Running and Smiling

By Utpal
http://perfectionjourney.org
16 July 2013 (morning)

This is a shortened version of the article, please visit the website for the full version

“They are very surprised that we are running and smiling.” Vasu is telling me this morning about a newspaper, from his home near St. Petersburg that is regularly printing pictures and stories about the Self-Transcendence 3,100 Mile Race taking place here in New York. He tells me that the readers are also encouraged to check out a Russian language version of this blog. Which, they are told, “if you read it you will be inspired.”

Vasu says that the paper is calling the 3100 Mile Race a sporting event — but they admit to their readers that they can’t even begin to understand how the runners are able to do it. Indeed, for everyone it is nearly impossible to comprehend what is happening here by simply looking at the daily result sheets. And no matter how you view or calculate all the statistics and numbers they really can’t tell you much about what is going on here.

When you look at Vasu’s picture (see next page) you cannot help but take note that he is clearly a man at peace with himself — and, yes, he has a smile too. But then mentally try and add to this radiant face of his the additional knowledge that in about six hours time he will pass the 2,000 mile mark. With this simple fact, our ability to understand who he really is and what he is accomplishing here on this block in Queens evaporates into thin air.

As someone who has run marathons and longer events, I personally know something about struggling and suffering to reach a finish line. I have felt the satisfaction of a number of hours of hard effort and then the immediate relief of crossing a finishline — and, then, it is all over. In this Race, there is also a finishline but it is one so remote and so distant it is almost inconceivable.

For Vasu, who has crossed this line once before (in 2012) and now it is “just” 1,000 miles away. It is not an invisible or imaginary thing that calls out to him — it is one he has constantly been aware of for the past 30 days. Vasu will undoubtedly arrive there successfully, not by being lost in his body’s struggles nor deterred by the mental suffering of his mind — he is experienced enough to realize that he will only transcend himself only by surrendering to the divine within himself.

I once asked him Vasu what his strategy was here at the 3,100 Mile Race. He replied, “I have no plan. My soul has a plan.”

Run, run, in the inner world run, run!
God’s Lightning-Smiles have already begun.


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Day 31

Heat’s On

By Sahishnu, 16 July 2013 (evening)
www.3100.ws/blog

On a sweltering, sticky day with little cloud cover and temps in the mid-nineties, five runners made it past sixty miles, the lowest total of the race this year. With at least three more hot ones to come, the group is being thoroughly tested. Atmavir Spacil seemed to have solved the heat puzzle for at least today by leading with 66.4 miles. Next best was Vasu Duzhiy with 63.6 and Nidhruvi Zimmerman with 62.0 miles. Two more men made it past 2,000 miles….

Vasu Duzhiy:
2,000 miles = 30 days+08:51:16
Sarvagata Ukrainskyi:
2,000 miles= 30 days+15:42:55
Vasu tells me about a unique method the runners are exploring to try and deal with the extreme weather, “Yesterday was a little bit hot. Dr. Kumar [an Ayurvedic doctor] told us to take onions. You just take it in your hand or put in your pocket and run.”

Vasu continues and says Dr. Kumar also suggested a different method of treating blisters, he suggested putting some grass along with rosewater into the bottom of the socks of those having foot problems. Vasu says with delight, “I was so happy. My skin became better. After five or ten laps of using [this method] my skin became better, much, much better.” Vasu tells me he isn’t using this right now and that he will use it only when it gets really hot.

Yesterday Ashprihanal teased Vasu about the “special power band” that Vasu wears from time to time. Vasu laughs and jokes that it is special because “it makes my mind silent.”

Yesterday Vasu completed 118 laps here. He is now 140 miles ahead of his pace from last year. He says the main quality he learned and worked upon last year was “patience”. He adds, “And this time, I hope, is happiness.”

He is also very interested in hearing about the personal experiences that others have had with Sri Chinmoy. Vasu says he feels tremendously inspired and identifies closely with the stories. He heard one story from someone who quite frequently drove one of the buses that the group used to have. The man told Vasu that sometimes Sri Chinmoy used to sit in the seat directly behind the driver. Vasu asked this person if it was okay to feel oneness with this person’s experience of driving the bus with Sri Chinmoy in it. Vasu says, “For the next few days I was not running. I was just a bus driver. I felt so much happiness and joy inside of me.”

Pranjal says, “Yesterday we had a tough day because of the weather. In the morning it was very hot and also very humid. But this is just part of the race. You cannot do anything with this, it belongs to the race. It would be nice to not have it like this — to run it in the Spring or in the Autumn, but there again there could be problems. It could get cold. But this race is so long the weather is changing all the time.” Despite the intense heat Pranjal maintains amazing consistency in the laps he runs every day.

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**Question:** How can our outer smile help our running?

**Sri Chinmoy:** Your outer smile can help your running considerably. When you smile, you disarm your opponent. Take running, for the time being, as your opponent. While you are fighting or struggling with your enemy, which is running, if you give a smile, naturally your enemy will lose some of its strength. So play a trick on your enemy by smiling. This may sound absurd, but I assure you it is true. Just think of the running world as an enemy and weaken the strength of this enemy by giving a smile.

— Sri Chinmoy, excerpt from “The Outer Running And The Inner Running” (Agni Press, 1974)
Day four of Heat Wave II produced high temps, intense sun, few breezes and a little cloud covering late. The field paid the price for just being out on the course, but stalwarts they are. Six of the twelve made it to sixty miles, led again by Sarvagata Ukrainskiy and his 68.05. Atmavir Spacil has climbed to within 18 miles of first place, after being down by 52 just three days ago. That is how this race can turn — a couple bad days and the other runners make up big ground. But with 850 more miles to go and the end of the heat wave in sight, anything can happen. And probably will. Meanwhile the Austrian ladies are smashing out the miles, oblivious to heat so far and making all the right choices. They both touched 62.01 miles with smiles on their faces and miles in the bank. With twenty more days to go the race is picking up momentum.
This morning is clearly a struggle for Ashprihanal. Not to see him flying around the Course as he usually does is difficult for everyone to witness.

Yesterday he developed a problem with his knee. It is still too early to know just how serious it is. Dr. Kumar is coming today and Ashprihanal is anxious to hear what he has to say about it.

Ananda-Lahari is always cheerful and seems to find meaning in each step he takes here. He says, “I have the feeling I should start running but, still, it doesn’t work. I am not able to really describe what is going on. I have energy but it seems to me that everything goes to the ground. But today Dr. Kumar is coming and I think today he will be the instrument that will help me to start running.”

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He says, “I feel much better than yesterday.” He laughs and adds, “I already ran 3 meters. There is still hope.”

Pranjal was telling me earlier in the Race that he was happy that his shoes were lasting six days. “But now that I have a blister I have changed my style and somehow my shoes now only last four days.”

Pranjal takes only one 15-minute “sleeping” break a day at 3pm. He jokes, “I am too slow to take more breaks. I am one of the slowest on the track, actually.” He adds, “In my first race, I started with three breaks. Then I had to cut it to two and then, in the end, to one break. Because I was just too slow.”

Every night, Pranjal records a video-blog and he talks about all the runners who share the track with him. I ask him what he thinks about those who are not going to finish. “In this Race, I think, it doesn’t matter that you finish it. The thing is that you are here and you are doing your best. It doesn’t matter if it is 50 miles or 70 miles. Sometimes you have a bad year and you can’t make it. It doesn’t matter as long as you do your best. That is what counts.”

You want to change the world.
Do you not realise
That you are taking away God’s job?
What has He done
To deserve this kind of punishment from you?

— Sri Chinmoy, excerpt from “Ten Thousand Flower-Flames, Part 34” (Agni Press, 1982)
By Utpal
http://perfectionjourney.org
18 July 2013 (morning)

This is a shortened version of the article, please visit the website for the full version

When Yuri ran up to the mileage board his eyes were bright with gratitude. He had actually hoped to have completed his last four laps the previous night but the weather conditions yesterday were horrific (and, unfortunately, will continue on this way for several days to come).

He says, “It is a very serious number.” The number Yuri Trostenyuk is referring to is 2,000 miles. He has been aiming towards this number now for the past 16 days since he reached 1,000 miles. If all goes well he will be able to rack up another 1,000 miles in an additional 16 days. Then all that will remain in front of him will be that last little bump of 100 miles.

Unless you are the most experienced of ultra-runners these distances simply cannot be comprehended. Certainly for even an average marathon runner there is no way of putting his accomplishment into perspective.

Out of curiosity I wondered if Yuri had set off from his home in Vinnitsa, 32 days ago, instead of running around the block here, just how far would he have been able to travel. I am not sure if he speaks too many foreign languages but he would have needed quite a few before he completed the full 2,000 miles west of his home in the Ukraine. Because if he ran in that direction he would have just about made it to Madrid, Spain (see image, next page). Google Maps say that by car, that journey should take about 34 hours (they don’t say how many days it would realistically take to drive that many hours).

Anything that I want to find
Is already there
In the depths of my heart.

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Yesterday a large box of goodies arrived at the Race. Sarah says, “Somebody from Iceland kindly donated some vitamins and supplements.” [Pranava is the most likely bestower of this generosity.] “It was so much appreciated by me because I have no idea what I am supposed to be taking.” Sarah laughs as she says this. “It was really nice. It was such a hot day and everyone was feeling so low. Then suddenly we got this big box of presents. You know these things happen quite regularly. It helps to give you a little lift.”

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“I have had a problem the last few days. It is heat related.”
Sopan is looking pretty good today. Like everyone he suffered with the weather the last few days. He says, “I could not push myself harder for some reason, which is not normal for me. I lose energy and cannot eat well. My energy crashed completely.” Dr. Kumar came by and recommended that Sopan and a few others drink a simple concoction of water, lemon, salt, and sugar. “He said drink it every 15 minutes all day long. I can feel it immediately when I drink it. It definitely got my energy up.”

Before I leave for the morning Sopan is clearly more energetic. Last year on day 18 after 1,000 miles his injuries forced him to leave the Race. Now as he starts day 33 he has over 1,800 miles beside his name. He says that he hasn’t felt this good since when he ran here in 2006. “It is good to be back. I haven’t been here in a long time.”

I SHALL NEVER BE DISTRESSED

I have already instilled peace in my heart;
Therefore
I shall never be distressed.
To You I have already offered
The flower of my heart’s expression.
— Sri Chinmoy, excerpt from “Transcendence-Perfection” (Agni Press, 1975)

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Pranjal says, “It is very hard on the body when you have so many days of over 30° (86°F). It takes too much energy. Many people are just in survival mode. You can’t push because it is too hard to go any faster. This is why many people are just doing the necessary.” He asks people to keep their fingers crossed. But the forecast says the weather won’t break until Sunday.

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Someone points out that today is Nelson Mandela International Day (as well as his 95th birthday) and people around the world are encouraged to provide 67 minutes of community service in honour of Mandela’s 67 years of public service. The overarching objective of Mandela Day is to inspire individuals to take action to help change the world for the better, and in doing so build a global movement for good. Ultimately, it seeks to empower communities everywhere. “Take Action; Inspire Change; Make Every Day a Mandela Day.”

Sri Chinmoy met with President Mandela on a number of occasions and said of him:

“South Africa sleeplessly needs the fragrance of your heart for its liberation and peace, and the whole world soulfully needs the garden of your life for its inspiration and bliss.”

Sri Chinmoy also composed several songs in Nelson Mandela’s honour, two of which:

A PERFECT JUSTICE-VOICE
Nelson Mandela, torture-sufferer supreme,
High Heaven’s Smile
and earth’s solace-dream.
Your heart has won the world’s admiration-choice.
Within, without, a perfect justice-voice.

LONG WALK TO FREEDOM
Long walk to freedom,
long walk to freedom
To be a child of oneness-kingdom.
Long walk to freedom, long, long, long:
Our proudest victory’s sweetest song.

All Souls Struggle

By Utpal
http://perfectionjourney.org
19 July 2013 (morning)

This is a shortened version of the article, please visit the website for the full version

Swami Paramesha Ananda ran 14 laps this morning with the runners and is now ready to carry on with the rest of his day. He says, “If you rely on the mind and the physical you will start getting weak. You have to go to the higher conscious level.”

His advice is correct in every way. For all spiritual seekers the goal is to always find the highest path when confronted by either joy or adversity. But on a practical level no one here is God-realized — at least not yet.

The Swami says, “I do the Guru mantra [a traditional Sanskrit mantra]. The Guru is so powerful because he manifests himself from consciousness. He meets you halfway. Because his body is really a manifestation of consciousness. So if you are able to connect to his body that automatically puts you into a higher consciousness.”

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It gets hotter and hotter with each passing hour this morning as the dawn breaks and the immense brilliance of the sun spills across the city. The relentless weight of the humidity presses down on everyone. It has been like this every day now for a week and any kind of relief in the weather is still days away.

A splash of water or a bag of ice are little remedies that work for just a moment: a flash of relief and then the struggle continues. A struggle for which there is no end in sight for the runners of the Self-Transcendence 3,100 Mile Race for at least 18 more days.

All souls
Struggle and struggle and struggle
Inside the body-cage,
But eventually they bring victory
To their Lord Supreme.
— Sri Chinmoy, excerpt from “My Christmas-New Year-Vacation Aspiration-Prayers, Part 57” (Agni Press,

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The past few days have been tough on Ashprihanal — perhaps tougher than he has ever seen during any of the previous years he has run in the 3,100 Mile Race.

Day 34

How Long Can This Go On?

By Sahishnu, 19 July 2013 (evening)
www.3100.ws/blog

The Heat wave stood its ground for the sixth straight day, daring the runners of courage to step over its boundaries and face debilitation. With temps approaching 100°F and nary a breeze, nature forced everyone to back off or hurt real bad. Surprisingly, Nidhruvi Zimmerman topped the list with 60.9 miles and was followed closely by Surasa Mairer, who reached 60.3 miles. The closest any man could come was 57.07 miles by Atmavir Spacil, who edged into first overall. The runners will gain some respite late Saturday as thunderstorms are expected to change things for the next two weeks to clear and cooler. The damage has been done, but eight are still on pace to finish within 52 days. The ever-changing face of the race from the outside only reflects the inner conflicts that runners endure to finish this thing. But run they must, and run they shall. Keep cool if you can.

Sri Chinmoy at the “Sports Day” track and field events in 1982

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There is a bandage on Ashprihanal’s left wrist indicating he recently received an I.V. to get his fluid levels back up. He is weak, but fine and is not in any physical danger. He will keep walking today, just as he did yesterday. He continues, at least in part, because he is searching — as everyone here is — for peace, joy, and satisfaction. Transcendence is not bestowed upon those who have not given their all. It is painful for those of us who have seen Ashprihanal “flying” around the Course here over the many years to have this level of struggle. And he has still 1,000 miles more to go.

Swamiji says that it is not easy running on days like this. “But once you start and get into the rhythm, you might slow down or you might move faster, but it is a rhythm. A mental rhythm. Then the mental rhythm changes over to a higher conscious rhythm. It is that higher conscious that will combat the heat.” He says that when you allow yourself to be in the higher conscious, “it negates all physical suffering, and mental anguish. Then you are able to proceed and to continue and continue.”

He continues saying, “You go to your source of strength which is patience, fortitude, and endurance. Our greatest asset is self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-respect. Then our greatest friends, are energy, enthusiasm, and perseverance. So when you bring these elements into it. These are divine inspirational words. When you bring these into the picture, then you are above the mundane existence. This Race is above that.”

Suras ran 111 laps yesterday and seems superbly adapted to the horrible hot weather. “In the morning I am very good. Until 11 a.m. I run good miles, and also in the evening. During the day the mileage is okay — but not quite as good.”

She is wearing a broad brimmed hat. “I will try it today and see if it works. I got it yesterday in the evening and I thought it would be very good. It is very light. But you can see that there are holes in it and the sun can come through, so I think that maybe it does not give me enough protection.”

Yuri’s heat-related condition became very serious yesterday. He was checked out by a nurse last night and given an I.V. He wants to keep running but Rupantar, the race director, has asked him to only walk easily today until his condition improves. This is a totally new experience for Yuri, but he takes this request cheerfully and seriously.

Sarvagata says that he is doing some new things this year. “I am wearing a hat and also using sandalwood powder on my skin and also some peppermint oil.” He seems to be able to adapt to the heat like no other runner here. He ran a phenomenal 121 laps. He says, “It seems like I am getting stronger. I am overcoming some problems in my body and in my mind.” He laughs and adds, “Now I am ready to face the next ones. Interesting. I am enjoying it all.”

I am struggling and struggling
To free my life
From my mind-entanglements,
And I am sure my victory is certain.
— Sri Chinmoy, excerpt from “Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 2” (Agni Press, 1998)