

Many at U.N. Find Guru's Message Brings Peace

Every Tuesday at noon about 100 men and women, some dressed in costumes of distant homelands, file into the quiet chapel of the Interdenominational Church Center, just across the street from the United Nations.

There they meditate with and listen to the preachings of Sri Chinmoy Kumar Ghose, a spiritual leader from India, who for the last seven years has conducted services in the United States and several other countries around the world.

Usually a dozen nationalities are represented in the austere furnished chapel and the garb of those present often creates a spectrum of color.

There might be a married couple from Burundi, for instance, in swirly, flowing dashikis, a Sikh in a Brooks Brothers suit and an enormous, dazzlingly red turban, or a woman in a demure silk sari.

Invited by Delegates

Sri Chinmoy began his meditation series at the Interdenominational Church Center a few weeks ago at the invitation of a group of United Nations delegates, but he has been involved with the U.N. in other ways.

Last spring he conducted a lecture series in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium at the invitation of Secretary General U Thant. He was invited again this fall for a similar series.

"No, the Master isn't paid for his talks," said David Gershon, a school teacher who is one of the guru's disciples. The meditation forums are open to the public free of charge.

"Sri Chinmoy asks only that one comes with a reverential and open mind."

A meditation session with the guru is partly an exercise in silence.

Sri Chinmoy is a slight, baldish man with deep-set, shining eyes. Those in attendance are asked to remove all footwear at the entrance of the chapel. A disciple explains that it is the "Indian way, one does not wear shoes or sandals in the presence of the Holy."

The guru himself is clad in a diaphanous saffron robe,

and a faint fragrance of the perfume of sandalwood paste emanates from his person.

Sri Chinmoy paces a bit at first, an unhurried shuffle as if in preparation for contemplation, and then, with gentle, light steps, he moves up to the podium.

Suddenly, even though it is hardly audible, an "om" pierces the stillness, rising into a crescendo, ringing about the room, and again, suddenly, there is silence.

In the dimness of the room, the elevated figure of the guru stands out in an eerie silhouette as wafts of incense float through the air.

'Love, Devotion, Surrender'

For the next 30 minutes, silence prevails. Each person is in a trance of his or her own. Then the guru steps down, approaches the congregation and begins his sermon, generally a reading from one of his 22 books, which have been published by Harper & Row both in hard-cover and paperback editions.

A hymn concludes the session, and then the delegates and the disciples leave. Sri Chinmoy steps briskly out of the church center and into a car and drives home to Queens, where there is a Sri Chinmoy center, world headquarters for the guru's movement. It has 14 centers in Europe, the Far East, the Caribbean and the United States.

"My philosophy is very simple," Sri Chinmoy said the other day in halting, but clear, English. "It is love, devotion and surrender to the Almighty."

His explanation:

"Divine love is different from human love in the sense that it isn't possessive. The most important aspect of my philosophy is total surrender to the will of God. I define God as One With Form, and so you find my disciples coming from different religions."

Sri Chinmoy does not ask his disciples, of whom there are at least 75 at the Queens center, to relinquish their own religious upbringing. He describes his philosophy as "essentially a form of theology."

"The three steps vital to ultimate surrender to the Divine," Sri Chinmoy said, "are Realization, Revelation and Manifestation."

He believes there are various ways to reach the Godhead, but the path of love is the swiftest."

An Individual Experience

In a sense what all this philosophy means is that through concentrated meditation each disciple can arrive at his own timetable in experiencing divine bliss.

When Sri Chinmoy came to the United States seven years ago, he worked in the Indian Consulate in New York and began to set up meditation classes. The classes soon gathered enough of a following for him to give up his job and to preach full-time. He is not a United States citizen.

While Sri Chinmoy's work is described strictly as a "one-man philosophy thing" by one of his disciples, many say that he has brought them peace.

An Indonesian delegate to the U.N. General Assembly, who seemed too embarrassed to disclose his name because, he noted, "I am a Moslem by faith," said: "Meditation gives inner serenity for me, something I need simply because I move about and travel so much in my work."

France Vecher, a Frenchwoman who has worked at the U.N. since 1948, said:

"I've seen the U.N. grow and with it, problems—both its problems and mine. Sri Chinmoy's prescription for peace of mind is just right

for me. I think it was an act of destiny that we met."

"He has given my wife and I real purpose in life" said David Gershon. "Through Sri Chinmoy we have found joy in life."

The Gershons, David and Gail, met at Sri Chinmoy's center in 1968 and were married by him, Indian style, the next year. Mr. Gershon teaches school in New Jersey, and his wife is a secretary at Cowles Communications.

Liz Addison, a South African who works at the United Nations as a secretary, said:

"Religion was a completely dead thing for me. Life became meaningful only after I met Sri Chinmoy."

Miss Addison helps to organize lectures for the guru at the United Nations.

Sri Chinmoy also lectures widely—at Ivy League schools, such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton, and at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England several times a year.

He recently summed up what his teaching is all about by reading a verse from one of his books:

"God's compassion does three things for us: In the morning it argues with ignorance—night and saves us; in the afternoon it threatens ignorance—sea and guides us.

"In the evening it conquers ignorance—cry and liberates us."