

## Strength in Togetherness

Pujya Swami Sarveshanada ji warmly welcomed to everyone to the banquet. He asked us to ponder over why we were there, not just at the Banquet, but as a CMDFW group. Sharing Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanaji's vision for the mission, he reminded us and helped us understand the purpose behind it, the importance of propagating the wisdom of our ancient heritage and the benefits to society at large.

### CMDFW's Growth Movement

In 1950 Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda started Chinmaya Mission with a vision. It began as a small experiment in Pune, and today it has already seen three leaders of Mission – Pujya Gurudev himself, Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda and our current Pujya Mukhya Swami Swaroopananda. We have seen this movement of the simple experiment that started in Pune, catch fire and spread all across the globe. We have seen an exponential growth from the time when we started in Dallas, in a small living room of the Kura household. It soon shifted to Chinmaya Saaket, then Chinmaya Chitrakoot and then to the Frisco session where we operate three full sessions. As we grow, we have to occasionally pause and revisit our roots – what was the spark or vision that started the movement. If we are aligned with the vision in which Pujya Gurudev found his inspiration, it will benefit not only our generation, but for many generations to come. Let us understand the vision or spark that ignited the inspiration in Pujya Gurudev.

### Pujya Gurudev's Vision

When studying with Pujya Swami Tapovan Maharaja, Pujya Gurudev and realized the great knowledge hidden in our scriptures in the Upanishads and the gems in the Bhagavad Gita. He realized that if this knowledge and wisdom was brought to local masses, the society will only excel from there onwards. With that one thought, he started reaching out to masses. Pretty soon by mid 1950s he realized that working with adults was different than the hope when working with kids. Thus the first Balavihar roots were established by his belief *Let's invest in kids*. His words were "Catch them young." Soak them with the concepts and sow seeds deep into their hearts. Let them fly high wherever they have to. When the environment around the individual is right, the seeds will sprout and the individual will blossom. No one knows when their *Prarabdha* (destiny) fructifies, but let's catch them young.

### Identity Formation

Back in India it started with the thought that it's some Swamiji doing something, so we should all go. But when we move here to another country, the whole intensity changes because our identity is on a very thin platform. We have to prove and establish our identity in every encounter. We need have clarity in order to be able to communicate this identity. It is different when asked about it by others from outside than when we are asked by our own kids - why do we do it? It's not the same environment we grew up in India where we didn't even have courage to question or understand. One glance from our elders would shut us up. But here, in this country, the kids start asking us some questions. At that time, we require a firm identity that has certain definitive direction and definition to it.

### Platform

This identity and movement can be created from many platforms and in many ways, such as despondency and fear. If identity is created out of despondency it creates a movement that rises and falls. It doesn't last. We have seen many revolutions through this despondency. The fear factor can also bring that togetherness and create a movement. For example, the Jewish community even today discusses the Holocaust, a terrible thing to have happened. When done out of fear, the community mobilizes their resources to constantly visit it and revisit it, make movies, and repeatedly remind us of what happened. They serve as a reminder to the community for the reason we should be together and collectively organize ourselves so that the atrocities are not repeated.

## Binding Factor

Our rishis, including Pujya Gurudev, could have taken the Mogul dynasty, or the oppression by British as a unification factor for the Hindus. But even that divisive vision has a fallacy and will fail. Nothing other than knowledge and wisdom can bind people together and make it a recognizable force. *Jnaena sadrusham pavitram iha vidyate* – Knowledge or wisdom alone can purify us. Nothing else can be anywhere close or equivalent to bringing that which knowledge can bring in as a unifying, inspiring, purifying, uplifting binding factor. Therefore, he made that as the purpose of Chinmaya Mission to bring us all together through the thread of the wisdom of our ancient Vedic literature. It not only binds us and brings us together, but it strengthens our love that we have. Knowledge and wisdom cannot coexist with despondency, fear or alienation. So where there is knowledge and wisdom, there cannot be any despondency, fear or alienation with any other creatures. That's is the greatness of our Vedic literature.

## Glory of Scriptures

Look at any of our scriptures – they always begin with a *shanti mantra* (peace invocations). They are not limited to only Hindus or Sanatana Dharma. They are applicable to everyone, regardless of their beliefs. *sarve bhavantu sukhinah* - May my effort to come together as a group bring happiness and prosperity to everyone regardless of their beliefs. Our rishis could have limited that result to only Hindus. But they weren't narrow minded. They said we can come together as Hindus so rest of humanity can benefit from our efforts. We should come together on one platform if we have to be productive and positive such that the entire humanity can benefit from our efforts. This knowledge brings us to the common platform. There are various *seva*-s (services) we can do with this knowledge. People come with their own ideas and Pujya Gurudev always said *joshayet sarva-karmani* – engage with everyone in all their activities inspiring them with the knowledge, but keep the understanding of the roots clear. By sharing this knowledge and wisdom, anybody else doing any other project or *seva* (service), and other any other temple or institution, they get clarity of how deep it can be established and how it can be run.

## Results of Shared Responsibility

If we have to establish that vision of that master and propagate it for generations to come ahead, we have to get together on that platform of strength of that wisdom so that next generation can proudly look up to it. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and we are looking at that village right here at this banquet. Just someone wearing ochre or yellow or white colored robes, doesn't suffice. Each one of us with whatever resources, talents, skills that we have, let us bring it all together on one platform and bind it together. That is the fabric of the rope. For example, the rope in India is made of jute. That soft fabric is twined into a solid rope and used for drawing the well water. Over a period of time, when this soft rope is constantly rubbed over the harsh stone, it leaves a dent on that harsh stone cutting through it. When a soft tender fiber can make that kind of a dent, can we not come together with our resources and talents to make that kind of an impact on society? We are all in this together regardless of the circumstances we are caught in – whether it was by our choice or not that we were brought together. Once we come together, we will definitely benefit through our unfoldment. These benefits are not limited only to us, but are extended to many more generations to come. That platform should not be out of despondency, fear, or anxiety. It should be on the platform of this strengthening knowledge and wisdom. Else like the other movements, this too will rise and fall like the innumerable revolutions we have witnessed in history. But after those revolutions, the society goes back to square one. Someone once said, it is not revolution, but evolution that will change us to a better state of existence. Evolution comes only with that knowledge and wisdom expressed through our actions. We teach this right from pre-K up until forever. This knowledge and it's application will be beneficial from womb to tomb if all of us come together and implement it.

## Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with One Step

Coming together is step one. Our expansion and exponential growth makes it imperative that we pay attention to it. There is an influx of so many new families and we have now grown a lot since a handful of families who were a part of this movement and divine journey in the beginning. The vision has to be kept alive so that not only do we benefit, but it will also benefit our next generations and the society at large. The glorious vision has to be shared, communicated and educated to the new families so that those families also carry forward with the wisdom and knowledge that we can get together and create the platform that was pointed by our ancestors. The platform should not be out of fear or anxiety, but out of wisdom and knowledge pointed out by our Upanishads.

We can bring knowledge to your thresholds. We have too many models to use it in this world, and very few role models. Next generation can find the inspiration to follow this only when we as a village stand together as their role models. Are we up for it? The resounding affirmation will reverberate through future generations. If we maintain the clarity it will be percolated further. That is what should bind us and strengthen us lead us from where we are to new heights.

## Summary

We are not trying to make good Hindus; that goodness is a by-product of our actions in light of the knowledge. By being a good Hindu you can give the greatest contribution to society by being the greatest human. We should be the type of ambassadors guided by our ideal such that when something good happens out there, people will associate it as a result of Hindus. Let's hope and pray that we can carry the inspiration of the Upanishad knowledge which can bring us together to evolve as individuals. The fragrance of the knowledge is expressed as our actions in the world. May our actions speak loud and clear. Coming together as a family, as a village, it is imperative as the first step. Thank you for stepping up. Let us invoke blessings of Pujya Gudev, Pujya Guruji and Pujya Mukhya Swamiji for each one of us. It is not just one person's responsibility, but is shouldered by each one of us. May that courage and wisdom always guide us.

Thank you.

Hari Om.