North America ECHOES
ONE WORLD ONE HUMANITY
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SHRI RAM CHANDRA MISSION®

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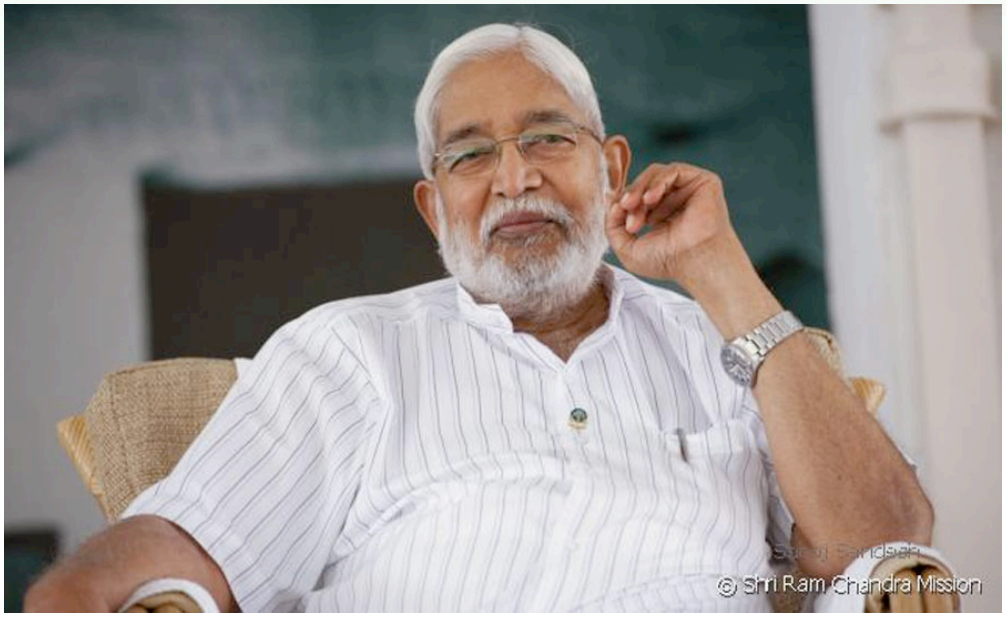
Think of Others — Forget Yourself

Shri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari



I am happy to be here with you all. I have always been happy to be with you all, not just now or yesterday or last week, because one proof of our work, the spiritual work, is that we are not only here or willing to be here but that we want to be here. I would be very happy to note or see for myself that if you go to a centre, you don't say abhyasis have gone shopping, or have gone to the theatre to see a movie, but that abhyasis are always with other abhyasis in their homes, talking about Sahaj Marg, talking about spiritual life – anything, exchanging stories from Puranas, from Ramayana, from Babuji's life. Because one of the ways by which we integrate our work is to see how well our people are bonding together; how necessary it is for them to get-together when they are free; how much people who go on tours go to visit abhyasis or prefects for a sitting, rather than spending time shopping or finding the next eatery where you have the best majjiga murukku [snacks] or where is the best pizza. I am looking for that, I am waiting for that. …

Now in the heart of every one of us, this [heart] is the nucleus which must understand, which must pull us together, keep us together. This is the one which creates, or must create, a gravitational force pulling everyone – unconsciously. It does not know. The gravitational force of this universe, I daresay, does not know it exists. It is not an entity with a life which says, "I must pull together..." or a central force in the sun which says, "I must keep the solar system together." It happens. It is there, it has been there for I don't know how many thousands of years, and if science is to be believed, it will be there for several million more years. …

Now, if nature can create that in the immaterial universe outside us … why on earth are we not able to allow this heart, which has been created by the Creator specifically for the purpose of keeping us together, to do its work? …

Excerpt from talk given to prefects on August 15, 2011 Chennai, India

Changes in North America

Change
John Barlow, Boston MA

Please be aware that the timing of the North American meeting with our master in India has been changed to Monday through Friday, February 20th through February 24th, 2012. We strongly recommend abhyasis do not yet purchase tickets as further information regarding group discounts, discount airline agencies and other travel tips will be forthcoming.

Someone once said the only thing that is constant is change, and it seems more appropriate today than ever. Everything around us is changing – quickly. Consider technology. It used to be that a major change like going from black and white TV to color TV took years of development, (yes, some of us were even around when television was without color). But with the advent of computers, the pace of change seems to have accelerated exponentially.

What is constant in us? Not the mind, the mind is changing all the time: what should I do today, tomorrow, in an hour, what to read, should I finish this article? In a way, that is why we meditate – to learn to become sensitive to and reveal what doesn't change in us. We make the supposition that when the mind quiets down, when it learns to meditate, it will allow us to see what doesn't change – the changeless state within us – the soul as it is naturally, an expression of divinity.

Why does the Mission exist? It exists to create and maintain an environment where spiritual transformation is available to all who seek it. The Mission exists to serve others in this quest. Prefects are the arteries of this serving instrument, the master the guiding light.

This past May our master assembled together at the Param Dham Ashram in Bangalore a group of dedicated long term and not so long term prefects/abhyasis, to take a look at the structure of the Mission with the assistance and thoughtful guidance of brother Dr. Adizes, an abhyasi (now a prefect) and an expert organizational consultant. Over the ten-day period a number of changes were established for two basic reasons. First, to organize the Mission in a way that would allow for continued growth, and second, to organize in a such way that our master would be relieved of some of the burden of overseeing such a large organization. How successful were we?

The new structure is making its way into the mainstream functioning of the Mission a little at a time and will continue to do so over the coming years. The overall worldwide structure has been strengthened by the implementation of a Global Service Team to oversee the worldwide Mission operations. Other unique functional areas are Spiritual Service, Community Building, Training and Delivery, Program Development, Operations Support, Member Services, Continuous Improvement and what was formerly Outreach is now called Heartspeak – how our heart speaks to potential aspirants.

In the new model as in the old we have some folks already assigned to specific roles and currently they are as follows for North America: Region-in-Charge, John Barlow; Regional Coordinators: Betsy Barlow, North East US and Canada; Kasinathan Muralidharan, Mid Atlantic and South; Janmarie Connor, Mid Central US & Canada, along with Heartspeak Initiatives for US & Canada, and Coordinator for Program Training and Delivery; Trupti Kulkarni, North Central US & Canada; Ragini Khanjee, South Central US; Aravind Ravindran, Northwest US and Canada.

Each of these areas will need the support of dedicated abhyasis working together to allow this wonderful method to be available to all willing and interested seekers.

North American Pilot Programs
Janmarie Connor, Indianapolis IN

Beavercreek, Ohio and Toronto, Ontario, Canada have been selected as pilot centers in North America for exploring ways we can strengthen our Sahaj Marg communities and also play a broader role in bringing spirituality to the greater Dayton and Toronto regions. The mission of the Sahaj Marg organization is to create a positive spiritual environment in order to make spiritual transformation available to all who seek it. The efforts underway at Beavercreek and Toronto focus on helping each abhyasi to dedicate him/herself to cultivating the inner environment and fixing the highest goal. Perhaps the degree to which we each embrace the real goal of human life signals the possibility for developing the true spirit of brotherhood and community.

This shared effort calls upon us to support one another, not only in deepening our practice but also in taking a sincere interest in the well being of fellow abhyasis. Both the Beavercreek and Toronto centers will explore various ways to further strengthen the foundations of mutual trust, respect and caring within our Sahaj Marg community. The intention is to effect natural attraction to our Sahaj Marg way of life while positively impacting broader communities we serve. From an enlivened inner environment can emerge a spirit of brotherhood and community supportive of spiritual transformation for all who seek it.

(See alsoTrevor Weltman and Vera Thornhill on changes and community in the Volunteer Corner.)

New Steps at Beavercreek

Julie Gallagher, Dayton, OH

Three of the seven members of the Beavercreek City Council, including the Vice Mayor, met with abhyasis during the July 22-24 celebrations at the Beavercreek Ashram in Dayton, Ohio. The purpose of the meeting was to share with the council members who we are and what Sahaj Marg meditation is all about. As our ashram and abhyasis are a part of the Beavercreek community, we wanted to learn from them how our organization and purpose might be better known and understood in the Beavercreek and greater Dayton region. They were very impressed with our method and our spiritual aim and offered many practical suggestions to this end. Since our meeting on July 23rd, they have continued to stay in touch with us, furthering the conversation and even introducing us to others with similar aims. In fact, we've begun discussions with representatives of the Peace Museum on how we might link our United Nations days of observation and our meditation and prayer for human integration with their efforts. Stay tuned for more information!

Change – an Insight

Chethan Reddy, Ann Arbor MI

Change your thoughts, which will change your deeds, which will change your world, which will fuel a self-sustaining process of change in others. That is how we can change the world.

Change is the only constant in life. The sooner we accept this axiom, the sooner we may go about creating the change we want in the world. As Gandhiji said, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." But what change do we want? What change do we wish to see for ourselves? What kind of a world do we want to live in – a world of hatred, corruption, hunger, poverty, and sickness? Is this the world we want? I am sure no one will answer, "yes." But is this the world we accept? Sadly for the most part, yes it is. How can a single human being change the world? By changing his world. Create your world with love, respect, kindness, generosity and unity and behold the unbelievable change you see in your world. Changing our individual worlds in this way will change the world in time.

Volunteer Corner

Community

Trevor Weltman, Detroit MI

For me, Sahaj Marg exists between two very distinct worlds: the one with our brothers and sisters in China, and the one with our brothers and sisters here in the midwestern US. Naturally this gives rise to rather hilarious inconsistencies, like the fact that with only three and half years of practicing – a period novitiate when compared to those here in the US practicing in Babuji's time – I am one of the old-timer grey-beards in the Far East; or how in my mind everybody knows and loves each other, when in reality they have never met, and maybe never will; Brian Jones probably couldn't pick Jenny Huang out of a crowd just as Wu Xiaolin most likely couldn't find Jyothi Joseph either.

Nevertheless, the inconsistency between these two wonderful groups *unnecessarily* transcends duration of practice and familiarity of person. You see, Sahaj Marg in China is more than just two satsanghs a week and a sitting every other. It is spontaneous dinners on weeknights, play-dates for the kids, running errands with and for each other and making up excuses to just to come together to do 'whatever' in His remembrance – usually in groups larger than four. Thus Sahaj Marg in China is a true community, one not just of uncles and aunties, old and young, brown and white; it is instead a full-on lifestyle, a family of siblings who act and interact, and bicker and love, just as siblings ought – and just as regularly, too.

But my Sahaj Marg in America is not like this. So after weeks of pondering I've come to the following conclusion: Sahaj Marg in America is lacking in plasticity. We're just way too comfortable here, too busy with work/children/Kumon/ class/ concerts, too willing to keep doing what we've been doing, even if we feel like something needs to be changed. Take, for example, Master's Birth Anniversary Celebration this past month at Beavercreek Ashram. This is not to say that the event was bereft of a certain robustness or love (how could it have lacked anything!?); rather I am speaking to the opposite. Everybody was so happy to be together. More than a few even commented to me about how "wonderful the atmosphere of brotherhood" was and about the "rarity of such a swelling of the heart."

Of course, there is a certain rareness to bhandara atmosphere. But the swelling of hearts? Sat means truth and sang means with and, with the truth of love and love as the goal, I have found it possible to be in satsangh on the bus, in a kitchen, even at the mall, when together with our brothers and sisters. The formula is simple: where there are more of His hearts there is more of His grace. And I've found similarly that that 'special' feeling is decidedly not rare the more I'm willing to open up not only my home – but also with greater difficultly, my heart – more regularly.

I have one year left of school, after which only He knows. China again? Perhaps India? Mars? Regardless, I hope in the interim to bring some of what I've known back here, and actually use it, actually assimilate my two worlds, actually begin actively building a stronger Sahaj Marg community in Detroit and elsewhere – and not just keep my experience saved for a rainy day.

(See also articles by Janmarie Connor on pilot programs and Vera Thornhill on the community gathering)

Community and Suggestions
Shenandoah Regional Gathering
Vera Thornhill, Columbus OH

After one satsangh we had a discussion with our regional coordinator, who asked for suggestions for improving the Mission. Two things were brought to his attention. We asked, "How can we have a greater sense of community?" "People go to satsangh, do their meditation, chat for 5 minutes then disperse." There is not much opportunity to create a sense of community.

Another suggestion concerned the children. Except for the gatherings there is not much for the children and the youths. Gatherings provide activities for kids but they are bimonthly and people cannot always attend. We need something on a more regular basis so kids can bond with each other and have guidance to keep them on the spiritual path, especially during the turbulent teen years.

Lots of good ideas were offered. Brother Murali said the solutions lie in the abhyasis themselves. We abhyasis are the basis of the Mission and when we come up with ideas we should try them out at the local level, then if they work we should expand them to other centers. So if you have any ideas talk to your local prefects and then take action. It is up to us to make a difference in our centers and our Mission.

(See also Janmarie Connor on NA pilot programs and Trevor Weltman on community.)

Volunteering at Teen Camp
Kirstin Santos, Atlanta GA

For those who were able to be present for the Teen Camp held at the Molena Ashram during the second week of August, it was the realization of a long-awaited dream. Seeing this group of young aspirants first-hand, guided and inspired by Shelly Gould Burgess and Tracie Pape, filled support staff with joy and hope for the development of the young people of the North American Mission. Master's loving eye, guidance and blessings were evident.

One activity that particularly inspired me was the construction of a "vision board" by each one on the theme of their own personal understanding of what it means to live a spiritual life, using elements from their culture. All of the participants had brought from home a few magazines that they currently value, from which they were instructed to express their inner vision in picture form, using images and words cut from the magazines.

As I walked around the tables where they happily worked on their vision boards, I was astonished and inspired by what I saw them illustrating. They worked intently on their own, sitting altogether, singing as they worked. The thought came that a bond of brotherhood was being formed that will help sustain them throughout their lives.

North American Teen Camp

North American Teen Camp a Life Changer

Shelly Gould Burgess, Cleveland OH

From August 9-13, twenty-five youth gathered at the Molena ashram for the inaugural North American Teen Camp. The purpose of the camp was to give teens whose parents meditate the chance to discover their own spirituality. Activities provided the opportunity to explore the theme, "What Spirituality Means to Me". After dinner the first evening everyone assembled at campfire where introductions were made during a torch-lighting ceremony and teens shared what they hoped to get out of the camp. The torchlight symbolized different things for different teens, but to me it showed the connection of one heart light to another, as each participant lit the torch of the next person. The next morning the teens, participating in introductory games, strengthened their connection after which they dove into the 'work' of the camp engaging in discussions and activities about their senses of spiritual self. During almost every session, teens engaged in journaling, building a foundation for introspective diary writing.

In the afternoon sister Tracie Pape and I gave an educational presentation about the basics of Sahaj Marg. We were surprised to find that many, including the young adult counselors who had begun meditation, said they were unfamiliar with the elements of Sahaj Marg or how the practice worked. Many expressed gratitude for the chance to gain a better understanding of the practice that was such a significant part of their parents' and their own lives. Later the teens took a break for some fun and bonding by tie-dying shirts, playing volleyball and running through a sprinkler to cool off in the Georgia heat.

The next day the teens took a nature walk with sister Sarah Workman, who taught them about the flora and fauna of the mountain, and they took photos to help catalog the species present. The rest of the morning consisted of team-building field games, such as three-legged races, water balloon tosses and other laughter-filled activities. After lunch participants discussed balancing their spiritual and material lives as young people

Insights during Teen Camp

Chethan Reddy, Ann Arbor MI

Aim High: Our thoughts are like waves; there is constructive and destructive interference. When waves with widely differing properties, such as wavelength, frequency etcetera clash, the result is discord and lack of harmony. In contrast, when waves with similar properties, come together and align, they amplify and blossom into something magnificent. These like thoughts and vibrations draw each other in towards similar thoughts and vibrations. Align your thoughts with His, keep your vibrations subtle and high, and love.

Love flows: Love will always flow as long as you continue to act as the open faucet does – always open, providing no resistance.

Returned Love: Love does not need to be returned in kind to spread. Go on loving and eventually, Love will once again find its way back to you.

Accept His Gift: [to Master] …. It is all your work, and I must accept that whatever comes to me (always, but especially during satsangh) is a divine gift from you, and that I am always being worked on.

Love Blossoms: Love blossoms when you can see Him in All.

Love All: Feel love for all brothers and sisters. Accept all as His creation and see how easy this is. Smile with this insight .

No Doubt: Feel Love flowing always. Speak from the heart and do not doubt what happens. March on courageously.

Living in the present: Living in the present is living with God. The Divine is always there, never looking back, never looking forward, just there. To be at one with this great power, we must also learn to simply be there and exist, not to get caught in the spiral of past regret and glory, nor that of looking too far to the future for plans. Accept all that you receive as a divine gift, cherish it; take it in as specially your own, for your spirituality and live life with this brilliantly simple idea to carry you directly to the Divine.

in our materialistic culture. As an extension of this exercise, they created collages to express sense of spiritual self using only images and words of their culture cut from popular magazines. The results were inspiring and as widely varied as the teens themselves but revealed that we can be spiritual beings even while physically immersed in our materialistic western culture.

On the final day teens explored the theme of the United Nations Youth Day by viewing and reflecting on some of Master's messages about how spiritual people can best change the world. Later in the day they visited beautiful Flint River to swim and relax together. That evening teens were treated to a call from brother William Waycott and other members of the North and South American working team who spoke with them via a conference call. It was inspiring to hear about the international nature of Sahaj Marg, and I think it meant a lot to the teens that such busy workers for SRCM took the time to speak with them. During a final discussion and torch lighting ceremony each shared how her/his sense of spiritual self had evolved during the days of the camp. They also shared how strongly connected they now felt with each other and how they couldn't wait for the camp next year.

During the camp teens also watched two movies, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* that Master had recommended for them. These movies at first confused and even disturbed some. However, after reflection, everyone found positive messages of encouragement to carry on with their spiritual journeys despite the negative elements of our culture.

On the last day the participants were thrilled to receive a message from Master. The camp counselors had emailed Master the night before to share their enthusiasm about the experience. After breakfast when it was time to see if he had written back the whole camp ran excitedly into the meditation hall. They refused to check for the email though until every person was found and brought into the room – a sweet testament to their developing brotherhood.

The teens had a natural way of participating in the work of maintaining the ashram. At every meal they organized themselves into dishwashing teams. Every day they picked up after themselves, and on the last day, a chore list was all that was needed to spur them into action. They left the ashram better than they found it, improving it physically while uplifting all spiritually. It was truly a gift to be a part of this special event. Some adults present reflected that the spark from the teens reignited the spark within themselves.

For me it seemed that their big hearts full of pure enthusiasm created a wave that has lifted the spiritual heart of North America. Not everyone left planning to practice Sahaj Marg, although many did. However, each participant expressed a greater sense of confidence about her/his ability to be a spiritual person leaving with hearts that were strong and energized. Teen Camp was a life-changer for us all.

The Beauty of the Ashram

Sahaja Atluri, New Jersey

It is evening, about 7:15 pm at the end of Teen Camp. I am upstairs to pack. As I look outside I notice a serenity about the surroundings. As Shelly said, there really is a mysteriously calming buzz around and in the ashram – I just have to tune in and listen. As I look up at the sky, the clouds slowly drift away from the sun creating the impression that Master is showering his blessings and grace upon us all. On the mountaintop, as I look at the trees below, a thin misty fog covers the canopy of the trees. Nature flourishes producing a symphony. The beauty is indescribable, inspiring awe. As I look up, I see soft, puffy and feather-like clouds slowly drifting away bringing an end to the day. In front of me at eye-level the trees and shrubs and other plants seem to dance in the gentle breeze. Suddenly it feels as if everything is paused – no movement and no sounds – just the beauty of the ashram.

Master's Birthday at Molena Ashram

K. Muralidharan, Virginia

Over 300, including quite a few new abhyasis, attended Master's Birthday Celebration at the Molena Ashram hosted by the Charlotte NC Center. They came from far and near arriving by plane, chartered bus and car. The dorms were filled to capacity while some personal tents were set up outside. Small group discussions on the theme, "Add Life to Your Years, not Years to Your Life" gave rise to additional personal reading and shared insights throughout the weekend. Five satsanghs over the 3 days allowed participants to dive deep into the heart, while Master's poignant message on the 24th gave us much to reflect on. There was also a well-attended prefect meeting on Saturday focusing on ideas for making connections between centers. Throughout the celebration we felt the enthusiasm of the youth as they anticipated the upcoming Teen Camp to be conducted at the ashram in August.

Master's Birthday Celebration Beavercreek Ashram

Julie Gallagher, Dayton OH

Master's 84th birthday was celebrated by over 250 people at the Beavercreek Ashram during the weekend of July 22-24 with the theme, "Live in the Present Moment in Every Moment." A program of related readings from all volumes of *Whispers from the Brighter World* created a focus for us. During the birthday celebration, there were special youth programs. Jean Appleby led children under 11 years in making flags and hanging them in the ashram. Kids also played with water balloons, piñatas, cut the birthday cake, ate ice cream and joyfully sang "Happy Birthday" to Master. Youth from 12 to 21 years, led by Brother Brian Jones, explored the gathering theme and played music around a campfire.

As mentioned in an earlier article, three of the seven Beavercreek City Council members met with abhyasis to initiate an ongoing relationship with the local community. We are enthused about expanding and strengthening our bonds with the community into the future.

Master's Birthday Celebrations, Seattle WA

Sanket Totala, Seattle WA

This year approximately 25 abhyasis took part in Seattle Center's three-day celebration of Master's birthday with the theme, "Discipline in Love". Every day began with a morning satsangh and ended with an evening satsangh. In between there were events and discussions including various videos of Master being with abhyasis that made everyone feel his presence. On the 23rd, there was a group activity in which abhyasis shared their understanding of Saint Kabir's *dohe* (rhyming couplets in poetry form) taking examples from their lives and from literature.

Everybody entered a contemplative mood after listening to Master's speech from Tiruppur. Later there was a fish-pond activity during which people put their questions into a bowl and everyone chimed in to share their thoughts answers.

An atmosphere of stillness and serenity pervaded these days enabling abhyasis to feel grace and blessings around them.

Master's (Surprise) Birthday Celebration
Sadhana Panuganti, Warrenville IL

When I knew I would not be going to Dayton for the celebrations, in my heart I had a deep desire to recognize Master's birthday in a special way. I visualized lots of abhyasis meeting in Warrenville to celebrate the special occasion. With no idea of who would come apart from local abhyasis, I began planning and organizing food. Nayan bhai and I planned a first satsangh on Saturday evening, sent email to local centers about the program and waited. Few replied.

Saturday the meditation hall was full and a serene atmosphere pervaded! By Sunday morning the place truly felt like a small bhandara with more than 46 abhyasis and 10 children from Iowa city and Des Moines IA, Rockford IL, Madison and Milwaukee WI, and suburbs Buffalo Grove and Evanston IL. All day we had wonderful satsanghs, reading and discussion on the theme "Living in the Present Moment, Every Moment" and played Master's message from Tiruppur. His grace and love abounded. Amazingly also everyone was blessedly comfortable in spite of our broken air conditioner. Because it had rained Saturday night and Sunday continued to be cloudy we could easily have been in Tiruppur instead of a Midwestern heat wave! The sun and heat returned only as we were dispersing. The whole event was magical – every one happy and filled with gratitude to beloved Master who made all this possible.

Tiruppur was Utopia
Angela Roach, Dayton OH

In one word my experience in Tiruppur for Master's Birthday was Utopia. The atmosphere for me was very serene. I felt unconditional love and acceptance as never before. Everywhere I went I met wonderful people. Even though we came from different lands and spoke different languages, we were and are united in love for Master.

The grand meditation hall had been beautifully decorated with flowers, fruit trees and a water feature for the festivities. I am very grateful and still in a state of joy to have been present to celebrate with my sisters and brothers and my master on his blessed day. I consciously surrendered my self to the awesome experience of being present with all the souls who had convened – they afforded me a genuine example of love for humanity and of course, love for the master.

Remembering Tiruppur 2011
Jonathan Seeger, St. Louis MO

Master graciously spoke to the North Americans while we were gathered at Tiruppur. From my recollection he said that time and space should not matter on this path. Now, as I let his words germinate I realize that if we stay in remembrance, His love in our hearts, we will be nearer than the nearest to our Master. Time and space, and all the ways in which our minds use them to divide and limit, do not matter on the path of love!

Master spoke about how we as Americans need to slow down and not be "busy bodies". I was recently on a river-floating trip and realized that when the river became deep and wide the current became slow, calm and peaceful. When the river became shallow and narrow the rocks appeared creating obstacles and the current became fast and treacherous. May our hearts be wide and deep, smoothly flowing into the sea of love.

Reflection on Tiruppur, July 23-25, 2011
Bob Perry, Brooklyn NY

The day after his birth anniversary Master sat for a brief visit with North American abhyasis. He appeared deeply fatigued. "I can see only half of you," he explained, due to his limited vision. "And I would prefer not to see the rest of you," he said through a smile.

Nevertheless, he concluded his comments by asking us if we would be staying for a few days. "Relax!" he implored. Be still, he seemed to be saying. Wait. Listen. Be attentive.

These large gatherings can be a test of one's approach to the Master – of the rightness, or integrity, of that approach. Who has not observed that physical proximity to the master can inspire intense yearning? The soul may soar, but the ego can become especially vulnerable.

At a gathering last year an abhyasi asked, "I feel Master is not paying attention to me and is upset with me. Does this ignoring have meaning?"

"Why should I pay attention to you," Master responded. Laughter ensued. "No, no, tell me why I should attend to your need? If you are hungry and come, I must feed you, not attend to you. … Now which would you like – that I attend to you and flatter you and praise you or that I do what is good for you? Which? Be wise!"

Children Celebrate Master's Birthday

Vera Lef and Preethi Anand, Sunderland Ashram

Circle Time: We continued our participation in the VBSE pilot started in January this year and conducted a session based on the value of citizenship on Saturday morning. The children were divided into two age groups. Children older than 7 years followed the VBSE material "We Each Have a Place", that focused on creating an awareness of the role and relationship of an individual to the community. Few children already had a good understanding of the topic and were eager to share their thoughts. During the circle time we noticed the kids' elevated sense of participation. A week before the gathering we had delegated the preparation of the materials needed for a circle time game and the responsibility of conducting the game to a few older children. This gave them a feeling of pride and a greater sense of participation. It was a beautiful learning experience for us and we believe it was for them as well.

The younger children read a book, *On the Town: A Community Adventure* by Judith Caseley, colored and discussed the same topic of citizenship and community.

Cultural Program: On Saturday afternoon, everyone enjoyed the cultural program consisting of two of solo songs, a piano performance, a violin performance and a group song. The highlight of the show was the meaningful song sung by children and parents for Revered Master's Birthday. The kids also announced their cultural program with ease.

Face Painting: On Sunday at the face painting station under the tent outside Sister Johanne was very busy decorating happy little faces with help from a few older children who volunteered.

Obedience, an experience

Carolyn Romano, Floyd County VA

I found myself [at Tiruppur] walking toward Master's cottage through the dark. I had meditated on the covered veranda of the old meditation hall, but an unexpected inner Voice had whispered, "Go stand outside His gate and sing." I tried to ignore it, but the command repeated itself. I surrendered to it, despite a growing apprehension. I might be a singer, but I am tremendously shy sometimes.

A brief rainstorm had dispersed the majority of the crowd and I stood near his cottage gate gathering my courage. I shut my eyes and sang very softly. When I stopped, a sister approached and asked me to sing again. A small group had gathered close to me and the atmosphere seemed more relaxed than before. I shut my eyes and singing openly, allowed my longing to inform each phrase. Suddenly Master was there. Behind closed eyes I could feel His presence immediately before me and I knew with complete certainty that He was my audience, He was that inner Voice, He was both singer and song.

> I took a step toward Infinity,
> Twenty three inches of motion in space.
> I shifted in ways that I couldn't see,
> I opened my eyes in a whole different place….

Song lyrics inspired by Master's speech "Toward Infinity", July 24th, 2010, Lucknow

Spiritual Cleaning

Enver Govender, Charleston WV

Our masters repeatedly ask us to follow our sadhana with particular attention to cleaning ourselves. We all have an importance that we do not take credit for. This is my story;

I was a very angry person both at home and at work. At work there were often complaints and the environment was very abrasive. It was worse when my partners left. One day there were so many problems that I admitted that this was extraordinarily abnormal and that nature was teaching me a lesson. I did not realize that these explosive situations were a result of bad signals that I was sending out – not by my direct communication with customers but by my mental state. Co-incidentally I joined Sahaj Marg and became very disciplined with my sadhana. I found my workplace became more peaceful and people did not complain and fuss so much. I found that it was my peaceful mind and Master that was creating this beautiful atmosphere! Our service scores are now close to excellent and it is a pleasure to go to work and perform my duty. The great lesson is that the effect of our thoughts go out and come back to us. Our masters say that if each one of us cleans ourselves faithfully our environment will improve tremendously. We get all this merely by faithful practice.

Trip to Satkhol
Gargi Bajaj

During the last week of May our master visited the Satkhol Ashram accompanied by 70 young abhyasis from the first graduating class of The Omega International School. In Delhi, on Master's return to Chennai I saw him and also met some of the youths. The following week of June 14th I was fortunate to go to Satkhol myself.

The program at the ashram was well planned. The first day we were given instructions on what we need to do in the ashram. Conserving water was a very big concern as it is only accumulated from rains. Next morning after satsangh and breakfast we were given our duties, which varied from cleaning the orchard to cleaning the storeroom. Our daily routine included two satsanghs, contemplation time, a talk, a video show and Q & A. A very dedicated group of resident abhyasis made all this possible for the visiting abhyasis.

The program, the place and the people I met there provided a transforming experience for me. The satsanghs and meditation were charged with divine energy. There were abhyasis of different age groups and from different regions. Some families had come with children as well. It felt like a big family. I was very happy to spend time with so many people who share my interest in spirituality. The quiet time provided during this visit was also beneficial. Each day felt like completing a year of college. Though I am back from Satkhol my heart still abides in the divine environment of that ashram.

Hocking Hills Gathering
Vera Thornhill, Columbus OH

The gathering venue at beautiful Hocking Hills State Park June 24-26 provided the perfect environment for our theme, "Be Plain And Simple, To Be Identical With Nature." The simple program involved no predetermined exercises – just hiking in the incredible natural landscape, which with the added charge of the gathering, held palpable spiritual energy.

Most families stayed in tents although a few people chose the nearby cabins with all the comforts of home. There was singing and marshmallow roasting around the campfire Friday and Saturday nights. We used a convenient shelter at the campsite for cooking the delicious food and for meditation. The kids and teenagers had fun in the park's outdoor swimming pool where lifeguards kept everyone safe. Some grownups went for starry walks after dark. We look forward to hosting this spiritually uplifting event again next year. Comments or suggestions for improvements can be directed to vthornhi@yahoo.com.

Listening to the Heart – Finding the Sacred in Simple Living
Everson, WA Camping Gathering, August 19 – 21
Judith Polston

Twenty abhyasis from Canada and Washington spent a contemplative weekend at the home of brother Robert and sister Penny. The experience of satsanghs outside in beautiful natural surroundings, tenting in the field, picking fresh vegetables from the abundant garden promoted "being simple and in tune with Nature" as Babuji once advised.

The idea of being 'in tune with Nature' transcended the bounds of the nature outside to include uniting with the real Nature inside us. The readings promoted going inward, being in silence and, combined with the transmission-filled atmosphere, allowed us to be in remembrance of Him and the real purpose of gathering together.

The auspicious day of Lord Krishna's birthday coincided with Sunday and the last satsangh of our gathering. Our weekend was filled with joy, laughter, and peacefulness that we took home with us to inspire our inward journey.

In Tune with Nature: Values Practiced – Memories Made – Families Growing Stronger
Regional Gathering at Big Meadows Park
Blue Ridge Mountains, VA: August 19-21, 2001
Atul K Patel, Richmond VA

In the midst of nature, 109 abhyasis and children gathered for 2 days in Big Meadows Park in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Nature was silently inviting all to be absorbed in it. We experienced living a simple life and the transformation it brought to our spiritual condition. An inner condition of serenity and joy was palpable during each group meditation. Families spent time with each other and participated in outdoor activities and bonfire on Saturday night. Everyone was touched by the atmosphere of brotherhood and simplicity.

Gathering at Masset, Canada

Nita McKenzie, Dawn Edwards, Heather Hodge, Denise Legare

August 12th to 14th the 4 abhyasis in Northwest Canada's remote Masset, on the island of Haida Gwaii, hosted a small gathering. Because our island is 6 hours by ferry from the mainland of British Columbia and another 19 hours from Vancouver Island, we understand the challenge of attending a gathering in our small community. The islands are filled with natural history, Haida culture, birds, plants and fish. Our venue, a longhouse in a quiet, pristine wilderness surrounded by moss-covered trees and ground enhanced the gathering theme, "Be Simple and In Tune with Nature". We read Master's talk "Learn to Listen to Nature" and upon request read Master's talk, "Samskaras". It is all with Master's grace that we return to our very busy lives in remembrance. We plan another event, perhaps an overnight and all-day this fall. Abhyasis are always welcome to come to visit us; we will provide accommodation and can simply organize a gathering anytime so if you are pulled to venture to the Northwest of Canada we welcome you. One can fly to Haida Gwaii. For more information contact Nita at mckenzie_nita@yahoo.ca.

Ashram Updates

West Coast Ashram Update

Naren Kini, Fremont CA

The 35,000 square foot facility on approximately 2.3 acres is designed to become an elegant structure that will meet a deep spiritual need. On reflecting, the building has seemed like an aspirant abhyasi wanting to become a sincere abhyasi, willing to go through all the change, cleaning and modifications with enough persistence to emerge pure and simple in a state of nothingness.

The next of several phases of work will produce an inside out transformation – another aspect of an aspirant abhyasi. The construction crew has begun demolition. When completed, over 400 abhyasis will be able to meditate together. There will also be a facility for VBSE programs, small children, a library, a "yogi café", a bookstore, workshops and a specific area for individual sittings. Keeping in mind the practical aspects of a gathering, there will be a place to leave shoes and another to bring and serve pre-cooked meals as well as plenty of storage to ensure Mission materials are safely kept.

Soon there will be a link to our website where abhyasis can see pictures and videos of the transformation from bowling alley to ashram. When we first shared a video of the property with Master he wrote, "I am very happy to receive this video, which permits me to see for the first time the gift that my Master has bestowed on all. May the people of the region come in large numbers to use it for their spiritual growth. Love to all."

Cranbury Ashram Constructions Activities in Full Swing

AMC Team, Cranbury NJ

The advent of a warm summer brought with it a lot of activity at the ashram. We are currently executing the major renovation projects. These are being led by our contractor, Kalai Constructions, in close collaboration with the township engineer and the various civic authorities who are involved at every major step of the process. Work started in the middle of July and accelerated July 26th. It's estimated that the exterior project will take 90 days. During this time the sewer line, water line, parking lots and restrooms will be completed.

In order to supervise work and ensure the proper logging of activities a core team of abhyasi brothers and sisters take turns on a daily basis. Additionally a regular stream of volunteers visit the ashram on weekdays and weekends.

The heavy equipment at the ashram site and the buzz that accompanies the activity heightens anticipation and eagerness to complete this final phase. While the exterior project is under way, the team is also working to finalize a contractor for the interior renovation.

On August 6th, as construction continued, 30 prefects from Washington DC to Boston attended a full day program led by brother John and sister Betsy Barlow.

We are working to complete the project on time and within budget and to make this beautiful venue available for regular use. Please be in touch with the AMC team for any questions regarding voluntary work and other activities.

SPURS

Brother Tom Stoner

It is with deep sadness that we remember our dear brother, Tom Stoner, who passed on Friday, July 22, 2011. Sister Mary Lou and their two children were at his bedside. Tom and Mary Lou had served devotedly as caretakers of the Spurs Ranch Retreat Center since its inception in the summer of 2007. Master was in touch with them during the difficult period of Tom's Illness and his prayers are with them always.

The retreat center is now open for abhyasis to apply and attend the retreat program. Sister Mary Lou continues in her caretaker role supported by abhyasis of the Austin Center.

ON BEING

Margaret Schenkman, Denver CO

I am here at SPURS for my third retreat and am overwhelmed with gratitude: to Master for providing us this place; to sister Mary Lou and brother Tom for their incredible graciousness – truly they are caretakers in every sense of the word; and to all the Austin brothers and sisters who work tirelessly to maintain this property. Because of Master, and these brothers and sisters, we all have a refuge where we can come to simply 'be'.

This trip, I came with no expectations and no desires except one: to learn to stay in remembrance. Yet I find I am also learning to simply 'be', and in 'being', whether on the hill overlooking the property, or the fields and woods behind the house, or sitting by the gate watching the neighbor's horses – I can imbibe the nectar of the atmosphere with nothing more important to accomplish than 'being'. In between 'being' while walking or sitting on the porch, I can meditate in the sanctuary as often as possible, recharging, rejuvenating, and revitalizing.

I discover that just 'being' without thoughts, desires, or action isn't easy – especially coming from a world of always 'doing'. And I find 'being' while doing nothing specific is easier than 'being' while at the same time doing daily tasks such as working in the flower bed or preparing meals. I can see clearly that 'being' while doing means remaining in a deep state of remembrance so that 'I' am no longer the do-er. Staying in remembrance constantly isn't an easy task either. But it is also clear that all will be attainable.

Master has said that if we can stay in remembrance for seven days continuously we will never leave that state. What a gift to have SPURS as a place to learn the secret of remembrance, which in the end is being with Him always and forever.

My SPURS Retreat, Apr 14-20, 2011

Rajapurna Ayyagari, Richmond VA

I was grateful to Master when my application to Spurs Retreat Center was confirmed. Soon I received a call from brother Tom Stoner to discuss how to prepare myself for retreat. After this loving call it seemed that my experience had already started well before I was there.

Brother Tom and sister Mary Lou were humble, loving and down to earth helping me feel at home without cultural inhibitions. Upon arriving I received an individual sitting and immediately began seeking within.

The initial two days were the learning phase as I adjusted to the conditions and the atmosphere, but once the settlement phase was over I was amazed to find myself sitting six or eight times a day with ease. The stay at the retreat was soul filling, nourishing and replenishing. I realized what I have been missing especially since I am physically far from my master.

I would not want to stay at Spurs for fewer than 5 days. My seven days allowed me to digest what I received and prepare myself to be able to share what I received with others.

SPURS – An Experience

Ragini Sridharan, NJ

Although I recently visited SPURS for only three days, I had an eye opening experience. There were seven sisters at the retreat, without speaking even a word to each other, completely absorbed in our selves.

Being in retreat or being silent proves to be a different experience for everyone. I felt that however silent the surroundings were, outer silence definitely does not lead to

inner silence. I had always believed that the external situations in my life triggered thoughts and emotions within me. But I was surprised to see how many thoughts and emotions I experienced even if nothing was happening around me in the retreat and I was completely cut off from my external world. This experience helped me understand that everything is really within *me*. *I* had created a web of impressions within myself that started revealing itself once the cleaning began in the retreat.

The silence in the retreat therefore helped me go within and understand some of the complexities inside me and appreciate the true importance of the cleaning process in my daily life. Also the atmosphere created by Master made each meditation a new experience. I certainly encourage all my brothers and sisters to visit the retreat. For each it will prove to be a unique experience.

Announcements

North American Gathering Update

Please note that the dates for the NA meeting in India with our Master have changed. The corrected dates for the NA gathering in India are now Monday through Friday, February 20th through February 24th, 2012. We still recommend that abhyasis do not yet purchase tickets as further travel information will be forthcoming.

Special Regional Gathering in Beavercreek

September 24-25, 2011

Mark your calendars now for a very special regional gathering entitled Balancing our Spiritual and Material Lives.

This gathering will include an open house on Saturday. Our special guest, Dr. Narinder Saini, Prevention Cardiologist, will speak to abhyasis and our open house guests on the topic of living a 'Healthy Heart' life. James Joseph from the Detroit Center will follow Dr. Saini and speak on the same theme addressing the impact of spiritual living on the heart and on overall wellness and wellbeing.

Regional gatherings afford us the opportunity for deepening our spiritual practice and coming together as a community with a shared spiritual purpose. Additionally, by attending these gatherings we show our gratitude for and commitment to Master and his Mission which exists for our spiritual transformation. Please take a moment now to register. Follow this link: https://www.sahajmarg.org/registration/selectSeminarHandler.jsp?seminar=110025

Calendar of Events: Sept-Dec 2011

Date	Where	Event	Contact
Sept 17-18	Beavercreek OH	Regional Gathering in Beavercreek, OH	Vijay Chitkara vchitkara@sbcglobal.net
Oct 8-9	Cranbury, NJ	Regional Gathering in Cranbury, NJ	Colleen Sackheim colleensackheim@yahoo.com
Oct 21-23	Camp Adams, OR	Regional Gathering in Camp Adams, OR	Jerry Coleman colemanj2@gmail.com
Oct 22	Detroit, MI	Abhyasi Training Program in Detroit, MI	Satyendra Savanur Smart2m9@gmail.com
Nov 12-13	Sunderland, MA	Regional Gathering in Sunderland, MA	Colleen Sackheim colleensackheim@yahoo.com
Nov 20	Sunderland, MA	UN Universal Children's Day in Sunderland, MA	Colleen Sackheim colleensackheim@yahoo.com
Nov 20	Detroit, MI	UN Universal Children's Day in Detroit, MI	Yugander Boyapalli yugandhar.boyapally@gmail.com
Nov 25-27	Molena, GA	Regional Gathering on Thanksgiving in Molena, GA	Murali Kasinathan Kasinathan.X.Muralidharan@questdiagnostics.com
Dec 10	Sunderland, MA	UN International Human Rights Day in Sunderland, MA	Colleen Sackheim colleensackheim@yahoo.com
Dec 10	Detroit, MI	UN International Human Rights Day in Detroit, MI	Yugander Boyapalli yugandhar.boyapally@gmail.com
Dec 30-Jan1	Everson, WA	Mission Road/Everson Mid-Winter Gathering in Everson, WA	Penny Hutchinson meditationspace.ph@gmail.com
Dec 30-Jan1	Warrenville, IL	New Year's Gathering in Warrenville, IL	Raga Ragavendran raga_ragavendran@yahoo.com
Dec 31	Detroit, MI	New Year's Gathering in Detroit, MI	Yugander Boyapalli yugandhar.boyapally@gmail.com
Dec 31-Jan1	Sunderland, MA	New Year's Eve Gathering in Sunderland, MA	Colleen Sackheim colleensackheim@yahoo.com
Dec 31-Jan1	Beavercreek, OH	New Year's Gathering in Beavercreek, OH	Vijay Chitkara vchitkara@sbcglobal.net
Dec 31-Jan2	Molena, GA	New Year's Gathering in Molena, GA	Murali Kasinathan Kasinathan.X.Muralidharan@questdiagnostics.com

Please contact your regional coordinator for upcoming events.
Please visit the link below to register for the above events https://www.srcm.org/registration/index.jsp

New Prefects

Name	City/State	Email
Karthikeyan Gopalakrishnan	Scarborough, Ontario	karthic.gopal@gmail.com
Venkat Arao Edara	Aurora, IL	vedara@hotmail.com
Suruchi Marwaha	Seatle, WA	suruchimarwaha@gmail.com

New Releases

Please check out the link below to access a list of new publications now available at Molena bookstore.
https://www.sahajmarg.us/onlinebookstore/catalog.do?category=0

For feedback, suggestion or contribution, please email the Echoes team at echoesna@sahajmarg.org

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