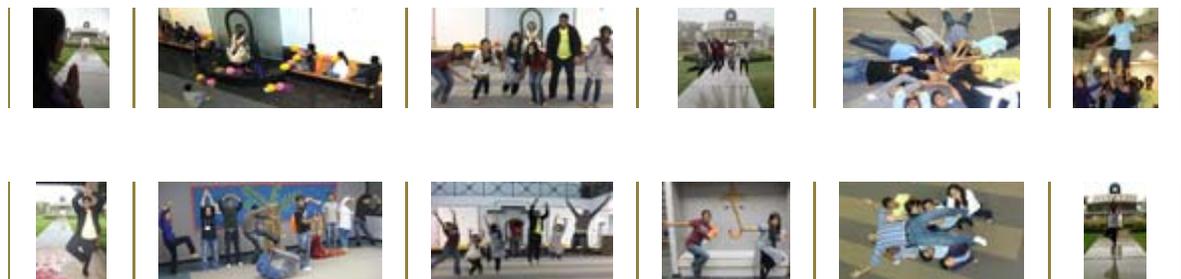
The Game of Life by Ved Chitale

CHYK West's annual Thanksgiving weekend camp, "The Game of Life," was held at CM Houston in 2011. Acharya Vivek Gupta (CM Niagara) explained over the course of an extraordinary camp, "Life flows around us, like energy, neither created nor destroyed." Living, however, is a different story. As given in Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda's *Game of Life* book, living is a game with four elements: the purpose, the field, the players, and the rules. The *Chinmaya Prabha* ashram transformed itself into a field of inspiration as campers became the players and played according to the rules given. The purpose was made crystal clear: Inspire; love; be; play the game well. And everyone did.

Interacting with Acharya Vivekji was invigorating made everyone feel somehow extraordinary. The camp commenced the morning after Thanksgiving, after CM Houston's Acharyas Gaurang and Darshana Nanavatys' opening address and welcome. For newcomers and first-time CHYK campers, among the throng of emotions, wonder seems to be at the top of the list, followed by a humbling to be surrounded by talented, charismatic, and intellectual individuals.

The camp included yoga and meditation, group discussions and outdoor activities, talent show and bonfire, and a spirited game of soccer in the parking lot. Vivekji gave a remarkable discourse on the rare blessing and opportunity of human birth, and the infinite nature of man. "Vedanta Unplugged" was a unique activity for campers to share their favorite songs or musical pieces by interpreting the lyrics in Vedantic reflections. The camp concluded with a tasteful closing ceremony, and instead of sadness in the farewells, there was more fullness and positive energy. Everyone went home more conscious of the field, purpose, rules, and players in the game of life, with overwhelming gratitude to God, to Guru, for such blessed and life-transforming *satsanga*.

CHYK camps are instant inspiration that need to be followed up with continued and regular scriptural studies, reflection, and meditation. For this, it is up to each sincere spiritual seeker to develop the determination and zeal to dissolve the merciless ego. To learn more about CHYK West, classes in your area, and upcoming camps and service projects, visit chykwest.com.



CM Princeton *Navaratri* and *Dipavali* Celebrations

by Alok Kumar

An unseasonably warm October in New Jersey made *Navaratri* and *Dipavali* celebrations at CM Princeton's *Chinmaya Vrindavan* ashram particularly special. In addition to Chinmaya Bala Vihar families, this year, the growing Indian community in the neighboring area was invited to participate in the elaborate festivities.

For *Navaratri*, a unique bangle-themed *alankaram* for Mother Durga was designed and assembled by creative *sevikas*. CM Princeton's fourth annual *Lalita Sahasranama* chanting was conducted over two evenings, with ten complete rounds of chanting. On *Durgashtami*, *Villakku Puja* was performed with *Lalita Sahasranamavali archana*. An additional highlight, the *Gayatri Homam*, conducted for the first time at the ashram, brought enthusiastic responses to make it an annual event.

For *Dipavali*, a local priest conducted *Lakshmi Kubera Puja* at the ashram and attendance by the community for this event, on a weeknight, was remarkable. The hall was packed with over 400 devotees and the joyous festivities concluded with dinner and sparklers.



Unique CHYK Retreat at *Chinmaya Govardhan*

by Chetan Devchand

When a small but enthusiastic group of CHYKs landed at CM St. Augustine's *Chinmaya Govardhan* ashram for a holiday weekend opportunity to "Flow into Spirituality," none of them could have guessed just how transformative Thanksgiving could really be.

Surrounded by lush greenery in the winter of Florida's outdoors, *Chinmaya Govardhan* is a unique haven and retreat center. Situated within minutes from the beach, the ashram is neatly tucked away to host camps, *satsangas*, and solitary retreats. The absence of excessive city light provides breathtaking views of the night sky.

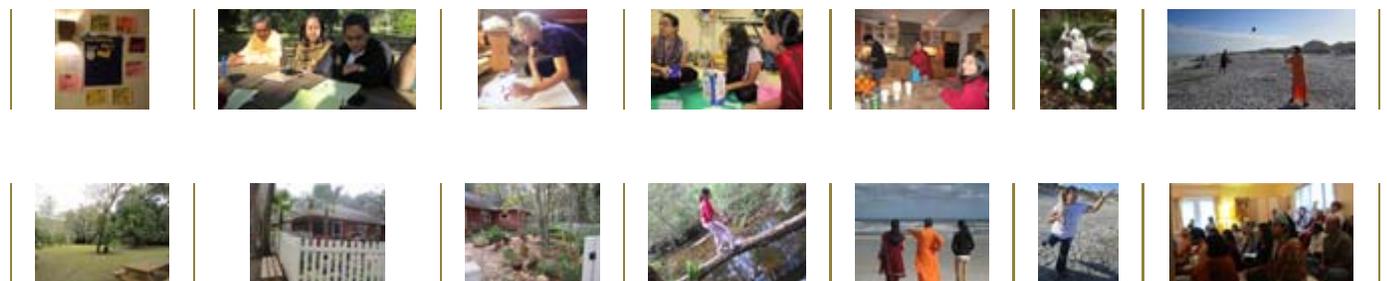
Conducted by Swami Prakashananda (CM Trinidad) and resident *acharya*, Brahmacharini Arpita, the weekend was filled with activities that taught campers the joy of going with the flow in all circumstances. The retreat began on Thanksgiving Day, where dinner was followed by stargazing with views of multiple shooting stars and icebreakers. The retreat included guided meditation, arts and crafts workshops, *satsang* with both *acharyas*, study group discussions, vegan s'mores under a star-studded campfire, time-capsule creation, sports with Swamiji (a talented cricket bowler and batsman), beach recreation, ashram *seva* projects, and devotional music with Arpitaji (on guitar, harmonium, and cymbals).

CHYKs were also able to spend one-on-one time with the *acharyas* before, during, and after meals (cutting, cooking, and cleaning together). Each *acharya* beautifully described how their CM centers were administered. Additionally, Swamiji spoke on his off-the-road adventures in his native birthplace, Trinidad. And Arpitaji spoke about her inspiring personal experiences with Pujya Gurudev.

On the concluding day was a unique workshop for which over 30 nearby CM devotees registered to hear Swamiji's *satsang* on Vedantic truths. Topics included Existence, Om, energy, creation, detachment, free will vs. destiny, and developing a personal relationship with the Lord.

CHYKs came to this retreat as strangers and left as lifelong students of Vedanta, with a larger friend circle and study group. In true CHYK camaraderie, the attendees made good use of their portable electronics and smart phones by sharing noteworthy Vedantic videos and/or recording *acharyas'* *satsang* sessions. The CHYKs departed with salutations and gratitude to Swamiji and Arpitaji for their loving guidance, exceptional care, valuable time, and joyous sharing of so much spiritual wealth.

By the Lord's grace and Pujya Gurudev's blessings, this first CHYK retreat at *Chinmaya Govardhan* raised almost \$7,500 through camp registrations, workshop donations, and sponsorships, to help support CM St. Augustine and its future spiritual activities and retreats. Every visiting devotee or group visiting CM St. Augustine has been enchanted and enthralled by the charm of Shri Radha-Krishna in the shrine, the sacred presence of Pujya Gurudev at every altar, and the overpowering serenity and silence pervading the entire ashram property. *Chinmaya Govardhan* is a rare and beautiful sanctuary, which hopefully will benefit more and more devotees in the years to come. For more information on *Chinmaya Govardhan*, visit chinmayamission.org/staugustine.



CORD USA Quarterly News by Subha Pathial

Check out [CORD USA](http://CORDUSA.org)'s holiday decorations and new website design, as well as detailed articles on CORD work.

Thanks to the efforts of CM centers in [Princeton/Philadelphia](#), [Columbus](#), Buffalo, and [Minneapolis](#), their CORD walkathons raised over \$65,000. Click on the links to see photos.

[Austin CHYKs](#) learned how service to the community transforms our lives as well as others during their *seva* project to help clean up the Montopolis Greenbelt on October 1.

CORD USA's Princeton chapter did a school supplies drive for the Auten Road Intermediate School in September. "Your example of caring and sharing will hopefully promote a spirit of community cohesiveness and responsibility in the many students you have helped," wrote the social worker who received the supplies on behalf of the school.

A few high school students at CM Minneapolis started the project of making fleece blankets to sell at the center's *Diwali Mela* and offered the proceeds as a donation to CORD USA. The super soft, extra warm blankets sold out in no time.

In the CORD USA Washington DC project of "Operation Gratitude" children shared their Halloween bounty with U.S. military soldiers overseas, thereby expressing gratitude for their service.

Chinmaya Bala Vihar students in grades 9-12 have the opportunity to join CORD USA's annual service visit to India to volunteer their time serving the under-served. The 2012 visit will be to CORD Sidhabari. More information will be posted on the website soon.

Acharya Vivek Gupta (CM Niagara) will be leading a CHYK *yatra* to CORD Siruvani in December 2011.

CORD Thamaraiakkam conducted a 21-day basic training program on making jute bags and other jute articles self-help group members and young women from nearby villages. Next time you visit India, instead of buying designer bags, consider supporting their cause and going eco-friendly. [Read](#) the full report.

More than 400 villagers surrounding CORD Siruvani were screened for dental caries, oral cancer, and other problems. The villagers were also explained the effects of tobacco chewing and smoking. They were given packs of toothpaste, toothbrush, and mouthwash and shown the correct method of brushing teeth. [Read](#) the full report.

CORD Sidhabari has identified 770 village volunteers on different issues pertaining to sanitation, domestic violence, female feticide, HIV/AIDS, adolescent girls, Bala Vihar, single women, and disabilities in 28 selected *panchayats*. They are continuously training the volunteers on how to better serve the community. [Read](#) the full report.

CORD Deuladiha is working on training farmers and rice growers to be more efficient in producing rice to guard them from scarcity during drought season. [Read the full report.](#)

CORD Lathikata recently held a *Vana Mahotsava* (*vana*: forest; *mahotsava*: festival), a go-green celebration where they planted more than 300 seedlings in school premises! They also conducted a quiz for 100 schoolchildren, along with an awareness program, on the importance of forest protection and conservation. [Read](#) the full report.

CORD Kaza's *Chinmaya Vijaya* orphanage has begun sending children off campus for formal schooling. [Read](#) the full report. The former President of India, Hon. Abdul Kalam, [sponsored](#) a lunch for all the children at *Chinmaya Vijaya* on the occasion of his birthday.

CORD Sri Lanka is continuing to help women who have been widowed or displaced from their homes after the tsunami in Sri Lanka. CORD services include helping the women by facilitating self-help groups and structuring a loan program with the Bank of Ceylon. [Read](#) the full report.

Here are a few [photos](#) of the Sree Sankara Balashramam orphanage, which now functions under CM Trivandrum.

Chinmaya Publications: New Arrivals

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