

Interview with Swami Tejomayananda **Brahmcharini Vividisha Chaitanya** *Originally printed in Tapovan Prasad, June 2008*

'Spirituality' is a loosely used term these days. What is your definition of spirituality?

Spirituality does not lie in doing something special. Its essence is in being one's own true divine Self. In short, spirituality is your feeling of oneness with all beings.

This seems a little too difficult. How can a lay person who is caught up in the rat race of the outside world practice spirituality?

Don't you have a feeling of oneness with your own body? Don't you feel love and concern for every limb or part of your body? Similarly a spiritual soul is filled with love and concern for all beings.

Come to think of it, everyone practices spirituality to a smaller or greater level with or without awareness. Doesn't a family member feel oneness with the whole family? Similarly, NGOs and many other social organizations express spirituality through their work. If only one becomes conscious of one's spiritual nature, one will find it most practicable and fulfilling.

What is the single quality of a genuinely spiritual soul?

Humility – because he realizes that the real doer of all things is God, and he is merely an instrument.

As the head of the Chinmaya Mission, you have to interact with people of diverse mindsets and natures. How do you manage this?

As I told you, the vision of spirituality comes in very handy here. I accept each person as he or she is and do not become judgmental at any point of my interaction.

But what happens if something goes wrong between the two of you?

In all such situations one should try and talk it out and make up as soon as possible. If a relationship goes beyond repair, then one should become better, not bitter.

Your dedication to your *guru*, Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda, is very moving. What is it about Gurudev that exactly influenced you?

In my childhood, I was pretty much influenced by saints like Swami Ramdas, Swami Vivekananda, etc. I used to read about their relationship with their *gurus* and was fascinated by the rapport between *guru* and *shishya*. Subconsciously, my desire for a *guru* must have been very strong. This desire became a reality when I decided to follow Gurudev.

What moved me most about Gurudev was that he fathered me, and taught me things big and small with boundless love. The next thing that moved me was his humane and compassionate approach to people around him. An American once told Gurudev, "Attitude shows altitude," to which Gurudev promptly rejoined, "No. Attitude shows depth!" This depth in Gurudev was very spontaneous and evident in his dealings with people or situations.

How did you conceive of Chinmaya Vibhooti, that mammoth project on 100 acres of land in Kolwan, as a tribute to Gurudev?

I realized that a great master starts his work with a vision, and an organization run by him remains vibrant only if his vision is kept alive. Otherwise, it becomes stagnant and the followers get distracted. It was to keep Gurudev's vision aflame that Chinmaya Vibhooti was conceived. It is very necessary for all of us devotees and disciples to be aware of his vision, which is reflected in our mission statement, "To provide to individuals from any background, the wisdom of Vedanta, and the practical means for spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors to society."

One of Pujya Gurudev's great gifts was his ability to inspire children, youth, and adults equally, and to sustain their enthusiasm and inspiration, directing their hearts and minds to the many tasks at hand. That enthusiasm and dedication to his vision are to this day rippling through many mission centers around the world. They also continue to come up with new projects and sustain those already established.

What is your single solution for all the social evils like corruption, violence, etc?

All evils are only expressions of the ignorance of spiritual knowledge. Just as doctors begin with symptomatic treatment of diseases, but slowly work to eradicate the very cause of diseases, we must eradicate spiritual ignorance to treat all our social ills. It is the vision that makes all the difference. A narrow vision is divisive, a broad vision is expansive, but a spiritual vision is all-inclusive.

Should politicians be made aware of this vision since they are channels of change?

Definitely. For them spirituality should translate into rising above individual party interests. They should identify with the entire nation. In short, the message for them is, "Nation before self!"

What stirs your heart?

The sublime heights I am transported to while reflecting or discoursing on the *Upanishads*. While that is for my intellect, my heart rejoices in the grace of my Lord Rama in each and every moment and event of my life. Then there is classical Indian music for my devotional and emotional appeal.

Finally, why are you not for the media at all?

I often find that they misquote what is said and then you have to call another press conference to qualify your stand. Also, there is no end to the number of newspapers or television channels who would seek interviews with you, if you consent to one of their requests. Then there are those photo shoots which take up a lot of your time. So I think it is better to keep on doing your best and let your work do all the talking.