

A ceremony of meditative silence, song and prayer draws to a close. At the invitation of guru Sri Chinmoy, his flock, numbering almost 50 this evening, rises from cross-legged humility on the floor of a frame house in Queens, N.Y. Disciples are mostly in Indian dress—women in flowing saris, short-haired men in white cotton pajamas.

The few outsiders are skeptical as they approach the final benediction, a one-to-one moment with the guru himself. But the encounter is unlikely to leave even the most cynical unmoved. Offering a handful of tiny cakes he has blessed, Sri Chinmoy concentrates intensely on the recipient. Then his eyes begin to flicker wildly, and the pupils eventually roll up to leave only the whites visible. Sri Chinmoy has reached a state of meditative bliss called "samadhi" in his native Bengali. "I swear I could see a gold-colored aura suffuse his head," exclaimed one first-time visitor later. "I don't think I could ever succumb to a guru," he added, "but there's no doubt in my mind that as far as gurus go, this one's the genuine article."

At present count, about 700 individuals worldwide have dedicated their lives to Sri Chinmoy's spiritual path. He advocates love, devotion and surrender to "the supreme." His most publicized adherents are rock musician Carlos Santana, who now uses the spiritual name of Devadip, and the British jazz guitarist Mahavishnu John McLaughlin. As head of the meditation program at the United Nations, the slight, bald-headed guru has attracted diplomats and statesmen as well. He has lectured at Yale and conferred with the Pope, and his writings have been published in several languages.

Some of his commercially minded followers manage "divine enterprises." Parsons Boulevard in Queens is dominated by stores with names like Guru Health Foods, Guru Stationery and the Blessing Light Supreme bookstore. The Smile of the Beyond cafe offers delicious ice cream, a favorite with Sri

Chinmoy, whose weight fluctuates as dramatically as his eyes in trance.

These businesses, which are dedicated to manifesting spiritual conviction to the outside world, are as nothing compared to the guru's own productivity. By avocation a painter, poet, songwriter and playwright, both in Bengali and English, Sri Chinmoy seeks constantly to "transcend" his own spiritual limitations. Recently he wrote 843 poems in 24 hours and then followed up with a staggering 16,031 paintings in the same amount of time. Disciples paraded up New York's Madison Avenue in celebration.

Born to a railroad inspector in West Bengal 44 years ago, Chinmoy Kumar Ghose (sri—pronounced shree—is an Indian title of respect) claims to have achieved the highest state of "god-realization" as a 12-year-old. After two decades in an Indian ashram he emigrated to this country in 1963 and worked in the visa section of the Indian consulate in New York, slowly gathering the flock he leads today.

Asked if he misses Bengal, Sri Chinmoy deftly summarizes his spiritual philosophy: "I don't miss anything or anybody, because inside me is the universal reality as inside you is the universal reality." He avows that "if I get a command from my Inner Pilot I will be more than happy to go to the foot of the Himalayas or into a Himalayan cave—which I did in some of my previous incarnations." □



The child of one of Sri Chinmoy's disciples discovers that the guru's blessing is a giggle-inducing pat on the head.



He calls it "fountain-art," and Chinmoy's outpourings are copious. He recently completed over 16,000 paintings in a day.

As he approaches bliss through meditation, Sri Chinmoy's eyes flicker and his features seem to melt from an inner heat.