

Inspiration-Letters

Running Edition

1 February 2018

Introduction

by Mahiruha Klein

I'm happy to reopen a new chapter in the chronicle of Inspiration-Letters. I hope we can continue to produce issues regularly. It gives all the writers joy to share their inspiration in this forum, it is a way to connect with the world through our love of language.

I don't know a whole lot about running. I used to run forty miles a week, and now I'm happy just to run ten. I've supplemented my exercise with cycling, swimming and weight training. But Guru always gave pride of place to running. He says, "...if you want to get the benefit of a higher force or higher reality for your physical body, then running is absolutely necessary." (Sri Chinmoy answers, part 33, Agni Press, 2002)

The longest race in the world is the Sri Chinmoy 3,100 Mile Self-Transcendence Race, held every summer in Queens. The runners need to complete at least sixty miles a day (more than two marathons daily) to finish in the fifty-day cutoff. I have often gone to see them; sometimes I just go and sit and read. The feeling of self-transcendence is palpable. Whenever I go to watch them run, I feel I should maintain soulful silence. I feel like these runners are a symbolic offering to the world, through their own stamina, endurance, determination, they are pathfinders of a new world.

Once Guru took some of his dearest disciples to see one of the people who sponsored his coming to America from India. The man was old at the time, near the very end of his life, he was also an artist, a little eccentric. When they arrived at his studio, the artist looked at all the disciples' shoes, one by one and said, "OK, you're a rebel - and your shoes tell me that you are also a rebel. You're all rebels." Then he paused and said meaningfully, "No, you are not rebels, but rather forerunners of a new human race."

I mentioned in my article for this issue how the spiritual highlight of my life was the 2005 World Harmony Run when I ran across the country with the team, from St. Louis Missouri to Eugene Oregon. An unforgettable journey. Everything about that experience was magical, but perhaps the most significant part of it for me was handing the Peace Torch to the kids, and watching them pass it around, after each one had said a little silent prayer for peace.

The Peace Run is a symbol of self-transcendence, the 3100 Mile race is a symbol of self-transcendence, and Inspiration-Letters is a symbol, in another medium, of self-transcendence. Let us aspire in every way to unlock our infinite capacities within. The road beckons.

“Birthday Reflections”

by Jogyata Dallas

My 71st birthday is looming, on bad days an ominous dark cloud heralding decline and ushering in those rather anxious and thoughtful reflections that often accompany ageing. Anxiety at the knowledge of certain mortality, remorse at the many un-lived days and neglected opportunities, prayers for a quick demise out on a frisbee field or a painless farewell during dreamless sleep. The good days bring a growing urgency to value and more fully use the remaining years of living – or what my late father humorously called ‘cramming for finals’, the last sprint towards the finish line in the effort to make up for previously wasted time. A sense too of gratitude at having survived for so long. Although age only measures the years of the body, I listen for sounds and signs of my mortality like a nervous tenant lying awake, peering into the darkness, listening for the sounds of an intruder. Seated at my shrine this morning, I weigh up my life like an anxious book keeper, the credits and debits, gains and losses, trying to make sense of it, the baggage of feeling, desires, hurts, triumphs and follies, the whole patchwork quilt of existence.

Convention equates age with the physical body and the chronology of clock-measured years, yet we neglect the other truer criteria. On a friend’s past birthday Sri Chinmoy commented that the celebrant’s body was 45 years old, then went on to describe the age of his vital, his mind, his heart and finally his soul – the last being ‘birthless and deathless’. Against which of these aspects of our humanity should we describe our real age?

The sense of urgency that ageing brings tells us – more meditation please, with more intensity; more adventures, while still able to backpack over a mountain, tackle distances; more courage in saying ‘yes’ to life instead of the customary ‘no’; and being inspired by holiness, not giving up on happiness and the God-quest, revisiting all the endless undone things. Remembering Michaelangelo’s words: ‘The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it’. And in our failing to challenge ourselves and discard the treacheries of comfort, another’s admonition comes – ‘A ship in port is safe, but that’s not what ships are built for...’ Yes, to still dare, to sail the uncharted seas and not shrink from the great journeys and the secret tasks of our hearts.

One of the challenges of our chronological, calendar birthdays is to avoid making a pact with ageing, instead to reflect on the youthfulness of heart, mind and soul and even to launch an all-out crusade to upgrade one’s biological age. We may be 30 years of age, yet a decade sitting in front of a computer can confer the biological age of a 50 year old – or 80 years old and running marathons and scaling mountains.

Running and exercise are among the great antidotes to ageing, despite the protests of the comfort-loving body and its ever-reliable accomplice, the mind. Running especially is a kind of metaphor for life itself, the outer running and the challenges from mind and body a proving ground for the development of a resolute spirit, for self-belief and determination, for courage in tackling great challenges. Running confronts us with our limitations, then teaches us how to transcend them and to explore and go beyond. For many runners their sport prepares them well for greater things, illumining them about their strengths and frailties and teaching them how to dare, to find determination and self-belief. The great ultra-runner Scott Jurek comments: “I run because overcoming the difficulties of an ultramarathon reminds me that I can overcome the difficulties of life, that overcoming difficulties is life”. And Emil Zátopek – best known for winning three gold medals at the 1952 Summer Olympics – memorably said: “If you want to run, run a mile. If you want to experience a different life, run a marathon. If you want to talk to God, run an ultra.”

In his book ‘Endless Energy’ Sri Chinmoy writes: “Unless you touch something every day, it does not shine. Often I have told people to touch the furniture in their homes every day. As soon as you touch something it gets new life. If you are aware of something, immediately it shines and gets a new luminosity. If you have good health, if you touch your health every day, it gets new life.” “The body’s capacity and the soul’s capacity, the body’s speed and the soul’s speed, go together. The outer running reminds us of something higher and deeper – the soul – which is running along Eternity’s road.

Running and physical fitness help us both in our inner life of aspiration and in our outer life of activity.”

I remember years ago in the Australian outback watching the great flocks of dawn birds, thousands of them, wheeling and turning high up against the huge canvas of blue as though rejoicing at the rising sun and the gift of the new day. It was a spectacular aerial ballet, rehearsed over millions of years, their wings and plumage showing pink, then silver, then green as they banked and soared in exultation. The joy of running seems our own version of that euphoric flight, a celebration of life and that aspect of life which is movement and dynamism and freedom.

Don't we each have too in our lives a personal standard or feeling by which we measure our living and our satisfaction? For me running is a barometer of all this, the litmus test of my risings or fallings...it keeps me at a certain level, ensures that I maintain this personal standard. In the complex landscape of a busy and multi-faceted life, running is a constant, like eating, sleeping, meditating, an essential ingredient underpinning the physical and spiritual, and without this the other things might weaken or falter. Running is often centre-stage in the battle against our ignorance – it challenges the reluctant mind, the bed-loving body, the gravitational descent into age and infirmity and ordinariness – and masters them. Running, although in the physical, exercises the soul's further-reaching will.

I like to run early when the dawn comes, the changing apricots and pink pageantry of the sunrise sky, the city slumbering and quiet. This is the hour of the songsters, the thrushes and blackbirds – and sparrows rule the streets, squabble over scraps. In the human world only a few homeless ones are about, stirring in their damp blankets and newspaper cladding. Hunched on a park bench, sometimes they curse me – I am too privileged, too remote to be accepted.

Sri Chinmoy, running pioneer and inspirational athlete himself, has the last word: “When it is a matter of running, all the members of the family – the body, vital, mind and heart – have to work together. It is like a family party. The head of the family has invited all of the family members to come and eat. Through running, the soul wants to offer a feast to all its children. What running is doing is keeping the body, vital, mind and heart fit so that the soul can get complete happiness. The soul is happy when it sees that all its children have come to enjoy the feast.....” (ibid)

A Spiritual Odyssey in 47 miles

by Abhinabha Tangerman

In August 2014 I participated in my longest race to date, the 47 Mile Race (roughly 76 kilometres) which is organized in honour of Sri Chinmoy's birthday. The race was inaugurated in 1978 on the Master's 47th birthday and has been ran every year since then.

For many years I had wanted to run this race, but because I was so involved in marathon training I never did. I was afraid it would make me slow and demand so much recovery that the rest of my marathon season would be wasted. But after a disappointing marathon experience in 2013, I felt I was ready for a new challenge and so I decided finally to give the 47 Miles a try. From the beginning of June I started training for it, which meant doing more miles and lengthening the distance of my long runs, while at the same time easing up on the speedwork.

The training went quite well. To my surprise I really enjoyed the long runs, averaging between 45 and 55 kilometres. I've always liked to set my goals high, so secretly I was dreaming of breaking the course record, which had stood for over thirty years at five hours and nine minutes. My disciple brother-friend Vajin from New Zealand had tried for five years to break it, but hadn't succeeded so far.

Over the past four years Vajin's star had risen quickly in the ultra-running world. Every year he took five months off to run races all over the world, as a semi-professional athlete. He had won several high-

profile races and had become second in the Swiss Alpine marathon in 2013. So this year we would be running together on the 47 Mile course, a very exciting prospect.

The 47 Miles starts at midnight of August 27th and goes all through the night. Although the cut-off is ten hours, Vajin and I were hoping to finish in about half the time. An hour or so before the race started, I was mentally preparing in my room reading Sri Chinmoy's book "The Outer Running And The Inner Running". One passage had stuck with me, where Sri Chinmoy explains a breathing exercise while running.

"While running, when you inhale, you can consciously invoke divine energy to energise you. (...) Each time you breathe in, if you can repeat just one time God's Name, or 'Supreme', or whatever divine name or form comes to mind, then that spiritual thought will increase your purity. Either it turns into purity within you or it grants purity to you. Then, when you breathe out, feel that a new eagerness and a new promise are going out from you to the Universal Consciousness. This new promise is nothing short of your sincere willingness and eagerness to become a good and perfect instrument of the Supreme." (Sri Chinmoy, The Outer Running And The Inner Running, Agni Press, 1974)

I used this technique during the race and it helped me immensely. I was able to get in touch with a profound spiritual reality beyond the pain and onslaught of those 47 unforgiving miles. The race course was just as merciless as the distance. We had to run forty laps of nearly two kilometres. Each lap was one block around Jamaica High School on hard concrete and asphalt, followed by a lap on the high-school track where the counters were seated. The outside lap around the school included four or five sharp turns. Apart from that the course was constantly going slightly uphill or downhill, the only real flat part being the track.

Vajin and I stuck together until the marathon distance (which we crossed in a time of approximately 2:46) after which I could no longer keep up the pace and dropped away. We then each ran our own race.

Once left to myself the deeply spiritual element of the 47 Miles revealed itself to me. Powerful feelings of gratitude surged up from my heart. I was so moved by the sheer beauty and majesty of the race that tears welled up in my eyes and streamed down my face. I felt lifted by a higher force, the love of my guru tangible in every cell of my body. Although the physical pain became ever more real, the soles of my feet burning at every step I took, the divine energy that flowed parallel to it kept me going and going.

From the corner of my eye I saw Vajin breaking the old record by almost a minute. When I finally entered the track for my last lap, I saw the clock was close to five hours and twenty minutes. I mustered all my will power and started a powerful sprint around the track, powered by the enthusiastic cheers of spectating disciples and the joy of seeing the finish line approaching, and I finally crossed the line in 5:19:55.

My body ached all over, but my soul was jumping with joy and delight. I've never felt so exhilarated after finishing a race. Sri Chinmoy once said that running the 47 Miles was the best birthday present you could give him, and now I understood why. At the same time he had given me infinitely more in return. For the remainder of the day I swam in a sea of happiness and joy. Sri Chinmoy's divine love kept welling up inside and made that birthday celebration one of the most memorable of my discipleship.

“The Giver of Joy”

Suchana Cao

Something unusual to my sadhana took place a short time after we finished running the Peace Run in 1991. I say 'unusual' for it is recommended to discard any wishes or desires when we experience the spiritual life. But on that occasion, on the verge of celebrating my ten years on Guru's Path, I suddenly developed a strong urge to see Guru running in person.

Over the years, I had seen Guru's photos and read articles about his running career in the ashram in India and a long list of marathons and ultramarathons and Master Games that he had completed in the West. But my inner being was not apparently getting full satisfaction from those readings.

The time for August Celebrations arrived and my flight to New York was surcharged with much aspiration, joy and a sense of newness. The day after my arrival a good friend of mine told me something that put me in an inner shock: “You know, Guru has been going through such physical pain that he has decided to give up running.”

I could not believe my ears and my heartbeat was pressing my chest. I could not but feel a deep disappointment.

Anyway Guru's high consciousness and the fact of my being involved in so many different activities — from doing selfless-service in the kitchen to singing songs and training for the 47 miles— kept my wish away for a while.

One of the special days during Celebrations is called 'Sports Day' and I was eager to participate in the one hundred meters and seven miles. I felt lucky to see Guru walking here and there while meditating powerfully on the track. The one hundred meters race was announced for seniors and Guru walked painfully to the start. He was wearing yellow sport clothes, very bright! When the starting order was given, my joy knew no bounds! I was seeing Guru running in person! So much pain he had! But he had both a lot of courage and determination to get to the finish line second or third!

Nothing remained of longing. It was all fulfilment and delight within. The Giver of Joy would inspire me to keep on running so that I could finish my first marathon a decade later.

Shanti Gratitude

"My dearest Guru is the Runner, the Coach and the Result"

by Sharani Robins

As a regular night owl and a very rare morning person, I had settled into a routine completely unusual for me. I was rising early to meditate and regularly going out for a morning run - or should I qualify it as a jog perhaps - as a standard practice. With this foundation of almost daily jogging and longer runs on the weekend under my belt, I found myself in an unfamiliar position during a week-long visit to New York for Celebrations. This usual non-athlete could actually study the parts of the program that listed various races and consider entering them or at least entering them without imagining I might be walking well more than half of the race's duration.

At the very end of Celebrations there was a longer race that started around 7AM and involved a simultaneous running of a distance of your choice of either 5 or 7 miles. I can count on only a few fingertips the number of times I have entered this longer race held only during Celebrations so I might even be remembering the distances and the time it started imprecisely. And just to set the record

straight these were not the only sporting events during Celebrations - there was also the public 2 mile races on Saturday mornings, the 12 hour walk in April, the 47 mile race in August, Sports Day and sometimes Games Day as well.

Back to the 5 and 7 milers - I remember setting the alarm clock with trepidation the night before because it was already so late. When it rang loudly in my ear the next morning, I fought an enormous urge to just go back to sleep and forget the whole notion! I did get up earlier than normal and headed out to the race, truthfully still half-asleep. The course for the race traversed the outskirts of Jamaica High School in the Queens, New York neighborhood where Celebrations is held.

Once there, I felt more awake and reminded myself of how good it felt to be outdoors early in the morning enjoying the challenge to transcend myself, feel more fit and enjoy the camaraderie of a sporting event with fellow disciples.

Then Guru himself arrived and every moment took on a heightened inner dimension of blessings and joy. I was extra happy that I didn't go back to sleep like I had wanted and that I was out in the field as a race participant instead of my more usual vantage point from the sidelines. Guru watched us, his disciples, for the remainder of the races and handed out prasad (blessed food) to us afterwards.

While the races were still in progress, all of a sudden a keen sense of Guru interacting with us as a coach came over me. As I continued the race, I was so inspired by this notion that Guru was like a personal coach to each one of us on an inner level as our Guru and also on an outer level through the inspiration of his own example in the field of sports such as running, tennis and weightlifting. I imagined that he was celebrating all of our achievements and attempts to go forward in the field of physical fitness. I felt as if he emanated a tangible encouragement, enthusiasm and joy for each person that ran past him and that we were the luckiest people.

By the time I finished the race in a rather exhausted state, that inner experience was less vivid as I approached Guru to take prasad. Then as I received the blessed food, Guru smiled at me so powerfully and vividly. His smile inwardly flooded me with divine love, blessings and encouragement. I will never forget this experience. It stands out to this day as one of the most special smile blessings I ever received.

As I walked away, I suddenly remembered my earlier sense of Guru being a coach and encourager to all of us and I knew for certain that this blessing smile during prasad was his way of saying, Yes it is true - I am your coach and I am a coach to each and every one of my spiritual children.

"Who is my coach?
He who inspires me
Before I run.

Who is my coach?
He who aspires in and through me
During my run.

Who is my coach?
He who corrects and perfects me
For a better future run."

Sri Chinmoy, Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants, part 3□, Agni Press, 1983

“Letter from Northland”

by Dhiraja McBryde

Helen Macdonald’s ‘H is for Hawk’: the President of the United States read it (the 44th), I read it, a lot of other people read it – Book of the Year winner.

Helen Macdonald writes in that book of the death of her father and of her response to that death – a collapse only halted, and ultimately reversed, by the experience of training a goshawk in the ancient art of falconry.

Many of us who picked up her book must have thought of the book we read many years before – ‘The Goshawk’ by T H White, and there, in Helen Macdonald’s book, we found, as a sub-plot running through her own accounts, an examination of T H White – his psychology, his inadequacies as a falconer, the sad thread of his life.

Love – the saints and savants, the avatars and haruspices tell us – is the force that runs the universe. Peel back the madness of human affairs, strip away the veil of atoms in the void, and there we find the eternal systole and diastole of love: the love of a father and daughter, the love one feels for a wild hawk, for the beauty of an early morning in the hills above Cambridge, the love for an activity, the love of Love itself that they name the Supreme.

Helen Macdonald writes with some bemusement of T H White’s greatest love: of ‘falling in love ... with a countryside’, but it is not so bemusing.

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We grind up the steep, switch-backed road of the Mangamuka Gorge in the dark. The trees – toatoa, kauri, rimu, rata, puriri – crowd in around the road. By day the bees collect the honeydew secreted by the scale insects as they feed on the sap of the trees. We wind down the windows and the sweet smell floods the car.

... Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

We stop at the top of the gorge and stand in the dark on the side of the road. A silken pressure presses silently in on our ears – only the tiny crackle of a hundred billion stars chorusing across the black, night sky and the owl-hoot of a distant ruru can be heard.

The demi-god Maui fished up the North Island from the abyss of the primal ocean when darkness covered the deep. Te Ika a Maui – the Fish of Maui – we call it, its body petrified into the mountains and plains and rivers of our country. And Northland is Te Hiku o Te Ika a Maui – the Tail of the Fish of Maui. Northland: ambiguous, artless, calm, chill, dark, earthy, elusive, ephemeral, humble, imperfect, inconspicuous, indigenous, intuitive, inward, lowly, secluded, simple, tentative, unassuming, understated, unencumbered, unrefined, unstudied, womb-like.

Tomorrow I will stand on the broad, flat sands of Te Oneroa a Tohe at the start line of The Te Houtaewa Challenge Ultra marathon.

There is no better way to experience place than to run. When we walk, we observe the land through which we pass, and when we stand, we may note in detail or survey a panorama, but when we run, we participate in the landscape. As everything moves – from the cascade of sub-atomic particles to the shadow of clouds along the sand to the billowing of galaxies – so too we move.

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There is nowhere one can find more clearly expressed the idea of running as an aspect of spirituality than in the words of Sri Chinmoy and in his actions too and in the actions of his students and of the Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team, but it is not an entirely novel idea. St Paul wrote: 'Run in such a way as to take the prize. Everyone who competes in the games trains with strict discipline'; the Navajo speak of running as 'joining in the motion which is at the heart of life itself'; the lung-gom-pa monks of Tibet ran without touching the ground, their eyes set upon a star; and the monks of Mount Hiei rack up a startling tally of miles ... in straw sandals.

And in twenty-first-century New Zealand it is no longer unusual for public races to begin or end with prayer – sign of the inherent sacredness of the ancient art of running. In our post-religious age where 42% of the population has no use for such things, these prayers are, of course, never in English, but always in Maori – the aboriginal peoples ever the custodians and guardians of our deepest realities. And runners will mutter an 'amene' when the kaumatua has finished his karakia. For what is spirituality if not oneness and peace, and what does running serve if not these?

And one race more than others.

In the 1830s there lived a great chief of the Te Apouri tribe – Te Houtaewa. They say that Te Houtaewa was eight-foot tall and they say that he could run as no one else could run. He ran the length of Te Oneroa a Tohe, the beach known now as 'Ninety-Mile Beach', and stole kumara – sweet potato – from the tribe at the southern end of the beach and he ran back between the turnings of the tide. It was a great feat. And it led to war. And it led, ultimately, to the death of Te Houtaewa and to the death of others. In the last years of the second millennium, the local tribe would establish an ultra marathon to run down the endless sand of Te Oneroa a Tohe from the land of Te Apouri to the land of Te Rarawa, and each runner would carry a kumara – would return that which had been stolen to those who had been wronged, an act of reparation, of reconciliation, of restitution – the feat serving peace and oneness where once it served division and war. It is a race whose very purpose is the essence of spirituality.

Few people run the race – a handful. Each year I stand at the start line at the Bluff and the beach stretches off over the horizon before us. To the right: the endless ocean. Above: the vast sky. The wide expanse of beach rucks to the left into a skyline of dunes. In this minimalist land, this mythical expanse of Platonic forms, we bow our heads and pray together to the atua, the cosmic entities of sky and land and sea, and to the ancestors who lived and died here and to the Supreme behind it all – Io-matua, the parent of all things, Io-mata-ngaro, Io-the-hidden-face. We pray that they open the way before us and guide and protect us and that they receive our gratitude.

Kotahitanga – Togetherness, Manaakitangi – Hospitality, Wairunatanga – Spirituality.

And so we run, beneath the great nuclear fireball of the Sun that rises over the sand hills, 63 kilometres into the haze of distance to the far hill of Ahipara. And at the end, when the race director at the conclusion of the prize giving, says 'We will end with a karakia', and the old kaumatua comes forward and leans on his stick and begins to chant, our hearts are 63 kilometres wide and contain only beauty and peace.

“Running - One way to the Goal”

by Arpan DeAngelo

Just as we have goals when we run from one point to another, sometimes as quickly as possible, our life is a series of goals from beginning to end.

The newborn infant cries and cries until he achieves his or her goal of appeasing his hunger by being fed.

The young child gets up and falls down countless times until he finally can walk from one end of the room to the other.

The student studies each subject until he finally passes the course and moves onto the next level.

The experiences of taking on challenges, both large and small, seems to naturally offer the human psyche a sense of fulfilment and joy.

Undoubtedly, joy, satisfaction and happiness are some of the most important and meaningful experiences of life on this amazingly unique planet earth.

So what do these qualities have to do with running? Why do some of us create running goals which are quite challenging while others cannot even think about or relate to this type of experience in their life to give them joy or satisfaction.

To some people running is just at times a necessity while to others it may be all about self-transcendence, or trying to go beyond previous achievements. Once a goal is reached then one can strive for yet another greater goal. The running goals are usually defined in terms of distance or speed. In order to achieve these goals while running one must have one-pointed determination.

In the words of Sri Chinmoy, "If you run forward with one-pointed determination, limitations and desires will fade away from your life. Aspiration is the only answer."

So running can help us not only to develop one-pointed determination, which is useful and practical in many aspects of our daily lives, but it also can help us create a sense of 'aspiration', or a yearning for a higher meaning and purpose in life.

In this way we can define running in spiritual terms, a striving for a goal which is beyond the physical body and mind, an 'inner running' so to speak. These two aspects or dimensions of running can complement and help each other.

In the words of Sri Chinmoy:

"The outer run
And the inner run
Are two complementary souls.
They help each other
Tremendously."

Like most children I just naturally ran around for fun and games, organized sports, etc. Running just seems like one of the most natural things to do for the human being who is able to finally walk as a very young child. It does not take long to graduate from walking to running within the first year of life for most children.

But as we grow older some of us tend to run only out of necessity like catching a bus or running away from danger. But to decide to take running a step further, so to speak, there must be a motivation which compels us to run on a regular basis and to create goals that usually involve speed and distance.

Since time immemorial it seems that there always was a portion of humanity that got tremendous satisfaction out of creating running goals for themselves and challenging others to those goals as well. Races of all types of distances have always been a part of the human social experience from the humble school playgrounds to the great Olympic venues.

Challenging others in running, as in other sports, seems to create the most excitement and motivation for people to transcend themselves and to train more seriously. But for others the motivation is more about challenging themselves and even the goal itself. In the following poem by Sri Chinmoy we clearly feel the aspect of running that goes beyond competing with others:

"Run!
You can easily challenge
The pride of frightening distance."

Running to me has always been a mixture of challenging myself and at the same time being inspired by others who wish to challenge themselves. Even by racing with others we can try to take this experience as the highest form of prayer. To some, the highest prayer is, 'Let God's Will be done.'

This lofty spiritual sentiment is expressed perfectly in this poem by Sri Chinmoy:

"In the inner and outer race
I will not say,
'God wants me to win',
But
'Let God's will be done'."

On a spiritual level for some people this is the highest goal of life and running is just one way to that Goal.

Retirement not granted

Tejvan Pettinger

I was recently invited to my old school to give a lecture on economics. I think my lecture was well received, in that I just about managed to keep the students awake and stave off any pre-lunch rebellion. But, as part of my invitation and introduction, the school had dug into its archive of old cross country races to find the results of a certain young Mr Pettinger. They proudly pointed out I used to beat a certain boy (now the Deputy Head) before the tables were turned and he started beating me. After that date I disappeared from the archive results, never to return

I found that amusing because I remember that race very well - a defining moment in my sporting life because I actually came dead last and vowed never to do competitive sport again. I reasoned if you come last and get beaten by the likes of Mr Darcy (now deputy head), you obviously don't have the genes for competitive sport. I slinked away from running through muddy fields and put my trainers in the cupboard.

However, that was not quite the end of the story. A few years later with school memories very much receding into the background, I found my Guru and running enthusiast Sri Chinmoy had very different ideas. Retirement at the age of 16 was definitely not for Guru's Path!

I retook to running with the enthusiasm and evangelism of a true believer. In fact, so much enthusiasm I picked up a bad knee injury. I remember well spending my first two celebrations hobbling around with a bad knee. So much for inspiring running stories.

But, as we know, every cloud can have a silver lining. The experience of the knee injury encouraged me to gently pick up cycling and give that a go instead. That turned out much better than expected and suggested my theories of genetic failings were limited to say the least. It just show you should be careful what you assume when 16 years of age.

Running

by Mahiruha Klein

Sometimes I wish I wasn't a lazy, daytime television watching couch potatoe. From now on I've decided to be a couch strawberry!

But seriously folks, this path is a running path, in every way, a path of self-transcendence in speed and speed in self-transcendence. I'm always making plans, making goals, making lists, trying to see how much I can get done in a given day, or in a week, or a month. Life has to have goals, otherwise we have no direction, there is no movement in life.

The question comes: what kinds of goals should I have? What should I aspire for? What's worth dedicating my precious limited time to?

I think an answer can be found in one of Guru's aphorisms, from Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees:

"All serious daring
Begins in the depths
Of the heart."

Sri Chinmoy, Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, part 23, Agni Press, 2001)

Guru says that if meditate on the heart, we can contact the soul, and the soul is all unhorizoned will-power. Therefore, by meditating more on the heart, we can bathe in the light and love of the soul, we can ascertain what projects deserve our time, concern and commitment, and we can also acquire the focus and determination and perserverance we need to accomplish those things.

The most important thing is to accompany the soul, be the companion of your own soul. Guru writes:

"Every day
God wants me to spend
At least four hours
In my soul-company."

Sri Chinmoy, My life's every day hope-blossoms and promise-trees, Agni Press, 2001

How do you remain in the company of your soul? Through spiritual disciplines and practices, like praying, meditating, singing, chanting, reading, selfless service and mixing with other aspiring seekers.

Guru made an interesting comment about singing. He said that if you sing his songs most soulfully, most prayerfully, that this can give you better results than your own highest meditation. If we take his songs most seriously, then that surpasses even our best meditation.

Perhaps there are other activities, like reading or running, that can also help us to enter into a deep meditative state.

I have always been fascinated by this question and answer from Guru's book "The Outer Running and the Inner Running"

Question: Many great athletes tell of having experiences of higher consciousness in the form of visions of their performances or oneness with the elements. Where do these experiences come from?

Sri Chinmoy: "It is not because these athletes are very spiritually developed that they are having higher experiences. Many people practice spirituality and do not get them. So how can they get these kinds of experiences? Sometimes it happens that God tries to inspire people in a very special way, at a very special hour. These athletes have killed themselves practising sports for so many years, and now God wants to show them that there are higher realities in life. He wants to tell them, "Do not halt, do not stop here! Now you are doing something for name and fame. If you come in first, you will get joy, and if you come in last, you will feel miserable. But there is another world. In that world, even while you are doing something, you get tremendous joy. Here you are thinking that there are so many things you have to do, so many things in front of you, and you feel that you cannot do them all. But in that other world, you will not only be able to do many more things at one time, but you will also get joy while you are doing those things. You will not have to wait for the results to get joy." - Sri Chinmoy. Continue reading at [The outer running and the inner running](#)

Guru expanded on this talk in a very short poem:

"To those who work very, very hard
In any field of life,
God will eventually give inner experiences
Unimaginable and undeserved
To tell them:
Do not halt!
Do not stop here!
There is something infinitely higher,
Far beyond your present life."

Sri Chinmoy, Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants, part 57, Agni Press, 1984

On our path, inner speed and outer achievement go together. I get the sense that many of the disciples have been cultural figures, writers, and athletes in our past lives. We may not have been spiritual in the strict sense of the term, but I get the sense that the people who are drawn to this path are often those who have achieved something for the world. This is just my speculation, but maybe Guru called souls who have tried to be excellent in art, in politics, in music, in sports, and offered his light and compassion to them, and encouraged them to put the same energy into spirituality that they gave to these outer endeavors.

Guru said something very interesting in this regard, in response to a seeker's question about acting:

Question: I am studying to be an actor at the Drama School here at Yale. Is it possible to follow the spiritual path and also have this earthly value, or must I totally devote myself to the spiritual path and be devoid of everything else?

Sri Chinmoy: "This is a very wrong conception of spirituality. True spirituality never, never negates our earthly life and our significant earthly values. True spirituality only simplifies our earthly life; it purifies, illumines our human existence. We are now in ignorance. We know that we are caught in the meshes of ignorance, but spirituality shows us how we can come out of ignorance, how we can free ourselves from the bondage that we have consciously or unconsciously created. If you want to be an actor, spirituality will never prevent you from being one. On the contrary, spirituality will inspire you in your acting line. Spirituality never negates. It is like your private tutor. It will teach you privately and secretly to be successful and meaningful in your outer, as well as your inner, life. Nothing has to be given up. Everything has to be changed and transformed. If you give up, then what are you going to achieve? If you give up this world, what are you going to do? It is here on earth that you have to realise God, reveal God and fulfil God."

Sri Chinmoy, AUM Vol. 4, No. 6, Jan. 27, 1969, AUM Centre Press, 1969

Maybe this is what makes Guru special, even among the great Masters- his philosophy advocates the full acceptance of the outer life, with its sturdy foundation in the wisdom of the inner life. Let us accept the world, but let us also soulfully pray and meditate so that we can know what our destined role is. Then alone we can be inwardly and outwardly fulfilled. It is a lofty vision.

The highlight of my spiritual life was my participation in the 2005 World Harmony Run. It struck me how the poorest neighborhoods always extended us the warmest welcome. I was running through a trailerpark in Oklahoma, when a woman in a denim dress ran out of her trailer and gave me the biggest smile and shouted words of encouragement. She was holding her baby girl. Another time, in Texas, I was running past a gas station, and after I had ran a half a mile past it, I heard this heavy breathing behind it, and I turned around and I saw one of the attendants, a teenage boy, puffing behind me. He had run after me all that way just to give me some water in a styrofoam cup!

In Arizona, I remember Arpan and I were driving along a rural highway, past some huge, strange rock formations, and we saw on the horizon a huge rock that looked just like the meditating Buddha in his early years. I never felt closer to Guru than I did on the World Harmony Run (now called the Peace Run). If you can manage to go, please go. It's the spiritual opportunity of a lifetime.

Before each of my daily runs during my five-week tour with the team, I said the following two poems, with which I'd like to conclude:

232. I run and run

With a happy speed
I run and run,
To cheerfully feed
My human race,
To transform
My human face,
To begin
A new journey's course,
To salute
The sunlit Source.

Sri Chinmoy, A soulful cry versus a fruitful smile, Agni Press, 1977

"Every day, every hour,
I soulfully salute
The Captain of my heart
So that He will make my life
A choice instrument of His."

Sri Chinmoy, Enthusiasm, part 8, 2005