

[Renaissance Yogi](#)

Category : [April 1989](#)

Published by Anonymous on Apr. 02, 1989

Renaissance Yogi

Pedersen, Kusumita P. This year Sri Chinmoy Centers all over the world will celebrate their Silver Jubilee. They date their beginning from April 13, 1964, when the young Chinmoy Kumar Ghose arrived in New York from India, following an inner call to teach meditation to seekers in the West. In the past 25 years, the 57-year-old Bengali yogi has emerged as one of the most dynamic and innovative spiritual leaders of contemporary Hinduism. His yoga is at once strictly traditional and progressively modern. Based on Vedantic principles and those of the Bhagavad Gita, it is a synthesis of devotion, intuitive knowledge and dedicated action, with a distinctive emphasis on the surpassing of self-imposed limits. Sri Chinmoy is known for his many achievements in the areas of music, writing, art and athletics, and also for his commitment to world peace, expressed through peace concerts, the international Peace Run and the meditations he leads at the United Nations. But for all these multifarious activities, communion with God through meditation and prayer remains the foundation of his teaching, and he spends most of his time taking care of his small (about 1,500) but far-flung flock of disciples, with whom he maintains a close personal relationship.

Jamaica Hills, New York

It doesn't look like the "international headquarters" of anything, but about one square mile of Jamaica Hills, New York, is the heart of 113 Sri Chinmoy Centers on five continents. Walk on up Parsons Boulevard and then one more block. You will see a small group of stores distinguished by their colorful hand-painted signs: a sprinting athlete for Guru Health Foods, the Himalayas for Smile of The Beyond luncheonette, a wreath of flowers for Garland of Divinity's Love florist, and several others. Posters in their windows announce free meditation classes, running races and an upcoming peace concert. Sri Chinmoy's home is just a few blocks away. He has lived here since 1968, only four years after he first came to New York. In a modest one-family house on a quiet one-block street, he has composed thousands of songs, written hundreds of books, painted many thousands of paintings, and more recently, lifted thousands of pounds in his own living room. And throughout all of this, he has ministered tirelessly and compassionately to his growing flock of

spiritual children.

"My work is love, and my work is service. I try to love humanity, and I try to serve humanity according to the capacity that God has granted me. To love God in aspiring humanity, and to serve God by serving humanity - this is my only work," Sri Chinmoy declares.

Sri Chinmoy established his first meditation center in Puerto Rico in 1966. There are now Sri Chinmoy Centers in the USA and Canada, the Caribbean, Western Europe, Australia, Japan, Southeast Asia and Africa. At this writing, steps are being taken to establish the first centers in India. Members of the centers come from all walks of life, and include single people of all ages, married couples, and families with children. Though the majority are under 50, their ages range from 90 to toddlers. Of the more than 300 members in the New York area, slightly less than 200 live right in Jamaica. This is a spiritual community where each individual is independent, personally in charge of his or her own daily schedule. There are always long and short term visitors from outlying centers. At any time you can be sure of finding a few Europeans and Canadians, a couple of Australians and perhaps some brothers or sisters from Japan, Puerto Rico or Zimbabwe.

April and August (the Center's anniversary and Sri Chinmoy's birthday) bring a great gathering of the members from everywhere for an experience known simply as "celebrations" - two solid weeks of programs night and day, including meditations, a peace concert, races and other sports competitions, plays, musical performances, as well as a chance to be all together as a spiritual family. As many as 600 visitors stay in New York, crowding the floors of local hosts with their sleeping bags and suitcases. At the last Indian Independence Day parade, Mayor Koch, US Senator Moynihan and a host of Indian VIPs looked on with Sri Chinmoy from the viewing stand on Madison Avenue as the entire Chinmoy contingent marched in formation with floats and music.

Outwardly, life in Jamaica Hills appears to go on at an unhurried, steady pace but there is an underlying seriousness beneath the relaxed, American-style manner of the disciples. Each thing is ideally done in the service of a spiritual goal. That goal is union with God, attained through meditation and dedicated action and, at the same time, "manifestation" of God, or transformation of the world, again achieved through meditation and action - and action and more action. Energy and endurance are needed, and they are developed through practice. (This is one reason that Sri

Chinmoy strongly encourages his disciples to run and to keep fit.) Each person decides how to participate, judging his or her own capacity at a given time. Disciples eventually become almost casual about such experiences as attending a seven-hour meditation, running a 24-hour relay, performing or listening to 50 or more songs at a time, meditating into the wee hours or even through the night on special days of the Hindu calendar, organizing a 1,300 mile race or preparing for a peace concert for an audience of several thousand.

As years go by, each disciple discovers that she or he can do things previously never imagined probable or even possible and finds deep fulfillment in this self-transcendence. Each one believes and feels that progress is achieved not merely by effort and practice, but by the effect of Divine Grace (and even our effort and practice, Sri Chinmoy teaches, is also the result of this grace). Grace is invoked not only by prayer and meditation, but by action devoted to a spiritual purpose. "Yoga is skill in action," the Bhagavad Gita says, and one attains God by "doing continually all actions whatsoever, taking refuge in Me." And again: "He who in action sees inaction, and in inaction sees action, is wise among men. He is a yogi." Or as Sri Chinmoy has put it, "Deep in action, in the heart of action, is the silence of meditation, and in the silence of meditation is the dynamism of the action."

Twice weekly at the United Nations, a small group of workers assemble in the Dag Hammarskjold Auditorium for the meeting of the Peace Meditation, an association of delegates, staff and accredited press founded in 1970. Sri Chinmoy arrives and opens the meditation by bowing wordlessly with folded hands. For half an hour silent meditation continues. The atmosphere of peace is palpable. Two songs honoring the UN are sung. The singers then recite aphorisms on peace. After several more minutes of silent meditation, those present adjourn for a quick bite of lunch before returning to their offices. In addition to meditations such as this, the group organizes cultural events and programs of special interest within the UN community.

Sri Chinmoy has written extensively on meditation, but does not recommend a particular "technique" to all. He rather advises each seeker to evolve his or her own best methods from inner experience, using certain basic principles: the need to focus on the heart with a quiet and silent mind; the enormous spiritual power of gratitude and the paramount necessity of "aspiration," that "cry" for self-transcendence, imaged as a flame mounting up towards God, whom he calls "the Supreme." No person who joins a Sri Chinmoy Center is expected to give up his or her own religion.

A Note of Personal Testimony

It has been said that a teacher's greatness is revealed in the quality and dedication of his or her students. Nishtha Baum is one of many long-time Chinmoy devotees (including her sister Pranika) who has experienced an ever-growing spiritual growth under the dynamic tutelage of Sri Chinmoy long past the novelty of yoga's first self-revelatory flush. A devotee since 1972, this is what she has to say about her teacher:

"I think that overcoming your own Imperfections is the important thing in spiritual life. Before I met Sri Chinmoy, I went through a stage of tremendous doubt. It was a very painful part of my life. As soon as I met Sri Chinmoy, I realized that this was a person that I could have faith in. And it's interesting that the name that he gave me, which he said was my soul's quality, was Nishtha, which means faith. That brought about a big change in me. I became a happy, progressive person who feels that there is a tremendous meaning to life and reason to live. Each year I have been with him I have found more and more inspiration. It's a personal self-discovery process. Yet, someone is helping you do it. I have to tell you, I have always worked with myself to be out-going but deep inside I knew that I had this shyness. Now, I'm part owner of a restaurant and often work with the media - people in TV and radio. I would never be doing these things if it had not been for Sri Chinmoy's teachings.

"A fundamental basis of his philosophy is: First, change yourself, and by doing that you'll change the world. He inspired me to LIVE yoga."

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.