



# mu NEWS

CHINMAYA MISSION® WEST BIMONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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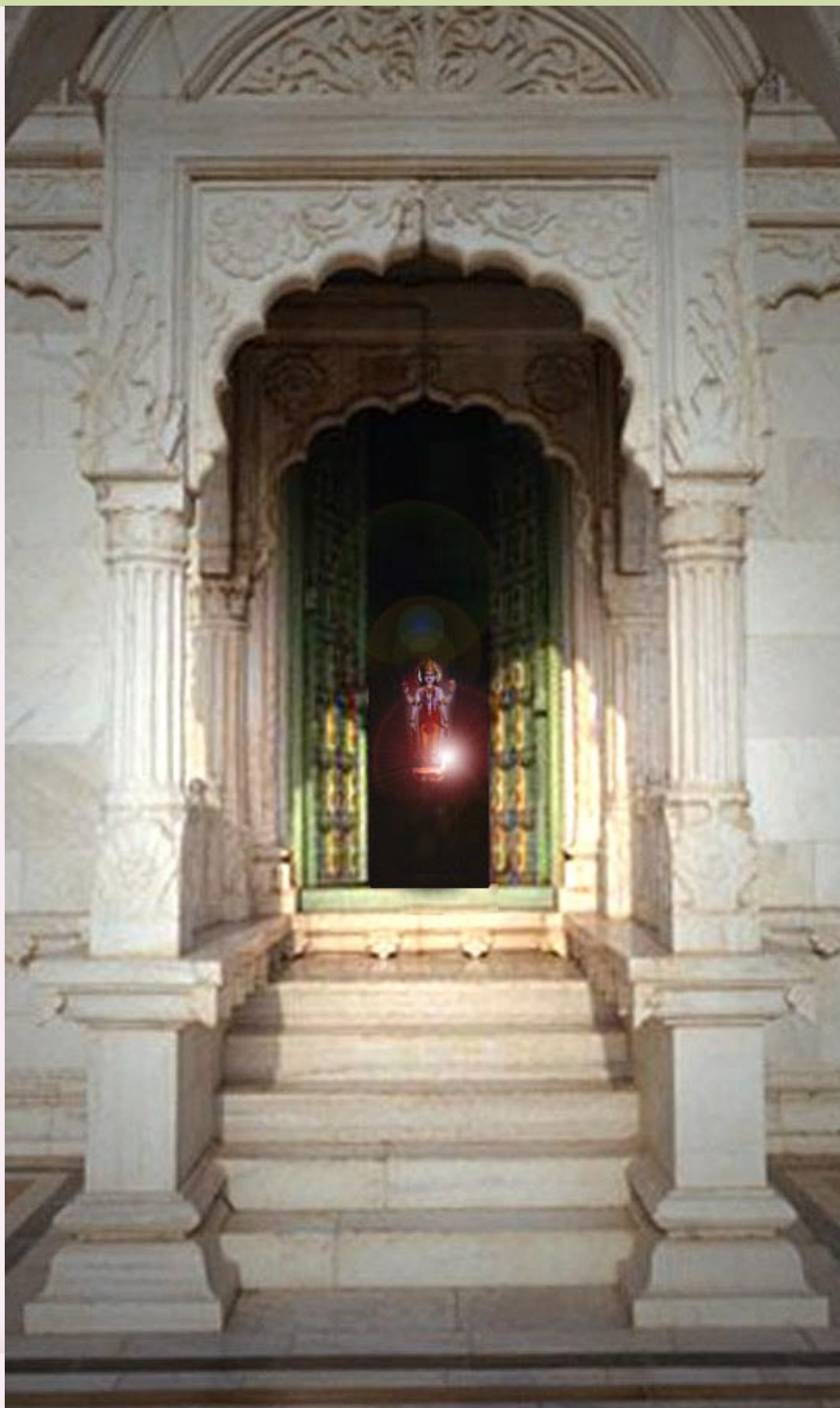
### HAVE YOU MET . . . ?

Brahmcharini Bhamati Chaitanya

### MISSION STATEMENT

To provide to individuals, from any background, the wisdom of Vedanta and the practical means for spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors to society.

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# Dear Readers,

*Hari Om. Pranāṁ.*

Welcome to a new year and to our first online issue of CMW News! On behalf of CMW's Board of Directors, we wish our Chinmaya Family worldwide for a blessed 2007!

By Pujya Gurudev's grace and Pujya Guruji's blessings and guidance, we continue to grow and stand as one family, sharing in the joy of inner unfoldment, blossoming centers and satellites, and service to the world.

Our new online issue features hyperlinks for faster access, and "Zoom" and "Full Screen" options for better viewing. For those of you who prefer hard copy, we have maintained the same layout as in prior issues. Each issue can easily be printed on standard size paper. You can opt to print in only black ink by modifying your printer properties accordingly.

Thank you for your kind support and constructive feedback over the years. It has been a pleasure to read, and delve into, so many inspiring stories, heartfelt poems, eye-opening travelogues, dynamic news reports, and spiritually expansive viewpoints. We look forward to meeting you in cyberspace, and hope you continue to share your thoughts and stay in touch with CMW's breath and breadth.

*Hari Om.*

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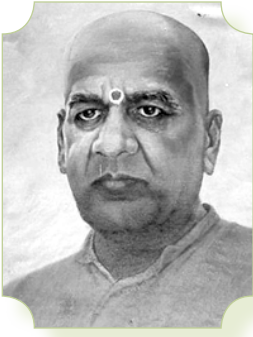
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His Holiness  
Swami Tapovanam

*When asked why he does not engage in national and patriotic work and stay amongst the populace instead of in the Himalayas . . .*

Even here, I am serving our motherland. Know that there is no greater service than what I render. On the basis of my personal experience and the scriptures, I am giving here practice to seekers of the supreme Truth and imparting spiritual instruction to them. In this worldly existence red-hot with the fire of sorrow, all that gives relief, comfort, and happiness is the peace of the Self. Men and women follow the *purushārthas* solely to this end. People desire name and fame, position, wealth, and status, all for this purpose. The peace of the Self, alas, looks like an invaluable treasure unattainable anywhere. If, through the spiritual advice of one, and his example of a calm, peaceful life, such peace becomes attainable to the world, who does more good to the world than he? Let these great rishis, who ever abide in the Self, remain wherever they be—on a mountain stops or in caves—know that they are the most invaluable ornaments to the world.

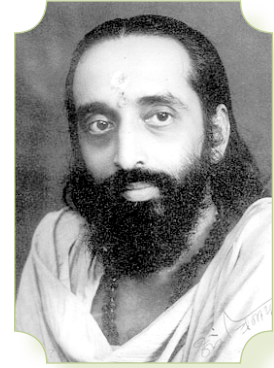
- Excerpt from *Ishvara Darshan*



Monkeys represent thoughts, the similarity being that both are restless and unsteady. Of all thoughts, the very minister of King Sugreeva (meaning, “well-reined”) was Hanuman—highly erudite and scholarly. Yet this thought-personality [by itself] cannot bring out its potential might and beauty, albeit serving as the minister to “self-control.” Knowledge and erudition, with moral restraint and physical control, are the highest from the standpoint of material education. Yet, Valmiki demonstrates that all the potentialities inherent can blossom forth only when that knowledge bows down to Rama, the spiritual Essence.

From the moment Anjaneya meets Rama, an explosion of inconceivable merits and beauties in that apparently ridiculous and insignificant form of a monkey. Such explosions we have seen throughout history—in a carpenter’s son becoming Jesus, or an equally empty Prince Siddhartha rising to the status of a Buddha, or an insignificant student of Calcutta University, Narendra, hatching into the gracious and dynamic Vivekananda.

- Excerpt from *Hanumat Vibhuti*



His Holiness  
Swami Chinmayananda



His Holiness  
Swami Tejmayananda

After understanding the nature of the Lord’s presence in the world begins the inquiry into the means by which the Reality can be realized. On inquiry, another strange truth comes to light. There are means, yet at the same time, no means can make one realize the Truth. Efforts would help gain a thing un-gained. The Reality being one with oneself, it is already gained, and hence no efforts can reveal It. To know that the Reality is oneself is the means of realizing It; this knowledge itself is Realization. No other physical or mental gymnastics can reveal the Reality. *Jijnāsā* is the desire to know. The pursuit of knowledge until it is realized in its totality is true *jijnāsā*.

- Excerpt from commentary on *Chatuhshloki Bhagavatam*





## Up, Down, All Around

Q&A with Brahmachari Uddhav Chaitanya in Bentonville, Arkansas

Continued from CMW News, November 2006

Transcribed by Preeta Narain

### Why is Lord Krishna portrayed as mischievous and not as straightforward as other forms of God?

Who said Krishna is not straight? He is as straightforward as a *jalebi*. *Jalebi ki tarah seedhe saadhe hain!* The ways of the Lord should be understood properly. If you're looking for a role model, follow Rama. If you want to know how to deal with intricate situations, follow Krishna. What Krishna did may not look so straightforward on the surface, but through an in-depth analysis, you will see the rightful sincerity and need of the time.

Yes, He was mischievous, showing us a livelier side to life, the sparks of joy in life's monotony. But I disagree that Krishna was not straightforward. We may not understand what He did and why He did it, but the fault lies in our ignorance, not in His actions. We are not straightforward enough to understand the Lord's depth. Straighten yourself out and you will understand Him better.

### Can you explain the seemingly unjust killings of Karna and Drona on the *Mahābhārata* battlefield?

When Drona heard Yuddhishtira say, "*Ashvatthāma hathah kunjārah*," he alighted from his chariot, sat on the ground, and did *prāṇa-bandhana* (a *prāṇik* technique to control breath and willfully leave the body). By the time they cut his head off, Drona was already dead.

The first reason for Karna's death was that Karna had unknowingly, but wrongfully, learned knowledge from his guru. Karna's fault was in his wrongful utility of rightful things—using *dhārmik* power for *adharma*. People like this are geniuses gone awry, like this teenager who created and distributed a virus that crashed almost 60% of heavy servers. Such people have immense knowledge, but use it for an unrighteous cause. Karna had such ability, but he willfully used it to help Duryodhana. He knew it was wrong, but he chose that platform anyway.

### Define *punya* and *pāpa*.

*Punya* means "merit" and *pāpa* means "sin." We earn *punya* through righteous (*dhārmik*) acts and *papa* through wrongful (*adhārmik*) acts—acts at the levels of body, speech, and mind (*kāya, vāk,*

*manah*). But understand clearly that one act doesn't cancel the other. Do something wrong and cover it up by doing something good—won't work. Your debit and credit sheets are assessed separately, not in comparison.

Our present age of *Kali Yuga* is one of the best times in one aspect: In any other *yuga*, if you even think something bad, it is considered a sin. In *Kali Yuga*, this law has been relaxed, so bad thoughts don't count. Only bad speech and actions do.

If you act righteously, you earn merits. Merits and sins get exhausted once you experience their fruits. There is no cancellation policy between the two. *Pūjās, tīrtha yātrās*, or Ganga-dipping won't clean-out cancel your sins.

Did you know . . . there were over 15 million people who bathed in the holy Ganga during the 2001 *Kumbha Mela*. It was the largest religious gathering in the world at that time, and it had the least number of casualties and health issues.

There is a great, divine power in the holy waters, and in regular *pūjās, vratas*, and *havans*. But, at most, these meritorious acts grant the devotee the confidence and willpower to face the music of his sinful deeds, not cancel them. If I am due for a heart attack, that's what I'll get; but my spiritual practices will have the counter-effect of increasing my merits to such a level that I can face anything without getting perturbed. This is as good as it gets.

### How can we teach children to have a goal in life?

First ask if you have a goal in your life. As parents, you need to give your kids a direction and a goal. Set them on the right track, on a righteous path. Is it not true that if a garden even slightly starts to go bad, you have to be alert and quick to weed and maintain it, no matter how troublesome it is? Weeds grow faster than you think. Keep postponing your lawn maintenance and before you know it, you have to search for the spot where your flowers used to be. It is not the fault of the earth or the weeds or the flowers; it is the fault of the gardener, because he did not do his duty.

It is a parent's duty to guide his child in the proper direction. There are two extremes: the US method and

the India method. I've seen both go wrong. Letting a teenager go his own way and make his own decisions—ones that will make or mar his life—is just as insane as wanting to control his every move.

I met an American university student. He said, “Right now, my dad is paying for my tuition, my dorm, and my personal needs. I manage my own life and do what I want, when I want. In two years, after I finish my education, my dad said I have to pay him back.” It's like they had a signed contract. His father had told him, “Live your own life and don't forget to pay me back. Otherwise, I'll see you in court.” This is one extreme.

Then there was a kid who didn't know how to manage his life at all. The choice was left in the child's hands, but at that age, with barely any experience, and temptations high, a youngster's choice is not always the right one. I knew an Indian fourth-year medical school student who went to his father one day and said, “Being a doctor is good and I like it, but I'd rather be a chef.” Can you imagine it? There's nothing wrong with being a chef, but after three years of medical school, he came back in utter confusion! This is because the kid was never fully clear on how tough, deep, and intense medical school is, and how much effort is required. With his Indian background, his parents may have told him from the start, “No, you have to become a doctor!”

To guide someone you deeply love and care about, to give him some direction and a goal—before any instructions, before reaching out to him with support—there is an important first step: See him and love him as a person, not as a relation. We may say we do what we do because we care, because we love, but our love has to be expressed in the right way. Your love and caring should not become chains that bind your loved one and stop him from naturally unfolding. Your loved one has to feel a rapport in your love, not bondage. Trust has to be created. Love and trust between two people has to translate into acceptance, where each party accepts the other “as is.” Once you gain your child's trust, they will readily follow your advice, because they are sure that you will tell them only what is for their own good.

I'm not focusing on what the goal should be or how clear the goal should be. The first requirement is to create a bridge between the two persons, whether parent to child or peer to peer. After you have created the bridge and provided a goal, along with clarity and guidance, you have to leave it to individual choice. However much you may love your child, the bottom line is that the choice is individual. And if the child's choice is wrong, if you need to explain more clearly, wait for the right time before intruding. You may have taught your child clearly, repeatedly, but when life's bigger decisions confront your child, he may not be

ready for them. Be patient, alert, and effective—it's all in the timing. Everything has its time. There is no point in getting frustrated. Wait for the opportune moment and when it is ripe, seize it. Be humble, alert, open, and large-hearted.

### **Please give us a few tips to enhance “thinking out of the box.”**

I like Taco Bell®'s ad for this: “Think out of the bun.” We get so habituated to so many psychological patterns fed to us through propaganda, that it's hard to find original people. Do you remember when you first came to the US? The first shock was, “Oh my God! I have to do everything myself?! Cooking, cleaning, lawn mowing!” Because if you call your \$80/hour-plumber, you will have a whole other set of complaints! Therefore, many people think it's easier to become a handyman than to pay through the nose. And this is how they end up spending their weekends at The Home Depot®!

Thinking out of the box is hard for most of us because we do not readily accept change. Life brings, with every experience, a new dimension, but we are not available to its beauty and wonder because we find it more comfortable to live in our age-old patterns. This brings stagnancy, which expresses as midlife crises, depression, frustration, fear, and pain. People who haven't changed for years, and refuse to change, live a stagnant life. Have you seen how stagnant water stinks after some days? So too, our personality starts to stink when we stop spiritually growing and going with life's flow.

Worst of all, when we do realize we are stuck, we try to find a way out, but only through the same rut of set patterns. Every new experience forces us to adapt, but we remain stuck due to fear and anxiety. We stick to our patterns like a plaster body-cast. Imagine how much it hurts when you try to pull the cast off. With each pull, there is tension and fear, and so most of us choose the trodden path—even if it does not fully solve our problem. In our comfort zone, we conveniently, yet miserably, stay inside the box.

Thinking out of the box is explained thoroughly in *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.14: *Āgama-apāyino'nityāh tāns-titikshasva bhārata*. This is acceptance—of all that life brings—with a smile, and it's the best way to keep the mind at ease and think out of the box.

### **Someone in Mumbai overdid yoga and was hospitalized. Can yoga be harmful?**

It's a simple principle. Eating food is fine. Overeating is not. The immediate consequence of overeating is an upset stomach. The eventual consequence of regular overeating is obesity. My principle is simple: Madhya Pradesh *mein gadbad to*

Uttar Pradesh *mein gadbad* (upset stomach, upset mind)—it’s a direct link.

Disciplining the body is good, but if you overdo it, especially *prāṇāyāma* without proper guidance, you will get one of the hardest kicks of your life! *Kuṇḍalīnī śakti* is more powerful than a hundred nuclear weapons fired simultaneously. Don’t mess with it just because you can read the steps in English. The point is to learn and practice correctly.

### Why isn’t it good to start a new project on *amāvasya* (new moon day)?

Which part of the world you come from. If you are from Tamil Nadu (India), *amāvasya* is considered auspicious. There are different calculations applicable with different types of logic. Follow your system of faith; each has its own purpose.

Once, when I was in Chennai, I brought in a large coconut leaf to help with some stage decoration. The volunteers got really upset with me because the leaf is apparently used in funerals. Different customs in different places, so when in Rome . . . this is *sāmānya dharma* and it is different in each place. For instance, if you are in a desert and want to purify something, your purifier is sand, not water (as is the case in other places). If you are in the Himalayas, snow is the purifier. You can rub an object in the snow and consider it as purified. One follows the *sāmānya dharma* of that geographical location.

### Should we believe in *Rāhu-kāla* and *Yama-gandam*?

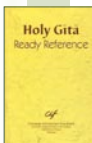
There are different *kālas* (time periods) where the scriptures prescribe “do this” or “don’t do that.” Only if you are doing something specific or special (*viśeṣha karma*) should you check out *Rāhu-kāla* and *Yama-gandam*; astrology is a beautiful science in itself. For daily duties (*nitya karma*) like brushing my teeth, using the restroom, or going to the office, there is no need to check, because *nitya karmas* don’t come under the purview of *Rāhu-kāla*. Only *viśeṣha karma* and *viśeṣha dharma* falls into this category.

Most of the *pañcāṅgas* (almanacs) are written topographically for the Indian subcontinent. So time zone adjustments are needed if you don’t reside in India. It’s pretty accurate.

Thank you very much for listening so patiently. I hope this Q&A session has not led to more questions for you.

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[About the Author](#)

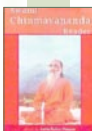


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Hard Cover, 647 Pages, US\$15

Published by Chinmaya International Foundation (CIF), India

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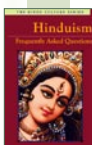


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Hard Cover, 278 Pages, US\$10

Published by Penguin (Chinmaya Mission® Delhi)

CM Delhi’s newly released book by Anita Raina Thapan is a distinguished compilation of Pujya Gurudev’s articles from various sources. This work also includes an impressive introduction and biographical recount of Swami Chinmayananda’s life and teachings by the author.



### Hinduism: Frequently Asked Questions

Soft Cover, 111 Pages, US\$6

Published by Chinmaya Publications (CMW), USA

CMW’s *Hinduism: FAQs*, the revised edition of the original Chinmaya publication, *Our Heritage*, is a noteworthy addition to the Hindu Culture Series. The work presents fundamental concepts and interesting topics of Hinduism in easy-to-read Q&A format. It is an excellent supplement to *Hindu Culture: An Introduction*.

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# Life Management



by Brahmacharini Sumati Chaitanya  
Resident *Acharya* of Chinmaya Mission United Kingdom

**I**f life means a series of experiences, then life management means being able to manage or guide every experience in the desirable and right direction. Everyone desires for happiness, but is the direction correct? How does one know what is right?

Saint Tulsidas says, *Binu satsanga, viveka na hoi*, or “Without good company, one does not come to know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, truth and falsehood.”

Thus, life becomes manageable when it remains in *satsanga*. *Sat* means “truth,” *sat* also means “good.” Just as the sun brings along with it light and warmth, because the sun is light and warmth, so too, Truth brings all that is good because Truth alone is goodness.

*Sanga* means association. When a person chooses the path of Truth, good alone happens to him. The first good thing that happens is that he gets a guide. And he gets the company of good persons. This ‘good company’ can be of the man of realization, who is ever established in Truth, or the company of those who are desirous of the Truth and thus practice Truth religiously. To supply right guidance through right association is the responsibility of the Lord, provided that one seeks Truth and Truth alone.

How does *satsanga* help one manage life? It gives one the right understanding of ‘who am I’ and of the nature of the world I live in. After all, how can I manage ‘my’ life without knowing myself? *Satsanga* gives one the correct vision to see oneself and the happenings of the world. Without this vision, one feels helpless and fearful to walk the rugged path of life. This vision does not ease the path, but makes us aware of the nature of the path.

*Satsanga* creates the need to live this vision—by glorifying Truth, the ways of Truth, and the people who live and are established in Truth. But just as a painting of the sun is not capable of brightening a dark room, so too, a mere understanding oneself and the world by itself is not enough to give us the capacity to manage life. When the seeker of Truth remains associated with the thoughts and words of Truth, he is tempted to bring Truth into day-to-day life and is inspired to experiment with the Truth.

*Satsanga* gives the know-how to live Truth in day-to-day life. Eagerness to live knowledge is also not enough. One must also know how to apply Truth in everyday life, because Truth has many facets. *Satsanga* offers a variety of ways to live Truth. Just as a key is capable of opening its specific lock, so too, each experience has its own way to be handled. Truth is one, but is expressed in many ways.

*Satsanga* inspires when spirits sink low. It brings hope when everything else fails. Falls on the path of Truth are inevitable. Pujya Gurudev would say, “If you say you haven’t fallen, then you haven’t begun.” These falls are because of old habits. *Satsanga* floods us with inspiration and rejuvenates our enthusiasm to pronounce that we too can do it, that sin is not in falling, but in remaining there.

All management techniques are futile if I do not know why I am doing what I am doing. *Satsanga* reminds us of our life’s goal. If the ultimate goal of life is happiness, then am I able to guide all my experiences toward that chosen goal?

Let us be sincere and honest seekers of Truth. Guidance will come. It is His responsibility. Let us have faith that life is not unmanageable for the one who has a guide. Guidance comes in the form of *satsanga*, which in turn gives us knowledge about life, the skill to face it, the eagerness and inspiration to practice spiritual techniques, and last, but not least, the purpose of life. With all this, life does not become a burden to be managed, but a divine song to be sung.



# In His Presence

## In the Land of the Lords

by Radha Bharania

*Continued from CMW News, November 2006*

After one month in Sidhabari, discovering and exploring the amazing work of CORD (Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development), I continue to be inspired by its efforts to empower women, educate children and youth, and change the lives of thousands of villagers. Since my arrival, I have also adjusted to life at the ashram. It is surprisingly filled with its own ups and downs, much like my life back home in Canada. But here, in Sidhabari, surrounded by the serenity and glory of Mother Nature at the foothills of the Himalayas, the ups and downs are not the result of day-to-day challenges and environmental changes; they are the result of my turbulent mind.

At some wonderful moments, the mind is calm and quiet. It is silent. This in itself has proven to be its own priceless prize. At other times, the mind begins its chatter, loud and clear, despite the peaceful surroundings. Almost like a game of hide-and-seek, the moments of silence come and go . . . mischievously . . . on the sly . . . without a trace. And suddenly the silence is gone, without my realizing it, and the game is reset for a new round of hide-and-seek to begin.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet a Hindi school teacher at the local government school. With three young children and a wife to support, he makes ends meet with a minimal monthly paycheck. He realized not long ago that one son is sick and needs an operation. He has admitted his son into the hospital, but admits that he does not have enough money for the bus fare to visit his son.

As we sat in his home inquiring about his child's health status, he insisted that we have some tea—after all, we are guests in his home, and whether he can afford it or not, he is more than hospitable. Declining the offer for tea was not an option—his offer was filled with love. Instantly, I started calculating how much milk and sugar must have gone into the tea—milk that could have been given to his other children. Allowing myself to get more and more emotionally involved, my mind began chattering for hours on end, an endless stream of thoughts with no sign of quietude in sight. Any attempt to try and find a sense of calm seemed to be wasted.

I have learned through many *yajnas* and *satsangs* that the key to a quiet mind is the removal of egocentric desires, which is possible through selfless service. I learned that the road to harmony begins by focusing

on a greater cause, rather than personal struggles and challenges. Beyond the words in the *yajnas*, I continue to see many examples of selfless service. Guruji travels around the world and comes year after year to Canada to serve as His messenger. At the end of each *yajna* he selflessly allocates all donations to the many Chinmaya centers, hospitals, schools, and programs such as CORD.

CORD's work, through Kshama Didi's tireless efforts, creates awareness, provides training, and transforms lives; it is one of the greatest examples of selfless service I have ever seen. With certainty, I can now relate back to all the Canadian centers who raise money for CORD projects year after year—and to CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), which continues to match each dollar donation—that their contributions are indeed having a ripple effect. Today, a school teacher may need money to visit his son in the hospital, but tomorrow, through training and guidance, he will stand on his own feet, and possibly help someone else do the same.

It has become clear to me in the past month that each step of the project's work, from the funding to the delivery, is pure, selfless service. In this work, there is some peace of mind. The project work and the villagers' stories and experiences continue to be a priceless learning tool for me, but I have not yet mastered the game of hide-and-seek. But like everyone else, I am forever seeking the silence. Let the next round begin.

## Echoes of the Past

by Arundhati Sundar

There was a debate going on in my mind as I looked down at my four year-old son sleeping under the mosquito net. It was 5:30 a.m. and still dark. Should I wake him or let him sleep? In the last few nights, bouts of hacking cough, wheezing, and frenzies of scratching at mosquito bites had troubled him. I was considering whether I should follow his instructions to wake him for the Sunday *Gāyatrī Havan* to be performed in the Chinmaya Gardens Ashram at 6 a.m.

The ashram in Coimbatore, where we were spending part of our vacation, is at the beautiful, tranquil foothills of the Nilgiri Mountains, surrounded by waterfalls and pristine forests where wild elephants roam. It is isolated enough where my son can explore Nature and I can forget about the dangers of strangers and traffic. So I



have found myself doing just that, giving him full rein to wander on his own.

Now, my protective instincts were pleading, “Let him sleep. It’s too early. He’s only four. He will get many more such opportunities in his lifetime—in fact, next Sunday.” On the other hand, I recalled the look on his face from the night before, which seemed to say, “I know you’ll try to sneak off without me.”

It was the previous Sunday when he had woken up and wandered out looking for me, coming up to where we were chanting. The *havan* had ended just then. He had seen the fire in the *havan kund*, sensed the serenity of the atmosphere, glimpsed the intensity and beauty of the ritual, and felt he had missed something. He was disappointed, so he demanded to know if four-year-olds were allowed to attend. I had said yes, provided they wake up early and shower while it is still dark. All this was before he’d been ill, and now, at 5:35, I was still hesitating.



In another part of my mind, a childhood memory stirred. I was five years old, skinny, in skimpy summer clothes, at my grandfather’s house in Surat, Gujarat, where we spent every vacation. It was always a happy time, sitting on swings, playing with cousins and friends on the streets, eating armfuls of mangoes, riding horse buggies to picnics by the river, and best of all, hearing stories from my aunt every afternoon and from my grandfather every evening.

One night, when I couldn’t fall asleep, I went to snuggle with my mother and found her bed empty. When I wandered downstairs, I was surprised to see my mother and aunt, dressed to go out in the middle of the night. They said they were going for *kīrtan* and would be back in an hour. They tried to hurry me back to bed, but I wasn’t about to give up on this clandestine, midnight adventure! So they threw some clothes over me, threatened dire consequences if I made any noise, and took me along.

We walked through dark, quiet lanes for what felt like a long distance, and arrived at a home where one would never have guessed it was night. The room was packed with women and the *kīrtan* started as we fit ourselves in. Cozily tucked into my mother’s side, leaning against a wall, I slowly took in the scene. The women in half the room faced the other half. Women on one side chanted and the other side followed. I could not see the altar clearly, as it was at the far end and my

view was blocked by women swaying, clapping, and playing cymbals to the rhythm of the chant.

The chanting was loud, monotonous, with occasional variations in speed and pitch. All the while, the same four words repeated, with devotion and complete absorption. Most had their eyes closed. I felt the wall I was leaning on vibrate with the chanted mantra, “*Shrī Krishna sharanam mama.*”

At some stage, I went from being an observer to a murmuring chanter, and then tried clapping, but gave up as my palms started to smart. Then I decided to close my eyes. I felt the chant slowly fill my entire being. My next conscious memory was of the silent air reverberating as my mind continued chanting, “*Shrī Krishna sharanam mama.*” I was convinced it could not have been an hour. I wanted to sit there and continue. Later, as I walked home between my mother and my aunt, holding each of their hands, I asked them if they sneaked off to *kīrtan* every night after I fell asleep. “No, silly! Only on *Ekādashī*,” was the reply. (*Ekādashī* is the 11th day in the moon’s waxing and waning cycle, on which devotees worship and fast.)

So, as I walked barefoot through the narrow lanes of Surat, I promised myself that I would stay awake every *Ekādashī* and never ever miss that intense, exhilarating experience. I repeatedly and explicitly asked my mother, aunt, and grandmother about the next *Ekādashī*. I was always put off, until one day, when I asked yet again, I was casually told, “Yesterday.” When I heard the next one was after 15 days, to the puzzlement of all, I burst out crying. After that, I decided to take the matter into my own hands. I started climbing chairs.

I would push the old chair toward the wall where the calendar hung high. I would climb onto its rickety arm to read not the date, which was visible from the floor, but the *tithi*, which was in tiny print, for the next *Ekādashī*. Innumerable times I had been caught on the chair and warned that I’d fall and crack my head.

One day, the end of our vacation was announced. For me, it was too sudden. My grandfather, expecting from us the usual excitement about train travel and departing gifts, informed us that our return tickets to Mumbai were booked. But my only question was, “Are we going before or after *Ekādashī*?” We went to check the calendar: Two days before! I pleaded for postponing the tickets, but was firmly refused. Reservations were hard to come by at the end of school vacations and my cousin had stood in line for four hours at the train station, in the blazing sun, to get these tickets for us. So we were packed off.

Once in Mumbai, in the excitement of reuniting with my father and entering a new school, I forgot all about *Ekādashī* and *kīrtan* . . . for along time . . . over 20 years. It was *Shrī Krishna Janmāshṭami*. I was

# News & Events

## CM Tustin Golf Fundraiser

Based on a report submitted by CM Tustin

CM Southern California's successful charity golf tournament and dinner at the Tustin Ranch Golf Course, was held on October 14 and benefited the *Chinmaya Mithilā* ashram and various Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD) projects in India.

Enthusiastic golfers participated in a day that one said was "fun with a purpose." For a fee of \$250, over 100 enthusiastic players joined in, including children and CM members.

Acknowledging their lively participation, Swami Ishwarananda, *āchārya* of CM Tustin, in his speech at the special dinner that evening, urged everyone to continue to GOLF: Go Out and Live Fully.



Swamiji's take on golf and life was further illustrated in a booklet that was given to all participants at registration, at which time they also received t-shirts and golf caps embellished with Puja Gurudev's signature. In the booklet, Swamiji explained golf as a *dharma-kshetra*, or "an arena of righteous action,"

and enumerated 18 tips, one from each of *Shrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*'s chapters, on how to be a winner in golf and in life. Included were elucidations on pithy sayings such as "Don't swing the mind," "Be still and act," and "A bend is not the end."



Swamiji distributed prizes to the winning teams. First Place: Arun Keni, Uma Varanasi, Bhavik Patel, and Mahesh Somani. Second Place: Venkat Reddy, William Hines, Carlos Padilla, and Ravi Pendurthy. Third Place: Vipul Patel, Tarak Chaudhary, Ben Chang, Govardhan Reddy. The "Closest to the Pin" and "Longest Drive" prizes went to Bruce Cleermans, Anup Kulkarni, and Jayesh M. Golf Trivia Quiz Winner Vipul Patel received a Cleveland cap autographed by professional golfer, David Toms.

The tournament's putting contest, where prizes from \$50-5,000 were up for grabs, aroused

everyone's participation, golfers and non-golfers. The new BMW car went unclaimed, for no one produced the needed Hole in One: a challenging 181 yards, par 3, that required a shot over water.



The featured Silent Auction included a framed picture of golfer Vijay Singh, an autographed picture of Los Angeles Laker, Kobe Bryant, and actress Lucille Ball memorabilia. Deepak Kulkarni conducted the humorous auction proceedings for golf items.

Brahmachari Girish Chaitanya, *āchārya* of CM Los Angeles, recognized the event's sponsors with plaques. Lead organizer and Mission member, Ravi Vishnubhotla, coordinated and spoke at the dinner program.

## Free Online CHYK Classes

by Pritesh Kot

CHYK-West is offering free online Vedanta classes via Skype™. Conducted by CM Tustin *āchārya* Swami Ishwarananda, the classes are open to all CHYKs (ages 18-30) in North America via free [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) accounts.

The one-hour classes, which commenced August 24, 2006, are held biweekly, 9 p.m. EST. The forum is an innovative study group that allows CHYKs to meet and learn from each other.

Interested students should register on Skype™ and thereafter e-mail [skype\\_class@chykwest.com](mailto:skype_class@chykwest.com) to get on the class list. Voice participation requires a computer microphone. E-mail [chykwest@chinmayamission.org](mailto:chykwest@chinmayamission.org) if you need additional help.

## CM Columbus' Jnāna Gangā

Based on a report submitted by Linda Ringler and Ron Gillinov

CM Columbus youth and the Nalanda School of Dance presented a devotional tribute of song and dance on Mother Ganga's spiritual significance and influence on India's countless ancient cities, pilgrim centers, shrines, and temples.

The performance, held on September 16, 2006, was an incredible combination of sight, sound, movement, and philosophy. Featuring slides of River Ganga and Vedantic luminaries, the allegoric narration, flowing dance movements, and stunning costumes all revealed Mother Ganga as the knowledge passed on by the teachers through the *guru-shishya* tradition. The multifaceted experience

was visually and emotionally rich, including a notable dance by CM Columbus children who waved lights as the slide in the background showed lights being placed in the river.



The program, originally conceived and produced by Chennai CHYK in 1998, has been performed in Mission centers across India and Singapore. In Columbus, the performance was superbly coordinated and executed through Indira Satyapriya (Director, Nalanda School of Dance), and it showcased an eclectic mix of *Bhāratnāṭyam*, *Kathakali*, *Mohiniyāṭam*, and Indian folk dances. The 70+ dancers were professional, well-rehearsed, and seemed to thoroughly enjoy their participation. The result immersed viewers in an aesthetic extravaganza that embraced all the senses, an experience that was made all the more profound because it shared the glory of Vedanta.

Tiny hands waved like little streams, and lanky legs like tributary rivers, in a cultural celebration of the waterway deemed holiest by Hindus.

- Felix Hoover, *Columbus Dispatch*

The beauty and commitment of the dancers drew me in to the Hindus' respect of life and Spirit. It was an incredible, peaceful, and deeply personal experience for me.

- Mary O'Donnell

## CM San Jose Thanksgiving Camp 2006

by Jayanthi Balachander



Every time I met Radha at *Krishṇālaya*, she was looking for her six-year-old daughter. Cell phone in hand, worried exchanges with

her husband, she would search everywhere for her child, only to discover her a little later somewhere with other children. Not knowing the whereabouts of her little one was something Radha was not used to. It took her the camp stay to realize that this was what was special about *Krishṇālaya*—it is so safe that she can actually stay away from her child for hours on end and find that her daughter is perfectly happy making new friends or exploring the grounds. This, and the chance to slow down, stare in rapture at the new idol

of Lord Krishna that adorns the ashram entrance, meditate, do yoga, take long walks in the middle of the day, help with communal chores, and above all, attend Brahmachari Prabodh Chaitanya's lectures, made this a truly unforgettable experience for Radha. And she was not alone.

On the last day of the camp, choked voices, copious tears, and parting hugs were the norm at *Krishṇālaya*. "How could I have gone through life till now with so many impressive degrees to my credit, not knowing anything about my real Self?" mused a first-time camper with reference to the camp text, *Panchadashi*, Chapter 3, by Swami Vidyaranya.

*Panchadashi* is an introductory Vedantic text and Chapter 3 indicates to the seeker the nature of the Self by discarding what it is not real. The five sheaths or layers that veil the real Self in all of us are dissected one by one. Twice each day, after a half-hour of guided meditation led by Prabodhji, we sat entranced as he systematically explained the nature of each of the conditionings with, and as, which we tend to identify.

The real Self, hidden in a deep cave within us, can be reached by recognizing and negating what we are not. Swami Vidyaranya says that the pervasiveness of *Ātman* is so obvious that not recognizing it is akin to being unaware of the tongue while speaking!

While the adults and Yuva Kendra teens attended discussion sessions on the *Panchadashi* lectures, the children, who were divided into two groups, attended Bala Vihar classes. The younger group listened to stories about Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna, and the older group learned about devotion (through faith, purity, and quietude) and creating a hotline to God. The two groups presented plays on the camp's conclusion.

*Shruti Mandir*, the main *satsanga* hall for our classes and activities, would be lit only by the soft glow of candles in the darkness of the morning. Here, we sat in silence, learning about the art of meditation. After our lectures, group discussions, Vedic chanting, yoga, and *bhajan* sessions, we reassembled here for post-dinner cultural activities, which is when the hall was filled with boisterous laughter and comments. "Game Night" was complete with blowing honkers and children accusing the quizmaster of unfairness!

The camp ended on Sunday morning with a beautiful *pādukā pūjā* of Pujya Gurudev. All too soon, it was time to bid farewell. Nature seemed to reflect the mood of the campers who were loath to leave. In the pouring rain, people lingered over breakfast and reluctantly packed for the long drive back, looking forward to returning for the Christmas camp.





## Strike a CORD

by Sneha Chakraborty

The social, economic, and spiritual work accomplished to date in the Himalayan foothills has been in accordance with Pujya Gurudev's grand vision of upliftment. The model created in Himachal Pradesh is unique. Since this work began, CORD (Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development) has ventured into other Indian states, including Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Jammu, Kashmir, Punjab, and Haryana.

At the Sidhabari Project, Dr. Kshama Metre and her team serve village women through self-help programs and self-sufficient entrepreneurs in micro-banking. After 15 years, many of these empowered women have educated their children to become professionals and respectable breadwinners for their families. The success of the Sidhabari Project has been possible through the help of supporters all around the world, in particular, CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency). Chinmaya Mission centers in Canada have substantially helped collect funds for matching grants.

The Sidhabari Project, also aimed at poverty eradication, is worthy of retention and replication

worldwide and is now entering a new three-year cooperative work phase with CIDA. CM Halton invites and welcomes all CHYKs, Junior CHYKs, and youth around the world to annually unite, organize, and conduct a CM "International Friendship Walk (IFW)" to benefit CORD's Sidhabari Project.

While every CM center has its own projects and needs, it is hoped that CHYKs worldwide will be inspired to offer at least one day a year to serve a noteworthy cause. CM Halton has been perfecting the IFW fundraiser for the past 11 years and has the prototype to initiate the same in every CM center, even on short notice.

Human resource development is a slow process for poor, semi-literate people. It requires a composite vision of their lives and issues, which need to be addressed by steadily, actively involving their participation. Persistent and consistent efforts strengthen and consolidate people's partnership in the development process. It is important for us to invoke worldwide involvement that continues to inspire others and make the world a joyous place to live in.

- Dr. Kshama Metre, Project Director

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sitting in the packed hall of the Jagdishvara Temple in Chinmaya Mission's Mumbai ashram. Swami Tejomanandaji sat on the dais running his hand lightly over the harmonium keys, while the violin and the tabla players tuned their instruments. He started chanting "Om" and all fell silent. For the next hour, Swamiji delighted us with tales of Shri Krishna, accompanied by songs of Surdas, Mirabai, and other saints. At 11 p.m., the hall lights were dimmed to a faint glow and Swamiji gently instructed, "Close your eyes. We will chant the name of the Lord as we wait for midnight, the time of Shri Krishna's birth." In his soft, melodious voice Swamiji sang, "*Shrī Krishna sharanam mama*," and every hair on my arms, neck, and back stood on end. This timeless time passed in a thrill of intense meditation, and ended only when the conch blew and the bells rang for *ārati*. As I opened my eyes and stood, I became aware of the sound of heavy rain mingling with the bells and voices. My childhood experience flooded back in amazing detail.

I sat near the havan *kund* with my son in my lap. He was imitating my movements: picking up the havan *sāmagri* of mixed grain and herbs, holding it between the thumb and three fingers, keeping the index finger pointing out, chanting, and

extending his little arm to drop the offering into the fire. The flames warmed my cheeks and their dance held my eyes riveted. My father sat, a smile playing on his face as he watched his grandson. The sun was coming up, light shimmering through the leaves amid the canopy of tall trees. A light breeze wafted the fragrance of burning wood, ghee, and herbs. Gladness filled my heart that my son was a participant in this ancient ritual. Its harmony will have touched his heart and perhaps allow him to delve deep into his Self when he is ready.

We stood as the last mantra was chanted. I wanted to hug my son as we took the *prasād* in our hands. He, of course, ran off after a dog. I stood beside my father as we watched my son feed the *halva prasād* to the dog and then himself—with the same hand!

## Sidhabari: 25 Years of Memories

by Prarthna Saran

The call from the guru comes loud and clear, and when it comes, no matter what, you've just got to go . . . and go I did! The first camp in Sidhabari [Himachal Pradesh, India] was held as a set of five



camps of fifteen days each, in which Gurudev taught *Vivekachūḍamāni* in its entirety. There were hardly any cottages, no beds, no tables or chairs; we ate on dried leaf plates and carried our own tea mugs. No one knew anything about Sidhabari then.

Leaving an anxious family behind, I flew to Jammu, and from there to Dharamshala, where I boarded a rickety local bus that dropped me unceremoniously on the main road, at a distance from the ashram. The driver said, “This is Sidhabari.” Rather than become an object of the villagers’ idle curiosity, I walked up to the corner shops and asked if they knew where Sidhabari was. My heart sank as they initially looked at each other vacantly, but soon they nodded in assent. They walked me to some distance and pointed to a hillock. I deposited my suitcase with one of them and decided to walk up.

This was one of my life’s major turning points. As I walked up, a strange sort of euphoria flooded my heart, as if I was being freed of all bondage and moving toward disembodied joy. There were no houses en route—only fields and a clear, warbling stream on both sides.

I was received warmly by the ashramites, but there



were no beds and no lunch! We slept on straw mats on the floor. But the peace . . . from the moment I arrived . . . it felt like there was a “Stay Order” on all troubles, and the Lord Himself was there to serve it. My first camp was an awakening, a second birth, a clarion call to the joy of Life. A Canadian delegate, when asked to sit

down, exclaimed, “How can I? I am always floating six inches above the ground here!” Sidhabari has changed since then, for the better.

Gurudev saw to the delegates’ needs and built many conveniences around the *satsanga* hall; Asha Kamdar worked dedicatedly like Hanumanji. In time, the Shri Rama Temple and colossal Hanumanji framed the ashram skyline. The ashram was on a raised hillock, with a deep valley in front and a dense pine forest at back. Like majestic sentinels, the snow-capped Dhauladhar Mountains arrest your view. Initially, nothing grew on this hillock, for it was a wind tunnel. But Gurudev’s grace brought forth the rise of rare, tall trees and a fragrant garden with

shrubs and plants of exotic nocturnal scents and vibrant colors. Mr. Madhwal was instrumental in the flowering of this paradise.

Peace, harmony, and beauty peep at you and whisper messages of love wherever you go. There is much that enlivens memories of the quiet transformations in many a life. You are uplifted into unfamiliar regions of a strange, mystic joy. Gurudev’s cottage has the fragrance of a father’s home to me, the kind relished by a daughter who revisits after many years of absence.

Gurudev’s *samādhi*, an abode of serenity and beatitude, is nestled at the foot of majestic mountains, in meditative poise.

Chatter is out of place here. Peace settles into your being in gentle rhythms of grace, perceived and sometimes half perceived.



In the early days, there were no buses, no shops, and sometimes, no electricity and no water. But life in Sidhabari is not about city comforts; it is more about making you see the real meaning behind this mad dance called life, teaching you to laugh and enjoy every part.

Camps were held one after the other, sometimes, three or four in a year. Gurudev’s teachings were deep and intensive. The *brahmachārīs* at the ongoing Vedanta course gave us a Vedic chanting alarm every morning at 4 a.m. One hour later, at 5 a.m., we achieved the impossible: sitting bathed and anointed with a sandalwood *tilak*, waiting, with almost suspended breath, for Pujya Gurudev’s arrival in the guided meditation class. Nobody could talk or move or blink, much less come in late!

The moment Gurudev walked in like a towering pillar of strength, Brahmachari Vivek Chaitanya switched off all the lights and bolted the doors (and dare you knock!). The campers lovingly addressed Brahmachari Vivek Chaitanya (now Pujya Gururji Swami Tejomayananda) as “Vivekji.” He was the first *āchārya* at *Sandeepany*, Sidhabari. He was as strict as Gurudev, but more approachable, allowing us certain liberties, a kind of *sankata mochanā* for all of us. He was our only open book that helped us better fathom the great, mystical phenomenon known as Swami Chinmayananda.

Gurudev did not allow talking after meditation and would conduct (to our great surprise) spontaneous rounds in the ashram to check up on us. One lazy afternoon, as we sat outside our cottage, I suddenly heard an unmistakable, commanding voice thunder, “What is happening here?” Luckily,

we had our *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi* open before us and were heavily into a Vedantic discussion. The storm blew over with, “Good!” Like school children we scurried back into our cottage.

Surprise rounds and rounding up was the order of the day, even by Vivekji. There was no letting up. He handed down tales of Gurudev’s disciplining the *brahmachārīs* when he was a student at *Sandeepany*, Mumbai—the discipline that crafted the making of a Swami Tejomayananda.

Gurudev placed great emphasis on solitary evening walks. One could not even go with family members, much less friends. These walks were meant to be deep reflection exercises. Delegates could be seen going for long walks through the pine forest, along the stream, up to the village of Kaned, or to Siddha Baba’s cave. I would sit under massive pines, or amid ripening golden wheat fields that were once lush green, and let the stillness and silence permeate my being. The rise and fall of the wind through the fields evoked images of the wildly swaying tresses of the Maenads in their Dionysian rites. As my nerves slowly unwound, contemplation on the Self came effortlessly in these moments of solitude.

Beyond village hutments sits the Sidhabari Project, which Gurudev envisioned, and which people like Dr. Kshama Metre, Swamini Nisthananda, and dedicated women of the local area continue to support and expand. Gurudev’s vision and his *sevak’s* tireless efforts have transformed simple folks, honest lives, and humble homes into developing centers of education, medical training, and income-growth programs. Gurudev’s love and encouragement of the nurses and project workers is what brought forth this miracle.

Simple, good food and undisturbed *sādhana* is part of the Sidhabari package. With none of the trappings of the modern day world—television, radio, newspaper, etc.—one gets a fair chance to evaluate the world unconditioned and unfiltered by other minds. I often read the scriptures, undisturbed for hours, in my balcony that overlooked a beautiful view of the green valley and exalted mountains. As twilight gently fell each day, the mountains would turn dark and mysterious. And I would watch and watch, and let this still beauty work on me its silent, therapeutic magic—from the crescent moon glittering against the clear, midnight blue sky to the lights of Dharamshala scattered like a broken diamond bracelet across the mountain range.

*Sandeepany* in the Himalayas is still being ably run as a prime institute by the current *āchārya* and the

regional head of Chinmaya Mission centers in North India: Swami Subodhananda. Swamiji, an erudite Vedanta scholar and teacher, has done tremendous work in expanding the Chinmaya *sevā* base. Ashram Manager K. Pai (now Swami Ramananda), among others, deserves special mention for his devoted services. Gurudev himself acknowledged this many times. Once, he commanded, “Where is Pai? Call him.” An anxious Paiji arrived, only to receive a heartwarming blessing from Gurudev, who put a gold chain around Paiji’s neck, saying, “For all the good work that you have done.” Paiji was speechless.

When you think of a no-questions-asked, single-pointed, highly focused *saguna sādhanā*, the one image my mind etches is the ever dutiful Shivaramji. He silently served Gurudev the living master, and continues to serve Him to date.

There are so many incidents involving so many people that it is impossible to recount them all. All of us who attended those glorious camps, and the *bhajan* evenings in the rose garden, and the question-answer sessions, and the blissful *satsangs*, and the awesome Hanumanji *abhishekams*, and the Vishnu *Sahasranāma* chantings, and the *havans* and *pūjās*, and the cultural festivals at Kamla Hall, and the bonfire festivities before the *Ram Mandir* . . . we are truly blessed, for how many can even

see such a master as Swami Chinmayananda?

The day on which Gurudev’s holy remains were carried to Sidhabari in royal splendor, the heavens tore open their heart. It rained and rained, hard and strong, as I have never seen before or after. Sheets of water fell as torrents of holy ablutions. It was suddenly calm the next day, and a dignified strength in grief, bestowed by Gurudev’s teachings, slowly settled us. After the completion of the *bhū-samādhi* rites, the serenity of the hushed evening descended on us like a balmy rest. The sun was setting from burnt orange to bleeding crimson, lighting the eastern clouds from luminous pink to deep peach. Slowly a wind rose and gained speed, flowing in an insane gush, sweeping the clouds, burnishing golden blessings over our heads. When the sun finally set, it made way for a sky with thousands of stars, a sky pulsating with bewitching beauty—like the Master who inspired thousands of dynamic *sevak*s and activities in Chinmaya Mission worldwide.

I seek no more, for I have found Him, not by seeking. He came to me when I was not looking, opening my soul’s secret door.

- Swami Paramananda



# Have You Met . . . ?

## Brahmacharini Bhamati Chaitanya



### **CMW News: What did you like most about your two-year *brahmachārī* course in Mumbai?**

I liked everything about the *brahmachārī* course. It is difficult to say what was not likable. The beautiful ashram environment was just perfect. The course curriculum, the program schedules, the structure and schedule of the day—all these were thoughtfully and carefully set. All our needs were taken care of, so as to give us the maximum time and facility to focus on our studies. Our Vedanta *āchāryas* (teachers): Each one is a master with profound knowledge of the subject they taught. Vedanta was not only our subject of study, but also the theme of every aspect of ashram life. I have no words to express how I feel about it—it was just so perfect!

The course subtly gives us purity and the needed clarity of the goal of life. The best thing is that it gently unfolds the dormant potential of the sincere student and then sets that potential into a dynamic mode. The course provides practical lessons crucial for seekers on the spiritual path. For anyone who wants to live a fulfilling and meaningful life, in whatever role, this course is the best education one can have.

### **Do you have a particular forte?**

Firm faith in *Advaita Vedānta* has itself been the strength. A seeker enjoys all work, but seeing the budding aspiration in others around, one's joy multiplies. Extending an arm and reaching out is fun. Firm determination to walk the tough terrain, seeking the Light, and continuously trying to tune-in—these are all part of the art of living and herein lies one's beauty and talent. Only by recognizing the grace and blessings of God and the Guru can one humbly outperform one's own past and attain success. I have found that in this field of work one never tires, because the spring of inspiration is eternal.

### **Please share some details about your personal daily *sādhana* that may inspire others.**

In general, the life of a Mission *brahmachārī* is devoted to service at his respective center, based on the center's needs. Teaching Vedanta is not restricted only to classes, though these are the main activities. All actions are done based on the

foundation of Vedantic knowledge; courage is needed to live this knowledge—through service, practical lessons, and daily observations.

Each *brahmachārī* has a personal daily structure, which is based on his intrinsic spiritual make-up and discipline. It may include definite hours of sleep, controlled food habits, etc. My early mornings are devoted to *pūjā*, *japa*, meditation, chanting, and scriptural studies. I blend yoga, *prāṇāyāma*, and physical exercise in my lifestyle for good health. I do give special importance to reading, writing, and preparing for classes.

There is a set time in the day to meet people, not just to socialize, but primarily for mutual spiritual enhancement and guidance. I also allocate time for routine work at the center, including communications and formal meetings, as needed. All this has to be well-blended into the daily flow of things.

In all activities, a *brahmachārī*'s life should facilitate further spiritual progress with humility. Our effort is therefore to firmly face life's challenges, in which it is most important to practice what we teach. Gurudev said it is through this kind of individual progress that can we bring about progress in the community, the nation, and the world.

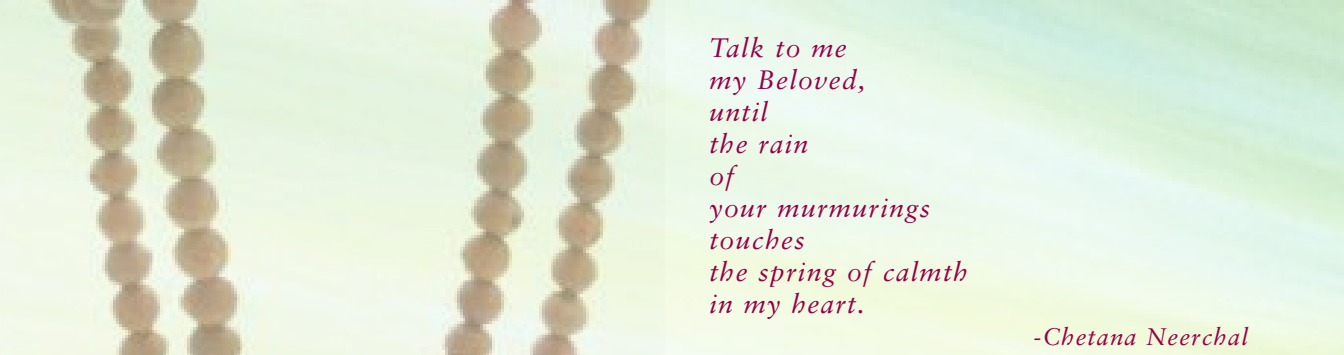
### **What spiritual texts would you recommend to avid readers at the beginner's level?**

One who is interested to know about spirituality may begin with texts written by Pujya Gurudev, in his order of recommended study. Through this comes the development of definite patterns of reasoning and reinforcements of the right concepts. Introductory texts are studied before *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā* or the *Upanishads*, for they clearly define fundamental Vedantic concepts. All texts are best studied under the guidance of a teacher who has been taught by his guru according to the guru's lineage.

*Hindu Culture*, *Symbolism in Hinduism*, and *Vision of Gītā* are informative for novices. I also appreciate Chinmaya Mission's magazines for various ages and Chinmaya Mission West's semiannual *Mananam* publication, which brings the wisdom of sages from around the world to the average reader.

I also find parallel readings of the life and teachings





*Talk to me  
my Beloved,  
until  
the rain  
of  
your murmurings  
touches  
the spring of calmth  
in my heart.*

*-Chetana Neerchal*

of great saints of different times, places, and faiths very helpful, for they are live demonstrations of scriptural teachings and give practical pointers for us to follow. Reading the *Purāṇas* is also recommended to grow in devotion and depth.

**Is there a particular book, person, or event that inspired you and first caused you to turn toward spirituality?**

My childhood was spent observing how both my parents served everyone—relatives and strangers alike—with loving respect and sincerity. My parents live a very simple and spiritual life that includes worship and meditation. In the evenings, after dinner, they pursue the study of the scriptures and the *Purāṇas*.

My siblings and I have inherited from them Hindu spirituality in the true sense. My mind was molded from early on, through their lessons of faith and devotion. My belief grew that for me, spirituality is the most serious business in life, and this alone is to be pursued. This belief deepened throughout the travails of life and came to full expression as a result of Pujya Gurudev's teachings.

**What were some of the most prevalent questions or doubts that you first had about Vedanta?**

My prevalent questions were: How is Truth realized within? How does the seen merge with the seer? How does this happen in meditation? How are duality and the waking experience effaced forever in the seeker? What is the technique to reach this goal? One has to live this crazy life, so how can one find enough time to practice this serious pursuit?

**Did you ever meet Pujya Gurudev?**

The second great thing that ever happened in my life—the first was getting the parents I did—was knowing Pujya Gurudev. The very first time I went to his public discourses on *Gītā* in South Mumbai was out of mere curiosity. There were crowds of thousands who had been attending regularly for six days. It was the last day of that series of talks, but that last day was the first day in my life, on which the doors to the serious study of *Gītā* opened for me. I was just stunned while listening to the discourse.

There had been earlier occasions when I had heard other speakers, who also drew a crowd of thousands, but this was different. The next day there was no discourse, but when I passed the same spot, the ground seemed to emanate those powerful words. There was a kind of reverberation and roar of the same deep voice all over the place. That was my first meeting and it is still as fresh as ever.

**What was Gurudev like?**

It is very difficult to answer this. In him, there is all that one would expect in a guru, guide, leader, father, mother, friend, author, scholar, orator, sage. He is someone special for everyone who comes in his contact. For me, the one word is “Divine!”

**What is your outlet for creativity?**

Learning to look at everyday experiences in the vision of Vedanta, seeing life as it is. Seeing the One behind everything is a wonderful, joyful, and creative engagement.

**How do you combat fear?**

With total and unflinching faith on the supreme Lord, who works through me and works through all. So long as I know that He knows best and He knows what I need, there cannot be fear. He gives me only what I need, and though I may not see it immediately, I do come to eventually understand it. There comes such peace that one does not get upset in an adverse situation, but considers it to be quite natural.

**Aside from the Vedantic texts, what are some of the most significant lessons you learned during your studies at the ashram?**

I learned that there is much significance in life, that life is a beautiful, growing, and transforming experience for thinkers. I learned we should grow with a smile and watch others around us grow and expand in happiness, in the vision of oneness.

**Is there an inspirational quote or message by which you live?**

My favorite quote is by Gurudev: “Faith is a belief in what I do not know now, so that I may come to know what I believe in.”