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The eminent spiritual leader, Bengal-born Sri Chinmoy, 62, received the Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace Award in Honolulu, Hawaii, on December 16, 1993. He is on a Pacific Islands tour which includes Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. In thirty years of teaching in the West, Sri Chinmoy has won repeated recognition for his promotion of world peace [see sidebar, page 7]. He accepted an invitation to visit the editorial offices of Hinduism Today on nearby Kauai with 32 devotees, and granted a rare interview which ranged from his United Nations meditation program to his teachings on self-transcendence. Hinduism Today: Please tell us about the United Nations meditation program. Chinmoy: Every Tuesday and Friday I go to the United Nations. For the last 23 years I've been offering prayer and meditation. It originated with the late Secretary General U Thant, a very close friend of mine who encouraged and inspired me. Diplomats, delegates, anyone can come who is inspired. For the last 5 years I've been meditating in silence. Previously I used to give a short talk at each meeting. HT: We spoke today with your disciple, Ashrita Furman, who holds the Guinness Book of World Records record for the most world's records. He told us how you inspired him in his latest record (carrying a nine-pound brick held from the top by one hand for 64 miles non-stop). He said he entered a blissful state of transcendence of his normal abilities. How did you so inspire him? Chinmoy: Self-transcendence is not only possible, but practical, provided we know and we sincerely feel in the depth of our hearts that we are not the doers, but somebody else is.

There are many, many things that Ashritha has performed over the years. It is far beyond my own imagination's flight; it does not fly that high. But how does he do it? He has implicit faith in me, and I have implicit faith in the Supreme. I tell all my students, "I'm not your Guru. There is only one Guru and that is the Absolute Lord Supreme." HT: What about competition? Chinmoy: Competition can never satisfy us. Let us say that I happen to be an athlete. I'm very proud. I just turn around, and I see there's somebody else who can defeat me easily. But in self-transcendence I am competing only with myself. Yesterday how many times did I tell lies? Let me start counting-say 20 times. Oh God, oh God! I'll try to stop it desperately. Not to tell 20 lies but only 19. I'll start at 19, that is difficult. Then the following day 18. This way the golden day will come when I will not tell lies at all. So I am competing with myself. HT: Guruji, are you a Hindu? Chinmoy: Well, if I use my mind-you know, the mind that blinds me and binds me, and the mind that gets a tremendous sense of satisfaction by dividing the world, by lording it over the world-then I am a Hindu. To me Hinduism is not a religion in the sense of a religion that blinds us. To me Hinduism is a home. But the Real in me is my aspiration, my love of Truth, my love of God. There I don't belong to any religion. For me, real religion is the heart home where I can see my inner shrine. So when I'm an aspiring human being, I'm not a Hindu, far from it. I'm cosmopolitan, I am a seeker of Truth, a lover of God. Each religion is like a home. You live here, I live in New York. But when you pray and meditate you go to an inner school, where God is our teacher. You come all the way from here, I come all the way from New York. HT: What are your teachings on brahmachariya, celibacy, which we understand you advocate for both married and unmarried devotees? Chinmoy: Again, it is all based on my personal experience in the inner world. Most of my students are unmarried bachelors and spinsters, and there are married

people. I tell them, "What do you actually want from life? Do you want joy or pleasure? You have to separate the two." Once you enter into spiritual life, you have to know whether you are going to remain in the life of pleasure or you are going to get real bliss. The pleasure life is followed by frustration. Once you are really frustrated, then your destruction is imminent. But if for five seconds during the meditation's highest flight, we get a glimpse of divine light, we feel divine light the whole day. I tell those are married, "Don't try to become celibate overnight. My philosophy is, 'slow and steady wins the race.' Slowly, steadily and unerringly." HT: How should we serve God? Chinmoy: You are destined to serve God the creation. If I know my father is all for me, can I not have faith in Him that whatever I need He will give me? Like a child. The child knows only how to cry. The mother comes running to give milk to the child. The child is not using the term "milk, milk" or something else. His only job is to cry. Similarly, I'm crying to God only to make me a good instrument of use. HT: Meditation seems too difficult. Chinmoy: Meditation is difficult. If I can't do meditation, let me start with prayer, which is easier. If prayer life is difficult, then start with japa on beads. And if japa is also not possible, then spend your precious time mixing with people who can do japa, who can do prayer, who can do meditation-we call it satsang. If you can't do that, go to a holy man, a guru, he will advise you. HT: How do we do God's work? Chinmoy: I serve God because He is all love, not because He is all powerful. Each human being is giving importance to the love of power. But we feel when you accept spiritual life it is the power of love that we need. Only if you can do something unconditionally for God happily, then you are fulfilled. HT: At the Parliament of the World's Religions recently held in Chicago you held only a silent meditation and refused to speak, even at the request of the organizers. Why? Chinmoy: Silence is infinitely more productive. When I open my big mouth to talk, I am proving I

am a better person. That is what I feel. The speaker always feels he is doing a big favor to the audience. He thinks that he is superior, because he is sharing with his students superior knowledge. But when he is doing silence, at that time who is superior and who is inferior? HT: Please tell us about your community in Jamaica, New York. Chinmoy: In Jamaica, my students have accepted me as their spiritual father, and I have accepted them as my spiritual children. I have implicit faith in my students that they are willing to work and march and run along the road. Again, they have faith in me, that I will be able to help them, guide them and lead them to the destined shore. It is based on mutual faith. I give you what I have, you give me what you have. Then comes, I give you what I am, and you give me what you are. This is how I am dealing with them individually, and collectively, not only in Jamaica, but in various parts of the world. HT: What are your observations on the family in America? Chinmoy: In America, the sense of freedom is taking the family away, away, away. If there are four members in a family, then there are three members, two members. They are not satisfied with what they have. In India, they make many blunders, but they try to make themselves belong to one family. The divine feelings of their heart are predominant. In America, forgive me to say, that quality is not as strong. I can't imagine putting my father in an old people's home. No matter how bad the father is in India, it is the son's obligation to take care of his father. Here in America, old age is punishment. When you were a kid, who brought you up? Who helped you go to college and all that? Your parents gave you what they had at that time and now in return what are you giving them? Your indifference. In India even the poorest of the poorest, even if there are ten members in the family, they always take care of each other. The Western perspective is always separating, separating from the realities that God gave us. Shri Chinmoy: Snapshots

Orphaned at age 12, Sri Chinmoy was sent to live at Aurobindo Ashram in South India. Here he spent the next twenty years in spiritual discipline until an inner call from God took him to New York in 1964. There the life-long bachelor resides in a modest house in Jamaica Hills, having established 150 centers worldwide. Several hundred serious followers live nearby in a loosely-knit, highly effective community. His yoga is based on Vedantic principles and those of the Bhagavad Gita. It is a syntheses of devotion, intuitive knowledge and dedicated action, with a distinctive emphasis on the surpassing of self-imposed limits. He has personally created tens of thousands of paintings and songs, and performed feats of extraordinary physical strength. Though raised at Aurobindo Ashram, he does not consider his work a continuation of that lineage. He is known for his many achievements in the areas of music, writing, art and athletics, and also for his commitment to world peace, expressed through peace concerts, the international peace run and the UN meditations. His peace activities have brought him encounters with numerous world leaders-he is especially close with Mikhail Gorbachev. Address: 84-43 164th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11432, USA.