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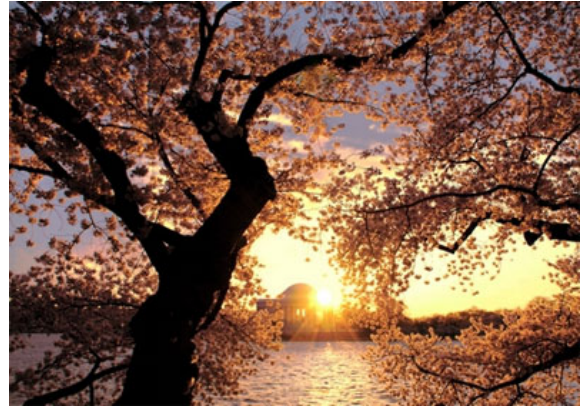
Inspiration Letters 25

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Sometimes people like to work from home. Maybe they feel it's "cooler" not to have to shower and shave and wear aftershave and look professional and presentable to the outside world. Maybe they'd rather not venture out of the house at all and would rather just order their meals from GrubHub.com and make their money writing copy for some online fair-trade handcrafts catalogue. I am one of those people.

Unfortunately, my Guru isn't. He has always insisted that his students lead normal lives, work in the world and see to their proper attire and grooming.

If I didn't write for this forum, I wouldn't know about the chaos in my mind and heart. Writing helps me pin that chaos down and see what's really going on inside of me. By making my feelings intelligible to others, I understand myself more clearly. I thank you all for accompanying me on this journey. It's been a long, strange, wonderful trip, and this is our twenty-fifth issue, a great milestone by any standard. Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude.



Living in the Now! Wow, what a theme! Now!

I know two women who have been disciples of Sri Chinmoy for over thirty years. Every weekend they drive to a distant city to put up posters, give meditation classes and meet with aspiring seekers. They have been doing this for almost two decades. Still, we do not have a centre in this city yet. They told me that they do not care that still we have no students in this city. "All we can do is to love Guru and stay in the now," one of them told me.

Stay in the now. Do what you have to do today. Be happy with where you are and what you have.

I know another lady, an old Asian woman, who recently went back to her native country, in Southeast Asia to do manifestation work. I asked her what she did. She told me she went to her family's old house, where she grew up and where her cousins now live, and she sat in the backyard for two hours a day doing japa, chanting "Supreme". Once she had chanted "Supreme" two hundred thousand times, she planted a tree, and she asked her cousins to pray and meditate there regularly. Maybe it's a very humble manifestation, but who knows? Perhaps the best service we can offer right now is our good will, our aspirations for a better and more peaceful world.

Here's a poem by Sri Chinmoy that I like:

Inside each of us,
There is an older than the oldest Being
And a younger than the youngest Child.
They are the same Person.
That Person deserves worship from us,
Day in and day out.

—Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 49*

I like that idea that the real reality in us is at once primeval and ever-young. It reminds me of St. Augustine's famous utterance: "Late, late, have I loved Thee, o Beauty, so ancient and so new."

Whenever I attended meditations with Sri Chinmoy, I felt he transformed the atmosphere of the entire hall, flooding the room with peace and poise and holiness and light. I am sure the consciousness he brought down will be cherished by the world forever. I can't think of anybody who has ever offered such constant inspiration and encouragement, so constantly and unconditionally.

I see time differently since becoming a student of Sri Chinmoy. I am less interested in proving myself to others, and more interested in being genuinely happy. I find I gel with Thomas Jefferson's famous line, "It is neither wealth, nor splendor, but tranquility and occupation, that give happiness."

Maybe I like my simple job because it gives me a lot of time to think about life. Again, maybe all my thinking is just a waste of time, and all that matters are the yellow plates coming out of the soapy water shining and dripping clean and smelling a bit of the lemony soap.

I like Chicago. I like it because it is an old, rusting city. I like the many vacant lots and abandoned buildings and overgrown urban parks. I like Chicago because I like old things. I like my old classical LPs. Some of them belonged to high school libraries, and were probably last listened to in the 1960s. Old records, like old books, keep an emotional impression of the people who listened to them and loved them and the joy and fondness they had for the music stays with the records. It's all recorded there.

Right now I am looking at a list of “friends” of the restaurant, people who come here a lot to eat. I see the name of a woman, “Daisy.” I guess the name Daisy comes from the flower, which used to be called the day’s eye, the beautiful brown eyes of the summer’s day. Who would’ve thought a day could have such plain, beautiful eyes? I also like the idea of a “day’s eye”. An eye in many cultures is a symbol for life. This life lasts only for a day in the bosom of eternity. Here’s another poem by Sri Chinmoy that I treasure:

Silence-Face, Forgiveness-Smile

Life is but a day.

Therefore

I try to finish

All my aspiring

And

All my loving

In the short span

Of one single day.

Life is but Eternity,

Therefore

I sleep and dream,

I sing and dance

And

Dance and sing

In the Silence-Face, Forgiveness-Smile

Of the birthless and deathless Day.

—Sri Chinmoy, *The Wings of Light*

May we proceed onward and upward in the Eternal Now!

Mahiruha

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Life — Now Available in Present Tense!

Brahmata



The Art of Now

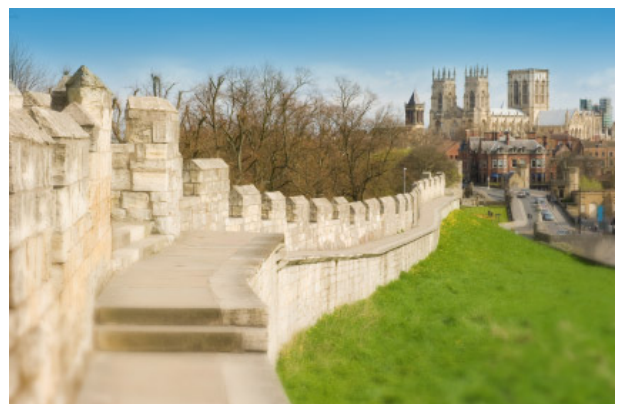
Mahiruha Klein

God’s Great Experiment

by [Sumangali Morhall](#)

My father forwarded an email to me this morning — one of those circulars sent between batches of friends and family. I always read them; I know my own friends and family would only share with me those topics that had profoundly moved them or amused them. This one must have been going around for years, and yet the story was new to me. Maybe you know it already.

It was the morning rush hour, some time in early 2007, at an especially ordinary subway station in Washington DC. An unassuming busker played violin, wearing jeans and a baseball cap. During his performance of 43 minutes he made \$32. Not a bad haul, until you find out he was Joshua Bell, one of the most highly acclaimed virtuoso musicians in the world. Three days earlier, one of the cheaper tickets to see him play at Boston Symphony Hall would have set you back \$100. In concert he can earn something in the region of \$1,000 a minute: the same man playing the same pieces on the same violin.



The violin was hand crafted by Antonio Stradivari in 1713, during what was known as his ‘golden period’. The performance was to begin with Chaconne from Bach’s Partita No. 2 in D Minor. According to Bell, it is “not just one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, but one of the greatest achievements of any man in history. It’s a spiritually powerful piece, emotionally powerful, structurally perfect.”* It is also considered one of the most difficult pieces to master for solo violin, and is said to celebrate the very breadth of human possibility itself.

And almost nobody noticed.

Only one woman recognised Bell, and was responsible for \$20 of his \$32 takings. Most of those who seemed to pick up on anything special were children, but they were whisked away by harried parents in the rush to work. Others threw in a perfunctory handful of pennies as they passed, perhaps just out of duty or habit. Some did recognise this was no ordinary busker, but a man demonstrating considerable skill and a deep connection with the music he was offering. Woefully few noticed anything much at all though, buried in their own thoughts and iPods, fixed on some future moment — the start of a working day, a business meeting, a deadline. Many queued to buy lottery tickets at the top of an escalator, well within earshot, not knowing they already had a winning ticket to see and hear one of the greatest performances they may ever witness in this lifetime.

I am not saying getting to work on time or getting children to school is unimportant; I am not saying I myself would have recognised Bell — far from it — but just reading about it saddened me and made me wonder about this age of stress and bustle. Are we so ruled by clocks and achievements that we have nothing spare for beauty and expression? Are we even looking and listening at all, or are we quite literally losing our senses? It was a deliberately tough challenge on the part of those who set up the experiment — rush hour commuters caught in their routine are bound to be a fairly downbeat and inflexible crowd, especially in such an uninspiring setting — but the response is still saddening.

It certainly made me think.

How can I augment my own tiny jigsaw piece of this world, treasuring it more and thus perhaps in some microscopic way raising the general awareness of its wonder? This world is itself God’s great Experiment. Will I then rush past it, flinging behind me a few spare pennies at His creation? Or will I let myself be ravished by His constant outpouring of surprise and adventure?

* * *

I remember a few months ago walking through a railway station somewhere in the north of England. There was a series of hoardings, each featuring a photograph of a destination that could easily be reached from there by train. One was a stretch of moorland, reminiscent of some enigmatic Brontë novel, fading back for miles, as though into the very mists of time. Another was a futuristic angle on a city, all glass and metal, like the winning project in some architectural award scheme. I was not reading the words, but only glancing at the pictures, imagining the sounds and smells that might go with them. A third was of higgledy-piggledy shops and houses, so bent with age they were nearly leaning into one another’s facades across a cobbled alley. The scene was almost ridiculously quaint, like a fairy-tale illustration born of an over-active imagination.

“Imagine living *there!*” I thought to myself for a tiny moment of childlike joy, before I realised where it was: York. I do live there.

My home is just outside the city walls — a two-mile circuit of stone begun by the Romans two thousand years ago. Through the middle ages, York is said to have been England’s second most powerful and consequential city after London. It also then became the northern capital of the Church of England, and the building of its imposing cathedral was soon under way. Known as a ‘minster’ — originally a missionary teaching church — it is now the second biggest Gothic cathedral in northern Europe, after Cologne. It holds the single largest example of medieval stained glass in the world, some of the other windows dating back to the twelfth century. With the rise of York’s importance, the protecting city walls became increasingly fortified, and its four portcullised entrances more elaborate. Since then, apart from retaining its religious status, its power and influence have faded almost to nothing. Its modest size and relative insignificance have thus kept it safe from war damage and inappropriate development. It remains a rare jewel of England, a delicious layer-cake of eccentricities, a living picture book of almost impossible charm.

Appreciating this city is never a conscious effort for me; each time I walk to town, the sight of it really does take my breath away. The streets are so small and condensed, the buildings such a raggle-taggle patchwork of styles and eras, only a slight turn of the head can reveal a whole new undiscovered story. Admittedly some days I appreciate it more than others. When caught in a downpour of hail, or when the ice on the bald cobbled pavements has not been gritted, or when I am quite simply in a rush to get things done, no I do not stop and wonder at the enchanting marvelousness of it all, I just want to get home. But today, sobered by the story of the violin, I am running all my errands at an ambling pace, and via all the tourist routes. Not exactly a hardship on the first sunny Saturday of Spring.

One of the things I love most about this place is that people are almost always here because they want to be. There is no significant business other than tourism, and although it sits exactly halfway between London and Edinburgh, York is not really on the way to anywhere. People visit here from all over the world precisely to be fascinated, to be swept away by legends of conquerors and gladiators and Viking ships, to walk into a living folk tale or a ghost story. Many are children, and those who are not are either escorting children or taking a childlike view. They walk slowly, smilingly, gazing in all directions. They pause to point out a gargoyle in a nook, they queue patiently for a table at the best teashop, they listen attentively to buskers; they are constantly stopping, looking and listening, because that is exactly what they came for. This is perhaps the opposite end of the sensory spectrum from a Washington subway station in rush hour.

Naturally it is a slightly different matter to see these sights every day, to do the shopping and other chores in the middle of a tourist attraction, but today I give all my attention to the people around me, and immerse myself in their wonderment. Two girls walk hand in hand, tiny feet in great big boots, smiling and laughing at a shared story, talking all at once in a Japanese jumble of memories. A hen party gabbles across the bridge, bursting with loud and insalubrious laughter, high precarious shoes, identical devil horns covered in pink feathers. A regatta is under way — teams of university rowers heaving red-faced along the gloss of the river. An elderly couple cling to one another for strength or out of familiar habit. A tiny child peeps out from a fabric sling on the chest of its father. A little boy strides ahead of his parents with a blunt wooden sword and a plastic Roman helmet, protecting them from sudden marauders. English in countless accents, languages I have never heard; faces I have never seen and will never see again. Everyone is looking, listening, stopping, smiling, captured only by a constantly unfolding moment; ordinary people doing ordinary things, fully engaged in God’s virtuosic Performance.

Walking home along the tops of the city walls, I hear the peal of church bells fading behind me. I peer over the battlements to see the long green banks full of daffodil buds, ready to explode into their annual sea of yellow any day now. Stepping down at Micklegate Bar — the old main entrance to the city — I pass one final cluster of visitors, and a woman's voice is the last I hear. Glancing at the heavy bag of vegetables on my shoulder, she turns to her companion:

“Imagine if you *lived* here...”

HERE and NOW
My life must learn
How to become
The life of the world.

—Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 49*

* The full story can be found at the [Washington Post](#).

Living in the Now

by [Rathin Boulton](#)

How do you live in the “Now”? And what exactly is the “Now”? This minute? This second? A fraction of a second? How small can a unit of time be, anyway?

The smallest measurement of time is one Planck time, and is the amount of time it takes light to travel, in a vacuum, a distance of one Planck length. A Planck length is equal to $1.616199(97) \times 10^{-35}$ metres. This is quite probably smaller than anything you can imagine, let alone see. Planck time is largely theoretical, as it is too small to be measured with, say, a stopwatch. To quote that much-maligned source, Wikipedia, “All scientific experiments and human experiences happen over billions of billions of billions of Planck times, making any events happening at the Planck scale hard to detect.” (Max Planck was a German physicist. He invented quantum physics, too.)



“Living in the now” is a concept that may seem identical to the expression “being in the moment”. But, taking the previous paragraph into consideration, that moment can be rather too fleeting to be much of anything in. It begs the question: what is time? And how are we “in” it?

Is time a “thing” at all? Well, here is another quote from Wikipedia (and for those who regard the internet as a second-rate source of information, consider this: The Encyclopedia Britannica will soon cease publishing hard copies of its books, and will be mainly available as an online resource, and one day we may kiss goodbye all papery, documenty, booky things altogether):

Two contrasting viewpoints on time divide many prominent philosophers. One view is that time is part of the fundamental structure of the universe, a dimension in which events occur in sequence. Sir Isaac Newton subscribed to this realist view, and hence it is sometimes referred to as Newtonian time. Time travel, in this view, becomes a possibility as other “times” persist like frames of a film strip, spread out across the time line. The opposing view is that time does not refer to any kind of “container” that events and objects “move through”, nor to any entity that “flows”, but that it is instead part of a fundamental intellectual structure (together with space and number) within which humans sequence and compare events. This second view, in the tradition of Gottfried Leibniz and Immanuel Kant, holds that time is neither an event nor a thing, and thus is not itself measurable nor can it be travelled.”

I tend to subscribe to the latter view, where time travel isn't possible, and you can't flit back in time to see the Last Supper or the Battle of Kurukshetra, and you certainly can't go forward and look at stuff that hasn't happened yet. But I reserve the right to revise that opinion based on possible future experiences (no pun intended).

So let's consider the whole “time” aspect as a bit of a red herring. After all, time is a measurement. The Sanskrit word “maya”, often interpreted as “illusion”, actually means “to measure”. This has caused me many years of rumination, the results of which can be summed up as: Maya refers to our physical universe, which for the most part, can be measured in an incredible number of ways. But our inner life, our spiritual life, is something that cannot be measured.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, and I am paraphrasing, that he wasn't interested in counting all the leaves in the mango orchard. He just wanted to eat mangos! The great spiritual master also told a story about a doll made of salt, who went to measure the depth of the ocean. It is immediately apparent what would happen to this doll upon contact with salt water. This little parables illustrates that, whilst measuring is absolutely vital to our physical life, it is quite useless to our inner life.

I can't help slip in one more clever quote about chronology: “Time... is what keeps everything from happening at once” (Ray Cummings, science fiction writer).

I have personally taken part in the [Self-Transcendence 3100-Mile Race](#) four times. Each race consists of 5649 laps of one Queens suburban block, and takes nearly two months to complete (especially at my pace). So I feel that I have had a taste of what eternity is like. Each race feels like a lifetime, with the end nowhere in sight. I discovered that after a few weeks, short-term memory seemed to practically disappear, and the future shrank to the next lap, the next few metres, the next step. This was a way of coping with an experience which was just too large for the mind to deal with: the mind surrendered. And all I was left with was the now. And it could be a pretty good place to be. Especially if there was ice cream.

Campfire Memories

by Jogyata Dallas

In that brutal bad New Zealand winter of 2002 the worst storm ever recorded charged across the central North Island mountains, burying the forests in metres of snow and sending the few humans crazy enough to be out there in that onslaught fleeing for lonely mountain huts. Marooned by waist high drifts, fallen trees and winds colder than grief they huddled over cheerless fires while the storm howled and hammered at the windows like a break-in, eking out their food for the long wait. The canopies of that beautiful forest became weighed down by accumulating snow and when the lethal winds would not abate, toppled to the forest floor, their huge trunks shattering like match sticks. The great cathedral-like valleys and long skylines of ancient podocarps were decimated, a holocaust, their splintered blood red timbers oozing sap like the death of a great dynasty.



We came there for three days in 2011. The toppled forest giants lay in their beautiful ruins, engulfed now in ferns, algae, multiplying mosses, dissolving back into the earth, soil for the hibernating seeds of the new generations. Lichens, purple mushrooms, ancient symbiotic things competed for life on the armor plated bark; and myriad fungi, their delicate spiderweb filaments creeping out, hungry tentacles craving nutrients and life.

In pools of startling transparency, grandfather trout fit to grace any fisherman's extravagant dreams lazed above pebble beds of smooth argillite and grey river stones. The water achingly cold, pure as tears. And deer tracks in the mud pans and snow, the splayed imprint of a hurrying stag, and last night, deft hooves of a hind, light, cautious. She stopped just there, listening deeply into the intense and telling silences, hearing every tiny sound of the night — stealthy wings, an owl trawling the dark; the mute whirr of a ghost moth; leaves moving, the sighing forest; the susurrations of water; far off a kiwi's plaintive cry. Then reassured, moving on.

Our flimsy tent fly is not needed on this clear night and we lie on the forest floor in our sleeping bags, staring up through the dark shapes of trees into an indigo sky filled with dishevelled stars, a high tossed handful of jasmine flowers. Now the long wait till dawn, awareness without thought, the brimming silence, the attentive listening — not just into the darkness but into those deeper silences that are existential, open you up to other perspectives and broodings. Deep in this remote place everything is pared away. The long night swallows up the follies in your mind, disentangles you from the fictions and myths of who you thought you were. You peer into the empty silent mirror of eternity to see yourself, unmasked and elemental, to become as nothing and to see what remains.

Then 5 a.m., the dawn sky swallowing its last pale stars, retiring owls calling from the dark folds of hills, a dim figure shuffling down to the cold, crystalline river to wash. Then to meditate together around a fire piled high with deadfall. "Look" says Ramana Maharshi in a passage I remember from somewhere. "This little finger covers the eye and prevents the whole world from being seen. In the same way this small mind covers the whole universe and prevents Reality from being seen. See how powerful it is!"

But in this silence before the dawn chorus of the birds the mind melts slowly away and there is only this moment attenuated out like a long string of presence, only the here and now and the simplicity of pure being. In this happiness, Sri Chinmoy writes,

"we will really spread our wings, and we will feel that we are flying in the divine freedom-sky. The entire length and breadth of the world become ours, not for us to rule over but as an expansion of our consciousness. We become reality and vastness itself."

—Sri Chinmoy, *Happiness*

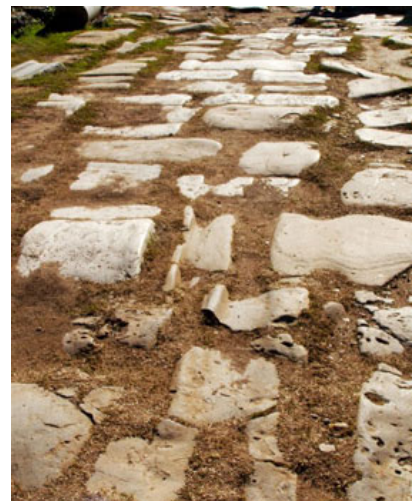
Bricklayer in Training

by Sharani Robins

While in New York for the weekend, I joined in a Sunday morning meditation at the Oneness-Heart Centre in Jamaica, Queens — one of the many meditation centres comprised of students of meditation master Sri Chinmoy. The Centre's atmosphere was a study in exquisite spiritual elegance and richly fed that part of me that loves spiritual beauty. More importantly, the beauty of oneness shone as the Centre embodied its name offered by Sri Chinmoy. Those present comprised a smorgasbord of nationalities — America, Bangladesh, the Ukraine, Latin America and more.

Upon arriving, first I glanced through the shelves of an extensive library of Sri Chinmoy's books to pick out a book for the silent reading portion of the meeting. There are many old editions of titles that are now out of print or have been re-issued in a different format. There is something altogether thrilling about handling what might be a first edition of some now classic title. Through the generous donation of various long-time local Centre members, this library (which allows check-out of books as well) is quite complete.

I picked out a book from the *Fifty Freedom-Boats to One Golden Shore* series to read silently prior to the meditation. The book contained questions and answers from a lecture tour by Sri Chinmoy across all 50 states of the U.S. back in 1974. These books are available full text online in the [Sri Chinmoy Library](#) but I prefer reading the actual book.



One of the questions that I read in the *Fifty Freedom-Boats* book concerned the topic of work and spirituality. Here it is excerpted from the online library:

Question: Why is it so difficult to unite one's worldly work with the spiritual life?

Sri Chinmoy: The difficulty is that we do not really try to follow the spiritual life. The moment we get up in the morning, we think of our school, our office, our family problems and our earthly duties. We do not do the first thing first. We do not think of God. Consciously or unconsciously we forget the existence of God, but we never forget the existence of mankind. God does not exist in our mind; what exists in our mind is man alone. Naturally we cannot combine the two. If God took precedence in our mind early in the morning, before humanity came into the picture, then we could combine them. But we have not invited our Eternal Friend to enter our room and stay with us; we have invited only man. When we do not invite our first and foremost Friend, naturally we cannot introduce our other friend to Him. We want to tell God, "This is my friend man," and we want to tell man, "This is my Friend God." But one of the friends is missing. So we have to make sure to invite both friends. But again, we shall be wise if we know which of the two friends has more capacity to please us and should come first. Before we invite the world at large, before we invite mankind into our mind and heart, let us invite God, our Eternal Friend. If He comes and we feel His presence in our heart, then easily we can combine both the outer world and the inner world."

—Sri Chinmoy, *Fifty Freedom-Boats To One Golden Shore, Part 4*

This particular passage from the book made a strong impact upon me. I found myself contemplating the concepts described in the answer and kept coming back to it.

The notion that God is a friend to invite into our interior life juxtaposed with the image of a description of worldly life as another friend created the perfect metaphor for me.

As I sat during my 6 a.m. meditation the next day, when my thoughts started to drift towards reviewing the previous day's activities and various dramas, I stopped myself and thought of Sri Chinmoy's words,

The moment we get up in the morning, we think of our school, our office, our family problems and our earthly duties. We do not do the first thing first. We do not think of God. Consciously or unconsciously we forget the existence of God, but we never forget the existence of mankind.

Was I not drifting in that direction by giving in to the urge to hit the rewind button and mull over all the various experiences from my day in New York prior to that morning's meditation. I certainly had no shortage of material — I was out the door early in the morning to take exercise and meditate at Aspiration-Ground and did not arrive back home to stay there for more than a few minutes until well beyond 12 hours later.

But I stopped myself. In what way was I not “consciously or unconsciously” forgetting the existence of God by thinking about my interactions with others (“we never forget the existence of mankind”) instead of engaging in **silent** meditation in communion with God.

I told myself that I had the whole rest of the day to think about what lessons and experiences I had the day before and that my morning meditation needed to keep to the straight and narrow, here and now, heart not mind...

Once I stopped swerving away and settled into the immediacy of meditation in the “now” a vision entered into my awareness of large brick pavers being placed at my feet in front of me. As these bricks appeared, I imagined that I stepped forward onto the path they created. The sense was that this path led directly to God.

Now I cannot resist humorously saying today that this vision struck me powerfully at the time — like a ton of bricks. Perhaps for individuals whose spiritual name does not mean “road” like mine does there is less resonance or profundity.

In case some of it does inspire others similarly, I will hazard sharing it here. You see usually when I think of a road or path as a symbol for the spiritual journey to the goal I am picturing a road that already exists and pilgrims are moving along it. Or I am picturing that the spiritual master and the community of disciples is itself the road to the goal.

This time, however, the image of actually laying the bricks before moving forward offers a different perspective. Laying the bricks in order to progress forward towards the goal adds more importance to finding what actions and thoughts cause a brick to be added to the path. No forward steps are possible until the road itself is first created.

It gives the feeling that everything we do results in a brick but that if one wants to move forward in a spiritual direction, certain actions must precede the appearance of a brick allowing you to go further that way.

Over-involvement in “the existence of mankind” in a worldly way creates bricks too but those bricks might extend sideways or curve off in a different direction than the road made from spiritual bricks. They will lead somewhere too but not in the direction that a spiritual seeker yearns to reach.

So we are all bricklayers and our thoughts, intentions and actions send us in certain directions. If we want a road to take us to a divine goal of union with God, the only way that will happen is if we remember to invite God our eternal friend into our minds and hearts first. That will lay bricks at our feet which we can walk, march and run upon to reach our “destined goal”. I think the road we travel upon does not actually exist until we will it into existence.

Do you like this kind of a road trip? I must confess I am mesmerised by it and am transfixed by adding more bricks to the road unfolding into the beyond just in front of me.

For an earlier version of these musings with comments, please visit [Sri Chinmoy Inspiration](#).

Magical Moments in Bangladesh

by Abhinabha Tangerman

As a disciple I have a special fondness for India and Bangladesh, Sri Chinmoy's land of birth. To me everything that comes from there is imbued with a magical glow: the music, the language, the poetry and of course the spirituality. Especially Mother Bengal — which when Sri Chinmoy was born was still part of India — is blessed with a deep spiritual touch. Four great spiritual Masters of the modern era, Sri Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo and Sri Chinmoy, all took birth in Bengal. You could safely say that Bengal is the spiritual womb of the world. Unfortunately in 1905, during the rule of the British, this once proud Indian province was divided into two: a poor East Bengal, now Bangladesh, and the more prosperous West Bengal, which remained part of India after independence. Yet despite the painful division Bengal is still very much one, in culture, language and heart. Perhaps one blessed day it will be reunited.



Although Sri Chinmoy was born in what is now Bangladesh, he moved to South India at the age of 11 after losing his parents, following his brothers and sisters into the ashram of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. When he later made his home in New York he outwardly lost touch with his motherland, yet he maintained a strong inner connection with the heart and soul of Bengal, musically, culturally and spiritually.

Once Sri Chinmoy revealed that he conversed with God in his Bengali village dialect:

Most of the time, I speak to God in the Chittagong dialect, which was spoken in my village, or in pure Bengali. Sometimes I speak English, but English comes last. When I was younger, every day I would recite a prayer from the Upanishads, India's sacred scriptures, which are in the Sanskrit language. Also, I used to read prayers in French. But I get more joy from Bengali prayers. If I pray to God in the Chittagong dialect, the prayer is more spontaneous.

—Sri Chinmoy, *World-Destruction: Never, Impossible!, Part 2*

He became well known as a spiritual leader in many parts of the world, but ironically enough remained unknown in the land of his birth. After his passing his disciples felt the time had come to introduce Sri Chinmoy's music and legacy to his motherland and a series of concerts was arranged. I was fortunate enough to participate in these concerts with our [Gandharva Loka Orchestra](#). Last February we performed both an indoor and outdoor concert in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka. It was a unique experience, which has increased my love of Bengal in many ways.

Being in Bangladesh is like being in two extreme worlds at the same time. On the one hand there is tremendous outer poverty. Streets and buildings are run-down and dilapidated, traffic is a chaotic, slow-moving cacophony of blaring car horns and rickshaw bells, and beggars in the most pitiful conditions swarm the sidewalks. Yet on the other hand the hearts of the inhabitants are flooded with the purest divine qualities. Nowhere else can you find a people so endowed with sweetness as in Bangladesh. It feels like swimming in an ocean of kindness, affection, love and oneness. In this respect Bangladesh is undoubtedly the richest country in the world. One extreme makes up for another.

For our concerts we worked together with a local music school, headed by one of the country's most famous singers, Rezwana Choudhury Bannya. Bangladesh is a country of singers, just like Brazil is a country of soccer players and Kenya a country of long-distance runners. In Bangladesh everybody sings, from the street cleaners to the ferrymen. So one can imagine the level of vocal perfection found in a genuine singing school. As Guru's disciples we have been singing for many years, but to hear these professionally schooled Bengalis sing is to feel oneself a toddler facing a university professor. The inner sweetness and outer perfection of their voices can only be felt and never be described. Needless to say it was an experience of purest delight and we felt much like aspiring amateur runners allowed on a training run with a group of Olympians.

Yet the absolute highlight of the whole trip was the outdoor concert. We played at an amphitheater overlooking a lake in the centre of town. Because of the media attention a lot of people had heard about the event. The concert was due to start at 4.30 p.m. An hour earlier the place already started to fill up. At 4 p.m. there was already a crowd, and half an hour later not a single spot was left. There were people everywhere, even filling up the streets behind the amphitheatre. The television stations estimated the crowd at 15,000 strong.

Sitting on stage getting ready to play and seeing this sea of people in front of me, every face eager with anticipation, I felt an unbelievable thrill pass through me. The sun was just about to set and the last rays of sunlight framed the setting in a golden glow. It was a magical moment. Bannya introduced Sri Chinmoy to the audience with tremendous eloquence, saying that while Rabindranath Tagore had introduced Bengali culture to the world, Sri Chinmoy had come full circle by bringing the world (us Westerners) back to Bangladesh. Indeed, to the audience it must have been quite amazing to see Westerners coming to their country to sing Bengali songs!

Then the concert started and during its entire two hours I was in a heightened state of consciousness, feeling a oneness with the audience that transcended culture, language and background. I relished every second and I don't think I've ever lived more in the Now. The love and appreciation coming back from the audience were like blissful waves breaking on our humble orchestra. I remember listening to the last song, a haunting Tagore arrangement sung by Bannya, and being overwhelmed with gratitude. 'Thank you, my Lord, for this moment,' I whispered to God. 'Thank you so very much.' And just when I thought things couldn't possibly get better, they suddenly did.

After she had sung the last song, to our surprise Bannya invited everybody to sing the national anthem. Suddenly 15,000 people rose like one man, placed their hands on their hearts and most soulfully started singing 'Amar Sonar Bangla', 'My Bengal of Gold', an unbelievably beautiful song composed by Rabindranath Tagore. I stood on stage mesmerised, looking out over a sea of people singing like their life depended on it. Tears were welling up in my eyes and I was swept away on a wave of emotion. It was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful moments of my life. I felt part of something epic and historical. The soul of Mother Bengal came down and sang through all of her children. There was no final applause, just that haunting and lilting song, carrying everybody away into a world of love, peace and oneness. I felt a sudden hope for the world. If only all this wealth that we carry inside could come to the fore from time to time, like it did on this evening. a new world of peace and oneness will be within our grasp. Bangladesh has shown that it can be done.

by Purnakama Rao

Living in the now is the quintessence of simplicity, yet achingly elusive, and oft times difficult to achieve.

Certainly when things are going well, living in the present moment feels quite easy, and you cannot imagine how you could ever be anything but ever present, enjoying the smooth flow of life, like a clear mountain stream.

However, when life's challenges begin to spout and sputter their hot lava, you often want to be anywhere but right in the middle of it.

Perhaps instead at a lakeside cabin, curled up with a good book and a nice cup of tea. Or perhaps in bed with your head well covered with blankets. Nice thick ones, to muffle the weeping and moaning.

No need to disturb the neighbours, or the cat.

Einstein said "When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute — and it's longer than any hour. That's relativity."

And that's living in the now; bearing pleasure and pain equally, and finding the strength and wisdom to do so.

On a recent Christmas trip to Hawaii, I had a unique experience walking along a paved beachside pathway. I was given the opportunity to see a microcosm of life, a lone soul walking between many eternal nows as I glimpsed stolen moments in other people's lives. Some were peaceful, some painful, but all were simply a moment in cosmic time.

It was a typically lovely Hawaiian evening at sunset, and I had taken the time to have a relaxing walk to bask in the awesomeness of nature's beauty.

As I walked, the people that I was passing (some on the beach, some on the park side) began to come into my awareness. It was like passing scenes in a play; brief impressions, little vignettes of life.

The first people that I passed were a middle-aged couple. They were sitting together on the beach looking out at the sunset in companionable silence using chopsticks to eat a Chinese takeaway from little fold top boxes. It was the kind of silence born of many years together, having seen the best and the worst of each other, and coming to the conclusion that they love each other anyway. No longer needing to impress or entertain each other they just sat, enjoying the moment of relaxation.

As I walked a little further, underneath a palm tree was a woman practicing yoga. She was a young beautiful woman with a lean toned body, flawless skin, and sporting expensive yoga gear that accentuated her perfect form. Her movements were lithe and graceful. One might say swanlike. She was slowly doing her sun salutations to the now rising moon and everything about her was perfection. Every move, every posture was supremely executed.

She seemed to glow with an aura of peace bathed in the dim light of the lamppost above.

A sharp noise quickly diverted my attention away from the young yogi, like a bell, signaling the end of one scene, and the beginning of another, this one in stark contrast to the previous one.

The noise came from a picnic table directly opposite the girl, on the park side of the path about 10 feet away. I turned my head to see that the noise that had distracted me came from a homeless man tossing one last tin can into his already full to overflowing shopping cart. He sat at the table wearing a stained and torn coat, much too large and heavy for the mildness of the evening. He stayed away from the light of the lamppost, as if trying to let the ensuing darkness swallow him whole, to keep him safe from the prying eyes, of passersby like me.

His hair was long and straggly grey, and his face wore a beard much the same. I looked at his eyes and saw exhaustion, pain, sadness and despair. A weary life with stories untold, filling his shopping cart to the brim.

I continued walking.

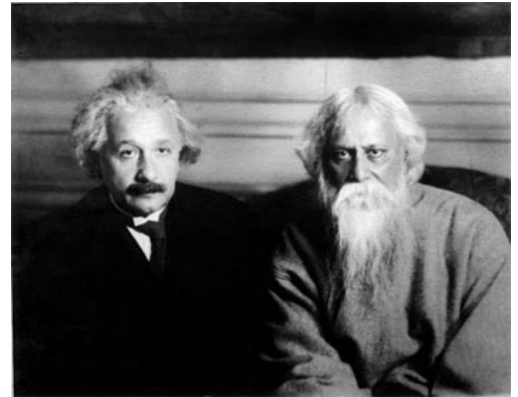
This time it was a voice that pulled my attention. It wasn't a normal voice that you might hear as you pass by people having a light conversation. It was a voice that was heavy, and pleading. I looked ahead to see a couple at a park bench, about 20 feet further along the path from the homeless man.

The woman sat on the bench like a stone, arms crossed, staring icily straight ahead. Although she was looking directly at the ocean and the beauty of the moonrise, it seemed that she saw nothing, blinded by her seething anger.

It was then that I saw the source of the voice. A man was kneeling on the ground at her feet, staring up at her, hoping to see any kind of movement or recognition. His hands grasped upward at her clenched arms, and tears dropped from his eyes to the grass below. He was begging her forgiveness for some wrong he had committed and he pleaded for just one more chance. His voice was pained and weeping, her eyes frozen and unforgiving.

I walked on, never finding out if all was eventually forgiven, or if they lived happily ever after, to one day eat Chinese take aways on the beach.

Finally, a light girly giggle drew my attention oceanside. I looked toward the burgeoning starry sky, and yes, there beside me was youth.



A young teenage couple was frolicking on the beach, flirting, romantic, and blissfully unaware that anything or anyone else existed. Not aware of the peaceful yogi, or of the desperate homeless man, or of the fighting couple who could possibly give them insight into a slice of their own future. They just laughed and played as if that moment in time was the only moment there ever would be, and that it would last forever.

I continued my stroll, and went back to the hotel. I mulled this experience over for quite a long time, and as well for many weeks afterward, remembering quite vividly the scenes that had played out before me.

Walking along the path that evening allowed me to see snippets of life in a few fleeting moments; love, joy, anger, despair, yet as I walked, I felt I was a silent observer, untouched by the emotions evoked at each scene. Just walking in my own now, watching, but not part of the play.

It made me think about my own life and the times that I actually felt the emotions that I observed on my walk, sometimes several at once in a confusing jumble. How very real those emotions felt, and how caught up I got in the moment, allowing my mind to create an unseen heaven or hell.

What if I could find the silent observer in me that is eternally linked to the Divine, and just watch the scenes of my life play out, the joy and the pain, with no judgment, just as I walked along the beachside path that evening?

Perhaps there, with that observer I could find my now; watching, accepting, surrendering, offering, not judging or becoming attached to the winds of emotion.

Perhaps there is the secret of living peacefully in the now.

From the Ocean to the Sky

by [Dhiraja McBryde](#)

I travelled once from Xi'an — ancient capital of China, eastern terminus of the mythical Silk Road — across the countryside of central China to the foot of the Qingling mountain range in Shaanxi Province.

To travel in a strange land is always interesting, for everything is new and novel. The post boxes of New York city, the litter on the side of the road in Mexico, the plantation trees in KwaZulu-Natal — these things are, no doubt, to locals, so commonplace as to be unseen but to the traveller from afar they are intriguing.

The art of New Zealand, once it shook off its dull, northern, European beginnings, has displayed a distinctive brightness and hard-edged quality. This comes, no doubt, from the brightness of the sun and the clearness of the air in these islands. As the woodsman said — on a clear day you can see forever.



Central China proved to be otherwise. It seemed that half the dust of the Gobi desert hung in the air along with the coal smoke of a thousand dark, satanic mills. What one *could* see through the gloom — and one could, at midday, look directly at the sun — was fascinating to a wide-eyed Antipodean. There were huge rivers — with no water in them; there were, lost in the country's depths, still to be seen the cave houses inhabited by the locals for centuries; there were brightly coloured temples and men driving rotary hoes down the road; there were mythical goat-antelopes in the mountains and there was the dwelling place of Lao Tzu, the greatest sage of the Tao.

Most fascinating was something not visible but something palpable nonetheless — a tingling at the base of my consciousness, an awareness that never before had I been so far from the ocean.

The sea is our mother. Its salty tides rock us in the womb, its endless expanse swells in the depths of our souls, its wrath and its bounty we know.

The evil-smelling, black mud of its mangrove edges has squelched between our toes; the sand of its beaches has stuck to our sun-burnt and salt-encrusted skin from our youngest childhood; its waves have lifted us up and pummelled us down.

The sea's mysterious margin has endlessly attracted with its beauty and its detritus. We have gathered its shells with their magic simulacrum of sound caught within; the white, twisted sculpture of driftwood; the otherworldly shapes of fish bones.

New Zealand consists of two long, thin islands. Off one coast lies Africa — 10,000 kilometres away; off the other coast — South America, an equal wave-tossed distance.

On March 15, 2012 I stood at dawn at the sea's edge. Its waves, no more than the ripples of a lake, slid to my feet and retreated. The wide expanse of beach extended out of sight in two directions. This point along Te Oneroa A Tohe — the beach of Tohe — could be the very spot where land and sea, air and sky, in pale dawn colour, melded together to form life; the spot that a goddess might step from a foam-decked sea shell; where in the east one might see hanging in the lightening sky the Stella Maris, the Star of the Sea, the mother of Jesus Christ; where ancient heroes may appear through the lucent, limpid, crepuscular light.

I turn south toward Ahipara — sacred fire — where once an eternal flame burned at the foot of the hill and maybe still does; Ahipara where a stone angel, till time and rain and the incremental creep of lichen crumble it away to dust, stands watch, stone trumpet in stone hand, over the grave of Emery Nopera.

I turn and run along the beach, the endless expanse of the ocean's edge.

The wind plumes the spray of the waves back in great, white drifts towards the sea.

It takes 6 hours and 58 minutes and 50 seconds to run to the Ahipara domain in one long, sustained effort of running; a single 'now' of movement with only stillness and silence at its core.

It is the thirteenth year that I have competed in the *Te Houtaewa Challenge* ultramarathon.

It might be thought that running a race is the opposite of living in 'the now'; that, in racing, one is forever attentive to a future point in time: the point one crosses the finish line; that one is striving ever to bring that future moment closer. But at its best one rather loses oneself in the instant of each footfall.

Two thirds of the way through the race my delight in the present led me to stop and take my small camera from my running pack and spend quite some time photographing scallop shells on the beach and gathering a few and slipping them into my bag. Strange behaviour, perhaps, during a race? Certainly not something a 100-metre runner could wisely do but perhaps the ultra runner has the luxury in the more lengthy 'now' of his race to indulge his spontaneous impulses.

Scallop shells have, of course, long been the symbols of pilgrimage. It was good to be reminded.

At the end of the race at the southern terminus of the beach I stood in the ocean, its briny fingers massaging away the strain from my legs, lost in the contentment of the moment.

A week later I travelled to Cromwell at the opposite end of our long, island home.

One week: the *Te Houtaewa Challenge* — 63 kilometres along the beach — the next: the *Northburn100* — 100 kilometres over the rough heights of the Central Otago hills.

The *Northburn100* is billed as the hardest race in the country — '*Northburn100 : you don't race it, you survive it.*' All competitors can look at similar races and think reassuringly to themselves — "it won't be as hard as Northburn."

The two races were different in many ways.

One race was over smooth, flat sand at sea level; the other over rough rock climbing into the sky; over blonde, parched hills of tussock; a bleak landscape scarred by the workings of the gold rush of the 1860s. The Japanese would deem that landscape *wabi sabi* — desolate, isolated, simple, quiet, withered.

One — the sun shone; the other — the snow fell. One had a change in elevation of a few inches — perhaps in places a few inches above sea level, perhaps occasionally slightly below — the other had a total climb of 4,800 metres — something more than half the height of Mount Everest.

There were *many* differences between the races but the most appealing to me was that, while the *Te Houtaewa Challenge* began on the very verge of the land and the ocean, the *Northburn100* began at the point in New Zealand furthest from the sea — our very own miniaturised version of central China; high in our own mysterious Shambala, a mountainous fastness where, if there were actually no yogis in the caves, there were at least goats on the peaks.

Each race one competes in teaches something. In this race I learned the importance of... living in 'the now'. The race consisted of two 50-km loops but within each loop was another subsidiary loop. These were named — the Loop of Deception and the Loop of Despair.

By the time I reached the Loop of Despair, after 13 hours of running, I had learnt my lesson — one must live in 'the now'. And he who lives in 'the now' can never despair, he has no expectations to fail him, he can only feel contentment — as indeed I did, staggering slowly up the steep, rough trail in the darkness of the Loop of Despair.

It was the Loop of Deception that ... deceived me, but, in so doing, taught me my lesson for it tumbled me out of 'the now' and I saw the result.

I knew that waiting for me at the half-way point was a tin of rice pudding. The beginning of the Loop of Deception was very near to the half-way point. 'Nearly there,' I thought. 'Only this little 11 kilometre loop and I'm half way.'

Thus no more was I living in 'the now' — I was hanging out for the future. And the more I did so, the worse my experience became. Never has 11 kilometres been so far or so miserable. Up, up, up the steep hill. Down, down, down into the next valley. Then, to my horror and despair, up out of that valley to another ridge. Descending from there to the next valley with only rice pudding on my mind and curse words on my breath, I saw that finally this interminable loop must start to point in the right direction for, on the far side of the river was an impenetrable stone cliff face -the route must head down the river. The route headed up the river and found a narrow cleft in the 'impenetrable' slope and headed up further in the wrong direction. It was with heavy boots that I carried on. Should I admit that those 11 kilometres took over two abject hours to complete?

When finally I arrived at the half-way point and I sat briefly and ate my rice pudding — with peaches — and pondered, as one does at such times, the nature of reality, I saw the truth of the advice to live in 'the now'.

It is perhaps the most oft quoted of things Sri Chinmoy [said](#) — 'Peace begins when expectation ends.' I had just taught myself quite convincingly the truth of this observation, for surely I had discovered that peace ends when expectation begins.

You have read *Born to Run* by Christopher McDougall and know how, however cool his hip, journo style, he earnestly explains that it is love, integrity, qualities of character, selflessness that are the base from which running springs and which running builds.

Sri Chinmoy adds another indispensable item to the runner's requirements — all of the above, and... gratitude.

In that seemingly *endless* 'now' that the race had become by the time the sun set slowly behind the mountains on the far side of Lake Dunstan — the goats saluting its departure with plaintive bleatings from the rocky heights — I kept that flame of gratitude aglow.

From high Above,
My Lord's Compassion-Rain descends.
From low below,
My gratitude-heart-flame ascends.

—Sri Chinmoy, *Unknown*

The race director in his race briefing had announced that the course was well marked. 'You can't get lost,' he said. 'If you get lost ... we will ridicule you.' It turned out that he was correct. Seemingly insignificant pieces of plastic tied onto dead weeds or small sprayed dashes of paint on rocks proved reassuring guides across the roughest terrain. Once darkness had descended — a darkness unknown to us city dwellers, a darkness total and thick — the trail was marked by tiny pieces of reflective tape which caught the light of one's head lamp. Their frequency varied along the route but they were adequate.

I began addressing these small flashes of light as I passed each one — 'Thank you, brother,' 'Thanks for your help, mate.'

I would address them with an earnest sincerity as they guided me through the night.

Perhaps Sri Chinmoy was not thinking specifically of gratitude towards small inanimate objects, but in that 'now' it seemed the most sensible and natural thing to do; out on those windswept heights at 2 a.m. — the only moving creature in a harsh, dark, geological world — my gratitude was never more sincere.

Steadily I carried on in the dark. The wind howled, the temperature fell. Fortunately I was off the heights by the time the snow came blasting in. But I remained in 'the now'. I had learnt my lesson. Each footfall without expectation, completed in contentment.

Ocean or sky — only now, only gratitude.

Life – Now Available in Present Tense!

by Brahmata

I am a great advocate of living in the present moment. I am always telling my friends, family and anyone who will listen that they too should try to enjoy the here and the now of life. For instance, the other day a friend of mine came up to me and said, "You know, I lent you a lot of money a year ago and I'm starting to feel like you have no intention of paying me back." To which I replied, "Quit living in the past!" Another example is when I finished my roommate's entire box of cereal this morning. She said, "I was planning on eating that tomorrow!" I replied, "Maybe if you spent more time thinking of the present and less time thinking about some distant 'tomorrow', these little things wouldn't affect you so much." My friends were both too proud to accept my sound wisdom, but one day they will thank me.

Actually, striving to live in the present moment is a very worthwhile pursuit indeed. The ability to be in the now does not come without a great deal of effort but, paradoxically, only comes when we let go and simply allow each moment to unfold. It takes more than an Eckhart Tolle book but no more than a still and open mind.

I think anxiety is such an epidemic simply because many of us do not know how to live in the present moment. The mind, in default mode, is either obsessing over the past or worrying about the future. The past and the future have one thing in common — both are completely out of our control. When we come to realise that the only thing we will ever have an iota of control over is our present reality, anxiety dissipates. Acceptance, although it may seem passive, is an extremely important quality. In shifting our awareness to the present moment, with openness and acceptance, we become active participants instead of observers; we empower ourselves!

For me, visiting friends and family whom I have not seen for a long time is usually a good experience. It is always nice to catch up and reconnect. In recent times, though, there is a recurring uncomfortable situation. The person I am speaking with finishes telling me about their newly acquired Master's Degree or the business they opened up or NGO they founded, and then they ask, "So, what are you doing now?" I tell them that I work at a vegetarian restaurant where I am a server and a baker. Each time, I am met with a bemused expression — a mixture of surprise, pity and disappointment. That is when the awkwardness begins! Sometimes there are follow-up questions, i.e. "How long are you going to do that for?" "What do you want to do *after* that?" or "Aren't you going to go to school?" The subtext: grow up and be realistic! I am actually happy with my current situation, but after repeatedly getting this reaction have considered making up elaborate job titles to keep people from worrying about me. "Oh, I'm the Director of Culinary Delegation and the Executive Dessert Formulator."

I thought that blind idealism was the right of every twenty-something, but loved ones and society are always there to tell me otherwise. It seems that it is not enough to worry about one's own life. If you truly care about someone, then you must also devote your worry to that person's life. So many people that I know worry like it's their job! I'm pretty sure that my grandmother, bless her heart, thinks that the world is still turning solely because of her tireless, relentless service in the form of crippling worry. In fact, that reminds me of a good joke. A mother calls her son and leaves him a voicemail, "Start worrying! Details to follow."

The truth is, I have never felt comfortable making long-term plans for the future. When I was in Grade 9, I almost had a nervous breakdown when asked



to map out a five-year plan in Career and Life Management class (with the not-so-apt acronym of C.A.L.M. class). My friends thought I was overreacting, “Just write down anything. It’s not a big deal”. But it was to me; I was intimidated by all of the choices and didn’t want to limit myself by pursuing (even on paper) just one option.

Two years after that incident, I was lucky enough to stumble upon a free meditation workshop where I was introduced to the philosophy of Sri Chinmoy and learned how to silence my mind. He uses a phrase in many of his writings that I really like — the “Eternal Now”. Now exists eternally because it is ALWAYS now. This concept is echoed in the words of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Eternity is not something that begins after you are dead. It is going on all the time”, and Emily Dickinson, “Forever is composed of nows.”

During my first meditation, something magical happened. In less than two minutes, all thoughts left me and my mind was completely clear. I felt peace flowing through me and was acquainted with a deeper reality within myself. One message resounded throughout my being, “*It doesn’t matter*”. This was such a liberating phrase for me! My anxieties about my career, getting good grades and making something out of myself — “*It doesn’t matter*”. My worry about not being popular enough, finding a significant other, and wanting to impress everybody — “*It doesn’t matter*”. Even my more existential worries about whether life had a purpose or if it was possible to find happiness — “*It doesn’t matter*”. I finally discovered something that, as a teenage girl, had for the most part eluded me — confidence!

I once read that all human actions are motivated by only two forces: love or fear. This experience of my higher self, in a matter of moments, allowed me to dissolve so many long-held and unfounded fears. In doing so, a consciousness of love was awakened — love for myself, love for humanity, love of life!

It was the most transformative experience of “now” that I have ever had. Since then, I have definitely had moments of doubt, insecurity and worry, but now I have the blueprint for getting back to reality. Breathe, silence the mind, and go to the place where “it doesn’t matter.” My experience wasn’t so much a reassurance that everything is going to be all right, more that everything is going to BE.

It wasn’t by personal effort or any great skill at meditation that I was able to have this experience. Like all of life’s lovely surprises, it was due only to grace. Time and again, I am shown that an “unseen hand” is guiding and protecting my life constantly. Not only my life, but everyone’s — the entire world. My faith in this truth is what gives me the security to trust in the present moment.

‘Now’ imparts the gift of feeling safe in a world of uncertainty and impermanence. ‘Now’ devours fear in all its forms: insecurity, worry, anxiety, and the need for constant control. ‘Now’ fosters love and all of its companions: acceptance, courage, faith, gratitude and the freedom to experience the fullness of life. ‘Now’ truly offers much more than just an excuse to steal your roommate’s cereal.

Living in the Present Moment

by Tejvan

When the weather turns very cold, I do my training on an indoor cycle trainer. The bike is stationary, you just pedal around in circles; an analogy to a hamster wheel is not entirely inappropriate. The problem is that after one hour of furious pedalling with sweat dripping on the floor, I look at my watch to see that actually only five minutes of earthly time have passed. And that means another 1.55 to go!

That is the bizarre thing about time, it is very relative. Sometimes it flies by, at other times you look back and think how quickly time passed. I once tried to understand time and relativity by reading Einstein’s great work, but the concepts of mass, time and relativity left me perplexed. I only noticed how time passed very slowly when I miserably failed to understand the finer points of quantum physics.

But, ignoring unnecessarily philosophical ideas, when we do live in the present moment; when we are free of all worries and anxieties, we can notice something quite striking — time begins to lose its hold. When we can truly live in the present moment, there is a feeling of lightness and freedom. As the saying goes — time flies.

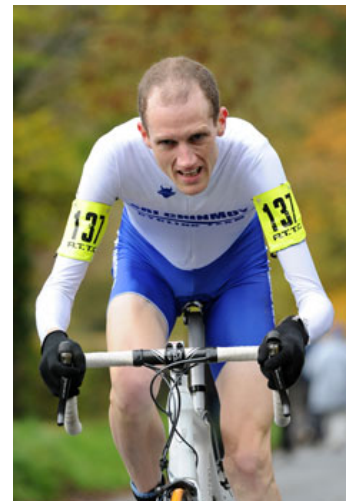
At some time, everyone has had an experience of being fully in the moment. It may occur looking at the wonder of nature or being absorbed by the beauty of some music. I will never forget the time I first heard Ave Maria by Schubert or the time I found myself alone in the Lake District at dusk one glorious sunset. However, these experiences are often far too short-lived and infrequent.

How can we actually live in the present moment everyday? Like many things, living in the present moment sounds wonderful, but when we actually try, we realise how conditioned we are to the inevitable thoughts of past and future. Living in the moment, which should be natural and spontaneous — is surprisingly difficult.

The most direct approach to live in the present moment is to learn how to mediate. Meditation can be described in various ways, but one key aspect of meditation is to be fully in the present moment. The secret of meditation is to still the mind so we are free from the presence of our thoughts. If we can transcend the machinations of the mind, we just experience the present moment; there are no thoughts of the past — no thoughts of the future.

To those who have never tried meditation, it may sound we are seeking a nothingness. But, the greatest gift of meditation is that we can discover that away from the limitations of the mind, there is a much greater, more beautiful more joyful consciousness. It is a childlike consciousness in which we simply live in the present moment. It is liberating, we can feel like we never really lived before — and it gives a real sense of freedom.

If meditation is the answer to living in the present moment, how do we successfully meditate? Unfortunately, meditation is not as easy as turning off a switch for our thoughts; the Great Designer of the Universe has a tendency of making worthwhile things require at least some effort on our part.



Firstly, in meditation, there are no prizes for sitting in a chair for 30 minutes. If we allow thoughts and daydreams to pass through our mind we will be far off into the future or past, and our meditation will be next to useless. But, if we strive to dive deep into our heart, if we repeatedly reject the promptings of the mind — we can begin to experience glimpses of this timelessness. The glimpses are never as much as we would like. But, even a few moments of being fully in the moment can make worthwhile all the preparation, patience and perseverance we need for meditation.

Meditation is not the only way to be in the present moment. Every moment is a sacred opportunity to live in the present. We can spend all our time worrying about the future, but equally we can just enjoy being in the present. Aside from meditation, my spiritual teacher, Sri Chinmoy would advocate purposeful dynamism — selfless activity to give life a focus. Work done in the right spirit can have that same effect as meditation in making ourselves feel we are living in the present moment. As a complement to work, just simply having joyful games / innocent fun can also help us be in the present moment. If we want to live in the present moment, there is no harm in going back to the simplicity of childhood.

The human condition, gives us ample reasons to worry about the future or regret the past. But, when we can live in the present moment, we also come to realise how many worries are merely unnecessary self-creations. As Sri Chinmoy succinctly put it, living in the moment is the best place to be:

I love the present moment,
Now,
More than I love
Anything.

—Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 26*

It's definitely worth making that conscious effort to live in the present moment, but if anyone knows how to help pass two hours training on an indoor cycle trainer, I'd love to hear from you.

The Art of Now

by Mahiruha Klein

For a long time I have been fascinated with the paintings created by the Hudson River School. The Hudson River School refers to a small group of exceptionally talented American artists who depicted the American landscape in an honest, naturalistic way. But, for all their interest in realism, their paintings also exude a certain joy in nature, and a palpable faith in the spiritually regenerative power of wilderness.

I live near the Chicago Art Institute, which has a large collection of paintings by George Inness. I love his landscapes, for the way he blends realism with impressionism. I like the way he shows the evening sunlight diffusing through clouds, and coating the forested valleys in a soft, beige warmth. I like his animals, so carefully modeled, and yet mystically suggestive. I like his trees. If he paints a forest scene, then each tree is unique for its gnarled branches, rough and moss-covered bark and spidery roots.

Trees, mountains, sunlight, water- these are the graphic themes that run through the work of the Hudson River School. George Inness saw these themes through the lens of Swedenborgian mysticism. Asher Durand captures a wonderful sense of awe and grace in his paintings — nobody does trees like Durand. Thomas Cole and Edwin Church both portrayed nature at her most awesome — mountains and gorges. Thomas Moran was fascinated by colour, his autumn leaves and brooks and crags just wash over you with their brilliant colours. Sanford Gifford loved the Catskills at evening twilight, and filled his paintings with nostalgia and longing.

Recently I've been working a lot. I work as a dishwasher and vegetable chopper in a café in the suburbs of Chicago. I don't have a lot of time to get away from the city and bask in nature. So, I go to the art museum and look at images of a wild America I will never know. I like seeing nature through the eyes of these great artists, valuing what they value.

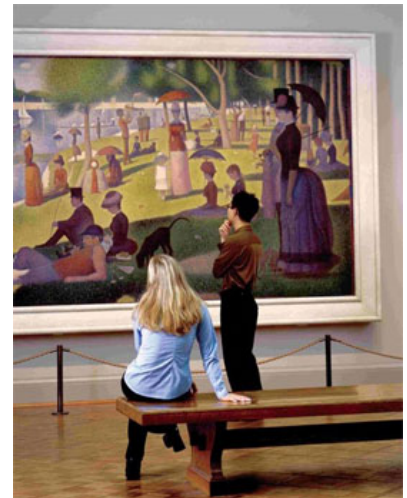
Does having a spiritual guide help in appreciating art? I would say, "absolutely!" I connect with Sri Chinmoy's poetry often and feel that his poems offer me a lens through which to appreciate the world of art in a special way.

Take this poem by Sri Chinmoy:

The sun is in the west,
A rainbow is in the east,
But I am neither in the sun
Nor in the rainbow.
I am only in God's Satisfaction.

—Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 1*

Then, consider this painting by George Inness, depicting the Delaware Water Gap:





I think spirituality makes us bigger. By spending time in silence we find that the real vastness is inside our heart.

Sri Chinmoy said that when you enter into nirvikalpa samadhi, you see that your heart is infinitely larger than the universe itself. In other words, you see that the entire universe is like a tiny dot inside your vast heart. By meditating and repeating his sacred poems and mantras, we can come to feel that the beauty of the natural world is our own beauty. We follow a spiritual path to claim all the beauty of the world as our own, and that includes the most glorious human achievements in art.

Once I asked Sri Chinmoy a question about two great composers. He began his response by wondering aloud if there were anyone who knew less about the subject than he did. Then he went on to speak about them for ten minutes in the most exacting detail!

Someone gave me a transcript of a talk that Sri Chinmoy gave a long time ago about his writings. He said that countless people would be immeasurably helped by repeating his poems and mantric utterances (my phrasing). I find his poems so handy in dealing with different life situations.

Take these poems for example:

I will arise, I will.
Do not worry, do not suffer.
I shall embrace a new beginning,
And divinely and unreservedly prosper.

A Soulful Cry Versus A Fruitful Smile

Obstructions loom large within and without.
Nevertheless, like a kite
I shall rise without fail
Against the wind.

Compassion-Sea And Satisfaction-Waves

Sri Chinmoy helped me tremendously to gain control over my own thoughts, to overcome many of my binding self-doubts, and to learn more forgiveness for others and also for myself. Because of his kind influence in my life, I can enjoy the beauty of nature, and I can devote much time to my own inner growth. These are great gifts.

Maybe the Hudson River School painters were contacting the soul of America, in their work, channeling her kindness, her vast generosity, and her all-encompassing heart. I am sure they would have loved Sri Chinmoy for bringing these quintessential American qualities forward in his own inimitable way.

To quote the Master:

“O green-blue Sacred Fire,
O sun Freedom-Light,
O Heaven's Gold Delight, America!
O My child of speed,
My supreme Promise-Seed.”

—Sri Chinmoy, *The Sacred Fire*

Page created by [Jaitra Gillespie](#)

Last updated on May 18 2012



