

Beginnings, by Banshidhar

San Juan, Puerto Rico 1969

Guru's visits to our island were always a full-on experience of pure joy and excitement. The anticipation leading up to his arrival filled us all with such heart-quickenning giddiness for days on end. Like little children eagerly awaiting Christmas morning, we knew that soon we would receive a very special gift... actually the greatest gift of all, the Master himself!

In those days, Guru's visits would last for several weeks, sometimes longer. We would see him nearly every day, spending hours at his feet in the purely blissful rapture of simply listening to his endlessly fascinating stories. Some funny, others profound, all his words transported us into a timeless realm of unconditional joy.

Our disciple-life during these early years consisted mostly of study, meditation and selfless service like printing Guru's books or producing arts and crafts for sale. Our only real physical activities were cleaning the Centre and maybe going to the beach afterwards. (Ah, the tropical island life!) Throw in a few hikes in Puerto

Rico's beautiful rain forests and we were happy puppies.

So imagine our surprise when one evening, out of the blue, Guru asked all of us to meet him early the next morning in a nearby park to “take exercise!” Little did we know that this first morning session with our Coach Supreme was only the beginning of a new wave of dynamic athleticism that would grow into one of the



defining pursuits of our spiritual path.

We were certainly a motley crew that morning

in the park, having stayed up quite late with Guru the night before. We groggily stood before him in a wavering line following his lead in all manner of exotic stretches, jumps, twists and hops! Guru was in such great shape, so limber and full of joyful energy as he led us through the exercise repertory from his Ashram days. For most of us, on the other hand, this was the

first time we ever did this kind of thing to our protesting bodies!



In that hot and muggy tropical morning, we soldiered on, following Guru as he did his favorite run-skip-twists through the park. When it was all over, we dragged our aching, limping bodies into the nearby ocean for some well-deserved

healing therapy!

That morning was soon followed by short races around the block, with Guru cheering us at the finish line with stopwatch in hand, giving everyone tips and encouragement, planting the seeds for a lifetime of integral spiritual fitness. Soon, training for the New York Marathon and putting on races for the public began. The floodgates were now open!

Today, the source of hundreds of Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team events around the world, the unparalleled 3100-mile race, and our path's central mantra of “self- transcendence”, can, in a sense, be

traced back to such humble beginnings as that tropical morning's exercise session in the park led by our very own "Champion of Champions."