

MUHAMMAD ALI AND SRI CHINMOY

On 30 January 1979 Sri Chinmoy and Muhammad Ali met in the heavyweight boxing champion's suite at the U.N. Plaza Hotel, while Ali was visiting the United Nations. The two discussed religion and spirituality, and the Meditation Group Choir sang a song Sri Chinmoy had composed for Ali, entitled "Greater than the Greatest." This was the third meeting between Sri Chinmoy and Ali. Excerpts from their conversation follow.



Muhammad Ali (referring to the meditation during their last meeting in September 1977, the morning of the Ernie Shavers fight): Brother, last time you gave me a lot of strength to win that fight (greeting Sri Chinmoy with the traditional Muslim embrace). You look good, you still look young and nice. People may think that you are converting me, but nobody can convert me.

Sri Chinmoy: It is absolutely true; you are for Allah. I have not come to convert you. I was born a Hindu, but since I started praying and meditating, I have no religion. I belong to all religions.

Muhammad Ali: Oh, that's good. I can also prove to you that I am above religion. (*Ali opens up his briefcase, containing three or four books, and shows Sri Chinmoy a book written by Pir Vilayat Kahn's father, Hazrat Inayat Kahn.*)

Sri Chinmoy: I have not met him, but his son and I are very good friends. I have composed a song about you and your paintings.

Muhammad Ali: About my paintings? When can I hear it?

Sri Chinmoy: A few singers are downstairs, if you would like to hear it.

Muhammad Ali: Please tell them to come up. (*Ali welcomes the singers.*) You all look so clean and nice. If the whole world would think like you're thinking, we'd have peace and unity in the world.

(*The Meditation Group Choir sings "Greater than the Greatest."*)

Muhammad Ali: That was beautiful! It is such an honour that you would compose a song about me and come and sing it here. But I would like to say one thing. I know the spirit in which you composed the song, but I have to say that I am not the greatest. Only God is the greatest. It is easy to become intoxicated with fame and all that, but when a man's intoxicated he acts abnormal. I always want to act normal. I always pray to Allah to make me strong and humble and modest amidst all this. Only Allah deserves this praise.

Sri Chinmoy: Although you have got the supreme honour from all over the world, you have

maintained your humility; that is why you will always remain greater than the greatest.

Muhammad Ali: I like the singing very much. You gave me some praise, but it is Allah who is really greater than the greatest. I would be guilty in His Eyes if I said that I am the greatest. I am not the greatest. I am supposed to tell you and the world that He is the greatest. I understand what you are saying in the song, but I have to say this because I know better. A man may kill someone, but God may not punish him as much as someone who knows better and just thinks something wrong. If I didn't tell you how I feel, with the knowledge that I have of God, God would punish me. Therefore it is my duty to tell you that I am not the greatest. I may be the best boxer, but if you say "Greater than the Greatest," then you're talking about God. I know I'm not God, you know I'm not God, but it's up to me to just make a statement to let you know how I feel.

Sri Chinmoy: Just a few minutes ago you told me that the river and ponds all go to the sea and become one. So when Father and son become entirely one by virtue of the son's prayer and meditation, if you say something about the Father, the son gets joy. And if you say something about the son, the Father gets joy.

Muhammad Ali: I never thought of it like that. (*Turning to the singers*) He's a wise man. I can see why you are with him.

Sri Chinmoy: The Father is so proud of His son, and if the son thinks of his Father, the son becomes so proud.

Muhammad Ali: Thank you. If all I learn today is this, then today will not be lost.

GREATER THAN THE GREATEST

Words and music
by Sri Chinmoy

words and music
by Sri Chinmoy

(♩ = 138) Fast

Great—er than the great—est, Swift—er than the swift—est,

A—li, A—li, Cham—pi—on!

fine

Own—er of a new vi—sion—,.

Su—preme box—er's jab—bing thun—ders

Sport— with— art—beau—ty's won—ders.

*Sing twice with repeats,
then D.C. al fine*

Greater than the greatest,
Swifter than the swiftest,
Ali, Ali, Champion!
Owner of a new vision.
Supreme boxer's jabbing thunders
Sport with art-beauty's wonders.