3100 Mile Race Media Report from Japan

By Harashita

When I left NY midway through this year’s Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence 3100 Mile Race (2021), I never imagined what would come out in Japanese media at Takasumi’s finish. Here I would like to summarize what have come out, and how they came about.

First of all, there are two main themes I have felt through this media journey: Guru has all sorts of beautiful things in store, if only we are willing and ready to start moving and doing things. Also, It is all about teamwork. Team Guru has many members, and by us playing our respective roles together, things get accomplished for Guru’s manifestation, which is extremely amazing and beautiful.

While in NY, I began working on the media a little bit, but I was absorbed in helping Harita, plus my back went out, I did only a lukewarm job. When I came back to Japan, however, this burning feeling came forward within me: “Japan HAS TO honour Takasumi!” What should be done was clear – try all avenues which might make that happen!

Actually, out of all the things I have done as a disciple, I find media work most challenging in a number of ways. You will get a lot of rejections and indifferent reactions, yet you have to keep going with intensity, perseverance, and tenacity. Timing and speed are of paramount importance as well, as very often once it’s a day late, they are no longer interested. Because of all this, I have to fight with unwillingness before taking the first step, especially when I am out of practice (which was the case this time!). However, once I get over the initial hesitation and keep going, there comes a time when I feel I am in a divine flow. Their reactions no longer matter, and I just keep going and going. Then I begin enjoying each encounter, some of them surprisingly inspiring and heartwarming. And this was exactly what happened. Out of probably 30 or so places I tried, several nice outcomes resulted.

1. **NY-based Japanese newspapers**

Initially being prompted by regular Taiwanese visitors at the course (but NO Japanese visitors!), we contacted several Japanese newspapers in NY in the hope that their publishing an article would encourage local Japanese to come out to the course. Tilvila was the one who helped me get motivated and started! One weekly paper, *Shukan NY Seikatsu*, promised to publish an article earlier on, but did not. After that we tried to reach them a few times, but no response. Toward the end, however, the editor finally wrote me back promising to publish an article about Takasumi’s finish, which turned out to be quite nice. Meanwhile, a small article came out in another weekly, *NY Japion*, a week before Takasumi’s finish – our first outcome! This gave Nina a lot of joy.

A funny thing happened with a third, bi-monthly paper *Yomi Time*. I sent the editor all the standard package (press release in both Japanese and English, with some photos from Jowan’s site), and when I called him to check if he had received everything, he scolded me (!) and said: “You told me you had worked as a helper, which plays an important role in this race. But your press release does not say anything about that. I need more information! Otherwise I cannot see, besides the distance, how this race is unique and different from all the other running events!” After apologizing him, I sent a long email message explaining a bit more ‘behind the scenes’ stories. In the end, he published quite a big article about Takasumi’s finish. He took a lot from the press release, so there was a good mention of Guru. He also included a photo with Nina, mentioning she played an important role for her husband’s finish.

So, in the end, 3 out of 4-5 Japanese publications in NY wrote about Takasumi. Not bad! In all 3 cases, Anjali was the kindest self-giver, driving to a Japanese grocery store to pick up some copies to give to the couple, the last one of which happened the night before their departure. They were so happy to see the big article!

1. **Japanese Government**

Who can honour Takasumi better than the Japanese government? With that idea in mind, a few places were contacted, and quite surprisingly, Consulate General of Japan in NY responded favorably. Here is what happened.

Once while in NY, I called them to find out something regarding the Covid test I had to take before my departure. The lady on the phone was very helpful. Back in Japan, I called them again to find out something for Takasumi and Nina’s Covid test. The same nice lady answered. In the middle of our conversation, a flash of idea came to my mind…I should ask her if they have a sports section. I found myself explaining about the 3100 Mile Race, and asking her if there is any way to honour this very first Japanese finishing the race. She forwarded me to the one in charge of cultural affairs and publicity, who sounded genuinely intrigued by the race and Takasumi. [One note here: as a general rule, Japanese do not show much emotion, especially while on duty, so when someone does show some feeling or reaction, it’s a nice surprise, and you cannot let go of this golden opportunity.] This lady forwarded the matter to the sports section, who took on the task.

We discussed different options and Takasumi’s likely condition around his finish. It took more than 2 weeks for them to decide what they would like to do. This is also a Japanese thing. Maybe it takes longer to reach a decision, but once decided, all the details have been very nicely organized. In the end, they invited Takasumi, Nina (in her new sari!), and Rupantar to a congratulatory lunch at a fancy Japanese restaurant in Manhattan a couple of days after the race. To abide by the political protocol, it had to be a private lunch, but I could tell they really wanted to go ahead with it, even with all the restrictions they had. Also, they chose the post-race lunch rather than coming to the race, “so that it would create the least stress on Senoo-san’s part, who must be exhausted after such a feat. Also, that way, we will have more chance to talk in a relaxed atmosphere.” (from their email)

Guru said “In concern, you have no equal” about Japan. I felt the embodiment of this quality in the action of the Japanese Consulate General.

1. **NY Bureaus of major Japanese media**

Another avenue to pursue was NY-based correspondents of the Japanese media. Two major success stories came out: *Kyodo News*, the biggest news agency in Japan, and *Asahi Shimbun*, the biggest newspaper in the country. To our joy, both outcomes (as well as all the others mentioned in this report) quote the full race name, which means Guru’s name has reached far and wide across the nation!! And here is how they came about.

***Kyodo News***

*Kyodo* is like the Associated Press (AP) of Japan. Their news feed would reach all four corners of the country for all kinds of newspapers to pick it up. But I also knew, from my previous experience, that they have a very strict standard: they would not accept our photos or writing; they would have to come out themselves to take photos and write about the event. This makes it less likely to succeed, I thought, and my unwillingness to try was particularly strong toward Kyodo, though I knew I had to do it. But as always, Guru had a way to maneuver, which in the end led to a most beautiful story!

It started out with a short text message from Sanjay while in NY. It said he knows someone who knows someone in Kyodo NY office. Do I want him to contact this person? Of course, please! – A gentle push from Guru, it seemed! I created a media package and sent it to him. No response. I wrote to this person myself next. No response again. Meanwhile, Pragati, my generous and wise host this time, was busy working on a big project at the UN, and at the end of it, she casually mentioned to me that Kyodo covered the story of this project among other international media. This prompted me to relate to her my (yet) unsuccessful attempt to contact them. In the conversation, we figured out that her contact at Kyodo is actually the boss of this person I have been trying to get in touch with. So now the updated information package was sent from Pragati to this boss at Kyodo, who promised to take a look at it. No response afterwards, however.

Back in Japan, the idea of Kyodo was lingering in my mind, and Pragati kindly offered to email her contact person again. I renewed the press release focusing on Takasumi actually finishing the race, and sent with more recent photos to Pragati, just a few days before the end of the race. I must add that a beautifully written English press release that Sukantika kindly shared was part of the package, to give an overall view of the race.

Now the boss wrote back Pragati saying he would be busy that day, but would try finding someone else who would be available. A reporter soon wrote to Pragati saying he would like to come under the condition that he could take his own photos and interview Takasumi himself. The last day’s forecast was heavy rain, so to secure good photos, this reporter came out to the course the day before, as well as at the finish. You all know the rest of the story at the finish…how he even ended up translating Takasumi’s speech!

He sent out his newsfeed to Japan probably a few hours after the finish. The finish was early morning in Japan, and in the evening of the same day, I got a text message from Sudasa, a disciple in Tokyo, that Krutananda, another Tokyo disciple, saw the news on a TV screen in a commuter train on his way back from work! Soon after that, Nina excitedly forwarded me an article in *Sankei Shimbun* – the 4th biggest national newspaper. In the end, at least 16 newspapers and online media from across Japan picked up this newsfeed. And the story does not end here.

Takasumi, as well as the whole experience at the course, must have touched this reporter’s heart. He sent scans of all the articles that appeared in various newspapers to Takasumi. How nice of him! Not only that, he also wrote a second, more interview-oriented article targeting regional newspapers. *Tokyo Shimbun* (yes, it’s a regional paper, but quite big and well regarded!) picked it up and published it in their ‘People’ section on November 18. His thrilled parents bought 3 copies of the paper, and he kindly sent one of them to me, as we cannot get it here in Kyoto!

***Asahi Shimbun – the biggest national newspaper***

When I called his cell phone a few days before the end of the race, this Asahi reporter was about to board a train to be on an out-of-town assignment for a few days. Surprisingly, he was immediately interested in Takasumi, though he would be out of town on the day of his finish. It was probably a perfect timing, as he would have time on the train to read email. For the next couple of hours, he would write me to ask me questions, request more information, then after going back and forth a few times this way, he was ready to come out to Queens to interview Takasumi. A few days after the race, he reached Panorama and met Sahishnu first. His interview with Takasumi (accompanied with Nina) lasted more than 1.5 hours! Afterwards. the reporter texted me saying it was such a memorable interview, which made him reflect on his own life. Another thing he said was “They kindly treated me coffee.” Panorama’s coffee helped him settle in Guru’s world!!

He wrote two articles from this interview: one long article, a life story of Takasumi, for the online Asahi. Related to this online article, the reporter did something interesting. He uses Twitter with catchy previews to invite potential readers to the actual articles he wrote. He says this is an effective way to bring in more readers nowadays. For Takasumi’s life story, he uploaded, as part of the preview, the video Natabara so patiently put together with his running footage and post-race interview.

The other shorter article he wrote was for the paper version’s ‘People’ section, which comes on page 2, with one person’s story per day. It is a very well-known section and carries prestige. The reporter said there are so many submissions for this section that it is common not to make it to publication. To our greatest joy, Takasumi’s story did make it, and came out on November 22. In the interview, Takasumi did not talk about Guru, but just the way he spoke about the race – he had known the race for 17 years, and it had been his lifetime goal, and all the other glorious achievements of his were simply stepping stones to be in this race – gave Guru’s 3100 Mile Race respect, credibility, and prestige that it so rightly deserved.

Evidently, Takasumi told the reporter he would like to do the 3100 Mile Race again, and the reporter is ready to come back to cover the story once more! I urged him to come out to the course while the race is still going on next time!

1. **Bureaus in Yokohama, Takasumi’s hometown**

Another sensible avenue to try was Yokohama bureaus of Japanese media, as Yokohama is a major city, and is also Takasumi’s hometown. Yokohama is also the closest big city to Kamakura. During his 2006 visit to Japan, Guru dispatched Tilvila, Lunthita, and me (as translator) to Yokohama to find TV stations – my first on-the-job training in media! This sweet memory also seemed to be encouraging me to “Go on, Go on!”

When I called *Mainichi Shimbun*, the 3rd biggest national newspaper, their deputy editor-in-chief answered and immediately gave me a positive response. “He sounds like a very interesting person. Please have him contact us once he is back in Japan. No rush.” Just like that, even without looking at the press release. Obviously he was interested in writing a feature article.

Do you remember Guru’s story of a Japanese policeman who bravely neglected his duty to pick up a newspaper for Guru? That was a copy of *Mainichi Daily News*, the same paper’s English edition, which had Guru’s first newspaper article in Japan, in 1969!

I heard that they had interviewed both Takasumi and Nina just the other day. The reporter really enjoyed meeting both of them, the interview lasted for a couple of hours! They would get photos from Jowan’s site, then let us know when and how the article will come out.

1. **Magazine for the running community**

One last, but not the least, important avenue to try was magazines. I could only think of one – *Runners*, the major monthly magazine for the nation’s running community. They used to put out small ‘Call for Runners’ for our races in the 90s. The editor who answered the phone immediately became amazed. She quickly concluded that the race is so unique that a mere interview would miss out on a lot of things and the readers would not be able to fully relate to Takasumi’s achievement. They discussed what the best way would be, and about a week later, got back to me and said they want Takasumi to write about his race experience. They also asked the race director to write about the history of the race and how this year’s race went, which Sahishnu very kindly and competently fulfilled!

Now here is a beautiful bonus to this story. They originally specified how many words Takasumi’s article should be. Then, when this editor saw his finish video which Utpal had just uploaded, she was so moved, especially by the cheerfulness at the finish, and how so many people together congratulated his finish. Now, wanting to know more about the race and Takasumi the runner, she doubled the length of the article. Takasumi did write a long article, his account of the race, and submitted it to her, only to be told a week later that they now want to meet him in person in order to publish a satisfactory story. His story is scheduled to come out at the end of December.

*In retrospect…*

If I had let my unwillingness and fatigue win, none of these would have happened. Look what a difference it makes! Before, there was nothing. Now, Guru’s race has shown up everywhere, and is going to reach many more people in Japan in the very near future through these upcoming articles!

Another reflection is that everything Guru gives is a necessary experience. For me, being at the race for the first time as a helper, and translating for Takasumi were both precious experiences in their own right. At the same time, they were also necessary for the next phase of my service for the race. These experiences prepared me to work with the media sufficiently later on.

Throughout this media journey, which has been going on for more than 2 months and still not over yet, Rupantar has always been so supportive and encouraging, giving me clear directions and insight, which I needed very much periodically. I am extremely grateful.

Lastly and most importantly, I place all my deepest gratitude at Guru’s Feet for granting me these golden opportunities, and for so compassionately working through my weaknesses to push me forward, as always!...also for giving me all the encouragement and push in and through my brother and sister disciples. Namaste.