

BODY, MIND, AND SOUL with Simone Gabbay, RNCP, Toronto, Ontario

Toronto's Annapurna: A Haven for Seekers

In today's hectic and stressful world, it's essential for all of us to have a safe and comfortable place or space where we can rest our weary body, and refresh our tired mind and soul, at the end of a busy day or week. Does the soul actually get tired? you might ask. I believe that it does or, at the very least, that a tired body and mind are unable to receive and benefit from the full strength of spiritual energies made available by the soul.

So, a place where we can refresh all three, body, mind, and soul is important. For many of us, that place is home, or perhaps the home of family or friends where we regularly gather for a meal, community, and the company of those with whom we can share our joys and sorrows, as well as support and encouragement on our life journey. For my family and me, that place is Annapurna, a vegetarian restaurant in Toronto that was inspired and inaugurated by the late Sri Chinmoy, a spiritual teacher who dedicated his life in the service of humanity, tirelessly travelling the world to offer free concerts, lectures, and public meditations. Sri Chinmoy established the World Harmony Run, an annual global relay that seeks to promote friendship, peace, and understanding between nations. He regularly conducted meditations at the United Nations, held meetings with world and community leaders, and initiated the "Lifting Up the World with a Oneness-Heart" award program honouring individuals who had inspired and uplifted humanity. He was also an extraordinarily accomplished athlete, author, poet, painter, and musician.

In November of 1974, Sri Chinmoy inaugurated the Annapurna restaurant in Toronto, predicting it would become "a haven for seekers." How true his promise has proven to be! Life in a crowded city and in a world that revolves mainly around material pursuits and values can be harsh and leave you hungry, not only for physical nourishment, but also for sustenance for the soul. Annapurna is a rare place



where both are offered in equal and abundant measure. In the East Indian philosophy, *Annapurna* is the name of the Supreme Mother Goddess symbolizing her bountiful offering of nourishment for the body and soul. Annapurna is the presiding deity of the holy city of Benares. Tradition holds that she does not allow anyone to go hungry in that city. And Sri Chinmoy's Annapurna restaurant will not let you go hungry in Toronto!

For a reasonable price, patrons can order a wide range of wholesome and delicious vegetarian dishes ranging from homemade soups, fresh salads, a daily dinner special, tasty East Indian fare, fresh vegetable juices, and fruit-and-yogurt-based smoothies. It's easy to get your daily quota of alkaline-forming vegetables and fruits, as recommended in the Edgar Cayce readings, at Annapurna. Healthful desserts, teas, and organic fair-trade coffee round out the menu. The best masala chai (Indian spice tea) in the city is prepared fresh daily.

Located in Toronto's Annex Neighbourhood (on Bathurst Street, just south of Dupont Avenue), Annapurna recently celebrated its 35th anniversary. It is the oldest vegetarian restaurant, and the first nonsmoking eatery, in Ontario. Several Annapurna patrons have been dining here since the restaurant first opened. Among the many loyal customers are out-of-towners who drive in from the Peterborough-Lindsay region to the east, and from the Kitchener-Waterloo

area to the west. But Annapurna's fame has even spread to the far reaches of the continent, with long-distance travellers making their stop here a memorable event along their journey.

Whether you come to eat a quiet meal in a spiritual atmosphere, or whether you drop by to chat with old and new friends, you will be richer for the experience. The atmosphere in the restaurant is imbued with Sri Chinmoy's energy. His music and chants play in the background, and his photos, poetry, and art are displayed on the walls. You can take some of his books to your table to read during your visit. One of Annapurna's most inspiring attributes is the spiritual fellowship that readily arises between patrons, and even between patrons and staff. The late Hugh Lynn Cayce, Edgar Cayce's younger son, who led the A.R.E. for many years, stressed the importance of fellowship for those on the spiritual journey. He has been quoted as saying, "Fellowship with others, the experience of that is more important than any lecture you will hear from us. You can get the information in many ways, but not the fellowship."

I wanted to share the story of Annapurna with the readers of *The Open Road* so that, if you happen to pass through Toronto, you'll know where to stop to recharge your physical and spiritual batteries. And even if you don't plan to visit Annapurna, perhaps you might be inspired to find or create a similar "haven for seekers" in other parts of the country and globe. Would that everyone had an Annapurna to nourish their body, mind, and soul. &

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Simone's two books, *Nourishing the Body Temple* and *Edgar Cayce's Diet Plan for Optimal Health* are available from The Higher Shelf.

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