

Inspiration-Letters – With Guru

Edition 26

The Universal Guru

By Mahiruha Klein

In the spring and summer of 2003, Guru announced that he would like to honour University Professors as part of his "Lifting Up the World With A Oneness-Heart" program. I was excited to hear that because I was still close to many of my Professors, and the idea of getting them to meet Guru was very exciting to me. I meditated on it, and then approached Ketan who was organizing the programs, and he liked my idea.

When I told my Professors that Guru wanted to meet them, honour them and lift them, they were ecstatic! I didn't expect they would even know who Guru was! They were in such awe of Guru and were so excited to meet him. Dominick, my philosophy Professor said it was "incredible" that he would get to meet Guru.

It's funny, I couldn't find a room or hall on campus with a high enough ceiling for the lift! At first I wanted to book the student centre but that had been leased out for the local summer camp already. I didn't think there were any options so I considered cancelling the event. Then, I remembered Sri Aurobindo's famous line from Savitri: "Fate shall be changed by an unchanging Will." So I went to the Residence Life office and asked to see the blueprints of all the academic halls on campus. Finally, I found one with a high enough ceiling- the beautiful Fine Arts Theatre!

At first I had just planned to limit the function to my eight favourite Professors. But then, they kept recommending to me other Professors who had done special things, whom they felt we could also honour. Soon, I had thirty-four Professors! I couldn't believe it! I was so thrilled that Guru's Light would touch and permeate my little University!

I remember a week before the lift, I walked past Guru and he gave me such a big blessingful smile and I knew he was so pleased that I had gathered so many Professors.

The night before the lift, I was waiting at the Oneness-Fountain-Heart when one of my co-workers said there was a phone call for me, I took the call and it was Nishtha, one of Guru's attendants. She said Guru wanted to talk to me. There was a pause and I heard Guru's voice:

"Muddis!" (That's how Guru said "Morris"!)

"Yes, Guru," I said.

He told me he was in a lot of pain, and that he could barely walk, and he didn't know what to do because the lift was scheduled for tomorrow and that he would have to use a cane. He said people would be looking at him, using a cane, and that he was in so much pain.

I said to him, "I do not want you to come down to my college if you are in terrible pain."

There was a pause. Guru seemed surprised. He said that he was more than in terrible pain, he was in excruciating agony. He was so grateful to me that I didn't mind rescheduling, even at the last minute. For my part, I was grateful because that was more or less the only conversation with Guru I ever had!

I remember the next day, in the evening, when the lift was supposed to take place, I saw a big double rainbow in the sky. I felt that was Guru's way of thanking me for understanding his situation.

I called all the Professors and they were very understanding, and we simply rescheduled for ten days later.

I remember the crackling excitement in the auditorium. Dominick, my beloved philosophy Professor, was one of the first to arrive. He was leaning forward in his chair, his head was a little bowed, and he was just looking at Guru, utterly fascinated.

All the other Professors arrived, and there was a moment of unearthly silence in the auditorium, and then Guru began playing his esraj, his dearest instrument. He played so hauntingly, so sublimely. We all felt uplifted into some other clime.

Then Guru offered the following prayer, if memory serves:

"God's Compassion-Smiles
And my aspiration-cries
Sing and play,
Play and sing,
Life after life."

Some of these Professors had just lost loved ones, spouses or children. And some of them died less than a year after Guru lifted them. I like that idea of God's Compassion-smiles playing forever with the tears of our aspiration-hearts.

Then Sanjay, the MC, spoke eloquently about Guru's "Lifting Up the World with a Oneness-Heart" programme and we showed a short video of previous recipients.

Then Guru began lifting the Professors, in pairs, men with men, women with women. He himself put the medals on all the men, and he asked Padmasini to garland the women.

Some of the Professors were openly weeping when Guru lifted them. Others were most serious up until the moment Guru upraised them, when they gave the most surprised and beautiful smiles.

I remember when it was Dominick's turn to be lifted. Guru meditated for a few extra seconds, perhaps almost a minute before lifting him and the Professor to his right, and he lifted him very high. Then afterwards Guru put the medal around Dominick's neck with such affection and gave him the sweetest smile. Before the lift I had shown Guru a poem I had written about Dominick and Guru told me that he really wanted to lift him.

When two of the women Professors were ascended the platform to be lifted, one of them whispered to the other, "I am so happy I am being lifted with you."

I saw a photograph of the audience after the lift, and some of the Professors were absolutely in trance. I can't use any other word, they were just rapt in trance. I am so grateful to them for their receptivity.

Guru asked me, through one of his attendants, if there was anyone else in the audience I felt should be lifted and I said yes, there was my grade school hearing therapist who helped me so much from grades three to twelve. She did everything for me: she inspired my love of reading, made sure I was always able to sit in the front of the class to hear the teacher, visited me in the hospital when I had frequent surgeries as a kid. She was very happy and honoured to be lifted.

At the end of the program, Sanjay asked the Professors if they would like to make any comments, and one Professor, she taught me both Russian and English, said that she was so happy that "Sri Chinmoy is continuing Morris' education. I can't think of anything better for Morris."

Dominick thanked Sri Chinmoy for his "fantastic" work for so many countries. When he walked past Guru, he raised his arm high in a salute to Guru, and Guru folded his hands to him.

Then Guru called me up to the stage. I didn't know for what, I assumed he wanted to lift me because his attendants had me stand on the scale, so I walked to the lifting apparatus, but Guru said "No." So I went up to Guru and Guru said, "I am not lifting you. I am honouring you." Then he placed a medal around my neck and had me face the audience and the whole auditorium gave me a standing ovation! Guru also clapped.

It went on for about a minute and then Guru asked me to sit down again and then he folded his hands and entered into silent meditation and his eyes went white. Some of the Professors also folded their hands. Then Guru bowed to everyone and left the stage and everyone clapped for him.

I will be grateful to Guru for honouring my University forever.

Being with Guru

By Purnakama Rajna

Just recently I was watching a video of Sri Chinmoy meditating. It was a simple video; just Sri Chinmoy in deep meditation at Aspiration Ground, while some of his students sang what he called the Long Song in the background.

But the moment the video began with the camera focused on a close up of Guru's face peacefully, yet intensely meditating, and his students began to sing, I was instantly transported back to those hot August days when we would sit at Aspiration Ground for hours watching Guru engage in a myriad of activities; meditating, singing, composing songs, playing tennis, lifting weights.

It was thrilling and comforting to know that even though more than ten years have passed since our Guru left this physical world, I was still able to feel that indescribable and wonderful feeling of being in his presence.

I was never a disciple who had any kind of outer relationship with Guru. He never called me out of a Prasad line to speak to me or ask me a question, and that's the way it was for many of us. There were just too many of us for that to be a reality, but that didn't mean that we couldn't feel his inner blessings, (which he gave out lavishly) most profoundly.

In the blink of an eye Guru could send you a silent blessing that would leave you in bliss, almost unaware of the outer world. I remember this happening on several occasions, but two in particular stand out for me. The first incident happened on a Christmas trip in New Zealand.

At the beginning of each section of the Christmas trip, Guru would sell cute little notebooks and sign them with your name, his name, and he would also usually draw some birds. These notebooks were for writing down the daily prayers that Guru dictated every morning. It was also another way that Guru could bestow individual blessings on us in a very sweet way. We were allowed to stand quite close to him as he did this, which was equally as wonderful as having him sign your name.

The Christmas trip in New Zealand was no exception. Guru sat in a large comfortable armchair, we stood in line in front of him, and he called us up one by one. Just standing in the line-up provided one with a fantastic meditation!

It was my turn and I moved towards him holding up my name for him to see. He smiled and motioned for me to come a little closer, which I obediently did.

Just moving those few steps forward changed everything.

I was transported to a world of purity that even the most beautiful, pure and precious flower could never encompass. There are no words to describe Guru's aura as it enveloped me. At one-point Guru stopped writing, looked at me and smiled, and drew some birds, then he handed me my beautiful new notebook imbued with the fragrance of his aura of purity.

I practically floated back to my seat, and that feeling, that sublime purity remained with me for the rest of the evening.

Another rare treat was receiving Prasad directly from Guru's hand. Like with the notebooks it was an opportunity for Guru to give us additional personal blessings.

One particular time I was in NY, and I was dealing with some inner issues that were making life difficult and causing me distress.

At the end of the function, Guru was handing out aloo pie for prasad, and while I was thrilled that Guru would be personally handing out prasad, I was also feeling so horrible that I felt less than worthy of receiving prasad from him, and instead I wanted to run and hide. But my soul won the battle over the mind and I got into the line with everyone else. I was desperately trying to be soulful, but not really succeeding.

Soon it was my turn.

I looked at Guru and he looked at me as he handed me the aloo pie. In that brief exchange which took only a mere second, all of the angst, worry and concern that had been torturing me simply vanished.

That was the power and magic of Guru's physical presence.

He could transform your consciousness, your entire being with a mere glance without ever uttering a word.

I am so grateful to have the hundreds of videos of Guru, to remind me and bring me back to that place, that feeling of being in his presence.

But it is those sweet, quiet, brief and transformative encounters that I truly miss the most.

One Summer Afternoon

By Jogyata Dallas

One summer afternoon back in the 80's, Guru visited the home of a Japanese student - from memory to honour the disciple's birthday. There was a swimming pool in the sloping terraced gardens and Guru, fully dressed in shorts and shirt, slipped in to the water. After some laps walking back and forward and a little quizzing of his small, delighted audience Guru climbed out, then invited the Japanese birthday celebrant into the pool. Then he invited all of the several other Japanese disciples who were present to also enter the pool. There was much merriment, the cultural and physical distinctions between Japanese and non-Japanese disciples clearly blurring as not only the eligible but several bogus and very un-Asian bodies plunged into the brimming waters, fancying Oriental connections and enjoying their Master's indulgence.

After some time, Guru invited into the pool any disciples who felt they had had a Japanese incarnation or felt a soul's connection with Japan. That was it! Without hesitation the entire gaggle of fully dressed remaining spectators surged forward, girls and boys, some diving dramatically in and sending tidal waves of water over the sides, others flopping or slithering in, a melee of current and former oriental souls - though some very clearly neither - enjoying this romp with the Master. Guru sat on the bank in his wet clothing, smiling benignly at the

unrestrained antics of his children in the packed pool, their shrieks and splashings and laughter filling the lazy afternoon.

Mirth and Meditation

Guru was very inventive and very practical in training us. In response to the common lament that it is hard to be meditative and spiritual in the 'ordinariness' of daily life, he once conducted the following exercise. He would tell a joke, at which we would all smile and laugh - then He asked us to immediately go up into our highest meditative consciousness. After some minutes, He again told another joke, and again we were all invited to laugh, to 'come down'. Following this second joke we were instructed to once more 'go into our highest' And then another joke, back down into the mind, the world, the commonplace, followed by another effort to soar up into the soul, the silence, the eternal.

This happened a number of times – Guru's jokes and then his lofty meditations, up, down, up, down... We were learning to go from laughter and the everyday up into the sacred, the God-conscious, to quickly reconnect with heart and spirit - and being shown that these two worlds are only one world, a thin veil apart. We were running up and down the ladder of consciousness, from mind to soul to mind to soul, being shown that inner peace, stillness, soulfulness are quickly accessible through practice and intent, that meditation can be found and practised anywhere. All of our life is our spiritual life and through proper understanding and practice we can consciously part the veil, bring mindfulness and spirit to each passing moment, stay close to the Self while living in this challenging and changing world.

Golden Days at Agni Press

Sometime in the '80's, I remember doing 50 hours of non-stop selfless service with a group of disciples at Agni Press. It was our tribute to one of Guru's multifarious feats and a practical way of catching up on a small mountain of Guru's unpublished writings.

The basic procedure was - keep circling anti-clockwise around the collating table for two days, thumbing page after page (preferably in numerical order for an easier read) into a stack; now dunk collated pages into an electric fry pan of hot glue, being careful not to inhale the toxic fumes or immerse any part of yourself or of the book other than the spine; now carefully glue-bind on the cover; then dispatch book upstairs to the guillotine for a trim. Presto!

But we all know that deepening fatigue and diminishing capacity go hand in hand, and only one day into our marathon the problems started. Hypoglycaemic from an excess of cola and snacks, senses stampeded by dim light, zero ventilation, an avalanche of Annam Brahma takeaways and coffee pick-me-ups; and hallucinating from the pungent vapours rising from the hot glue, we started on a downward spiral into rampant inefficiency, peaking in occasional

major blunders. Fatigue started to play havoc in all areas of the operation - collation foul-ups/too much glue/not enough glue/no glue!/hot glue burns/covers upside down/glue spilt on cover/chapatti roll-up stains on cover/wrong cover entirely/not trimmed straight/not trimmed at all!

I was voted disciple least likely to cut off his hand on the guillotine and found myself appointed chief book trimmer - as the hours wore on into days and those endless sugary pick-me-ups failed to even dent my growing incapacity, the book trimming slowly turned into a nightmare, whole boxes of misshapen, non-rectangular, asymmetrical Flower Flames, each splendidly unique and different from the last!

Guru called in once to check on our progress. I remember clambering up the basement stairs in a fog of fatigue - halfway up a pair of bare brown legs materialized in front of my eyes and I looked up to see Guru, smiling down at me.

One week after our selfless service marathon was over, Guru called for our boxes of books to be sold. Someone chose one of the worst examples of my handiwork and placed this sample on Guru's table. Guru picked up the strangely asymmetrical, almost rhomboidal book, pages gummed up by glue and barely able to be opened, and made one cryptic comment that was like a dagger to my heart 'Oi!'

Even now, our books are out there in their hundreds, priceless originals from those Golden Days, books with repeat or absent pages, with entire chapters missing, cut at rakish angles and with rivulets of excess glue still there on the inside cover. Each has a story to tell of a willing heart, a triumphant purpose and a terrible sense of timing.

Angels and Elevators, and China Memories

by Sharani Robins

I was in China for a whole month on a Christmas Trip at the end of 2004. It seemed a radical cultural departure from my native U.S. roots and I even listened to Chinese language learning audios while driving to and from work leading up to the trip. Nihao! Even though we didn't pass through Beijing except for the flight in and out, on our way back we made sure to visit the Great Wall, of course!

While the Christmas Trip with Guru included many highlights, what I remember most is an experience that might be classified as a morality tale.

Many of Sri Chinmoy's students were present in Qingdao, the city in China where the second half of my stay took place. It was right over Christmas and although we were spread out of over two adjacent hotels, precisely at Christmas the hotel administrators asked if our group could vacate the meeting hall we were using and meet instead in the neighbouring hotel. The prior day an announcement was made asking everyone who had already been on the trip for a while to allow the newer arrivals to have precedence in the smaller meeting room we switched over to.

My Christmas trip roommate and I had indeed already arrived in China at the previous location before Qingdao so we chattered about what kind of field trip we might go on instead of attending the meditation function inside the hotel's temporary meeting venue.

That next morning as we went to go down the elevator to leave for our planned sightseeing, none other than Guru himself was inside the elevator when it opened on our floor. This took us by surprise and we stood there riveted to the floor, feeling slightly shy and delighted at the same time, and not quite sure what to do next.

He invited us to enter the elevator and then asked which floor the changed meeting room was located on. We both experienced a moment of silent panic because we didn't even pay attention to those details since we were opting out on attending. Luckily my roommate scanned the description of what was on each floor inside the elevator and followed an inner prompting to press the button to go the floor she was guessing was correct.

Sure enough! The elevator door opened and right there were some of the attendants, waiting expectantly for Guru. He exited the elevator to the floor where the meditation function would be held and we continued down to the lobby to enjoy our day trip.

Typically on a Christmas Trip, meals are served buffet style in the hotel where many of us are staying while on the trip. When we came back to have lunch in the hotel, some Canadian disciples said to me, isn't it nice that Guru wrote songs with your name, the word Sharani in it today? Wasn't it perhaps three songs? We said we didn't realize it because we had obediently made other plans to help out the dilemma of the smaller meeting room for that day. Then as we investigated further, it turned out that most people had decided that the announcement to not attend the function wasn't really necessary to abide by and they had piled into the room almost the same as usual even though the space was decidedly smaller.

As soon as I heard about how many songs had been written in Bengali including my spiritual name and taught by Guru at the function we missed, the imperative was obvious! The tradition over the years was to give a prasad item whenever Guru composed and taught a song with your name in it so first I had to find out if I needed to give 3 items for 3 songs or if one would be sufficient. The sentiment was that one would work so off we went in a taxi to the local Chinese equivalent of a department store combined with a grocery store.

One of the songs had the word "oishi" in it which means heaven.

Tomar oishi sharani
ajike dakiche amai dakiche
Mor dharanir ghor karagar tomar ashani nachiche

All of the sudden I noticed individual sized bags of marshmallows that had the word oishi on the package. I knew that this was the item I was meant to get but how to get 400 bags of them to have enough for prasad? We tried to speak to the staff in the store but I certainly had not

become a Chinese speaker despite my self-guided lessons in advance of the trip. And they did not speak English...

Then suddenly at the end of the aisle where we were debating how to proceed, my roommate sees a Western girl with long blonde hair perusing the shelves nearby. We walk up to her and she is from the U.S. and says that she is in China teaching English to the Chinese people who live there. We explain our dilemma, she (fluent in Chinese) speaks to the appropriate person in the store and then translates for us that they said that if we come back at 7pm, they will have 400 of this item delivered to the store for us to buy. As I spoke to her, she also said that she was from Michigan, the same state that I grew up in and we were comparing notes on how far away from each other we had lived back when we were growing up in Michigan.

As this interaction unfolded, I had the uncanny sense that this was not something ordinary taking place. What were the chances that a young woman about my age from the same area as me back in the U.S. would be in that store the same time as us, just by coincidence? And I assure you that there were not many Westerners in China when we were there back four years before the Olympics was even held in Beijing.

Honestly the whole time I interacted with her inside my head I was hearing and feeling, this is Guru making this happen, it is him that you are seeing - just taking her form - and then I kept feeling, "be grateful, be grateful, be grateful for this blessing gift."

And just as mysteriously as she arrived, she vanished. Making us question if she had ever really been a human being or perhaps an angel or some other apparition.

Later that night when I was finally at a meditation function for the first time that day, I felt very little inside. It seemed to me that the universe was telling me that my meditation function had happened elsewhere - in an elevator and in a Chinese grocery department store.

When we went to sleep that night, we both knew that without even saying it out loud that Guru was pleased that we had heeded the request to assist in keeping the meeting space less crowded, that in doing so we had been at the right place at the right time to help him find his way on the elevator in the unfamiliar hotel and that the composition of those songs which are so very special to me even now had a back story that no one but us ever knew... until now.

[A few stories with Guru Sri Chinmoy](#)

By Suchana Cao

Day in, day out I am used to spending partly of my time with my spiritual heart-memories. Not having got the opportunity to stay at my Master's feet every day, those special moments by his side or around him, I deeply treasure and love bringing back to the present.

I remember once to have been invited to Guru's house after an evening function. It was a cold day. As far as I know, nobody was aware of my fear of dogs. But Guru was! I just remember that his disciples were gathered in the living-room watching a tv program and I sat behind Guru. Out of the blue a white small dog with glossy hair appeared and jumped directly into my lap, staying there for a while. He was Kanu, one of Guru's white dogs. I heard someone saying, 'You are lucky that Kanu came to you!'

Since then my fear of dogs began to decrease. Only a true Master of the transcendental Beyond can be one with his disciples' needs and give them consolation. I started learning the art of gratitude there.

On a separate occasion, when we went on a Christmas Trip in Mexico, Guru visited Merida and offered a Peace Concert at the Cathedral. The head of the cathedral was a Monsignor at that time. He felt upset when we asked him about the organ for Guru to play on it. Their old organ was broken and they were waiting for a technician to come from Germany after Christmas. A few hours before Guru's Peace Concert took place, I came across Prachar who confidently told me, 'The organ is already repaired and Guru will play on it'.

When Guru asked me about the head of the Cathedral a few minutes prior to his concert, I was unable to give him the exact translation of the word 'monseñor' in English. My efforts to get that noun translated into English were useless so, with a tender smile Guru said to me, 'Is he a Monsignor?' 'Yes, Guru, he is!' That was a true relief to me. Why was Guru so concerned about that priest? Well, he wanted to offer him a most beautiful yellow rose before his Peace Concert; something that he did silently with a very compassionate Smile while the Monsignor was asking me if he was allowed to touch Guru's hands. They both exchanged lovely smiles, that was all.

The Cathedral of Merida was over crowded! A silent peaceful atmosphere flooded the old building during the entire concert, and Monsignor was delighted with tears in his eyes.

Guru is a gentleman. One day Guru asked me to come to his house and I was delighted. After Prasad, he went to his kitchen and told me to follow him. I was supposed to have got to New York along with another new disciple from a far away country; but she didn't want to travel - even if she would have received a free flight ticket.

I saw Guru's face full of concern and love when he inquired about the reason of her absence. Guru loved her so much! But I could not find the right answer! So, deeply moved by his unique lonely experience as a spiritual Master, with a very low compassionate voice, Guru asked me, 'Is she afraid of my Transcendental?' My answer was positive and Guru smiled compassionately again.

Here, I realised how much suffering Guru was going through, both in the inner and outer worlds. And something more significant, I realised how much love and concern Guru poured upon the life of my friend at the point that she could find the best location for exercising her profession of journalist.

One touch

By Patanga Cordeiro

The second time I went to visit my Guru Sri Chinmoy was in April, 2006. One of the highlights of visiting Sri Chinmoy in New York for me is a day of circus performances, with a nice sideshow that includes the vending of spiritual articles like inspiring books, movies, meditation aids such as cushions, timers, etc. I was told Sri Chinmoy traditionally blessed all T-shirts purchased on circus day by putting his hand over them.

At that time, I was dead broke financially and, feeling completely out of money, I thought I could not afford 10-15 USD to purchase one shirt that would be blessed by Guru, and instead bought 3 bookmarks with Sri Chinmoy's Jharna-Kala art printed on them for 0.75 USD. During the intermission, surprisingly, it was announced that Guru would bless the articles from the Jharna-Kala stand. I was startled and took my bookmarks and stood in line to pass by Sri Chinmoy and hand him the bookmarks.

The line went very fast, and I noticed that the disciples would just stretch their arms with the items and Sri Chinmoy would press them with his hand for a split second. My bookmarks were so small that they wouldn't cover the whole of my left hand, where they sat waiting as I stretched my arms together towards Guru. In this way I inadvertently made Sri Chinmoy touch my hand, since he had been touching everything on the line with a wide open palm.

I say "inadvertently" because Spiritual Masters will often take upon themselves the imperfections in human nature through diverse methods, one of them being by touch, and I had no intention of making Sri Chinmoy touch me while handing the bookmarks. I was well aware that Swami Vivekananda had at one point forbidden other disciples to touch Sarada Devi's feet when saluting her (a traditional way to salute one's Guru or parents in the East), for the reason that he did not want to lose her like they had lost Sri Ramakrishna, who contracted cancer partly from taking upon himself his disciples' imperfections.

Having received the touch of my Guru's hand, I noticed then an immediate shift in conscience for the next few minutes. Much higher, much brighter, full of light – yes, full of light is a good way of describing it. I don't know if it was a permanent change, but as I am writing this 12 years after the occasion, I can still feel some of the experience of then.

And my left hand has never been the same again. I often feel like washing my right hand and face many times during the day, but my left hand seems to be always alright. I have told this whole story a few times, and whenever I do I feel something in my left hand and in my heart at the same time.

Two of the bookmarks I gave to dear friends, and the one which was on top I had it framed and stays on my working desk.

With Guru: Three (well-documented) recollections

By Dhiraja McBryde

Fungible is the human memory – fungible and frangible and fragile. There are fungi in there – dry rot, and mildew and a few lurid mushrooms. We think that we remember, we think the old synapses are recording it all like dutiful stenographers, like scribes in the Akashic records department – but we are mistaken.

Fortunately some cunning Greek or Phoenician came up with an alphabet and fortunately I have, on occasion, employed that to write an account of events as they happened.

However, I did not need to refer to written records to realise that ‘sweet, intimate remembrances from Guru’s House and the Christmas Trip’ (Mahiruha’s suggestion for this piece of writing) was not going to be an angle to take on this topic. It was not a question of failing to recall but rather a lack of any possible material to recall. I doubt I could point out on a map the location of Guru’s house, and, though I have walked past it on the footpath a couple of times, I have certainly never stepped across the property boundary.

But ‘with Guru’ could cover other things. I pulled down the cardboard box from the top shelf of the cupboard and found the battered notebook that I took with me in 1995 on my first visit to New York City. This, I thought, would confirm my memory of that trip. In fact, its account provided some stark contrasts with the account that had been mouldering in my memory these years. Volleyball! I have no recollection of ever playing volleyball in New York but the documents show that in 1995 I played a lot – I even commented on how my game was improving.

Pope Saint John Paul II during his 1986 visit to New Zealand pointed out that the Otago/Southland diocese was the administrative area of the Catholic Church furthest from Rome. When the new mosque was being built in Christchurch, it was claimed to be the one furthest from Mecca. So when I joined the Sri Chinmoy Centre – when Sri Chinmoy accepted me as someone capable of being assisted along the sunlit path toward divine reality – I was 14,000 km away and remained so for several years at the far end of the world.

That 1995 trip to New York – detailed at the time in fairly legible script – was the first time I had ever left the shores of the archaic archipelago, distant corner of Polynesia, in which I had been born and lived. In my account in that orange notebook I hold forth about the wonders of air travel, the amazement of a day in Japan and then note impression of arrival in the USA – ‘old, dirty, squalid, rundown, shabby, tatty, rude, unfriendly’. Goodness!

When I finally arrived at the goal of my travelling – the ‘meditation garden’, the ground of aspiration – I fortunately bumped into a, more knowledgeable, fellow New Zealander who, fortunately, or perhaps otherwise, had things for me to do: ‘Here’s a shovel. We just have to dig some holes and construct some benches for people to sit on’.

So I dug some postholes and then there was the advanced woodwork to be done – with two strange people I had not met before – to construct the bench that we had been assigned to

construct. Should we put the posts in the ground and build the bench on top or should we construct the whole thing and then lower it fully formed into the postholes? This odd Australian fellow seemed to have very firm ideas but didn't give an entirely reassuring impression that he really knew what he was talking about. (Many years later I lived with him in Auckland.)

As we worked away, there were other people wandering about. At some point I looked up and thought, 'Oh, I think that man there is the one I have travelled all this way to see', and then – back to holding the end of the bench while Simahin banged in some nails.

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In the dozen years between when I departed New Zealand for the first time and when he departed our physical realm, I was to see Sri Chinmoy 15 times: in New York and also in Australia and China and Thailand. (This information recorded in a blue notebook.)

But most memorably and most excellently and most splendidly, I was to see him in New Zealand in 2002 deep in the rural hinterland, down rutted dirt roads in the greenest heart of agricultural New Zealand where he fitted in as perfectly as he did in the halls of the United Nations or anywhere else.

It was the highlight of those twelve years between 1995 and 2007 to help in his task of lifting 1,000 lambs.

It was my job to hoist the woolly fellows out of the cage after they had been lifted and to liberate them back to their paddock and their confreres. It was joy. As, oddly enough, was cleaning all the equipment at the end of each day. Upon the vast face of the Earth for this short time in this most obscure of places, I played my tiny loving role in some strange symbolic act played out in tangible reality – grubby, greasy, little sheep, or, as Mr Blake said, 'Softest clothing woolly bright'.

Sri Chinmoy said: *'Why am I doing this? I have a deep love for lambs. The saviour Christ had a very special affection, love and fondness for lambs and I also have a very special inner feeling for lambs. We all need to be God's lamb-children. My goal is to inspire people [and] by lifting up one thousand lambs I feel God has given me a golden opportunity to be of service to Him and to inspire others to fulfil their own goals.'*

*

In those twelve years, however, Sri Chinmoy never gave any outer indication of being aware that I existed.

Except, of course, for the letter.

The letter that he sent to ... my brother!

What?

'My dear brother-friend Michael,' he wrote. 'I wish to offer you my deepest gratitude from the inmost recesses of my heart for what you have done for me and for my students ...'

In 1998, New Zealand became one of the first of, now, 152 Sri Chinmoy Peace-Blossom-Nations – this thanks to the tireless and persistent work of Jogyata Dallas.

The proposal to so designate our country was made by Jogyata to the Prime Minister's office, the staff of which must have been, not unnaturally, a little bemused by the concept, and so they sent the proposal off to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, since it was perhaps an idea with foreign policy implications. And there, it landed upon the desk of His Excellency Dr Michael James McBryde, which is to say, my brother – the one who was at university before I started school and who spent the time we had together at home between his lectures teaching me Latin at the age of four.

And so it was my brother who wrote a recommendation to the Prime Minister regarding the proposal.

Sri Chinmoy in his letter to my brother wrote:

'The response that you wrote regarding the proposal to dedicate New Zealand as a Sri Chinmoy Peace-Blossom-Nation has moved me far beyond your imagination. Based on this letter of yours, we were able to realise our dream of a Peace-Blossom-Nation. I am sure news has reached you through Barney that the Prime Minister most graciously signed a letter of dedication on September 23rd.'

The letter concluded: *'Dear Michael, in you New Zealand has found a true peace-lover and peace-server – and I have found a true oneness-friend. I pray that you may continue to go forward in your life with the same unparalleled courage, faith, determination and heart's magnanimity.'* and was signed *'With my heart of ever-blossoming gratitude, Sri Chinmoy'* and decorated with 19 swirling bird drawings.

*

I may have contributed a little to Sri Chinmoy's life. He may have contributed a little to mine. I do not have to rely on memory – I have the written and photographic documents: 1995, 1998, 2002.