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Sage-Musician At the United Nations: Sri Chinmoy and Inner Peace

The search for silence in contemporary life is increasingly difficult, even more so the search for the "active silence" found in group meditation. For example, today churches are filled with songs and talk. Could it be this noise and that of a non-traditional spirituality that twice filled the Espace Ballard on Saturday, 13 October at 3:00 and 9:00 pm. In all, more than 10,000 people came to see Sri Chinmoy, "guru" of the United Nations, and lecturer and author of books and poems to the glory of love and the quest for inner peace. He is also a composer.

The free performance, billed the "Concert of a Lifetime," was organized by Sri Chinmoy's disciple Haridass Greif. Among other instruments, the "master" played on the Indian flute, concert flute, cello, and sang. It is hard for a Westerner to judge this Indian "music of the Spheres," which is so linear, and where only the iridescence of the tones registers on the profane ear. Curiously, one had the feeling that the crowd had not come for the music, but rather for what was between the compositions, that is, the inner peace that the sounds only served to prolong. It was remarkable that in such a multitude of men and women no one objected to this invitation to silence. There were no hecklers to shout out from the back of the hall. "Hey, guru, are you all right upstairs!"—or worse.

Does the rejection of "hackneyed phrases" and "materialistic values" explain this new need for the spiritual noted by sociologists? The need to believe is no longer met. Whether Sri Chinmoy fills this need or whether this is witnessed by some as some kind of show is not really important. The appreciation or the rejection depends on temperament, cultural background, and susceptibility. The journalist is simply put in the presence of an extraordinary sociological fact: it is very rare that a man, simply by standing with folded hands, is able to impose several minutes of pin-drop silence upon thousands of people from all walks of life. (There were remarkably few fannies in the hall.)

We asked several questions of this 52-year-old Bengali, who was educated at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and who has directed the Peace-Meditation at the United Nations since 1970. He admires the dynamism of the West, its search for the spiritual and wishes to put love at the service of peace.

"Do not criticize the world," he says, "better it. How? Simply by bettering yourself at every moment."

—Can the discipline that you have set out for yourself—to reach a harmonious synthesis between such different activities as meditation and an active outer life—be expected from any human beings? Are your teachings meant for everybody?

—According to my philosophy, the heart of meditation and the life of action are not for the chosen few; they can be practised by all. Since God is in every human being, He has given each individual ample opportunity to combine the inner life of peace and the outer life

of dynamism in order to achieve complete satisfaction here on earth.

—To what social categories do your disciples belong? I don't imagine that there are many manual labourers among them.

—My disciples come from all walks of life. We have teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers and so on. We also have labourers, builders, masons, gardeners and painters. About seventy of my disciples work at the United Nations. Most of them are secretaries, and a few are executives. Some of my disciples are musicians.

—Your teaching is free. How then do you make a living?

—My teaching has always been free. But unfortunately I am unable to offer for free the more than 600 books that I have written. I happen to be a musician as well. I have composed a few thousand songs in Bengali and English. So, through the sale of books and musical tapes, I am able to meet my expenses. Therefore, it is possible for me to visit various parts of the world to offer musical concerts, meditations and spiritual talks.

—Can one speak of a harmonious self-development when you ask your disciples to refrain not only from eating meat and drinking alcohol but also from having sexual relationships?

—I feel that in order to have harmonious self-development we must go beyond the countless demands of the body, vital and mind. It is through self-transcendence that we get real joy. While we are in the process of transcending the demands of the body, vital and mind, we do not feel sorry that we have to give up things that once upon a time we enjoyed and cherished. For self-transcendence itself embodies delight in boundless assurance. The urges of the lower vital can be purified, illumined and transcended when the seeker enters the world of ever-illuminating realities and becomes the conscious possessor or enjoyer of these higher, divine realities.

—There is, all over the world, a strong quest for spirituality. In your opinion, why are the traditional religions not able to fulfil it?

—Unfortunately, the traditional religions tend to bind human beings. They tell us that theirs is the only way. But real spirituality says, "Your way is good for you. My way is good for me. Now let us discover another way that will be better than either your way or my way: The way of oneness-heart. Only a oneness-heart can offer a fullness-of-life." This is the message that spirituality gives.

—This is why seekers all over the world are drawn more to spirituality than to the traditional religions. Sects have multiplied. Some have seemed dangerous to society, in that they tend to "drug" the individual spiritually. Now can we distinguish the "good seed from the evil," as the Gospel puts it?

—Ours is not a sect. We live not only in society but also for society. We accept society as it is and, at the same time, strive to better society—with its kind co-operation. For us, each individual is like the petal of a rose. If one petal is destroyed, the rose loses all its beauty. Therefore, we have to nourish and preserve each and every petal. In this way we can appreciate the flower in all its fragrance and purity and grow into the heart of the flower—consciousness, which is itself a world of beauty, purity and divinity.

You ask how we can distinguish the good from the evil. It is easy. The evil will tell us: "Mine is the only way. Therefore, I am entitled to dominate the world." But the good will tell us: "My way is to love, to serve, to become one. My way is to help the world grow into a oneness-family."

—Since 1970 you have been the director of a meditation group at the United Nations. What is its purpose? What type of issues do you deal with? What type of people come to see you there? And for what reasons?

—I feel that the political life and the spiritual life must go together, since politics needs continuous prayer and meditation in order to change the face of the earth and bring about not only a peace-loving world but also a peace-flooded world. I serve the United Nations, along with my students who work there, by offering silent meditations and spiritual talks. I also seek to inspire the various nations by appreciating the gifts that they have offered to the outer world and the inner world. At our meetings, ambassadors, delegates, UN executives and staff share with us their spiritual, political, national and international values. In this way we bring to the fore the best in each other from the depths of our hearts.

The message of oneness comes directly from God to the soul. The soul transmits it to the heart and the heart transmits it to the mind. Each nation has a soul. Each nation has a heart. Each nation has a mind. If each nation can bring to the fore the all-loving qualities of the heart, then the mind will be able to fulfil the needs and feed the hunger of world-peace and world-satisfaction.

I am extremely grateful to the United Nations: I am extremely grateful to the various Secretaries-General and Presidents of the General Assembly who have all encouraged me to carry on with my prayers and my meditation at the United Nations and soulfully serve the world-community.

—You have had the opportunity to become friendly with some outstanding personalities of our time. What one, or which ones, have impressed you the most? And for what reasons?

—Among spiritual figures, Pope Paul VI has impressed me most. I had struck his inner illumination. I had the occasion to meet with him and be blessed by his four times. He was extremely kind to me, appreciating my dedicated service at the United Nations. Pir Vilait Khan, head of the Sufi Order in the West, has also impressed me deeply. We have become very close friends. Among political leaders, Dr. Jorge Illueca, the President of Panama and current President of the United Nations General Assembly, has deeply impressed me. I have been cherishing his friendship for many years. He has clearly shown me that the political life has such to accept from the spiritual life and that both can go hand-in-hand provided the political life truly values spirituality. If the foundation is spirituality, then all the branches of life can offer us harmony, joy and a sense of divine accomplishment.

When I met with President de Valera of Ireland in 1973, I was impressed by the fervor of his spiritual quest. He asked me many questions about spirituality and the Bible. United Nations Secretary-General U Thant also has left a lasting

impression in my heart.

Among musicians, Leonard Bernstein—who possesses an ocean of musical talent—and Pablo Casals, the divine cellist, have impressed me most. I wrote a song for Leonard Bernstein and he also wrote a song for me. Pablo Casals I met in Puerto Rico in 1972. When we meditated together in his home, he shed soulful tears. Both of us swam in the sea of mutual love, affection and admiration.

In the sports world, Jesse Owens—whom I admired and looked up to so much during my own athletic career—has left the most profound impression on me. I had the golden opportunity to meet with him in New York several years ago. We had a long discussion about spirituality and sports. His vast knowledge of sports and the upliftment of young athletes to the higher realities of life impressed me deeply. He was truly an unparalleled legend.

Now Carl Lewis, who is known as another Jesse Owens, is a very good friend of mine. His life of simplicity and serenity, and his life of promise for their perfect fulfillment of spiritual tasks, has impressed me most. I pray to my Lord Supreme that his ever-transcending glory will awaken divinely and illumine supremely the firmament of world-athletics.

—You first accept the society which you want to transform. This is a very realistic attitude, rarely to be found among spiritual Masters. But how will you come out of this compromise: accept, and at the same time, transform? And how do you expect to transform the world?

—In the beginning we try to bring forward the good qualities of society and give very little importance to its shortcomings. Once the good qualities of society are increased and strengthened, they will be in a position to transform and illumine the bad qualities of society.

We feel that although the preparation of the collective is absolutely necessary for a better society, the first and foremost goal must be the perfection of the individual. The hope and fulfillment of individual perfection is the only thing that can transform and perfect the whole of society.

—Manifest the Divine within you? You tell your disciples, "For me the Divine is not somewhere else. It is within us. In the beginning the Divine within us is like a seed. Then the seed grows into a plant and eventually becomes a huge tree. All the time the Divine is transcending its own capacities in and through us. The Divine within us embodies the message of transcendence. As a matter of fact, this is the cosmic vision—its mission and its realization. This moment it is the promise of transcendence, the next moment it is the act of transcendence and following moment it becomes the realization of transcendence. So, as instruments of God, we are also transcending ourselves at every moment. The finite in us is entering into the Infinite and the Infinite is consciously transcending its own infinity."

—Meditation plays an important role in your life and in the life of your disciples. Does it consist of set formulas as is left to the freedom of each disciple?

—Meditation plays the most

important role in our spiritual life. I tell my disciples to meditate in whichever way brings them peace, joy and satisfaction. But I also tell them that the path of the heart is the safest, quickest and also the most rewarding approach. I tell them to enter into their hearts and see what their hearts want them to do. I tell them to listen to their loving hearts and not to their doubting minds. The aspiring heart has a free access to the illumining soul, and the illumining soul has a free access to the all-fulfilling God. So the heart is the first rung, the soul is the second rung and God is the ultimate rung of the spiritual ladder.

—Music seems to you best able, right after meditation "to express the inexpressible". But is it not considered by most listeners simply as a means of entertainment?

—True, music is next to meditation in its ability to express the inexpressible. Those who think that music is only a means of entertainment are deplorably mistaken. If we are speaking of rock and roll, jazz or some other kind of music, then definitely it is entertainment... But if it is soulful music, the music that tries to bring to the fore the all-loving qualities of the heart, then it is definitely meant for the enlightenment of the entire being and not for anything else.

—In essence, your teachings seem to say: "Love is the only true knowledge". Is a period where power alone seems to be emphasized, this affirmation of the spiritual wisdom is indispensable. Does it have any chance to be heard?

—We all know that there is a kind of love that binds and a kind of love that liberates. The love that liberates is founded upon the inner peace that comes from soulful meditation. The power of love can make a most powerful contribution to meditation. The love of power can be transformed into the power of love through meditation. He who believes in meditation will not and cannot fail, for meditation is the love-power that illumines, liberates and fulfills.

—Does inner peace remove the risks of war, or does it only allow one to withstand them?

—The sincere hunger for world peace will be able to withstand even a world war. Again, if the inner world is inundated with peace, then the nightmare of world war cannot even come into being.

Peace teaches us to love others the way we want to love ourselves. War has a different message. It teaches us to love ourselves first, so that we can dominate others. Peace is self-expansion, and from self-expansion we grow into universal expansion. War, on the other hand, starts and ends with destruction.

Mage-musicien aux Nations unies

Sri Chinmoy et la paix intérieure.

La recherche du silence dans la cité est de plus en plus difficile. Encore plus celle du silence actif, c'est-à-dire de la méditation communautaire, les églises étant remplies aujourd'hui de chants et de paroles. Est-ce cette attente et celle d'une spiritualité non traditionnelle qui a rempli par deux fois, samedi 13 octobre à 18 heures et à 21 heures,

l'Espece Balard (en tout, plus de dix mille personnes) autour de Sri Chinmoy, « gourou » des Nations unies, auteur de livres, de poèmes, de conférences, à la gloire de l'amour et de la recherche de la paix intérieure, etc., et en outre compositeur ?

La rencontre - gratuite - était celle du « Concert d'une vie », organisée par son disciple Haridas Greif. Le « maître » a joué notamment de la flûte indienne, de la flûte traversière, du violoncelle, et a chanté. Difficile pour un Occidental de juger cette musique des sphères de l'Inde, si linéaire, où seule l'assiation des timbres accroche l'oreille profane. Curieusement, on avait le sentiment que la foule n'était pas venue pour la musique, mais pour ce qu'il y avait entre les morceaux, c'est-à-dire le recueillement, prolongé seulement par les sons. Étrange acception de cette masse d'hommes et de femmes ne trouvant rien à redire à cette invite. Pas un titi parisien, à fond de salle, pour crier : « Eh ! le mage, ça va pas la tête », ou autre interpellation plus musclée.

Le rejet des « langues de bois », des valeurs trop « intéressées », explique-t-il cette nouvelle attente du spirituel constatée par tous les sociologues ? Le besoin de croire n'est plus assouvi, c'est certain. Que Sri Chinmoy le remplisse bien ou mal pour quelques-uns, que certains voient là un show comme un autre, à la limite, peu importe. L'appréciation ou le rejet dépend des tempéraments, des antécédents culturels, des disponibilités. Simplement, le journaliste est mis en présence d'un fait de société peu banal : il est rare qu'un homme puisse imposer plusieurs minutes de silence à des milliers de personnes d'origines aussi variées (il y avait assez peu de fanatiques dans la salle), un silence sans faille, rien qu'en joignant les mains, debout, face au public.

Nous avons posé quelques questions à ce Bengali de cinquante-trois ans, formé à l'ashram de Sri Aurobindo, qui dirige à l'ONU depuis 1970 le groupe Peace Meditation. Il admire le dynamisme de l'Occident, sa recherche du spirituel, et veut mettre l'amour au service de la paix. « Ne critiquez pas le monde, dit-il. Améliorez-le. Comment ? En vous améliorant vous-même à chaque instant. »

« L'exigence que vous vous êtes assignée : réaliser harmonieusement une synthèse d'activités aussi diverses que la méditation et la vie active, peut-elle être attendue de beaucoup d'hommes ? Votre enseignement est-il pour tout le monde ?

« Selon ma philosophie, le cœur de la méditation et la vie extérieure de la manifestation ne sont pas destinés à un petit cercle d'élus ; ils peuvent être vécus par tous. Dieu étant en chaque être humain. Il a offert à chaque individu de multiples occasions d'associer une vie intérieure de paix et une vie extérieure de dynamisme, afin d'aboutir à une satisfaction complète sur terre.

« À quelles catégories sociales appartenez-vous disciples ? Je pense qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup de travailleurs manuels parmi eux ?

« Ils proviennent de tous les milieux sociaux. Il y a des enseignants, des médecins, des avocats, des ingénieurs, etc. Mais il y a également des travailleurs manuels : des entrepreneurs, des maçons, des peintres en bâtiment, des jardiniers. Soixante-dix de mes disciples travaillent aux Nations unies. La plupart d'entre eux sont secrétaires, les autres y ont des postes de responsabilité. Certains sont musiciens.

« Votre enseignement est gratuit ; de quel visez-vous ?

« Mon enseignement a toujours été gratuit. Malheureusement, je ne puis offrir gratuitement les quelques six cents livres que j'ai écrits sous forme de plaquettes, de recueils de poèmes, de comptes rendus de conférences, de dialogues, ou d'œuvres plus importantes. Il se trouve que je suis également musicien. J'ai composé plusieurs milliers de chants sur des textes bengalis et anglais. Aussi, grâce à la vente de mes livres et de mes cassettes, je puis subvenir à mes besoins. Il m'est ainsi possible de visiter les diverses parties du monde, afin d'y offrir des concerts, des méditations et des causeries spirituelles.

« Peut-on encore parler d'harmonie dans le développement si vous demandez à vos disciples non seulement de ne pas consommer de viande ni d'alcool, mais aussi de s'abstenir de relations sexuelles ?

« Je pense qu'afin de connaître un développement de soi harmonieux, l'homme doit aller au-delà des exigences incommensurables du corps, du vital et du mental. C'est par la transcendance de soi que l'on obtient la joie véritable. Lorsque l'on est en train de transcender les exigences du corps, du vital et du mental, on ne regrette pas d'avoir abandonné les choses que l'on appréciait et chérissait auparavant. Car la transcendance de soi incarne en elle-même la félicité en abondance. Les besoins du vital inférieur peuvent être purifiés, illuminés et transcendés, dès lors que le chercheur pénètre dans le domaine des réalités éternellement illuminantes et devient le propriétaire conscient de ces réalités supérieures, divines.

« Il y a, à travers le monde, une forte demande spirituelle. Pourquoi, selon vous, les religions traditionnelles ne peuvent-elles suffire à y répondre ?

« Malheureusement, les religions traditionnelles tendent à enchaîner les êtres humains. Elles nous disent que leur approche est la seule. Mais la véritable spiritualité nous dit : « Votre voie vous convient. La mienne me convient également. Maintenant, découvrons ensemble une autre voie qui sera meilleure que la vôtre ou que la mienne : la voie du cœur d'unité. Seul un cœur d'unité peut offrir une vie de plénitude. »

« Tel est le message que proclame la spiritualité. C'est la raison pour laquelle tant de chercheurs du monde entier sont attirés davantage par la spiritualité que par les religions traditionnelles.

« Les sectes se sont multipliées. Certaines ont paru dangereuses à la société, dans la mesure où elles « droguaient » spirituellement l'individu. Comment séparer « le bon grain de l'ivraie », comme dirait notre Erangle ?

« Nous ne sommes pas une secte. Non seulement vivons-nous dans la société, mais aussi pour la société. Nous acceptons la société telle qu'elle est, et, en même temps, luttons - avec sa participation active - pour une société meilleure. Pour nous,

inspirer les différentes nations, en appréciant les dons qu'elles ont offerts au monde extérieur et au monde intérieur. Lors de nos réunions, des ambassadeurs, des délégués et des responsables de l'ONU viennent partager avec nous leurs valeurs spirituelles, politiques, nationales et internationales. De cette façon, nous faisons apparaître à la surface ce qu'il y a de meilleur en chacun, des profondeurs mêmes de notre cœur.

« Le message de l'unité va directement de Dieu à l'âme. L'âme le transmet au cœur et le cœur le transmet au mental. Chaque pays a une âme. Chaque pays a un mental. Si chaque pays peut faire venir à la surface les qualités d'amour du cœur, les qualités de manifesta-

tion que les deux pouvaient marcher main dans la main pour que la vie politique accorde sa pleine valeur à la spiritualité. Si la fondation est la spiritualité, toutes les branches de la vie nous offriront l'harmonie, la joie et le sens de l'accomplissement divin.

« Lorsque j'ai rencontré le président de la République d'Irlande, Eamon de Valera, en 1973, j'ai été impressionné par la ferveur de sa quête spirituelle. Il m'a posé de nombreuses questions sur la spiritualité et sur la Bible.

« U Thant, l'ancien secrétaire général des Nations unies, a laissé également une trace durable en mon cœur.

« Parmi les musiciens, Léonard Bernstein - qui est un océan de talents musicaux - et Pablo Casals, le divin violoncelliste, m'ont marqué le plus. J'ai écrit un chant pour Léonard Bernstein, et il en a écrit un à mon intention. J'ai rencontré Pablo Casals à Porto-Rico, en 1972. Lorsque nous avons médité chez lui, il a versé des larmes d'émotion. Nous baignions dans un océan d'amour, d'affection et d'admiration mutuelles.

« Dans le monde des sports, Jesse Owens - que j'admirais tant et pour qui j'éprouvais tant d'estime du temps de ma propre carrière athlétique - a laissé l'impression la plus profonde sur moi. J'ai eu la chance exceptionnelle de le rencontrer il y a plusieurs années de cela à New-York. Nous avons eu une longue discussion sur la spiritualité et les sports. Ses vastes connaissances sur le sport et sur les moyens d'élever les jeunes athlètes jusqu'aux réalités supérieures de la vie m'ont profondément impressionné. C'était vraiment un homme légendaire et sans égal !

« De nos jours, Carl Lewis, que certains considèrent comme un nouveau Jesse Owens, est un de mes très bons amis. Sa vie de simplicité et de sérénité, sa vie de promesse pour un accomplissement parfait des tâches spirituelles, m'ont impressionné au plus haut point. Je prie mon Seigneur suprême pour que sa gloire montante éveille divinement et illumine le firmament de l'athlétisme mondial.

« Vous acceptez d'abord la société que vous voulez transformer. C'est là faire preuve d'un grand réalisme, rare chez les maîtres en spiritualité. Mais comment sortez-vous du compromis ? Comme comptez-vous transformer le monde ?

« Au début, nous nous efforçons de mettre en avant les bonnes qualités de la société et de minimiser ses faiblesses. Les qualités de la société, une fois accrues et fortifiées, seront en mesure de transformer et d'illuminer ses aspects négatifs.

« Je crois que, bien qu'une préparation au niveau collectif soit absolument nécessaire pour construire une société meilleure, le but primordial et fondamental doit être la perfection de l'individu. L'espoir et l'accomplissement de la perfection individuelle est la seule chose qui puisse transformer et parfaire la société dans son ensemble.

« Manifestez le divin qui est en vous », dites-vous à vos disciples. Pour vous, le divin n'est-il pas aussi « ailleurs » ? Que signifierait, sinon, la transcendance ?

« A mes yeux, le divin n'est pas ailleurs. Il est en nous. Au commencement, le divin en nous est semblable à une graine. Puis la graine devient une plante et, en dernier lieu, un arbre gigantesque. Le divin transcende en permanence ses propres capacités en nous et à travers nous. Le divin en nous incarne le message de la transcendance. En fait, c'est la vision cosmique, sa mission et sa réalisation. A un moment, l'on

voit la promesse de la transcendance, l'instant d'après, l'acte même de la transcendance, et l'instant suivant la réalisation de la transcendance. Aussi, en tant qu'instruments de Dieu, nous nous transcendons nous-mêmes à chaque instant. Le fini en nous entre dans l'infini et l'infini transcende consciemment sa propre infinité.

« La méditation tient une grande place dans votre vie et dans celle de vos disciples. Est-elle encadrée par des formules que vous proposez ou totalement libre ?

« La méditation joue le rôle le plus important qui soit dans notre vie spirituelle. Je dis à mes disciples de méditer de la manière qui leur apporte le plus de paix, de joie et de satisfaction. Mais je leur dis également que la voie du cœur est l'approche la plus sûre, la plus rapide et la plus gratifiante. Je leur conseille d'entrer dans leur cœur et de voir ce qu'il leur demande de faire. Je leur dis d'écouter leur cœur aimant et non point leur mental soupeonneux. Leur cœur aspirant possède un libre accès vers l'âme illuminante et l'âme illuminante possède un libre accès vers le Dieu accomplissant toute chose. Ainsi le cœur est-il le premier degré, l'âme le deuxième, et Dieu le degré ultime de l'échelle spirituelle.

« La musique vous semble être, tout de suite après la méditation, la mieux à même d'exprimer l'inexprimable. Oui, mais n'est-elle pas conçue par la plupart des auditeurs surtout comme un moyen de divertissement ?

« C'est vrai, la musique vient tout de suite après la méditation, par son aptitude à exprimer l'inexprimable. Ceux qui pensent que la musique n'est qu'un moyen de se divertir commettent une erreur déplorable. Si vous parlez du rock and roll, du jazz ou d'autres musiques similaires, elles ne sont que divertissement... Mais s'il s'agit de musique spirituelle, la musique qui s'efforce de faire jaillir à la surface les qualités aimantes du cœur, elle est inconcevablement destinée à l'illumination de l'être tout entier, et à toute autre chose.

« Le seul véritable savoir, c'est l'amour », dites-vous. A l'heure où l'on exalte la puissance, cette affirmation renouvelée de la sagesse évangélique apparaît indispensable. A-t-elle des chances d'être entendue ?

« Nous savons tous qu'il y a un type d'amour qui enchaîne et un type d'amour qui libère. L'amour qui libère est fondé sur la paix intérieure provenant de la méditation fervente. La puissance de l'amour peut contribuer de manière essentielle à la méditation, et l'amour de la puissance peut être transformé en la puissance de l'amour grâce à la méditation. Celui qui croit en la méditation ne peut pas échouer et n'échouera pas, car la méditation est la puissance d'amour qui illumine, libère et comble.

« La paix intérieure éloigne-t-elle le risque de guerre ou permet-elle de le supporter ?

« L'appétit sincère pour la paix dans le monde peut éloigner jusqu'au risque d'une guerre mondiale. Cela dit, si le monde intérieur est inondé de paix, le cauchemar d'un conflit à l'échelle mondiale ne verra même pas le jour.

« La paix nous enseigne à aimer autrui comme nous nous aimons nous-mêmes. La guerre délivre un message bien différent. Elle nous enseigne à nous aimer d'abord, pour pouvoir ensuite dominer autrui. La paix est expansion de soi, et de l'expansion de soi nous pénétrons dans l'expansion universelle. La guerre, quant à elle, commence et finit par la destruction. »

PIERRE DROUIN.



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The search for silence in contemporary life is increasingly difficult, even more so the search for the "active silence" found in group meditation. For example, today churches are filled with songs and talk. Could it be this need and that of a non-traditional spirituality that twice filled the Espace Ballard on Saturday, 13 October at 3:00 and 9:00 pm. In all, more than 10,000 people came to see Sri Chinmoy, "guru" of the United Nations, and lecturer and author of books and poems to the glory of love and the quest for inner peace. He is also a composer.

The free performance, billed the "Concert of a Lifetime," was organized by Sri Chinmoy's disciple Haridas Greif. Among other instruments, the "master" played on the Indian flute, concert flute, cello, and sang. It is hard for a Westerner to judge this Indian "Music of the Spheres," which is so linear, and where only the iridescence of the tones registers on the profane ear. Curiously, one had the feeling that the crowd had not come for the music, but rather for what was between the compositions, that is, the inner peace that the sounds only served to prolong. It was remarkable that in such a multitude of men and women no one objected to this invitation to silence. There were no hecklers to shout out from the back of the hall, "Hey, guru, are you all right upstairs!"—or worse.

Does the rejection of "hackneyed phrases" and "materialistic values" explain this new need for the spiritual noted by sociologists? The need to believe is no longer met. Whether Sri Chinmoy fills this need or whether this is viewed by some as some kind of show is not really important. The appreciation or the rejection depends on temperament, cultural background, and susceptibility. The journalist is simply put in the presence of an extraordinary sociological fact: it is very rare that a man, simply by standing with folded hands is able to impose several minutes of pindrop silence upon thousands of people from all walks of life. (There were remarkably few fanatics in the hall.)

We asked several questions of this 53 year old Bengali, who was educated at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and who has directed the Peace-Meditation at the United Nation since 1970. He admires the dynamism of the West, its search for the spiritual and wishes to put love at the service of peace.

"Do not criticize the world," he says, "better it. How? Simply by bettering yourself at every moment."

--Can the discipline that you have set out for yourself--to reach a harmonious synthesis between such different activities as meditation and an active outer life--be expected from many human beings? Are your teachings meant for everybody?
--According to my philosophy, the heart of meditation and the life of action are not for the chosen few; they can be practised by all. Since God is in every human being, He has given each individual ample opportunity to combine the inner life of peace and the outer life

of dynamism in order to achieve complete satisfaction here on earth.

--To what social categories do your disciples belong? I don't imagine that there are many manual labourers among them.

--My disciples come from all walks of life. We have teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers and so on. We also have labourers, builders, masons, gardeners and painters. About seventy of my disciples work at the United Nations. Most of them are secretaries, and a few are executives. Some of my disciples are musicians.

--Your teaching is free. How then do you make a living?

--My teaching has always been free. But unfortunately I am unable to offer for free the more than 600 books that I have written. I happen to be a musician as well. I have composed a few thousand songs in Bengali and English. So, through the sale of my books and musical tapes, I am able to meet with my expenses. Therefore, it is possible for me to visit various parts of the world to offer musical concerts, meditations and spiritual talks.

--Can one speak of a harmonious self-development when you ask your disciples to refrain not only from eating meat and drinking alcohol but also from having sexual relationships?

--I feel that in order to have harmonious self-development we must go beyond the countless demands of the body, vital and mind. It is through self-transcendence that we get real joy. While we are in the process of transcending the demands of the body, vital and mind, we do not feel sorry that we have to give up things that once upon a time we enjoyed and cherished. For self-transcendence itself embodies delight in boundless measure. The urges of the lower vital can be purified, illumined and transcended when the seeker enters the world of ever-illuminating realities and becomes the conscious possessor or enjoyer of these higher, divine realities.

--There is, all over the world, a strong quest for spirituality. In your opinion, why are the traditional religions not able to fulfil it?

--Unfortunately, the traditional religions tend to bind human beings. They tell us that theirs is the only way. But real spirituality says, "Your way is good for you. My way is good for me. Now let us discover another way that will be better than either your way or my way: The way of oneness-heart. Only a oneness-heart can offer a fulness-life." This is the message that spirituality gives. That is why seekers all over the world are drawn more to spirituality than to the traditional religions.

Sects have multiplied. Some have seemed dangerous to society, in that they tend to "drug" the individual spiritually. How can we distinguish the "good seed from the evil," as the Gospel puts it?

--Ours is not a sect. We live not only in society but also for society. We accept society as it is and, at the same time, strive to better society--with its kind co-operation. For us, each individual is like the petal of a rose. If one petal is destroyed, the rose loses all its beauty. Therefore, we have to nourish and preserve each and every petal. In this way we can appreciate the flower in all its fragrance and purity and grow into the heart of the flower-consciousness, which is itself a world of beauty, purity and divinity.

You ask how we can distinguish the good from the evil. It is easy. The evil will tell us: "Mine is the only way. Therefore, I am entitled to dominate the world." But the good will tell us: "My way is to love, to serve, to become one. My way is to help the world grow into a oneness-family."

--Since 1970 you have been the director of a meditation group at the United Nations. What is its purpose? What type of issues do you deal with? What type of people come to see you there? And for what reasons?

--I feel that the political life and the spiritual life must go together, since politics needs continuous prayer and meditation in order to change the face of the earth and bring about not only a peace-loving world but also a peace-flooded world. I serve the United Nations, along with my students who work there, by offering silent meditations and spiritual talks. I also seek to inspire the various nations by appreciating the gifts that they have offered to the outer world and the inner world. At our meetings, ambassadors, delegates, UN executives and staff share with us their spiritual, political, national and international values. In this way we bring to the fore the best in each other from the depths of our hearts.

The message of oneness comes directly from God to the soul. The soul transmits it to the heart and the heart transmits it to the mind. Each nation has a soul. Each nation has a heart. Each nation has a mind. If each nation can bring to the fore the all-loving qualities of the heart, then the all-manifesting qualities of the mind will be able to fulfil the needs and feed the hunger of world-peace and world-satisfaction.

I am extremely grateful to the United Nations. I am extremely grateful to the various Secretaries-General and Presidents of the General Assembly who have all encouraged and inspired me to carry on with my prayers and my meditation at the United Nations and soulfully serve the world-community.

--You have had the opportunity to become friendly with some outstanding personalities of our time. What one, or which ones, have impressed you the most? And for what reasons?

--Among spiritual figures, Pope Paul VI has impressed me most. I was struck by his inner illumination. I had the occasion to meet with him and be blessed by him four times. He was extremely kind to me, appreciating my dedicated service at the United Nations. Pir Vilayat Khan, head of the Sufi Order in the West, has also impressed me deeply. We have become very close friends.

Among political leaders, Dr. Jorge Illueca, the President of Panama and current President of the United Nations General Assembly, has deeply impressed me. I have been cherishing his friendship for many years. He has clearly shown me that the political life has much to accept from the spiritual life and that both can go hand-in-hand provided the political life truly values spirituality. If the foundation is spirituality, then all the branches of life can offer us harmony, joy and a sense of divine accomplishment.

When I met with President de Valera of Ireland in 1973, I was impressed by the fervor of his spiritual quest. He asked me many questions about spirituality and the Bible. United Nations Secretary-General U Thant also has left a lasting

impression in my heart.

Among musicians, Leonard Bernstein--who possesses an ocean of musical talent--and Pablo Casals, the divine cellist, have impressed me most. I wrote a song for Leonard Bernstein and he also wrote a song for me. Pablo Casals I met in Puerto Rico in 1972. When we meditated together in his home, he shed soulful tears. Both of us swam in the sea of mutual love, affection and admiration.

In the sports world, Jesse Owens--whom I adored and looked up to so much during my own athletic career--has left the most profound impression on me. I had the golden opportunity to meet with him in New York several years ago. We had a long discussion about spirituality and sports. His vast knowledge of sports and the upliftment of young athletes to the higher realities of life impressed me deeply. He was truly an unparalleled legend.

Now Carl Lewis, who is known as another Jesse Owens, is a very good friend of mine. His life of simplicity and serenity, and his life of promise for the perfect fulfilment of spiritual tasks, has impressed me most. I pray to my Lord Supreme that his ever-transcending glory will awaken divinely and illumine supremely the firmament of world-athletics.

--You first accept the society which you want to transform. This is a very realistic attitude, rarely to be found among spiritual Masters. But how will you come out of this compromise: accept, and at the same time, transform? And how do you expect to transform the world?

--In the beginning we try to bring forward the good qualities of society and give very little importance to its shortcomings. Once the good qualities of society are increased and strengthened, they will be in a position to transform and illumine the bad qualities of society.

We feel that although the preparation of the collective is absolutely necessary for a better society, the first and foremost goal must be the perfection of the individual. The hope and fulfilment of individual perfection is the only thing that can transform and perfect the whole of society.

--"Manifest the Divine within you" you tell your disciples. For you, isn't the Divine also "somewhere else"? If not, what would then be the meaning of transcendence?

--For me the Divine is not somewhere else. It is within us. In the beginning the Divine within us is like a seed. Then the seed grows into a plant and eventually becomes a huge tree. All the time the Divine is transcending its own capacities in and through us. The Divine within us embodies the message of transcendence. As a matter of fact, this is the cosmic vision--its mission and its realization. This moment it is the promise of transcendence, the next moment it is the act of transcendence and following moment it becomes the realisation of transcendence. So, as instruments of God, we are also transcending ourselves at every moment. The finite in us is entering into the Infinite and the Infinite is consciously transcending its own Infinity.

--Meditation plays an important role in your life and in the life of your disciples. Does it consist of set formulas or is it left to the freedom of each disciple?

--Meditation plays the most

important role in our spiritual life. I tell my disciples to meditate in whichever way brings them peace, joy and satisfaction. But I also tell them that the path of the heart is the safest, quickest and also the most rewarding approach. I tell them to enter into their hearts and see what their hearts want them to do. I tell them to listen to their loving hearts and not to their doubting minds. The aspiring heart has a free access to the illumining soul, and the illumining soul has a free access to the all-fulfilling God. So the heart is the first rung, the soul is the second rung and God is the ultimate rung of the spiritual ladder.

--Music seems to you best able, right after meditation "to express the inexpressible". But is it not considered by most listeners simply as a means of entertainment?

--True, music is next to meditation in its ability to express the inexpressible. Those who think that music is only a means of entertainment are deplorably mistaken. If we are speaking of rock and roll, jazz or some other kind of music, then definitely it is all entertainment... But if it is soulful music, the music that tries to bring to the fore the all-loving qualities of the heart, then it is definitely meant for the enlightenment of the entire being and not for anything else.

--In essence, your teachings seem to say: "Love is the only true knowledge". In a period where power alone seems to be emphasized, this affirmation of the evangelical wisdom is indispensable. But does it have any chance to be heard?

--We all know that there is a kind of love that binds and a kind of love that liberates. The love that liberates is founded upon the inner peace that comes from soulful meditation. The power of love can make a most powerful contribution to meditation, and the love of power can be transformed into the power of love through meditation. He who believes in meditation will not and cannot fail, for meditation is the love-power that illumines, liberates and fulfills.

--Does inner peace remove the risks of war, or does it only allow one to withstand them?

--The sincere hunger for world peace will be able to withstand even a world war. Again, if the inner world is inundated with peace, then the nightmare of world war cannot even come into being.

Peace teaches us to love others the way we want to love ourselves. War has a different message. It teaches us to love ourselves first, so that we can dominate others. Peace is self-expansion, and from self-expansion we grow into universal expansion. War, on the other hand, starts and ends with destruction.