

# New Year Message

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SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA



**H**appy New Year! You must have heard this in the last week a thousand times and at least a hundred times you must have said it. "Happy New Year! Happy New Year!" In fact, there is no 'new' year. 'Year' is but a measurement in a continuous stream of time that we have created for our own convenience. Time is the same – labelled as past, present or future – it is a concept. For our convenience, we have created divisions of days, weeks, months, years, centuries and millennia. Whether in the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, 20<sup>th</sup> or even the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 'time' is ever the same. But all that is floating in time and reaching us is constantly changing.

Now, in India, there has already been a lot of expenditure of money and effort in cleaning and purifying the

Ganges. The river is not impure, but individuals like you and I, living on both her banks, all along the thousands of miles of her pilgrimage, throw dirt and filth into the river and make her dirty. To purify the Ganges, you and I actually need to do nothing – just stop polluting it! Fresh gallons of water flowing downstream from the snowy Himalayan peaks will force out the polluted waters and the river shall be pristine and purified once again!

## Renew Yourself

In the same way, Time as such is ever pure, ever new – *nava, nava* – ever new, never old. It is not enough just to change the number of the calendar year from 1992 to 1993 – it is you and I who have to change. We have to stop poisoning the times with our base urges of lust, greed, anger, etc. We are the ones who spoil it and then we say that the times are bad. Times are never bad, times are

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From a speech by Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda in Hong Kong in January 1993, transcribed and edited by Meena Mathur.

always good. Nowadays the trend is to say, "I don't know what kind of a time this is now-a-days, a very sad time. Everywhere around the world there are wars, destruction and life being taken ..." But carefully examine and question just who has committed these atrocities. Who is to blame? Is it Time? Has Time killed anybody? Time never did it! You and I, prompted by our false values of hatred, jealousy, greed, passions and lust, act on in the world outside. The quality of those very actions is our contribution to Time, making or marring it, just as the Ganges is made impure or polluted by our own act of dumping rubbish into it.

So the greeting 'Happy New Year' is actually a wish that one and all may discover more happiness for themselves in the coming year, by renewing not the year, but oneself. The year cannot be changed! This is a time for renewal. This is the reason so many people make

New Year resolutions. Year after year they do it. "I'll get up early in the morning." "I must meditate regularly." "Read the *Gita* everyday..." Not even for three days are they kept.

### **Courage to Change**

If the courage to change is absent, no progress is possible. Buddha truly experienced a 'Happy New Year' when he became Buddha. One day he decided that he wanted something else out of life, and having decided, he worked towards it consistently. Thus Siddhartha blossomed into Sri Buddha.

Even two communities or nations can mend their relationship if they decide to do so and work on it. Though most politicians talk about change, they don't really mean it. What is wanted is a renewal of attitude. This courage to change is essential in a spiritual student. One may exhibit spirituality and strut about pretending to have changed, but unless one actually

## **ATHREYA MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

A-28, Chittaranjan Park,  
New Delhi 110 019

Tel: 011-2627 2154/7865; Fax: 2627 2952

Email: [athreyas@airtelmail.in](mailto:athreyas@airtelmail.in)

Welcome every experience  
with a Krishna-smile on your  
face.

*Saxami Chinmayananda*

changes, one will not experience the benefits. People complain: "Swamiji, I have been in your *ashram* for the last four years; I cleaned the place, cooked the food and washed your clothes, but ... Swamiji, no change!" We never promised that the *ashram* would change for you! It is not the *ashram*, nor the *Guru* – you have to change! You can certainly take help from the *Guru* and from the quiet *ashram*, where you meet like-minded people. Being in that company, you do not feel like over-indulging. You do not visit the night club which may be there in the vicinity. You put a halt to all such indulgence, thereby bringing about a change in yourself.

### Change at Three Levels

The great *Rishis* of yore had analysed and concluded that change for the better can be brought about only by a change of the mood of the mind. If that is changed, then changes in one's lifestyle, attitude to things,

behaviour and quality of thoughts also follow suit. This change has to be brought about at three levels – the quality of thoughts, the quantity of thoughts and the direction of thoughts. After all, the mind is but a flow of thoughts. Once the thoughts change, we can confidently say that the mind has changed.

The techniques of *bhakti*, *karma*, and *jnana* are prescribed to address these three kinds of changes. Through *bhakti*, devotion to the Lord, the quality of thoughts will change. Through *karma yoga*, the quantity of thoughts is reduced. Thoughts of anxiety and worry about the future, about the results of one's actions etc. are minimised. Finally, the direction of thoughts – ordinarily one's thoughts are turned outward, but with knowledge (*jnana*), an attempt is made to steer the direction of thoughts in search of the spring of Consciousness within oneself. When these

**SMT. GOWRAMMA &  
SRI K. SEETHARAMA RAO**

Teacher, Mysore

Carve out a new canal  
in your mind with  
repeated good thought  
waves.

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three are undertaken concurrently, then one can master the mind at three times the speed!

### **You Change, the World Changes**

When the mind is changed, you are changed. When you change, the year becomes new! You don't have to wait for the first of January! The day you change, it is the 'New Year' for you. You are the master of your life. A mere repetition of 'Happy New Year' or sending New Year cards does not make it happen for anybody. Think... The underlying spirit should be a wish that the friend or relative would change their attitude to life through a process of control, regulation and purification of thoughts. Thereby the individual changes, and when the person changes, the world outside is effectively changed. New times, new thoughts have been created. It is the dawn of a New Year!

So this is the kind of world-

making programme that spirituality is about. One should not put off or deny oneself this blessing by saying, "What is the use of my becoming good? My husband is bad, my father-in-law is bad, my mother-in-law is terrible..." Don't worry about others – you have not come into this world for others. Your job is to look after yourself! You change, and then see your surroundings change. The world changes, your own domestic life, economic life, your own happiness and success – everything changes! All just by changing yourself! But people say, "Swamiji, I can't change! How can I change? Let the world change." Thus you have been waiting for centuries and millennia – millions of years have gone by waiting for evolution to happen. Plants and animals can wait for a more evolved creature to come to their help, but man need not wait because he has been made to master his own mind. He

**SMT. SUNEETHA &  
DR. R.L. UMASHANKAR**  
Davangere

Whatever be the field in which we are working today, we must use it as an opportunity to polish our inner character.

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alone has the freedom to make or mar his life.

Thus the *Rishis* have been kind enough not only to declare this Truth, but also to give us intelligent and practical techniques by which each one of us can start a five-year or ten-year programme of changing ourselves, staying exactly where we are. If everybody were to move to the Himalayas, the population would increase there, and so would the pollution! Their advice is that the required change can be brought about in and through one's daily life, wherever one is stationed. It is in this context that they also insisted that one must give up the false expectation of happiness from sense indulgence.

The *Rishis* did understand and acknowledge that when sense instruments come in contact with sense objects, there is an experience of pleasure. But is that experience under one's control? Or does the individual get carried away? One cannot control or regulate it all of a sudden. So the moral codes and ethical laws and regulations were laid down for our self-improvement. In the modern age, one does not appreciate the need for this. People dismiss

these as infringements on personal freedom. But the wise *Rishis* were very emphatic and insisted upon self-control and the giving up of false expectations of lasting fulfilment or happiness through sense indulgence.

### **Ripples in the Mind**

There is deep logic behind this assertion of the *Rishis*. When there is no contact with sense objects, then there are no thoughts. In deep sleep, there is no perception of objects, and hence there are no thoughts. Think! The mind becomes totally extinct, lulled, incapable of functioning, neutralised – that is the state called deep sleep. When we become conscious of sense objects or sense stimuli, it is called 'thought'. Without objects, there cannot be any thoughts. Consciousness plus an object is a thought.

Put another way, when an object is perceived by the sense organs, a disturbance is created in the mind in the form of a perception; this perception shines out in the ever-present, all-pervading Consciousness, our own Self, and we say that there is a thought in my mind. 'I am happy, I am unhappy, I want this, I want that...' Good

thoughts, bad thoughts – every thought is but a disturbance, a ripple in our minds. Interestingly, the ripple in my mind will cease to be a thought when I become conscious of it.

### The Wiper of Vairagya

Further, if the number of thoughts (meaning the number of perceptions) being generated is reduced, then the mind becomes relatively quiet, and a quiet mind perceives that which lies beyond the mind. It is the mind with its constant flood of thoughts that is obstructing clarity of perception. If the windscreen wipers are not functioning, a person who is driving in a heavy downpour will not have a clear view of the road, no matter how powerful the car headlights may be. The wiper that clears the mind is called *vairagya*. The more you are surrounded by sense objects, the faster the wiper must function. It is said: *vairagyameva abhayam – vairagya* alone bestows fearlessness. The only shelter in life is *vairagya*, but people go for just the opposite – *raga*, lust, desire and passions. In the mad frenzy to achieve one's goals in life, one chases one's desires indiscriminately and then gets fatigued by

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that very exertion. If only one would pause and think: "Why am I exerting myself so? Will this mad chase really give me all that I want out of life – peace, satisfaction, joy, happiness?"

*Vedanta* straightens your thinking process – makes you a better person, a happier person. And then you can definitely greet each other: "Happy New Year!" The year is not new – you have renewed yourself. And so you are happy.

Well, Happy New Year to everybody! Hope is the last thing that dies in a human mind, and therefore in mine also. I have the hope that each one of you has understood this message and will live up to it.

**Happy New Year!**