

Love and Brotherhood Across The Cultural Divide *by Gertrudes Sapitan, Philippines*

29 days, 696 hours, 41760 minutes. These figures sum up the duration of the month that changed 30 lives forever. From 15th December 2010 to 12th January 2011, I was in South India as a participant of the 2010-2011 International Scholarship Training Program (ISTP). For one whole month, I, along with 29 other scholars from 20 different countries, lived and breathed the principles of love, tolerance, discipline, prayer, and brotherhood.

We all came from different backgrounds, cultures, languages, continents, and belief systems. We all had our preconceived notions about people from certain countries, people we had never met. We all had our fears as lone representatives of our countries (more than half of us were the sole delegates). We all had our doubts, given the language barrier, among other things. However, as Master said, when there is love, we speak not with words, but with the language of the heart.

The sessions were a virtual United Nations assembly. Every so often, the interpreters would valiantly translate the words of the speakers, coordinators, and scholars for everyone's benefit. Outside the hallowed halls of the classroom, sporadic, informal language classes in Spanish, Russian, Korean, Japanese, Italian, French, Chinese, and Filipino would ensue among us excited scholars. We were slowly bringing down the language and cultural divide. As the days passed, inhibitions were slowly eroded, friendships bloomed, and deeper understanding of the practice blossomed. Our looks and origins differed, but our hearts were one — they still are one. Each of us looked beyond our own idiosyncrasies; instead, we focused on what each of us could contribute towards the improvement of the other as an abhyasi, as a person. In becoming aware of our differences, we had discovered the similarities we had with each other.



In the hurried minutes of tea time, in between classes and late night insomnia attacks, we swapped stories about our lives in our native lands, dreams for ourselves and our own centres, jokes, and hours of bonding. In the midst of Natrampalli's cold breeze and Chennai's hustle and bustle, we grew in our faith, in our practice. Even in the occasional good-natured dig at one's language or accent, or innate *loony-ness*, we were all one in spirit. Disregarding the differences, the language, religion, sex, and culture, we were — and still are — aware that we were brothers and sisters.

We are all human beings. This experience opened our eyes, our hearts to what the world has to offer and to what we can offer to the world. All these things have changed us for the better. Forever we will remain grateful for the chance given to us to become scholars. Forever we will carry in our hearts the fact that we are all abhyasis cocooned in Master's unyielding love.



Basics of Character at Kharagpur CREST by *Balakrishnan Subramaniam, Malaysia*

Pre-Seminar

Hearing Master's speech on character formation, I realised the importance of a good character for spiritual evolution. The effect of the speeches heard and the books read are only momentary and I go back to my usual self and act the same. After awhile I feel bad and angry over my inadequacy of handling the situation even though I am equipped with the required knowledge. I begin blaming myself for not doing the cleaning properly and not leading a 'right' life. This had been going on for few months.

After one Satsangh a notice about seminars on 'character' conducted at Kharagpur CREST was read out. At that instant, I told myself that if I had the money I would attend the seminar and then promptly forgot about it. A few days later my son told me that he had a free ticket to any Air Asia destination and one only had to pay the Airport Tax of RM110. I immediately sent in my application for the seminar at Kharagpur!

As I was the first to reach, I received brothers arriving and made them comfortable in the dormitory, which is something that I would usually not do. I felt very friendly and cheerful and started to mingle with the other participants. Only when abhyasis asked how I felt did I realise, the magic was from the place and not me. The ideal character I wanted to be had manifested in me in Kharagpur!

The Seminar

CREST is modern and it has a 'state of the art' library. The course material came from books and Master's speeches, which have been read or heard by me several times. They have been discussed during our seminars and extended sessions. But here, all pertinent qualities for character formation were spoken in detail. A saying of our Masters was given during group discussions. Participants then related a past incident with the given saying/topic and came up with remedies they would take in future to avoid such occurrences. A representative from each group related it during plenary/daily sessions. During these sessions, the participants were allowed to ask questions. By the end of the session the participants would try to understand the day's topic, absorb the knowledge and apply it in their daily lives.



Extra features were the readjustment technique in which we meditated for about two minutes before starting an activity feeling Master's participation in the activity and in between or after an active activity, and the golden silence hour. The whole seminar was a joyful affair, brothers and sisters mixed freely and there was a sense of brotherhood in the atmosphere. The staff attended to our needs and carried out their duties without any resentment.

Post Seminar

The challenges faced during the seminar have taught me a few lessons. Agitation towards fellow abhyasis, irritation towards delays in trains and unhygienic condition of hotels have turned to my being cool and calm in these situations. I have learnt to not judge myself and others. I take few minutes to readjust myself when I feel the toll, then I bring my self to a meditative condition. I make an effort to live the Maxims daily.

The Environment at CREST

The environment is fully charged spiritually. One can feel the subtlety. I felt as though a heavy load had dropped off me. I felt confident that the possibility of reaching the goal is not difficult. The seminar and the environment contributed to such a feeling in me.





China: A journey dedicated to our Master by Fabienne, France

Very often, life makes us take unexpected paths, I would not be able to explain why I participated in this adventure. But here I am after a year for the fourth time in China. Every journey brings me back inexorably to Xi'An in China, a place where more than any where else I feel carried away and filled up by my Master's love. I cannot explain what alchemy makes this possible. But here I always feel Him waking up in me more and more. The abhyasis that I meet again, (Hong Tao, Li Qing Mei, Ge Hong) or that I discover for the first time (Trevor, Neo, Wu Xiao Ling) carry in their hearts such beautiful values, that it allows me to become a much better person every time I come in contact with them.



Inner transformation which can be so difficult at times, becomes a simple and natural path here. And I can feel my soul being ever more nourished and joyous by these moments shared together in His benevolent presence. The experiences I have lived recently have convinced me that it is also together that we grow and progress on this path. And now I can perceive (as minutely as it may be) the luminous world evoked by Babuji.

My experience in Xi'An by Neo, China

This is the second seminar that I have attended after joining Sahaj Marg. During the week's stay in Xi'An, Chinese and French abhyasis bonded with each other by sharing their experiences, studying Master's work and following His instructions on this path of spirituality. Two open houses were conducted with a few participants joining the practice of Sahaj Marg.

I must say that I am touched by the love and commitment the French Sisters and Brothers display. Their tireless efforts and constant assistance has helped the Chinese abhyasis to progress in our practice. I am equally impressed by the Chinese abhyasis for their willingness to better themselves. But above all, I thank Master for bringing us together and making our progress possible.

As for me, I have gained a lot from this five day seminar. Sittings with different prefects, Satsanghs, Master's DVDs, interacting with abhyasis, all these have given me a better understanding of meditation. This experience has helped me know myself better, train my mind and balance my life.

I will cherish my time in Xi'An forever. With Master's blessings we all will improve in our practice and reach our spiritual goal.



Centre Updates

Japan

The recent natural disasters in Japan have touched the life of everyone living in Japan in one way or the other. An atmosphere of uncertainty and disquiet prevails. The 11th Bi-annual retreat planned for three days (29th April to 1st May 2011) spanning over Babuji's Birth Anniversary, provided the perfect time and space to re-examine our lives and spiritual practice in the light of the changes around us.

The new location for this retreat was Kyoto, down south. A small group of around 30 abhyasis from Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka attended the retreat. The three day retreat was a combination of Satsanghs, study sessions, yoga sessions, cooking sessions and informal interactions that left us feeling refreshed and ready to face the challenges of the outside world with a strong sense of spiritual equanimity.



Thailand

Revered Babuji's birthday celebrations were held in Bangkok at Sis. Lovely's house on 30th April. The gathering consisted of 12 abhyasis. The celebration started with morning Satsangh followed by an abhyasi training program. Discussions on the Sahaj Marg practice ensued throughout the day. All abhyasis participated enthusiastically and actively in all the discussions. Sis. Lovely also arranged for a delicious lunch prepared in remembrance of Master. The celebration ended with Satsangh in the evening.





Singapore

Ashram Fundraising Activities

Earthenware Pottery and Greeting Cards created by Abhyasis and their children were put on sale as part of the Ashram fundraising drive. The abhyasis and children immensely enjoyed the pottery sessions under the guidance of Sis. Suriani. They also made hand crafted cards.

With this exercise the SRCM group in Singapore was exposed to new activities and at the same time was able to generate funds for the ashram.

The Centre is planning more of these fund raising activities in the near future.



Babuji Maharaj's 112th Birth Anniversary

The Singapore Centre celebrated Babuji Maharaj's birth anniversary with hearts full of gratitude and joy. Although there wasn't a specific theme for the program, the emphasis was on emulating and learning from the life of the Master. Towards this, video and slide shows highlighting the role of an abhyasi in today's world were shown. Videos on the relevance of Maxim 4 ("Be simple to be in tune with Nature") in our lives were presented. The morning session concluded with an interesting 'homemade' short movie enacted by abhyasis, depicting how complicated we have made our lives.

In the second half of the day, an abhyasi brother described vividly how he met Babuji Maharaj during his younger days. The much awaited children's program drew quite a bit of laughter and brought a different sense of Being in the abhyasis present. The children presented a skit that highlighted the importance of being simple and truthful to oneself. At the end of the celebration we could feel the joy and lightness that this special occasion had created in each one of us.





Asian Seminar

Malaysia, June 23rd to 26th 2011

With the DIVINE BLESSINGS of our Beloved Master, we are excitedly moving forward to warmly welcome all of you to Malaysia. This, as you would appreciate, is not a Malaysian event but it is one where we all are part of HIS bigger divine plan - that of a Sahaj Marg Family with HIM as our Divine Mother who is central to everything that goes on in the Mission anywhere in the world.

We hope and pray that HIS health permits HIM to come. To quote HIM, "... if I can come, I will come..." which in itself is a very positive expression of how much HE would try to make it in spite of HIS physical challenges. Nonetheless, we all must carry on together and jointly forge ahead with a strong and deep spiritual tide rooted only in HIS thought .

Master would really be very happy to see us all go ahead with the seminar regardless of HIS physical presence, whatever the circumstance HIS presence will surely be with us. He is being updated frequently and is aware of all the preparations and progress.

The Ashram has been upgraded and repaired in a very simple way and we hope that all can share the joy of being together here. HE will be really happy, no doubt.

