

Guru and Goose Pond Park: A Disciple History by Rupantar and friends

By the late 1990s Guru was nearing the completion of his long and glorious running career, from Ashram sprinter to ultra-runner. Just as in the Mahabharata when Arjuna could no longer utilize his bow, Guru's days of sprinting and competing in races were coming to a close. What remained of Guru's running career were only walking and a handful of 2-mile races in Goose Pond Park.



Figure 1 Guru finishing 2-Mile Race

If you happened to be near Goose Pond Park during the 1990s and early 2000s, and you were there around 5 a.m., you just might have been lucky enough to see Vinaya driving Guru past the park en route to one of his early morning drives or walks.



Figure 2 Guru with Nishtha at 2-Mile Race

The photos of Guru running in this article are from his participation in three 2-mile races in Goose Pond Park—two in 1995 and one in 1996. There are two seasons represented in these races: fall (including a snowfall in one of the races) and winter. On the Sri Chinmoy Reflections site it is recorded that Guru ran 3 official 2-mile races in the park between 1995 and 1996: 2 December 1995, 9 December 1995 and 10 February 1996. The December races were before we took off on our Christmas Trip to South Africa and the last race was when we returned.

Guru's times for these three races in Goose Pond Park (2-mile time, then 1-mile time) are:

2 December 1995:	27:56 and 13:58
9 December 1995:	24:25 and 12:13
10 February 1996:	23:31 and 11:41

As a footnote to Guru's times, it will be noted that Guru participated in many races during the South Africa Christmas Trip—possibly accounting for Guru's faster time when he returned to Queens. After the South Africa trip, Guru ran 8 more races in Goose Pond Park (all 2-mile races), as well as a handful of unofficial runs on the

remaining Christmas Trips, but the 10 February race would remain his fastest time for those remaining races.



Figure 3 Guru running in the snow by the lake, with videographer on tricycle!

Often when Guru ran, there would be monitors/helpers on the course as well as photographers and/or someone videoing his running. If you look closely at the photo of Guru running in the snow by the lake, you will see a red tricycle ahead of Guru: that's Mridanga sitting in the back facing Guru while videoing. We have enjoyed watching that video of Guru's determined progress in the snow many times during our functions at Aspiration-Ground. The special 3-wheeler used by Mridanga required quite a bit of effort by whoever was pedalling, as it was a very heavy industrial model. Needless to say, with all the hills in the Park, that was a real workout for the pedaller. The trike was purchased by Mridanga specifically for the purpose of videoing Guru running. It was a good thing that the boys tested the trike before videoing Guru, as they got a flat on their test voyage! To prevent this from happening again, special puncture-proof tires were purchased. Well done!



Figure 4 Guru talking about Goose Pond Park with Rupantar

During one of these 2-mile races a photo was taken of me kneeling next to Guru. As I remember, this was the time when Guru asked if we could have our ultra-races in Goose Pond Park. At that time the Queens Parks Commissioner was our dear friend Richard Murphy.

After I consulted with Richard Murphy about the feasibility of the project, alas, either because of a lack of enthusiasm or a lack of faith on my part, nothing

happened. But perhaps Guru's dream was manifested in a different way when the 12-Hour Walk, organised by Pratyaya, was moved to the Park, where it continues to be held today. Wish fulfilled?

ABOUT THE PARK

The Park had fallen into disrepair by the late 20th century. For years a series of attempts were made at clean-up and restoration, culminating in a \$2.4 million renovation by the NYC Parks Department beginning in 2014.

For some years the Sri Chinmoy Centre, with the enthusiastic leadership of Bhitihara, a valued Community Board member, has formed a team of "Friends of Captain Tilly Park." One of their clean-up sessions would lead to the removal of about 1,000 bags of debris from the Park. When another Community Board member heard that our team would be taking on the job, he told an employee of the NYC Parks Department, "If the Sri Chinmoy Centre is doing this, you will be amazed at the result!"

It is important to note that for many years the City Councilman for our district was Jimmy Gennaro, who chaired the Environmental Protection Committee. He was widely respected by all his constituents for the care and concern he showed to everyone, and to our entire neighbourhood, for which he secured valuable funding. He has always been a treasured friend to the Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team.



Figure 5 Jamaica High School as seen from Goose Pond Park

On another note: is it Goose Pond Park or Captain George Tilly Park? Most disciples, and Guru himself, have always known the Park as Goose Pond Park, but technically it is Captain George Tilly Park. The Park is named for the son of a prominent Jamaica family who was killed while fighting in the American subjugation of the Philippines in 1899. At the turn of the 20th century the bulk of the land and the pond (called Goose Pond) was owned by the Highland Park Society. In 1935, city officials

renamed the property Captain George Tilly Park in his memory. Guru called the park Goose Pond Park, as do pretty much all the disciples. So in reality it is Goose Pond Park.

The north end of the Park looks up toward the front of majestic Jamaica High School, the largest school building in the country when it was constructed in 1927, and designated a New York City landmark in 2009. In 1985 it was deemed the best secondary school in the United States by the US Department of Education; now, after some difficult years, it houses several smaller public high schools. The disciples have run countless miles on the street between the Park and the school during the 2-mile and 47-mile races over the years.

GURU'S BLESSINGFUL PRESENCE IN THE PARK

Guru's presence, both personally and through the activities of the disciples running, singing and enjoying Celebration meals in Goose Pond Park, as well as cleaning in their I LOVE JAMAICA HILLS T-shirts designed by Sanyogita, has brought new life to the Park. Even in the early 1970s, Guru's light started permeating the Park. In what is now our meal area, Sushumna of London filmed her devoted presentation of the Centre girls dressed in white saris to commemorate Guru's 1973 poetry series *The Dance of Life*.

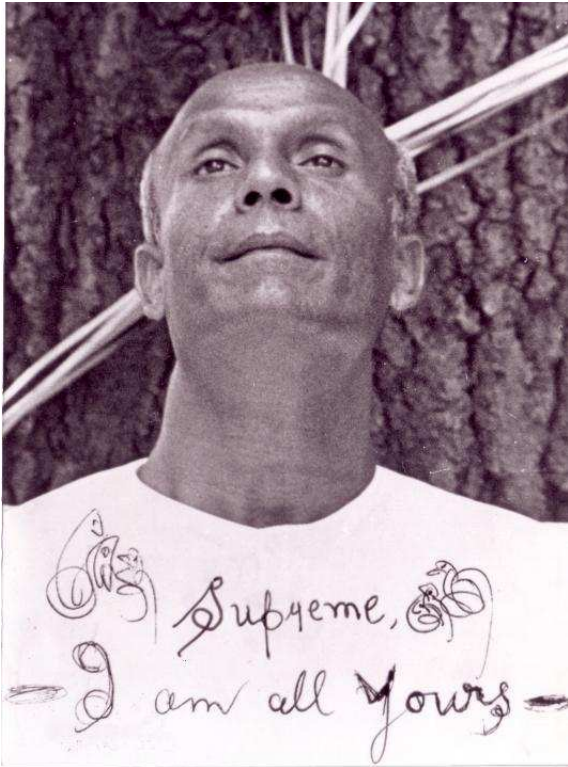


Figure 5 "Supreme, I am all Yours"

On July 20, 1980, at the same location in the Park, Guru held a special meditation for the third anniversary of *Everest-Aspiration*. He sat cross-legged in the middle of the lawn, in front of a large tree that is no longer there. Sarama, one of the original Centre photographers, took a famous close-up photograph of Guru meditating in front of the tree. In 1997, Pulak showed that photograph to Guru because he wanted to offer it for prasad on his birthday. At that time Guru inscribed the photo, "Supreme, I am all Yours," and added birds, requesting Pulak to copy it that way for the disciples.

At the 1980 function, Guru gave each disciple a tall purple liatris flower which he designated the aspiration flower. He had earlier gone to the flower market with Kanan and Hashi to select a flower to signify the quality of aspiration. To this

day, we continue to give out the purple liatris flower for prasad on *Everest-Aspiration Day*.

DISCIPLE STORIES

An anecdote from Vidagdha:

"The only story I remember from Goose Pond Park is that one time a disciple brought Guru a gift from a Russian disciple. It was a very old kind of dagger. Guru looked at it and said that it had so many hostile forces in it he would not even touch it. So he told one of the girls to get rid of it. That disciple had the idea to take it down to Goose Pond Park late at night and throw it into the lake. She was a strong girl so she thought she would throw it far into the centre of the lake. She drew back her hand to throw it but, as she released it, it sliced the top of her finger. The hostile forces in the dagger would not go peacefully!"

Memories of Captain Tilly Park (Goose Pond) with Guru, by Arpan

“Most disciples are familiar with the park we usually refer to as ‘Goose Pond Park’ but which is officially named ‘Captain Tilly Park’. Just a block down the street from Aspiration- Ground and across the street from Jamaica High School, this small park was the scene of many activities for our Centre for many decades. After Annam Brahma established its location on 164th St. in 1971, our activities started slowly evolving in this part of Jamaica, Queens. We also spent lots of time, especially in the summer, at Jamaica High School track practising for Sports Day and holding races around the school block and on the 400-metre track as well.

“In 1980 we acquired the property called ‘the gully’ at that time, which is across the street from Annam Brahma, and turned it into the ‘Tennis Court’, which Guru soon aptly named ‘Aspiration-Ground’. This quickly became the hub of Guru’s activities, but mostly tennis, of course. As the area started developing and growing in space, Guru spent more and more time there with us to share his enthusiastic athletic activities, meditations, music and many other events which became part of our daily life for many years to come.

“Because Goose Pond Park was so close by, we ended up spending more time there, especially during Celebrations. Almost all of our meals were served there during April and August Celebrations. We started having races there as well, especially in the early to mid-’90s. Some visiting disciples may recall the 12-hour walk which took place there for the first time in the early ’90s.

“Those of us who live in the neighbourhood were so blessed and fortunate to spend many Saturdays there with Guru running our Runners are Smilers 2-mile races. It was in September of 1995 when we moved that race from Flushing Meadows-Corona Park to Goose Pond Park, where it remained until the end of July 1996, when we began using our course around the high school. It was so convenient for us who lived in the area just to jog down to Goose Pond and run the race so close to home.

“Guru would usually come and walk the course, which was about 4 and a half laps on a large loop around the pond, onto the Highland Ave. sidewalk and back into the park. If we had finished the race and Guru was still walking, he usually was in a very soulful, meditative consciousness. He expected us to also stay in a soulful consciousness and silently wait for him to finish his walking meditation. I remember at least one occasion when Guru seriously reminded us of how important

it was to be in a receptive consciousness after our race was over and he was still walking soulfully on the course.

“For many Saturdays until March 2, 1996, Guru would invite us to Annam Brahma after the 2-mile race in Goose Pond Park. Even though the restaurant was not usually open for breakfast, Guru requested the workers to cook for us and have special breakfast with him. Many times Guru would get the prasad for us himself, and sometimes he would go right next door and buy it at the deli.



Figure 6 Photo of eggs eaten by Guru, still on display in Annam Braham Restaurant

“One-time Guru bought dozens of raw eggs for prasad. He told us that if we went up to get an egg for prasad, we had to eat it there in its raw form. He showed us how he used to eat raw eggs by breaking a hole in each end of the shell and sucking out the egg, yolk and all. He then proceeded to put five finished eggs on his hand, one on each finger. Those eggs are still on Guru’s table at the front of Annam Brahma to this day. There is a famous photo of Guru with the eggs on his fingers as well.

“Reminiscing about these experiences with Guru many decades ago stirs a sense of deep gratitude for these wonderful opportunities we had with him. But even more than that, it demonstrates how much love and oneness he had with us as he found so many ways to spend time with us and give us outer joy and endless inner blessings as well.

“Goose Pond Park—as well as the whole neighbourhood, which became the epicenter of many of our outdoor activities for decades—can still stir the emotions, the inspiration and the aspiration which blossomed in the days of Guru’s countless hours there with us.

IN SRI CHINMOY'S WORDS

In *Beyond Likes and Dislikes*, Guru writes:

“This morning at 5:20, Vinaya was driving me to Goose Pond Park. Vinaya is very fond of the ducks there. I started my one-mile walk. Right from the first step, Swami Vivekananda was walking with me inwardly for one full mile. A very thin crane was watching us. On the earthly level, I saw one Indian, a Hindi-speaker. He was lying down most comfortably on a bench, speaking on the phone. God alone knows whether it was his wife or someone else that he was speaking with. I passed by, and when I came back, he was still talking. I went around again. I walked comfortably for over eighteen minutes, and Swami Vivekananda was with me inwardly, chatting and chatting.”

In later years, Guru would rely on his chariots more and more: on the Christmas Trips; at the multi-day races, where a small ‘garage’ was constructed to house them; and also in Goose Pond Park. In *Only One Power*, Guru writes:

“And here is a cute story. As you know, we have our Goose Pond Park in Jamaica. The manager of that park has appointed me and Rupantar to be his supervisors, so that I will not have any problems when I am riding there!”

The following story is taken from *Sri Chinmoy Answers, Part 24*.

“Yesterday morning I went to Goose Pond Park. It was drizzling and I was running slowly. Five times I passed by a man sitting on a bench who was heavily drunk. Each time I came by him, he smiled at me. I could not understand what he was saying, but each time I passed by him, he said something encouraging to me. Now if I had had to consciously try to see the divine in him — if I had said, ‘He is also God’s creation. Although he is drinking heavily, let me see the divine in him’ — I would have been wasting my time. But each time I came by, spontaneously I got such joy. If I had identified myself with his outer life, I would have been disgusted. I do not care for drinking at all. For me, it is something abominable. But while I was passing him, I was seeing the divine in him. His inner divinity immediately attracted me. His heart entered into me and my heart entered into him. Therefore, I sincerely got joy.”

Note: The information for this article comes from the New York City Parks Department website and other sites, and from Arpan, Bhitihara, Mridanga, Nemi (editor), Pragati, Pulak, Rupantar, Vidagdha and Vinaya.

Comments and additions are most welcome!

Rupantar (June 1, 2020)