

Meditation at the United Nations

SEPTEMBER 1998

MONTHLY BULLETIN OF
SRI CHINMOY:
THE PEACE MEDITATION
AT THE UNITED NATIONS



MEDITATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Editor's Note

SRI CHINMOY: THE PEACE MEDITATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS is an association of UN staff, delegates, representatives of non-governmental organisations and accredited press correspondents which has been meeting twice weekly since 1970, when then Secretary-General U Thant invited Sri Chinmoy to conduct meditations for peace. Besides the regular non-denominational one-hour lunchtime meetings, the Group sponsors special programmes, inviting members of the international community to share their spiritual vision for world peace. This monthly bulletin, *Meditation at the United Nations*, chronicles the Group's activities and offers articles emphasising the spiritual values upon which the Organisation was founded.

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COVER PHOTO: *During the 4 April 1998 Peace Run for the United Nations, the United Nations flag is carried past the Unisphere in Flushing Meadows—Corona Park, where the UN General Assembly conducted its sessions many years ago.*

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U Thant Peace Award Presented to Pope John Paul II

THE U THANT PEACE AWARD is a symbolic presentation by Sri Chinmoy: The Peace Meditation at the United Nations to individuals or organisations whose distinguished accomplishments toward the attainment of world peace reflect the lofty spiritual ideals of the late UN Secretary-General.

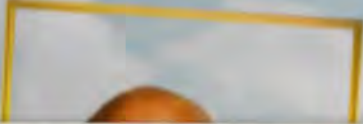
Previous recipients of the award, which was first offered in 1982, include former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Mother Teresa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African President Nelson Mandela and Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral.

On Sunday, 17 May 1998, Sri Chinmoy presented the U Thant Peace Award to His Holiness Pope John Paul II

*Each day the
Holy Father
brings to the
world a new
hope and a new
promise for the
betterment of
humanity.*

SRI CHINMOY

OPPOSITE: *Sri Chinmoy presents the U Thant Peace Award to His Holiness Pope John Paul II, 17 May 1998.*



Sri Chinmoy was a true visionary.
His vast insight flowed from his
spiritual achievement called

for his unparalleled efforts on behalf of peace for the peoples of the world. The presentation took place at the Vatican on the eve of the Pontiff's 78th birthday.

The following morning Sri Chinmoy performed a Peace Concert at the Church of Santa Maria in the Vatican. At the start of the concert Sri Chinmoy offered the following soulful dedication to the Pope.

“TODAY’S PEACE CONCERT we are most devotedly offering to the Holy Father. We are praying to the Holy Father to bless all of us on this most auspicious occasion. May his birthday illumine each and every human being on earth. I pray to our Absolute Lord Supreme, out of His infinite Bounty, to keep the Holy Father in his physical body for quite a few years more. Each day the Holy Father brings to the world a new hope and a new promise for the betterment of humanity. May we all feel our Holy Father’s blessingful presence as we dedicate prayerfully and soulfully our Peace Concert to him.”

OPPOSITE: *Sri Chinmoy performs on the esraj during a Peace Concert at the Church of Santa Maria in the Vatican, 18 May 1998.*



...mination...
...the big picture...



Raisa Maximovna Gorbachev claps as President Gorbachev sings "Moscow Nights" and Sri Chinmoy accompanies him on the harmonium.

Visit *with the* Gorbachevs

IN A VISIT WITH THE GORBACHEVS at the Waldorf-Astoria Towers on 4 March 1998, Sri Chinmoy gave a short concert in honour of President Gorbachev's birthday, playing on the Indian esraj, Western flute, cello and other instruments. At the end of the performance, the former Soviet President sang "Moscow Nights" while Sri Chinmoy accompanied him on the harmonium.

"You have made the birthday boy very happy," Raisa Maximovna laughed. President Gorbachev had turned 67 two days earlier, on 2 March 1998.

*You have made the birthday
boy very happy.*

RAISA MAXIMOVNA

Sri Chinmoy was a true visionary.
His vast insight flowed from his

A World of Poetry

IN HONOUR OF NATIONAL POETRY MONTH in the United States, the United Nations Staff Recreation Council Society of Writers held a special poetry reading at the United Nations on 1 April 1998, in cooperation with several associations, including the ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS, THE AMERICAN POETRY AND LITERACY PROJECT, THE BOOK-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB, CITY COLLEGE'S ANNUAL SPRING POETRY FESTIVAL, SOMETHING IN COMMON and TEACHERS AND WRITERS COLLABORATIVE. At the end of the programme, copies of *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time* were given out to the audience by Mr. John Major and Ms. Katharine Washburn, the editors of the book, on behalf of the BOOK-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB.

IN HER WELCOMING REMARKS, Ms. Bhikshuni Weisbrot of the UNSRC
Society of Writers read the following poem by Sri Chinmoy:

O my poem,
You are the lotus of my heart.
You bring into my heart
Nectar-Light from Heaven.
When my life flows
With the river of sorrow,
With its countless waves,
May your magic touch
Hide me in the waves of liberation-sea.

Peace Run *for the* **United Nations**

ON SATURDAY, 4 APRIL 1998, United Nations delegates and staff, joined by local runners from the New York area, participated in the fourteenth annual Peace Run for the United Nations. During the 18-mile run from the site of the first UN Headquarters at Lake Success, Long Island, to the current Headquarters in Manhattan, people of many countries ran together carrying flags of the UN and its Member States, symbolising the spirit of cooperation among nations along the road of peace.

The event is sponsored by the Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team in cooperation with the United Nations Staff Recreation Council Athletics Club and Sri Chinmoy: The Peace Meditation at the United Nations.



During the 4 April 1998 Peace Run for the United Nations, runners pause in front of the Unisphere in Flushing Meadows—Corona Park, where the UN General Assembly conducted its sessions many years ago.

Holding the United Nations flag is Major Rob T. Sondag, Deputy Military Adviser of the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the United Nations. Next to him is Mr. Ameur Betka, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Algeria to the United Nations, and behind him is Mr. Luis Fernando Pérez-Segnini, Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Venezuela to the United Nations.

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Mr. Kirill K. Speranskiy, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, addresses the gathering at the final ceremony.



Runners in front of United Nations Headquarters at the conclusion of the 4 April 1998 Peace Run.



Mr. Betka of Algeria is congratulated by his family and supporters after completing the full 18-mile distance.



Peace Prayer

Following is a prayer that Sri Chinmoy offered at the final ceremony of one of the Peace Runs for the United Nations.

“O GOD THE CREATOR, O God the creation, may this self-giving Peace Run be humanity’s perfection-dream and, at the same time, may this Peace Run, O Lord, be Your Satisfaction-Reality.

O Lord, You are more than ready to grant us peace in infinite measure, but are we ready? Are we ready? We are not, O Lord! Do grant us the capacity to be ready so that we can have Your choice gift, peace, in a sweet, illumining and fulfilling oneness-home here on earth.”

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spiritual achievement called



Peace Concert *for the* **Millennium** *and the* **“Heart of Gold”** **Presentation**

ON 17 APRIL 1998 Sri Chinmoy offered a Peace Concert dedicated to the upcoming Millennium in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium of the United Nations, performing on the Indian esraj, flute, harmonium, piano and other instruments. Special guests included members of the Society of Authors and Composers of Music of Mexico, who presented the artist with their *Heart of Gold* Award during the event.

As part of the concert, the Peace Meditation choir sang two songs by Sri Chinmoy dedicated to the Society, which had first been performed during the initial award ceremony at the Society's headquarters in Mexico City on 21 January 1998. A video documentary of the Mexico City visit by Sri Chinmoy and the Peace Meditation choir was also shown.

OPPOSITE: *Maestro Roberto Cantoral, President of the Society of Authors and Composers of Music of Mexico, presents Sri Chinmoy with the Heart of Gold.*

In Mexico, the Society's Board of Directors had presented Sri Chinmoy with its prestigious *Heart of Gold* Award for his "great altruistic service in the cause of world peace." Previous recipients of the Award include Pope John Paul II; opera legend Placido Domingo; the famous Mexican composer and singer Juan Gabriel; and Arpad Bogsch, Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization, a United Nations agency that protects the rights of authors, musicians and inventors.

Following are excerpts from the 17 April 1998 programme at the United Nations.

M S . V I J A Y A C L A X T O N, *Master of Ceremonies*: We are honoured today by many distinguished guests. Several members of the Society of Authors and Composers of Music of Mexico have come to New York today as the final step in awarding Sri Chinmoy the Society's distinguished *Corazón de Oro* Award. The President of the Society, Mr. Roberto Cantoral, himself a renowned composer and singer, will present a *Heart of Gold* to Sri Chinmoy. His colleague, Mr. Rafael Buelna, head of International Activities, has done much to facilitate today's programme. We thank both of them, as well as the other members of the Society, very much for their efforts in furthering the arts and in supporting the work of Sri Chinmoy. We are inspired by the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication that brought them to New York today.

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you the President of the Society of Authors and Composers of Music of Mexico, Mr. Roberto Cantoral. A distinguished artist in his own right, he has served as President of other organisations and has received several international recognitions for his musical works, a few of which I would like to cite: "El Reloj," "La Barca," "El Preso Numero 9" and "El Triste." His work has been interpreted in recordings by outstanding artists such as Placido Domingo, Luis Miguel, Tom Parker, the Royal Philharmonic of London, Jose Feliciano, Vicky Carr, Mina Dalida, Neil Sedaka, Paul Mauriat, Joan Baez and Linda Ronstadt, as well as the most important Latin performers. It is with great admiration and appreciation that I introduce to you Roberto Cantoral.

MAESTRO ROBERTO CANTORAL, *President, Society of Authors and Composers of Music of Mexico* (translated from Spanish): Today, in the name of the Society of Authors and Composers over which I preside, I hereby present to Sri Chinmoy the *Heart of Gold* while we stand in the heart of the United Nations.

ON 21 JANUARY 1998 a ceremony bestowing on Sri Chinmoy the *Heart of Gold* Award was held at the Headquarters of the Society of Authors and Composers of Music of Mexico in Mexico City. The President, Mr. Roberto Cantoral, in his April 1998 visit to New York, stated:

Personally speaking, I have found in Sri Chinmoy a great man who transmits affection and deep inner peace.

MAESTRO
ROBERTO
CANTORAL

The *Heart of Gold* is a distinction that was conferred on Sri Chinmoy for his lifelong dedication to humanity. His untiring struggle for world peace, manifested through concerts and other events throughout the globe, have made him worthy of the recognition of the *Heart of Gold* on behalf of all Mexican authors and composers.

Personally speaking, I, Roberto Cantoral, have found in Sri Chinmoy a great man who transmits affection and deep inner peace, which is especially needed in these difficult days and enables us to perform our daily duties. At the same time, I am sure that those present here have found in Sri Chinmoy a constant hope in their daily self-transcendence-task. His message of peace to humanity, and the humanitarian and selfless causes that he pursues, provided the necessary elements for the Society of Mexican Authors and Composers to confer on him the important *Heart of Gold* Award during his recent visit to Mexico. Sri Chinmoy, it is an honour to present you today with this *Heart of Gold*.

SRI CHINMOY: My dear Brother-Friend Roberto, I wish to offer you my prayerful and soulful gratitude for this signal award that you have accorded to me. In all sincerity I wish to tell you that, unlike you, I am not a musician of Himalayan height. In the past you have given this award to most distinguished people who have contributed much to the music world and to the Society. Here you have made a most deplorable mistake by offering this award to me! I am a budding musician, still blooming. But as a student of peace, as a man of prayer, I try to include

music in my prayers and meditations. Whatever I do, I do with prayerful and soulful melodies deep inside my heart.

So, in that capacity I wish to accept your blessingful award—as a student of peace, as a man of prayer, as a lover of God who tries in each and every activity of his to carry a peaceful melody. My prayerful and peaceful music I wish to offer to you, Brother-Friend Roberto, and also to my dear friend Rafael, and to all the others who are blessingfully offering this award to me. I shall cherish this award in the very depths of my gratitude-heart.

I feel that each and every human being in God's creation needs a heart of gold. A heart of gold means purity, beauty, divinity and immortality. If each of us has a heart of gold, then this world of ours—which right now is full of conflicts, quarrels and fights—will, without fail, be inundated with peace, light and bliss. So today's blessingful award of yours will always remind me, and I do hope all my students as well, of one thing—that we all desperately need a heart of gold to have a peaceful world. If we have a heart of gold, then automatically peace will blossom in each and every human being, and the whole of humanity will be flooded with love, joy and bliss. I wish this heart of gold to grow inside my prayerful heart so that my heart will be as beautiful, as pure and as divine as your blessingful offering to me today.

A heart of gold means purity, beauty, divinity and immortality. If each of us has a heart of gold, then this world of ours—which right now is full of conflicts, quarrels and fights—will, without fail, be inundated with peace, light and bliss.

SRI CHINMOY

Corazón de Oro

$\text{♩} = 132$ - Moderate - fast

Words and Music by Sri Chinmoy

20 January 1998

Co--ra-zón de O-----ro, Co--ra--zón de O-----ro,
 Co--ra-zón de O---rol
 O Heart of Gold, O Heart of Gold, O Heart of Gold! ^{1.} ^{2.}
 In--fi--ni--ty's ³ one-ness-de-light y--ou e--ver en--fold.
 Y--our song - beau-ty mu-----sic - fra-----grance, __ trea-sured by God's Core.
 Y--our ^(rit.) cul-ture -he-ri-tage is the sum-mit - pride of the Gol-den Shore.

D.C.

Corazón de Oro!

El deleite de la unidad del infinito

Los envuelve a ustedes siempre.

La fragancia musical de su bella canción

Es atesorada por el centro de Dios.

Su herencia cultural

Es la cima de su orgullo.

TRADUCCIÓN POR *Gil Rivera*

In Harmony with the Universe

Music by Sri Chinmoy
14 January 1998

$\text{♩} = \text{Mod. - fast}$

In har-mo-ny w-----ith the U-----ni-----verse.

In har-mo-ny w-----ith the U-----ni-----verse.

In har-mo-ny w-----ith the U-----ni-----verse.

In har-mo-ny with the U-----ni-----verse.

$\text{♩} = \text{Mod. - slow}$

In har-mo-ny with the U-----ni-----verse.

$\text{♩} = \text{a tempo}$

In har-mo-ny w-----ith the U-----ni-----verse.

In har-mo-ny w-----ith the

U-----ni-----verse.

Sri Chinmoy was a true visionary.
His vast insight flowed from his
spiritual achievement called

*From left to right:
Sri Chinmoy;
Mr. Rafael Buelna,
Sub-Coordinator of
the Presidency of
International Activities
for the Society of
Authors and Composers
of Music of Mexico;
Mr. Roberto Cantoral,
Society President; and
Mr. Larrea, Legal Counsel
for the Society.*



*Maestro Roberto
Cantoral offers
Sri Chinmoy the
Heart of Gold.*





*After the presentation,
Sri Chinmoy performs
on several instruments,
including Indian esraj
and piano.*

Sri Chinmoy was a true visionary.



Meeting *with* Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky

DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA

ON 19 APRIL 1998 Sri Chinmoy held a special dinner in New York in honour of Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Mr. Petrovsky was in New York in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament.

During the course of the evening, Mr. Petrovsky congratulated Sri Chinmoy on his recent completion of a 270-volume series of spiritual poems, entitled *Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants*. The Director-General presented Sri Chinmoy with a hand-carved wooden pencil from Russia to commemorate his completion of the fourteen-year poetry project.

Sri Chinmoy thanked Mr. Petrovsky, saying, "This is the greatest treasure. From this pencil I shall get inspiration and aspiration in

OPPOSITE: *Sri Chinmoy and Mr. Petrovsky at their meeting on 19 April 1998.*

abundant measure to write sixty-five more poems, which I will dedicate to you in honour of your sixty-fifth birthday.” That book of poems, entitled *Vladimir Petrovsky: Builder of a New Heart-Firmament*, was published on 29 April 1998.

Following are excerpts from the conversation that Mr. Petrovsky and Sri Chinmoy had during their dinner, which was their twentieth meeting.

Your concern for each and every citizen of the world is being felt by the heart and the soul of the entire humanity.

SRI CHINMOY

SRI CHINMOY: Throughout Eternity, the soul of the world and the heart of the world will remain grateful to you because of what you are doing in a global way. The beauty and fragrance of your heart is inundating the length and breadth of the world. Your physical body is at one particular place, but your concern for each and every citizen of the world is being felt by the heart and the soul of the entire humanity.

Ordinary politicians come and go, but you are not an ordinary politician. Brother, you are proving that politicians can use not just the mind, but the heart. You are a politician of the heart, not a politician of the mouth. While you are talking, the words are coming from the very depths of your heart. Then you give your heart itself for the betterment of this planet. History will bear witness to the fact that you not only speak from the heart, but give your heart as well.

In your life, talking has been replaced by practising—practising the feeling of oneness. At every moment you are showing your oneness. Your heart is the bridge between the poor and the rich, between the weak and the strong, between the smallest countries and the largest countries. You were born in the Soviet Union, but now the whole world claims you with utmost love, joy, pride and gratitude. This is my most sincere feeling when I think of you, when I pray for you and when we are together.

MR. VLADIMIR PETROVSKY: Thank you very much, Sri Chinmoy, for these encouraging words.

Being so many years in politics and in many other fields, I have become a strong believer in human relations, as people say, in human chemistry. It does not matter if we are with governments or non-governmental organisations. All of us are human beings, and we live on the same planet.

I was recently in Washington, and I was very much impressed with the National Air and Space Museum. There is an intergalactic model, and in this model our earth is a very small planet among other planets. It reminds me of a kind of spaceship. We are all passengers in this spaceship, and we need to behave in such a way as to provide a safe intergalactic flight. Things now are changing. I feel that we have come through a difficult period.

SRI CHINMOY: The world is progressing. The world is becoming more receptive to the inner light.

MR. PETROVSKY: Yes, more receptive to the inner light and more understanding! We are all diversified, but we are the passengers here, and we need to behave as one team. That is why I think it was tremendously important that we turned our attention to the civil society. For the new millennium we are planning to have two assemblies: one Millennium Assembly will be for the Heads of State, and to the other we will invite members of the non-governmental community.

SRI CHINMOY: Recently, President Clinton was in South Africa. He said that previously he used to tell the South Africans, "What do you want from us? What can we do for you?" But he said that those days are gone. Now he says, "What can we do together?" Before, there was a feeling of superiority; but now there is a feeling of oneness.

MR. PETROVSKY: Africa is also very much involved in this process: activities, changes and dialogues. It depends, as you rightly said, if you go in deep from the heart and really want not only words, but action. Then you could achieve something.

A few years ago we still felt very strongly that we were an inter-governmental organisation, that we were dealing only with governments. Of course, the governments are our major partners, but we cannot live in isolation. If we want to achieve something, we need to work with all the non-governmental structures. More than that I will tell you: some non-governmental structures are tremendously helpful. For example, we made the anti-personnel landmine treaty. It was an initiative of a non-governmental organisation. That is why there is a change in attitude now. But it came with time. We take lessons from life. Now we are very much open to this.

We have many organisations registered in Geneva with the United Nations, so the question is how to organise them. In my field, in disarmament, there are a number of very good, very prominent organisations, but for us there are not yet any existing rules: how to deal with them, how to invite them. Some of the governments are not always pleased with them. But we are trying now to use this year 2000 to completely change the attitude and to build very close relations.

The trend is here, and you were one of the pioneers, Sri Chinmoy, in this field. You felt it was very important. You started with U Thant. You came through a different experience.

SRI CHINMOY: I feel that governments and non-governmental organisations can go together like two brothers. Governments have physical power, but the non-governmental organisations come with heart-power. One is serving in a particular way; the other one is serving in another way. It is like prayer and meditation. In the West they give importance to prayer. In the East, specially in India, they give more importance to meditation. But prayer and meditation both have the same goal.

Sometimes one country comes forward and says: "I am self-sufficient. I do not need the help of others." That is where the problem arises. We have to have interdependence. I have to depend on you, and you have to depend on me; it has to be mutual give and take. Outwardly I may brag and boast that I do not need your help. But if I am sincere, immediately I will admit that I need your help more than you can ever imagine.

*I strongly share
your views that we
are interdependent.
There can be no
countries separated
one from another.
Whatever happens
in one part of the
world will be
immediately
reflected in
another part
of the world.*

V L A D I M I R
P E T R O V S K Y

In a family, each member has something to contribute. Let us say that one family member is a lawyer and one is a doctor. When somebody is sick, the doctor comes forward. When there is a legal case, the lawyer comes forward. I may say that I am self-sufficient and do not need anybody's help. But if I am sick, I do need a doctor's help. And if I am involved in a lawsuit, I do need a lawyer's help. In exactly the same way, the world is one family, and each member has something special to contribute. People who are holding high governmental posts should feel that non-governmental people also can be of help. We need oneness, oneness, oneness. If I give to my brother what I can offer and if he gives to me what he can offer happily and cheerfully, then we are both fulfilled.

M R . P E T R O V S K Y: I think you are absolutely right. I strongly share your views that we are interdependent. There can be no countries separated one from another. Whatever happens in one part of the world will be immediately reflected in another part of the world. For example, there is a financial crisis in Asia, but its consequences are felt around the world because the world is one social body and the pain in one part is immediately reflected in another part.

SRI CHINMOY: If my little finger is hurt, immediately I feel my entire body is hurt.

MR. PETROVSKY: Yes, you cannot feel happy if your small finger is hurt. Non-governmental structures also have some kind of community of people of good will who are organised not on an official level, but unofficially. Also, they have some kind of affiliation, and you need to work through all these structures. What is very important, I think, is to have a balance of interest. The interest sometimes differs, but you need to find a balance of interest and to work together.

SRI CHINMOY: For members of non-governmental organisations, good feelings come spontaneously because they do not hold posts. When power comes into the picture, very often the mind tries to dominate others and power is misused. As soon as I sit on the throne, I want only to give commands: "Do this, do that! And if you do not do it immediately, I shall punish you." The person to whom I am speaking will most reluctantly obey me, but inwardly he is only thinking of how he can destroy me. But if I do not hold a high post, at that time I will use the term "please." I will ask the other person, "Please, can you do me a big favour and help me in this particular way?" Then the other person's heart will come forward and he will willingly and eagerly try to help me.

In India there were some kings who were very spiritual. They went to spiritual Masters and said they wanted to give up politics and find peace. They said that they could not manage as rulers. But the spiritual Masters said, "No, you have to remain in politics. Only change your attitude.

Instead of feeling superior to your subjects, feel that they are your brothers and sisters. Treat them as members of your family. If you use your power properly, you can rule well and still keep your spirituality.”

High government officials have to use their power with the help of love. They say that they are using their wisdom, but what kind of wisdom is it that keeps love away? Fellow-feeling is the best wisdom. Love for each human being is the highest wisdom. Heart-power and love-power must come to the fore in politics and government.

M R . P E T R O V S K Y: More than that, I think that power cannot be separated from spirituality. Spirituality is needed also in power because spirit moves people to do good things, things that are very humanistic in nature. This is one of the many lessons we can take from history.

Now I am living in Europe, so I am reading European history. I am very much surprised, for example, to read about the kinds of wars they had in Europe. In Switzerland, more than a hundred years ago there were difficulties. Now it is a completely different situation. People have learned the lessons. They have become much more human, much more humanised. I think humanisation looks like the immediate trend in the development of international relations. But humanisation can be brought forward only if the governments that have the power are closely connected with spirituality. It is like creating atomic energy, which requires an enrichment process, or cross-fertilisation, as they say in agriculture. That is why we need these kinds of close links.

SRI CHINMOY: We need the seed. Again, we also need fertile soil. If we do not have fertile land, the seed will not germinate. Again, even if the land is fertile, what will we do if there is no seed?

MR. PETROVSKY: Exactly. We do not get the fruits. That is very important. What you are doing is tremendously important. Through the students whom you have all over the world, it is good for me to witness that your ideas are spreading. You have a presence now in practically all parts of the world—though, of course, it still takes effort and energy.



The Secretary-General in a reflective mood at an interfaith ceremony held in his honour on 25 April 1997.

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1113

“The Challenge of Diversity”

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On 30 April 1998 Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke about “The Challenge of Diversity” in the Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Memorial Lecture at the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York. His lecture was the keynote address in an event organised by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

The talk, which stresses the spiritual dimensions of the United Nations, left many members of the Peace Meditation Group deeply moved. Excerpts follow.

YOU MAY BE WONDERING what a Secretary-General of the United Nations is doing in a synagogue, speaking about religion. You may think that the United Nations, an intergovernmental organisation, must abide by the same separation between Church and State found in the

There is a basic affinity between the teachings of the great religions of the world and the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

SECRETARY-GENERAL
KOFI ANNAN

OPPOSITE: *The Secretary-General in a reflective mood at an interfaith ceremony held in his honour on 25 April 1997.*

United States and many other countries. You may be trying to imagine how spirituality can coexist with the world of diplomacy, national security and hard-edged negotiations.

I would ask you to think differently; I would ask you to take another look. The United Nations is a tapestry, not only of suits and saris, but of clerics' collars, nuns' habits and lamas' robes—of mitres, skullcaps and yarmulkes.

I meet regularly with interfaith groups and religious figures of many creeds.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II is one of many religious leaders who have made memorable visits to the United Nations, in his case in 1995 during the Organisation's fiftieth anniversary year. "The politics of nations," he said on that occasion, "can never ignore the transcendent, spiritual dimension of the human experience."

That is a message I take to heart. There is a basic affinity between the teachings of the great religions of the world and the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

I am not alone in this belief. My predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld, who is remembered as much for his faith as for his achievements as Secretary-General, carried two documents with him wherever he travelled: a New Testament and a United Nations Charter—his two Bibles, if you will.

Consider some of the Ten Commandments set forth in the Old Testament book of Exodus: thou shalt not murder; thou shalt not steal;

thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Consider the Hindu principle of dharma: live righteously, do your duty. Consider that one of the five pillars of Islam is alms-giving. Or that Buddhism's path involves avoiding ill-will and hurt to living things.

Now consider a few words from the United Nations Charter: "We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is also deeply rooted in the history of humankind, from the sayings of Confucius to Sa'adi—the thirteenth century Persian poet—to Thomas Jefferson.

Religions may manifest themselves in widely varying practices and belief systems; the United Nations may display the outward signs of secular pursuits; but at heart we are dealing in universal values. To be kind, to be merciful: no single religion can claim a monopoly on such teachings. The problem, as I see it, is not with the faith; it is with the faithful.

"Wars begin in the minds of men," says another famous Charter, that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). And so "it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."

From war to discrimination and other violations of human rights, what we see all too frequently is a lack of tolerance and understanding between religious traditions. There is a tendency to think of "us" and "them."

People fear what is different and demonise the “other.” As the Italian-Jewish writer and holocaust survivor Primo Levi once wrote: “Many people—many nations—can find themselves holding, more or less wittingly, that ‘every stranger is an enemy’. For the most part this conviction lies deep down like some latent infection; it betrays itself only in random, disconnected acts, and does not lie at the base of a system of reason. But when this does come about, when the unspoken dogma becomes the major premise in a syllogism, then, at the end of the chain, there is the Laager [the armed camps].” Some say this is human nature. So-called realist political theories are built on this assumption. Others cite poverty and economic despair; or the insecurities engendered by fundamental change, such as the end of the cold war; or globalisation, which can undermine indigenous cultural and religious values.

Whatever role these factors play, in the end I believe that conflict and hatred, while common, are not inevitable. People choose to hate. People are taught to be cruel to others.

Religion, sadly, has been misused throughout history in the cause of division, discrimination and even death. From antiquity, through the Crusades, to the present day, religion has been distorted, turned from a personal matter of faith and sustenance into a weapon of power and coercion. The cry of the soul for meaning and for God has been drowned out by the battle cry of those claiming to have God on their side.

Around the world, identity politics based on religion, ethnicity and other characteristics have intensified in recent years, within and among countries.

We have our work cut out for us. How can we fight discrimination? How can we promote diversity? How can we transcend, and ensure that faith becomes an enlightening and unifying reality? Let us remember Elie Wiesel's wise words: "Faith elicits respect, and fanaticism provokes hate."

The work of the United Nations starts with setting norms and standards for international behaviour. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights makes this right legally binding for the 140 countries who are party to that instrument. A Declaration adopted by the General Assembly in 1981 fleshes out still further the nature and meaning of this most basic freedom.

A culture of diversity can be ours. Just as the pen is mightier than the sword, so too are appeals to values—religious values, United Nations Charter values—more forceful than calls to arms.

We must stress what we have in common—the universality of human aspirations and human rights. Just as important, we must have the courage of these convictions.

Last month, I had the pleasure and privilege of visiting Israel and the Middle East. During my visit to Yad Vashem, I laid a wreath at the memorial for victims and paused for reflection in front of the tree planted in memory of my wife's uncle, Raoul Wallenberg.

Raoul took extraordinary risks. He was unafraid of the brutal and inhuman force that killed millions of people and destroyed Europe. The Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara was also heroic in saving lives during that awful time.

But why did so many people turn the other way? Why were there so few Raoul Wallenbergs? Why does evil seem so plain and goodness so mysterious? We must heed the unforgettable warning of the German theologian Martin Niemoeller: "In Germany, they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up." I have come tonight to speak up—for diversity. And I have come to speak up for the religious and spiritual dimension of our work at the United Nations.

I said upon my return from Iraq that one should never underestimate the power of prayer. When we speak up, when we pray, individually and collectively, with one voice or with a multitude of voices, we can overwhelm the sounds of war. We can overcome the seeds of intolerance. We can forge the peace and justice that is the birthright of every human being.

Questions & Answers

During a Peace Concert tour in South Africa, Sri Chinmoy gave a press conference at the South Beach Holiday Inn in Durban, on 18 January 1996. A partial transcript follows.

Q *UESTION:* *Could you please tell us a little about your philosophy and your way of life?*

S *RI CHINMOY:* Everybody is a seeker of truth and a lover of God—either a conscious one or an unconscious one. In our case, we belong to the first category. Consciously, sleeplessly and breathlessly we are trying to be God-seekers and God-lovers.

There are many good things and many undivine, unaspiring things in our nature. We try to increase and multiply our good qualities and, at the same time, on the strength of our prayers and meditations, we try to

decrease and eventually eliminate our undivine qualities. We are not trying to destroy our bad qualities; only we want to transform and illumine them. Darkness has to be transformed into light. The ignorance that we have been cherishing from time immemorial must be illumined.

According to traditional Indian philosophy, God is the Creator, God is the Preserver and God is the Destroyer. But we feel that, being the Author of all Good and being the Source of Compassion infinite, God cannot and will not actually destroy His creation. We feel that, at His choice Hour, He transforms anything within us that is not aspiring and makes it divine, illumining and fulfilling. So there is no such thing as destruction; there is only illumination, which takes place at God's choice Hour.

On our path we give due importance to the physical life. Inside the physical is the soul, which is the direct representative of God. The body is the temple, and inside the temple is the soul, the shrine. Both the shrine and the temple must be kept in proper order. Our inner life of aspiration and our outer life of dedication must go side by side. Like the flower and its fragrance, they cannot be separated; they have to be taken as two complementary realities. My students practise meditation and follow the spiritual life; at the same time, they have their respective jobs. We live in the world and we live for the world.

QUESTION: *Most people in this area of South Africa suffer a lot because of daily violence. I am interested to hear your views on the causes of violence and any message that you might have as to what they can do about it.*

SRI CHINMOY: The causes of violence are the divisions created by the mind. The mind always separates; it gets tremendous satisfaction in dividing reality. Because it sees itself as separate from others, the mind wants to exercise supremacy over others. Inside the mind is restlessness, which eventually becomes destruction. Long before violence is manifested on the outer plane, it takes place in the form of thoughts inside the mind.

If we listen to our mind when it tells us to strike someone, at that time the mind becomes our lord. But there is always something within us that reminds us that we have another boss: the heart. Unlike the mind, the heart only wants to establish intimacy and oneness with others; it gets satisfaction not in division but in unification. The heart tells us, "By destroying someone you will never get even an iota of joy, but by loving that person you will get abiding joy." So we have to pray and meditate to silence our restless mind and to illumine our un aspiring mind. If we can transform the mind and live in the heart, then there can be no violence.

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SRI CHINMOY

QUESTION: *Are your Peace Concerts political in any way?*

SRI CHINMOY: There are many ways to bring about world peace. My way is to pray and meditate and offer meditative Peace Concerts. I am a total stranger to politics and I do not enter into the political arena. I have love for all human beings, so I love politicians, too. But I cannot say anything about their political views.

I have been practising spirituality since childhood. I am a man of prayer. I am a student of peace. I devote myself to the art of self-discovery, and I ask my students to do the same. People come to me when they are hungry for inner peace, inner light and inner bliss. Many, many times politicians—along with others in various walks of life—have come to pray and meditate with me or have remained in a meditative consciousness while I have played instruments and sung.

QUESTION: *As a Hindu, I believe that the ultimate Truth is God-realisation. How do we reach our goal?*

SRI CHINMOY: God-realisation is a most difficult subject. We can say that it is like climbing up not one, but countless Himalayas. Millions and billions of people are living on this planet, but how many have dared to climb up the Himalayan mountains? Most of us do not dare even to try; we feel that it is impossible for us. Fortunately, we do not have to justify our existence on earth by physically climbing up the Himalayas; but the inner mountains we all have to climb. God will not allow any human being to remain unrealised.

In the outer life there are many obstacles that we have to surmount. Every day, in the hustle and bustle of life, we face many challenges. If we do not accept all the challenges, no harm! If we do not like athletics, for example, it is not necessary to play soccer or to try and become the world's fastest runner. We do not have to participate in the outer race for our evolution or for our individual growth. But even if we do not consciously participate in the outer race, we have to know that our mind is always racing and racing aimlessly—like a mad elephant. It goes this way and that way and, at the same time, it builds solid walls that divide us from others.

There is also an inner race—to our inner goal. Christians call that goal salvation. Buddhists call it illumination. Hindus call it God-realisation. We believe that each individual shall realise God at his own special time. When my hour strikes, God will definitely bless me with God-realisation; when your hour strikes, God will bless you with God-realisation.

If God-realisation is our goal, then the first and foremost necessity on our part is to pray and meditate regularly. Again, we have to know what we are praying for. Are we praying to God for money to buy one house, two houses, three houses? If we have a car, are we praying for a second car or a third car? If we are praying to God to bless us with more material possessions, then we are still in the desire-life and God-realisation remains a far cry.

There is another way, which we call the life of aspiration. In the aspiration-life, we pray to God to give us only what we truly need, not what we want. The highest form of prayer in the aspiration-life is to say: “God, You know what I actually need. If it is Your Will to bless me with the things that I truly need, then at Your choice Hour do bless me with those things. If You do not want to give me anything, that also is up to You. I want only to please You in Your own Way.”

When we are in the aspiration-world, we pray to God to give us the capacity to please Him in His own Way. When we do this, we are walking along the right road. God-realisation comes at the right moment provided we walk along the right path. So if we can pray and meditate to please God in God's own Way, definitely God-realisation will dawn on us.

QUESTION: *Do you work also in a political way to bring about peace?*

SRI CHINMOY: I do not want to deal with politics, which is the world of the mind. I want only to live in the heart and discover a sea of peace in each and every country. A few countries are fighting wars today; tomorrow some other countries may engage in war. People proclaim, "We shall never again enter into war." But as long as we live in the mind that is not properly illumined, there will always be conflicts and wars. The mind may remain silent for a few days, a few months or even a few years; but the very nature of the mind is to try to exercise its supremacy.

I will not dare to solve the problems in Bosnia and other places by exercising political means. I have my own way, which is to pray and meditate to bring about peace. In no way will I condemn those who follow other ways. Politicians are all my brothers and sisters, and we are aiming at the same goal. If they can arrive at the goal before us, I will be the happiest person. Or, after reaching the goal, if they ask us to walk along with them, definitely we shall abide by their request. But, right now, we feel that they have their way and we have our way. God alone knows which way is best! But we feel, in the inmost recesses of our heart, that the way of prayer and meditation is best for us.

Q UESTION: *Do you feel that people in the world are moving further away from leading a spiritual life, or do you feel that there is a gradual awakening towards spirituality?*

SRI CHINMOY: It is my own personal conviction that people are more awakened and that they are turning more towards light than before. There was a time twenty or thirty years ago when peace was only a dictionary word. People used the word, but they did not mean it; they did not even care to know what it meant. But now there are many people on earth who most sincerely believe in peace and want to lead a life of peace. We are still not fully awakened, but now at least we sincerely feel the supreme necessity of world peace.

So the world is progressing in the way it is accepting peace and light. Some individuals are consciously accepting this message, while others are unconsciously accepting it; still others are not aware of it and do not care for it. But if we are talking of the majority, then I have to say in all sincerity that more people are turning towards light than before.

QUESTION: *What inspired you to follow this path of peace?*

SRI CHINMOY: When we pray and meditate, there comes a time when we get an inner message. Or we can say that something within us prompts us to do something. I have been praying and meditating for many years. From deep within an inner Voice, which we call the Voice of the Inner Pilot or God, commanded me to be of service to Him by offering my prayers and meditations to the world at large and sharing with others the message of peace.

Here we are all students of peace. Peace is a common subject that we are all studying in the same school—the school of our heart. Whatever I have learned with regard to peace I have come here to share with you. At the same time, I have come to learn from you. I am not only a teacher, but also a student. I am still learning and learning; for peace is a subject that is vaster than the vastest.

QUESTION: *You mentioned the struggle between the heart and the mind. In an area such as Kwazulu Natal, where so many have been killed and where people's hearts have actually been hardened or broken, is it much more difficult for them to follow the right path than for others who are leading a more peaceful or ordinary life?*

SRI CHINMOY: It entirely depends on the individual. Those who are denied peace by outer circumstances or by undivine human beings often have a greater inner hunger for peace than those who have found an iota of peace or abundant peace. People who suffer unnecessarily are more likely to pray to God and receive His Light than those who already have some peace of mind. So while the more fortunate ones may be wallowing in the pleasures of the limited peace that they already have found, individuals whose suffering has led them to develop an intense inner cry for world peace and harmony may be blessed with abundant peace sooner by God. When innocent victims cry from the inmost recesses of their heart, their cry is bound to melt the Heart of God.

But the question arises whether someone is really hungry for peace or whether he has simply surrendered to his fate. Some individuals lose faith in God or in their inner existence when their relatives are killed by undivine human beings. They say, "My dear ones did nothing wrong. If God has infinite Compassion, why did He allow them to be killed?" So these individuals may inwardly revolt and say that God is not active or dynamic, that God is perhaps sleeping. Again, they may become furious

that their dear ones have been attacked and go to the length of saying: "There is no God, there is no God!"

Unfortunately, these people do not look for light. They do not pray for the light to illumine those undivine human beings who have attacked their dear ones. If they did, then God would definitely change the mental attitude of those undivine human beings. The victims' sincere cry for the illumination of the wrong-doers would reach God's Heart. So if we pray to God in the right way, then those who have done wrong things and also those who may do wrong things in the near future will be illumined.

QUESTION: *I have found that music can change people, although I am not speaking about political change. I would like to hear your views on music.*

SRI CHINMOY: We have to know whether we are talking about the music that tends to destroy our nerves and subtle bodies, or prayerful music that gives us pure joy and inspires us to become good citizens of the world. Prayerful and soulful music is definitely going to help us bring about world peace and establish oneness in the world community, for that music has a special appeal to the heart. It awakens and deepens our longing for a better life. When we play or listen to divine music, or when we sing divine songs, it becomes easier for us to see the light within us. It also helps us increase that light and bring it to the fore so we can transform the darkness that the mind has and is.



Sri Chinmoy during a lunchtime meditation in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium on 16 June 1998.

Aphorisms Dedicated to the UN

*At a lunchtime meeting of the Peace Meditation at the United Nations,
Sri Chinmoy offered the following aphorisms:*

May the soul-captain
Of the United Nations-Boat
Compassionately steer the UN-Boat
To the universal oneness-shore.



May the ocean-deep
And mountain-high peace
Of the United Nations soul
Preside every day
Over the division-frustration-realities
And oneness-fulness-dreams
Conferences.

MEDITATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS

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