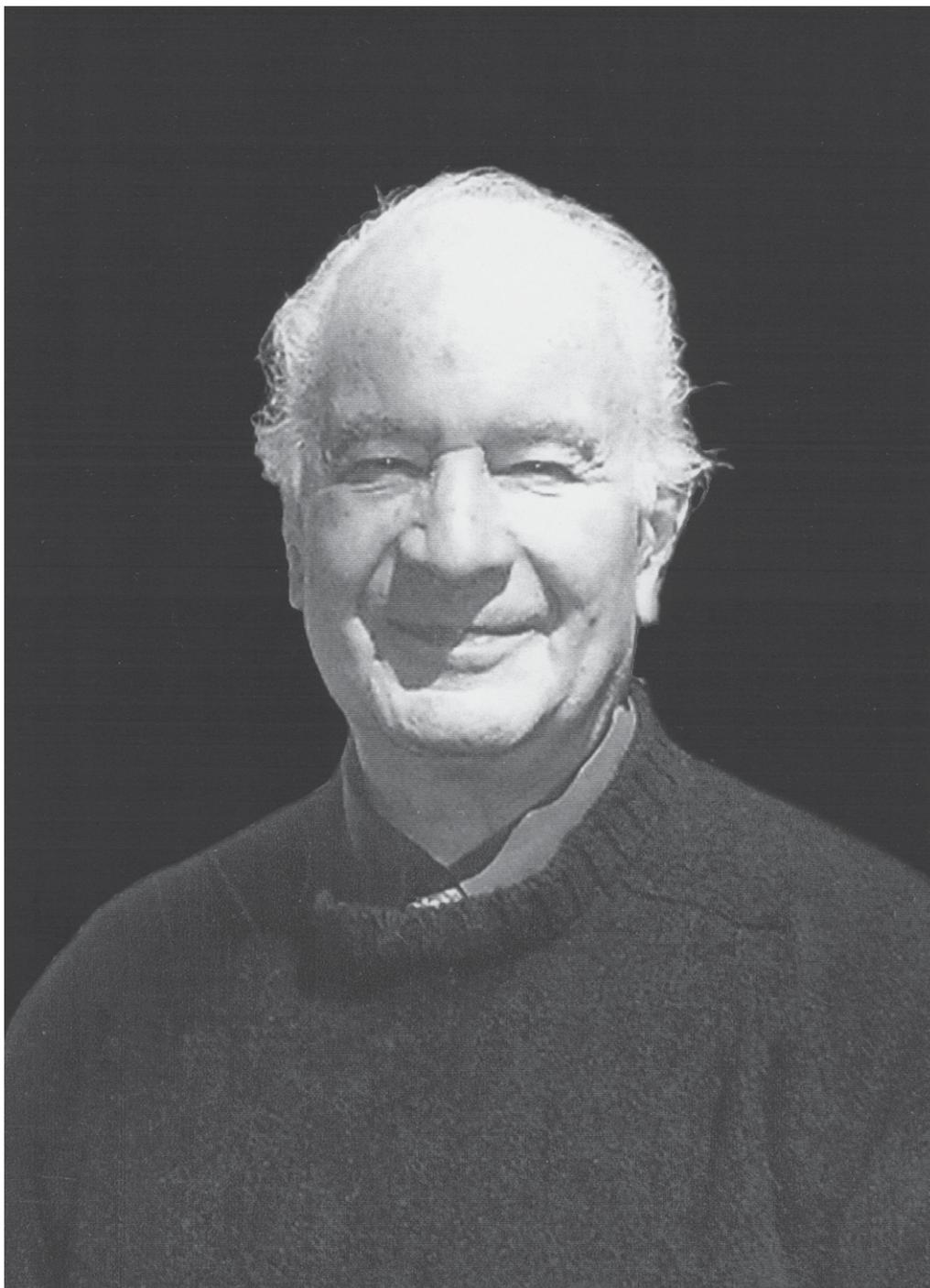


# Collaboration

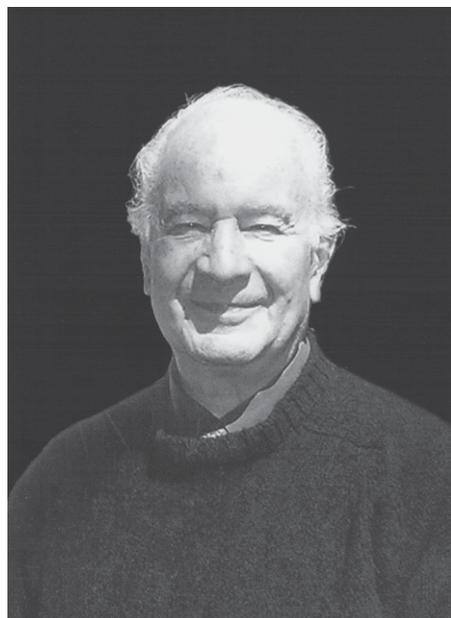
Summer 2008

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**Sam Spanier 1925-2008**



### About the cover

Sam Spanier, founder of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mt. Tremper, NY, passed away on 30 January 2008. He was 82 years old. A remembrance appears on p. 4 (Photo courtesy Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center)

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**Luc Venet** worked with Satprem on the English translations of the latter's works and their distribution in America; he was coauthor with Satprem of *Life without Death*. He later became disillusioned with Satprem, and has expressed his reasons in the present article, reprinted with his permission.

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## From the office of Collaboration

In this issue we feature a chronicle by Luc Venet, “End of illusions,” about his experience in the inner circle of disciples working with Satprem on the publication of *Mother’s Agenda* and other works. Recognizing this is a controversial subject, we decided that the importance of the issues involved outweighed the negative feelings and reactions that it might stir. Although controversial, Satprem has certainly been an important spokesperson and actor in the Integral Yoga community, with many influential books to his credit, and with his own following. Therefore, it seems useful for the community to grapple with the difficult issues involved than to simply ignore them or sweep them under the rug. Perhaps by examining them dispassionately, we will find that things were not as black and white as first imagined, but like with most endeavors of human beings, there was a mixture of truth and error, knowledge and ignorance, selflessness and selfishness.

Luc examines especially Satprem’s magnetic quality that drew people, including the author, so powerfully. For Luc, and apparently for others in his circle, this attraction was so strong that they were induced to give up their own sense of individuality, their own judgment, and became instead adjuncts of Satprem’s own personality. A major part of this attraction was the feeling of coming closer to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and becoming part of their divine work. Another part was the battle against the “enemy,” which was elusive, but always ready to attack, and which bore such names as the “Ashram trustees” and the “Asuras,” the latter who hoped to hold back the evolution. There was also the important work of publishing the *Agenda* and other books, which focused everyone on an immense and inspiring mission. According to Luc, there was also a subtler element, an unspoken but implicit insistence on Satprem’s view of the situation, that one was either in the inner circle of “Truth,” or outside, where all shades of grey were decidedly outside. By laying out what he calls the “Satprem phenomenon” in historical context, Luc helps us to understand not only the subtleties of the web in which he felt caught, but also its development over time, and its potential and real outcomes.

We accompany this feature with three shorter essays that provide some context and background in which to better understand it. The first of these by Lynda Lester focuses on the distinctions between yoga, religion, and fundamentalism. After briefly defining these, she shows how all three have played roles in the Integral Yoga community, and helps us to clarify and understand our own practice. The second article by M. Alan Kazlev provides a biographical perspective of Satprem, shows us his achievements in terms of his publications, and gives a wider perspective of his polarizing effect in the Integral Yoga community. The third article by myself, Larry Seidlitz, discusses the value and contributions of *Mother’s Agenda*, the 13 volume set of conversations between Satprem and the Mother together with some additional material. It is my feeling that *Mother’s Agenda*, though it may include some unfortunate material, is of immense importance to the Integral Yoga community, and that the controversy surrounding Satprem and its publication should no longer stand in the way of reading, studying, and utilizing its rich contents.

We start off our issue with a remembrance of Sam Spanier, the founder of Matagiri, who passed away this year, by Cassia Berman, a long-time friend and associate. Our thoughts, prayers, and best wishes are with Eric Hughes, who ran the center together with Sam for the past 40 years, and with all those associated with Sam and Matagiri. In AV Almanac, we have two articles, one by Dr. Chamanlal Gupta on the various research initiatives taken up in Auroville over the years, and the second by Mauna van der Vlugt on the inauguration of a new statue of Sri Aurobindo in front of Savitri Bhavan. We also have source material by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on “silence,” a subject suggested to me by Satalal, a member of the Ashram, as well as wonderful poetry, apropos quotes, and photographs.

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**Marianna Lines**, an early resident of Findhorn, is an artist and expert on Celtic and Pictish megalithic sites. During visits with her cousin, Julian, she developed a deep connection with Sam. She lives outside of Edinburgh, Scotland.

**Giorgio Molinari** ([gimoli68@yahoo.co.in](mailto:gimoli68@yahoo.co.in)) shot the photos of the statue of Sri Aurobindo. He worked as a professional photographer in Italy for 40 years; he now lives in Auroville.

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**About SAA:** The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville and supports various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: Theresa Boschert, coordinator; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Chandresh Patel, secretary.

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## Current Affairs

### Sam Spanier: A divine calling

by Cassia Berman

On January 30, Sam Spanier, a warm, outgoing presence in the American branch of our spiritual family, passed away at the age of 82. It's not an exaggeration to say that he was loved by thousands of people around the world. A founder of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mt. Tremper, NY, one of the first centers for Mother and Sri Aurobindo's work in North America, Sam was instrumental in helping to spread the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the United States. In the words of his longtime partner, Eric Hughes, Sam identified himself most as a painter. His large, colorful canvases received solo shows in New York City, Paris and Woodstock, NY; the Woodstock Artists Association honored him with its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

Before settling in Mt. Tremper 40 years ago, Sam lived a true bohemian life, rubbing shoulders with many of the well-known people of his time, from Marlon Brando, Wally Cox, Marian Seldes and others in New York's theater world, to James Baldwin, Giacometti, Beauford Delany, Paul Jenkins and others in Paris. Born on 6 May 1925 in Brooklyn, NY, he was the son of the late Isadore and Rose Brecher Spanier. He was gifted with spiritual experiences from childhood, showed early promise as an artist, and also as an actor. In his early teens, he acted in the Yiddish theater, appearing in productions on Broadway with Maurice Schwartz. On his parents' insistence that he get a more dependable profession, he attended a trade high school, and for a time worked as a diamond cutter and jewelry designer at the De Beer Diamond Company in Manhattan.

"To fulfill my life to me meant to experience everything there was to experience," Sam said in notes for a memoir, left unfinished. "Some strong aspect of my being said, 'You are all there is—everything.' Not understanding what that meant, but being thrilled by it, I thought, Oh my God! To be an actor, you can be a king, a pauper, a murderer—all the things I thought I was being told I am." He worked in the theater for more than ten years until, in a production in Greenwich Village, he began to hear an inner voice urging him on to further spiritual discovery.

He was drawn to Paris, and traveled there by ship in 1949. There he started painting in earnest, and there also he first heard of the work of Gurdjieff—a unique blend of ancient and unconventional techniques for exploring the nature of consciousness. In 1952, after proving his sincerity, he was accepted into the Gurdjieff movement, working with some of its early teachers—in Paris with Mme. de Salzmann, leader of the Gurdjieff movement after Gurdjieff's death; upon his return to New York, under the guid-



As Sam had said, he 'was always laughing.' (Photo by Marianna Lines)

ance of Mme. Nyland for another six years.

"The difficulty was," Sam said in his notes, "that by nature I was a happy fellow—I was always laughing, still am. The Gurdjieff people, curiously enough, very rarely laughed." Eventually rebelling, both artistically and spiritually, against the movement's pragmatic emphasis, he left the group, though he felt the work he did with them helped him become a fuller, more complete person.

Soon after, his spiritual search reached its culmination. He'd been aware of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for years. Upon hearing a recording of the Mother's voice, he became determined to meet her, and in 1962 travelled to Pondicherry, India to do so.

Sam spoke of "...the feeling of total completeness, nothing needed, everything given, completely, completely with love," that he experienced in her presence. His first darshan with Mother was unusually long. Among other things, she told him, "You can be a link between East and West." Two weeks later, sitting in Maggi Lidchi's garden near the Ashram, he had a vision, as clear as a slide show, of a center he was to bring into being. When asked to verify his vision, the Mother gave her blessing. He returned to New York City, but it wasn't until 1965 that he felt the inner guidance to go upstate to Woodstock to look for land. After two months of fruitless searching, somewhat discouraged, a realtor took him to see a place a few miles out of town in Mt. Tremper. When they arrived at the property, Sam heard the Mother's voice within say, "This is it," and to the surprise of the realtor, before they had even driven up to the house, Sam said, "I'll take it." Mother herself sent him a name for the land: Matagiri, in Sanskrit, means "Mother's Mountain."

Matagiri for many years functioned as a live-in ashram, and Sam, always paying careful attention to the inner guidance he himself received from the Mother, stood at its helm and offered guidance to the many seekers who passed through. Matagiri supported itself with a small chicken farm, and with wholesale



Sam loved to engage in discussion with the thousands of people who visited Matagiri. (Photo by Julian Lines)

distribution of incense, books, and beautiful hand-made paper from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in India. Sam designed the stationery, managed the business, and often made the weekly local egg deliveries as well.

Matagiri has continued, under the stewardship of Sam and Eric, to host darshan gatherings and meditations as well as concerts and talks, often by visitors from Auroville and Pondicherry. It is a non-profit entity unto itself, but for those who knew Sam, it will always be inseparable from his expansive presence and dedication. Sam infused the buildings and land with his very particular sense of beauty and whimsy, blending yard-sale kitsch with priceless statues from the East; planting artificial flowers alongside real ones (which you might not notice until you see summer flowers blooming in the snow). Devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from all over the world made Matagiri a primary destination not only to visit its archival library, make pilgrimage to Mother's mountain and meditate in its sacred atmosphere, but to partake of Sam's charming hospitality, endless storytelling and deep insight.

Several years ago, Matagiri opened a small gallery on the premises to house Sam's paintings, which are also in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the *Musee D'Art Moderne* in Paris, the Carnegie Institute, the WAAM, and many private collections.

Though in the last few years Sam was spending more and more time at home, sitting in quiet contemplation, he also loved to wander around Woodstock, chatting with the wide spectrum of people he knew. He tended to be private about his spiritual life outside of Matagiri, but radiated a special quality that people sensed without knowing anything about Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Recently, an artist in Woodstock who had met Sam only a few months before his passing spoke of the love, delight and respect with which he greeted everyone, whether he had known them forever or had just met them, and the special feeling that gave her.

In addition to Eric, Sam leaves behind his sister Leslie Linchuk, four nieces and nephews and their children, and a large extended family of devoted friends. Memorial gatherings have been held at the Playground in Pondicherry and at the Woodstock Artists Association; a memorial in Woodstock for his relatives and spiritual family is scheduled for May 4. In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Sam Spanier can be made to the non-profit organization Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, 1218 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457, USA.

## Online resources on the Yoga

Sri Aurobindo Ashram site has downloadable pdf versions of most of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works: <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/ashram/sriuro/writings.php>; there is a glossary to Sri Aurobindo's *Record of Yoga* at: <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/research/archives.php>; and downloadable versions of Mother's organ music and Sunil's music at: <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/music/index.php>.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Info has loads of resources including searchable versions of the complete works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and works of several disciples, quotes on important topics, music and artwork by the Mother and prominent disciples, many photos, darshan and new year messages, information on the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and its departments, and more: <http://sriurobindoashram.info>.

The Auroville site has loads of information about its many varied communities, initiatives, and activities, including many articles, photos, artwork, and more: <http://www.auroville.org>.

Sri Aurobindo Society, in addition to information on its various centers and activities, has an archive of quotes by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on various challenges of spiritual life: <http://www.sriurobindosociety.org.in/qstarch/qstlist.htm>; and an e-magazine: <http://nextfuture.sriurobindosociety.org.in>.

Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research and its online university, Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow, offers online certificate and advanced degree programs in Sri Aurobindo's thought: <http://www.sacar.in>.

The Miraura site has a wealth of general information and links related to the Integral Yoga, including contact information on various centers and study groups around the world: <http://www.miraura.org>.

Savitri by Sri Aurobindo has the text and associated information on *Savitri*; including Sri Aurobindo's letters, a bibliography of works on *Savitri*, recordings of the Mother reading *Savitri*, and back issues of *Invocation*, a journal published by Savitri Bhavan in Auroville: <http://www.savitribysriurobindo.com>.

Sri Aurobindo Association site has information on its activities, on AUM, study guides on *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and some online editions of back issues of *Collaboration*: <http://www.collaboration.org>.



# AV almanac

## Growing with research in Auroville

by Chamanlal Gupta

Reprinted from Mother India, February 2008, with permission.

### Introduction

“Tomorrow morning: sunrise”—with these words of the Mother spoken on 28 February 1972, the eve of the anniversary of Supramental Manifestation in Sri Aurobindo’s centenary year, the first professional research facility in Auroville later known as “Auroromet” was launched. It was a B1 class meteorological station with autographic recording instruments and Sun Radiation and sunshine instruments—no power, no electronics at that time. Janet brought UNESCO gift coupons worth \$3,000 to pay for it. It continued for five years continuously with Charlie, Allen and later Navoditte manning it and with data analysis being done by Chamanlal. Piero designed and constructed a hut for a princely sum of Rs. 2,500 for keeping records, etc. Later Tim Rees, Frederick and Chamanlal set up an ‘Auroville Centre for Environmental Studies—ACES’ to receive the first Government research grants in 1974 amounting to half a million rupees. Also, Mother gave the name ‘Success’ to the tree-planting program started by Tim and Bob Lawlor at Forecomers. Then the blow struck unexpectedly. Someone, unknown till now, ransacked the station and threw all the instruments into the bushes. They were smashed beyond repair. However, the seeds were sown and Auroville now has thriving research programs in many areas of work. In this 40<sup>th</sup> year of Auroville, it may be sobering to recapitulate those humble beginnings of research and its resurgence in spite of tragedies en route.

### First major research projects

The first project was two Eco houses at Certitude—one to serve as a laboratory and the other for living in later on—of which only one was built, where Dipti and Arjun stay now. It had rainfall harvesting, multi-feed biogas plant as waste recycling system, integrated solar water heating and cooking systems, venturies for natural ventilation and low-energy experimental roofs. A projected wind-electric machine was not put up on the stairwell because of possible breakdown during cyclones causing damage to the building. It provided hard data on system costs, insight into difficulties of working in building design teams and was the first such Eco house in the whole of Asia in 1976. Most systems were not proven at the time and have since gone into disuse, even though the house is still in use. Vikas from Auroville and Ranajit from the Ashram School had worked on this project and William Netter was

one of the concept providers. Today Eco houses and Eco communities are standard bearers of sustainable living all over the world.

The second project was on a low-temperature solar pump for which a “Sofretes” solar motor was gifted by Auroville International, Paris and the rest of the funds came from the Department of Science and Technology, government of India. Flat-plate collectors were made at Auroville workshops. Luc Venet and Andre Viozat were the original investigators. Afterwards Agami Reddy of the Ashram School and Santhanam did the measurements, which were subsequently published. The efficiencies were low and finally the project was discontinued for they were neither cheap nor simple nor efficient. Later, solar PV pumps came into operation all over the world for which Aurore Unit of Auroville Centre for Scientific Research has become the leader in India and has also won the International Ashden Award a couple of years back. An interesting episode took place in the gifting of a solar motor because AVI France ran short of funds and there was no money left to cover shipping expenses in foreign exchange. In spite of tight controls, the Reserve Bank of India cleared our request and granted the release of 3,500 French francs against project funds in rupees in one step. The local State Bank Manager kept shaking his head and went on saying, “Impossible, impossible...”

The third project was natural cultivation of algae called Chlorella, firstly at Forecomers and later at Mango grove just with sea water and cow urine as provider of nutrients and a vertical axis wood rotor providing the stirring. Twenty-four grammes per square meter were obtained as daily output—the world maximum in Japan’s sophisticated laboratories being 28 grammes. Of all the six centers, as part of All India Coordinated Project on Algae, Auroville was the only one to provide 50 kg. of dried algae to the Government of India. Total project costs were only Rs. 80,000. Bob Lawlor and Jim deVries worked on the project and Udar from the Ashram took great interest. Spirulina at Auroville came much later and is now widely used in India and abroad. Spirulina is more difficult to grow because of easier contamination, but is easier on the digestive system because of thinner cell walls.

### A stormy interlude

Apart from work at Matrimandir, several major activities of creative nature came to a standstill in Auroville during 1977-1985. A strange change came over the people: reasonableness was replaced by extremism, smiles were replaced by scowls and one really did not know what was happening and what caused this explicit polarization. Many in the big family of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were affected. The clue came from an unexpected quarter. The Secretary for Science and Technology in New Delhi, Dr. A. Ramachandran told us: “When an ordinary mother from an ordinary family goes, there is upheaval. Yours is no ordinary family and Mother was no ordinary mother and so you are all facing this. You have been overtaken by history by hold tight and it will



pass. As for me, I have no doubt about Auroville's potential and future in research and your own technical and financial integrity." Within a time frame of three or four years, this 'cleansing through fire' took place at Auroville after Mother's physical withdrawal. Dr. Ramachandran kept his support and advised us to fold up the projects decently and keep one open with a token sum of money so that channels remained open—this was a wise counsel. Internally, there was sound advice and support from Nolini-da, Champaklal-ji, Monsieur André and Shyam Sunder-ji. Also, when default funds were to be cleared (before Government research funds could be received again at Auroville), the Sri Aurobindo Society was cooperative and all the process was gone through with good grace to open the way again. Things got really cleared in 1988, when a descent took place on Auroville's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which was perceived by many. Then it was, in the words of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*, "A might of storm chased by the might of the Sun." The situation was clear once again.

### In-house research projects

Apart from major funded research projects, in-house projects continued with small funds. Some examples were:

- While trying to correlate discharge rates with intensity of rainfall, the autographic level meter anchored by Tim in the canyon of Forecomers was swept off by the fury of flash floods and it was a great lesson. So the work began on soil and water conservation and afforestation initially at Pitchandikulam and Forecomers.
- Johnny had already started work on organic agriculture and this also took off with greater speed. Now there is an active program of organic vegetables by Stefan.
- Work at Nursery of documenting plants and their growth by Narad was supplemented by seeds exchange and documentation of trees by Walter at Shakti and others.
- Research in mud housing by Poppo resulted in a widely acclaimed publication and now Auroville is a world leader in Compressed Earth Block through the work of Satprem Maini and others.
- Search for fire-proof roofing material began after a devastating fire at Toujours Mieux workshop and this led to Ferro-cement in which Udar was very interested. Auroville is the most successful promoter of this technology in India and has successfully made airtight biogas gas holders and the ribs for the first concrete Solar Bowl in the world. Gas holders are even shipped to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and insured by Mother's blessing packets. Tency is the moving spirit behind Ferro-cement technology.
- Auroville was invited to pick up the debris of well-designed wind mills of National Aeronautical Laboratory—NAL, which were in disuse because of lack of care (under Indian democratic

procedures, they had to be sited on Perambroke land and no one took care of them). This led to a research program in Wind pumps which has culminated in the most efficient and cost-effective wind pump in India. These are designed, manufactured and marketed by Robbie at Aureka.

### Later research projects and birth of CSR

In 1984, the Centre for Scientific Research (CSR) was started and major research funds started flowing in again. More importantly, students started coming in and in-house Auroville research teams started evolving.

As stated earlier, Ferro-cement biogas plants, Floating Drum and Fixed Dome were designed and fabricated here quite successfully along with building components like roofing channels, door shutters and portable lavatory blocks and recently, decentralized waste water treatment modules (Dewatt systems). These have been extensively used in rural areas and for Tsunami relief work and earthquake resistant housing in Bhuj with Tency as its pivot.

With the development of stabilized mud bricks for walls and Ferro-cement elements for roofing, two very low-energy buildings came into being, namely Visitor's Centre and Solar Kitchen, which as a solar bowl integrated within. These were conceived and designed by Suhasini and Gilles with support from technology teams. They are passive buildings and have been widely acclaimed.

And so the process goes on . . . !

### Conclusion

The writer has been associated with most of these projects at some level or the other. The following pointers for research have emerged from this experience of growing with research in Auroville:

- Research programs growing organically in response to the needs of the community evolve their own paradigms, which are not structured mentally as in normal organized research but evolve a pattern of their own as seen by an overarching presence. This leads to creativity and good results if one is flexible and receptive in attitude but meticulous in detailing and actual execution in matter.
- Funds are never in abundance but are never the prime limiting constraint—they flow in somehow, if one observes the Laws of Mahalakshmi in handling them: scrupulous care in spending and accounting with minimal waste.
- If harmony in the research team can be achieved, the Grace pours in and achieves miracles, i.e. outputs are far out of proportion to inputs and one is left wondering with a grateful heart, bowed head, and misty eyes.



## Sri Aurobindo statue in Auroville

by Mauna van der Vlugt

Since Golden Day on 29 February 2008, Auroville has a statue of Sri Aurobindo that, at the initiative of Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, was installed at the new entrance of the Savitri Bhavan complex. The white sweep of the building forms a perfect background for it and the entire tableau with its gardens and serene atmosphere offers yet an entirely new and different vista of the township.

The statue is one of five in India made from the same cast and was made by dedicated artists from Calcutta in Lalit Verma's garden in Pondicherry, and then brought to the Ashram for a blessing.

In *Auroville Today* of March 2008, we read the description given by Lalit of the complex process of creating it: "There are only 10 or 15 photographs of Sri Aurobindo, and just one of him standing. So we had to be ingenious. We blew all these photos up to a very large size and then, surrounded by them, worked for a month doing sketches. Using these as a guide, we then created nine different full-size models, eight of which we rejected. Five artists from Calcutta then worked 12 hours a day casting in the age-old technique of 'lost wax.'

"The statue is made of 85% copper, 5% lead, and 5% zinc, a traditional recipe from south India. To this, Helmut [architect of Savitri Bhavan] has added some pieces of gold that his parents had left him. This was very nice, as gold gives off a particular vibration."

As Dr. Singh had to cancel his visit to Auroville during the week of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary because issues in Indian Parliament kept him in Delhi, he was not able to inaugurate the statue on February 29<sup>th</sup> as envisaged. In his stead, Ashram trustee Manoj Das guided a quiet dedication in the morning of that Golden Day, during which those present each read their favourite passages from *Savitri*.

On March 30<sup>th</sup> however, when Dr. Singh did come to visit Auroville in preparation for the meeting of the Governing Board on April 9<sup>th</sup> in New Delhi, he inaugurated the statue during a simple ceremony where a reading by Nirodbaran from *Savitri*, Book 11, was quietly listened to.

During an interactive session with the community later on that day, Dr Singh stated: "While Matrimandir is the gift from Auroville to the world, the statue of Sri Aurobindo is the Foundation's gift to Auroville. I really think that this was something that was needed, and I am happy that its location is in front of the new wing of Savitri Bhavan—a very lovely place—and the statue completes the celebrations of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary."

Savitri Bhavan itself had issued a small card with a photo of the statue, accompanied by a quotation from the Mother:

"Sri Aurobindo's message  
is an immortal sunlight  
radiating over the future."



Sri Aurobindo statue at Savitri Bhavan. (Photos by Giorgio Molinari)



# Chronicles

## End of illusions

by Luc Venet

### Introduction

I was 26 when I first met Satprem. It was in 1969, on the seashore of the Bay of Bengal, at the playground where Mother, past 80, sometimes came to play tennis with the Ashram children. Newly arrived from the West with a doctorate in mathematics, I stared like an infant at that wholly unknown world, struck by the air of simplicity and familiarity that seemed to pervade everything. A few days earlier, Mother had concentrated her diamond-like gaze upon me. And the first meeting with Satprem that followed seemed to confirm my inner certitude that this had been my world from the beginning, and would be forevermore—although it still felt very mysterious and completely out of line with my mathematical theorems!

It had all begun 18 months earlier at the *Place de l'Odéon* in Paris. I stood there one day in February 1968, just before the May convulsions that shook the world, when the subway had deposited my destiny on the sidewalk, right under the watchful eyes of Danton, whose statue dominates the square. A friend I had not seen in a long time had just come out of the Metro. We had barely finished displaying our mutual surprise and delight at this chance encounter when he started to tell me about a place he had recently visited in India and about a book that would explain everything. He spoke with a kind of urgency in his voice, as though he were freeing his conscience of a responsibility whose meaning and origins, though vague were nonetheless insistent. The place he described was Pondicherry, and the book was *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, by Satprem.

I last saw Satprem in 1990, at his home in the Nilgiris Mountains, where he had

informed me in terms precluding any dialogue that my current problem was a clear-cut matter of exorcism. That was when my childlike trust died, shattered amid the rubble of a world of illusions and distorting mirrors which, as I discovered later, I had myself somehow created. For over 20 years I had been living in a close working relationship with Satprem. All those years which I thought I had spent in absolute, selfless dedication to the ideals of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, selflessly performing tasks defined and deemed rightful and worthy by Satprem, had now abruptly come to naught. And thus stripped of all illusions and disguise, I had to face and then come to terms with the stark reality of my loss, or else die of grief on the spot.

What follows is my account of what happened during the years between those two meetings with Satprem—and why the first contained the premonitory signs of the second.

Today, by a stroke of fortune—even an act of grace—that astounds me continually, I live a life grounded in true reality, completely freed from Satprem and all my childish illusions. Looking back with a steady perspective at the long road I have traveled, I feel I understand all its twists and turns. And most importantly, I comprehend the significance of this perilous journey and why it nearly cost me my life.

For finally, it is Mother and Sri Aurobindo alone who shine in everything. No more Satprem as “guide,” “advanced older brother on the path,” “privileged intermediary.” No more lure or diversion of any kind. Rather life itself, direct and unmediated; with no barriers left standing between oneself and ‘that’ (Or perhaps ‘that’ and ‘That’?).

Others have not been as fortunate.

### Patrice

It would have been easier to remain silent. In fact, this is what I had originally decided to do. After all, my story is first and foremost my own. And too, my experiences with Satprem are the result of a destiny which I claim as personal and private, and of a course of action which led me to a

goal which was my own and did not concern anybody but me.

But Patrice’s death changed everything.

Patrice died in 2006. To my shock and utter horror, I learned that he had thrown himself from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of his apartment building in Paris. I felt this loss to be my own. His death affected my personal world far too deeply and directly for me to remain silent. This was not a news item that I could shelve and summarily dismiss, and allow to vanish into oblivion.

I had first met “Little Patrice” in Auroville some 30 years before, shortly after his arrival from France. His face constantly lit with a half-mocking smile, he, like myself, had followed Satprem. His body now lay amidst the trash-cans at the foot of his building. His sole epitaph was merely a leaden silence from Satprem and a few cold words from Sujata.

A critical threshold had thus been crossed; a point of no return had been reached, compelling me to break my silence. Nor would any “explanation” explain anything: the theories about “Patrice’s karma” or “Patrice’s fault” would not appease the gnawing pain within me.

To you, Patrice, I dedicate these lines. Even if no one understands the “reasons” for your suicide, I know the torment you endured, and which finally broke you—because the very same torment almost got the better of me, too.

### The Cage

Like yours, my story begins with an impulse of childlike enthusiasm, followed by a surrender of all personal considerations.

At the beginning of 1976, a relatively recent resident of Auroville, I had received “by chance” a bundle of mimeographed letters, then circulating in Auroville. I learned that “threats” were being leveled at Satprem by certain Ashram authorities concerning the original manuscripts of *Mother’s Agenda* which he kept in his house in Nandanam.

Without thinking, I rushed to offer him my support against the “enemy,” as



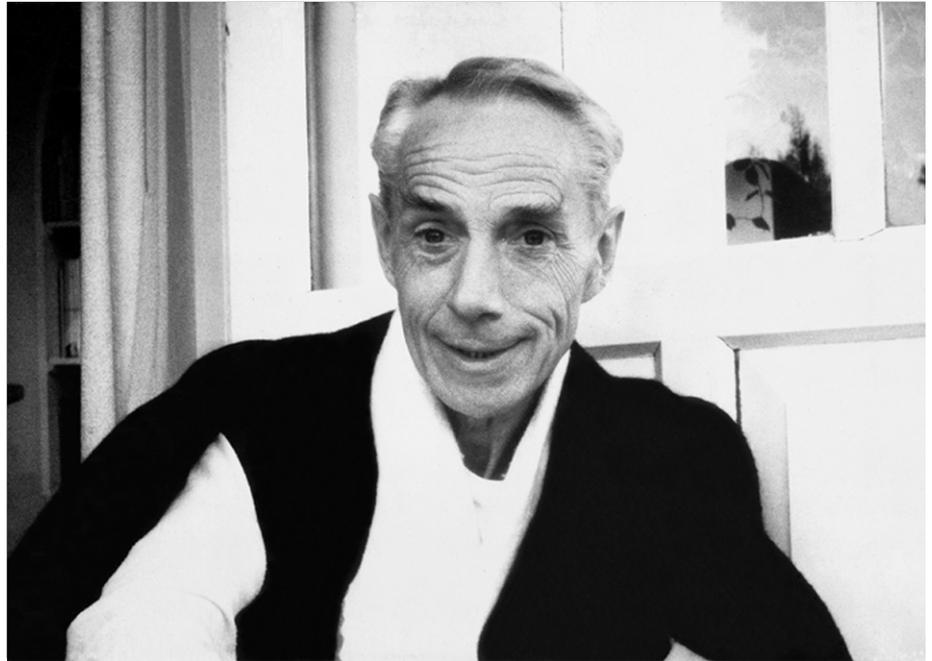
vague for me as if all this were simply a work of fiction, but in fact very real and material for him, made up of real faces and people. Unknown to me, I was about to enter a world of internecine quarrels among certain Ashram members. Satprem, because of his personality and previous stances, was cast in a starring role. But I did not care about the “historical” reality. I disregarded all contingencies. It was imperative for me to side with the underdog, the alleged victim; even if in doing so I was sacrificing reason and reflection upon the altar of spontaneity.

Thus, I began a new life. I had chosen my camp, as it were. In my eagerness and naiveté, I subscribed to a past that was completely foreign to me, and eagerly began to endorse a psychological profile that was not mine. Henceforth, there would be “pros” and “cons,” “blacks” and “whites,” but no halftones. And, above all, no wavering. For in fact, my existence had become amazingly plain and simple. I was embarking on the path already mapped out by Satprem. In a split-second I had willingly handed over to someone else the job of understanding and interpreting the world about me. I had agreed to immerse myself body and soul into a prearranged universe. And my commitment had to be free of all personal reservations. Such was the price I would have to pay to gain access to the world of responsibilities and to exchange my youthful hesitations for a strong-minded certitude, even though that strength would not be really mine. The child in me would be comfortable. For I would thus be endowed with a new life, proud to be relieved of my infantile cocoon. I would be “responsible” at last.

Or so I thought. For, in actual fact, I had already, if unknowingly, entered the cage of illusions.

I believed I had grown up by committing to an “adult” stance. I had a “real cause” to defend fiercely against numberless (and often faceless) enemies. “Enemies” seemed a prerequisite in order to be taken seriously. Enemies helped to define who you were; they enhanced your state of being.

In retrospect, I see now that none of



*Satprem in his prime. (Photo courtesy Auroville)*

this had anything to do with me. I was not getting any closer to myself by taking such a “radical” position. In reality, without my knowing it, I had internalized Satprem’s own internal world. My initial movement of adherence and uncontrolled empathy led me to identify with Satprem’s inner reality. I now felt as he felt, thought as he thought, saw through his eyes.

It was a perfect working arrangement and a win-win situation. I covered the field in my borrowed seven-league boots; he gained a helper who would spare no effort. In the ensuing years, to varying degrees, I saw the same phenomenon of identification affect all who had an extended working relationship with Satprem. Although the practical, day-to-day benefits of such a situation seemed inestimable, it is obvious that the extreme empathy which I felt also carried the perils of total psychic dependence—as future events would unfortunately more than demonstrate.

Why do human beings often feel such a need to seek support outside themselves in order to give significance to their life? Why must we seek to offload the burden of finding the full meaning of our incarnation onto an outsider, be it a person or an

organization? Do we not contain everything within ourselves? The question and its answer? The problem and its solution, like two chicks in the same egg? For a time, it is no doubt easier to leave the matter in someone else’s hands. But this is just putting off the day of reckoning. A time will come when we are alone face to face with ourselves.

But for the moment, these queries were mere inner murmurs, vague intuitions awaiting their time to burst into the open and declare themselves.

### **The Agenda**

Eighteen months later, in July 1977, Satprem and I ascended the steps leading to the Central Court building in *L’Ile de la Cité* in Paris, in order to register the statutes of the “*Institut de Recherches Evolutives*,” whose purpose was to publish and distribute *Mother’s Agenda* worldwide. The day before, a prominent Paris attorney had confirmed that the copyrights of the *Agenda* were Satprem’s legal property, thus opening the way to its publication independent of the Ashram’s good offices. Several publication attempts within the



Ashram had previously failed because Satprem maintained that such arrangements would jeopardize the validity and integrity of the publication.

From then on, the work of the *Agenda* would be in the hands of four associates of Satprem's: Micheline, Anne, Robert, and me. A handful of other friends in France and in India would lend their occasional but enthusiastic support.

There was a great feeling of shared delight in our original little group. We had found a gold-laden ship at the bottom of the sea and we were bringing the ingots one by one to the surface. The very material in this marvelous *Agenda* revived our energies and filled our days with sparkling life. Although each person had very specific and challenging tasks to accomplish, we were united by the birth of the *Agenda*. Future plans were infinite. Publication in other languages, creation of other "Institutes" around the world, "laboratories of evolution" bringing together those who were eager to embark on their own evolution in the light of the teachings of the *Agenda*.

It was thus the extended moment of a felicitous dream that could somehow effortlessly become real, almost as though by accident.

The first volume of the *Agenda* came out in its beautiful red jacket for Mother's centenary, in February 1978. By then, the earlier threats concerning Satprem had materialized into a full-fledge expulsion from the Ashram, and he was compelled to find a new residence in the Nilgiris Mountains. This now became the main center for all the *Agenda* activity.

Subsequently, in the course of a few years of intense, concentrated work, the 13 volumes of the *Agenda* in French were published. Translations into several other languages—Hindi, English, Italian, German, Spanish—were begun.

Those first years were for me an opportunity to settle into my new existence. I had waited all my life for a chance to give myself wholeheartedly to a work that had real meaning. And I did not spare myself! It was a monumental task to transcribe hundreds of hours of conversation, taped on

non-professional recorders, into printed matter which reflected accurately the nuances of Mother's message. But the faith and commitment of our little group could have moved mountains. Often ingenuity made up for the dearth of available resources.

Over time, in order to respond to the challenge of a growing task and its expanded geographical setting, our little group gained new members: Keya, Roger, Boni, Davide, Nicole, Michel, Patrice. Satprem also counted on the support of personal relations of his own in the literary and political circles of New Delhi and Paris.

Satprem seemed to be everywhere at once. Nothing escaped his attention and assiduity. With far greater experience than we in publishing, he supervised every detail of the production, but he also knew instinctively how to teach us, trust us, and develop our fragile confidence. His encouragements and trust were the main-spring of our daily actions. On the other hand, everyone had the utmost faith in his judgment and vision for all matters concerning the *Agenda*'s material destiny.

And yet there was a serious flaw in this idyllic picture. A problem which concerned his relations with what must be called the "Enemy."

For despite a set of trustworthy and devoted friends, some of whom would have no doubt given everything to support and protect him, and despite the move to this magnificent and protected environment in the Nilgiris Mountains, Satprem felt constantly pursued, hounded by a pack of invisible foes. A word picked out in a letter, a fleeting image caught in a dream was enough to set in motion a whole train of catastrophic and despondent fears: the "adverse forces" were looming in the shadows, ready to pounce at the least fault and to destroy the Work in progress . . .

The ensuing crisis of confidence would typically last a few hours or a few days, during which everyone held his breath. Then all would return to normal. The clouds vanished as suddenly as they had arrived, and the sun reappeared.

On the occasion of these "setbacks," a newcomer to the group would soon learn

to assume and take into account the "occult reality" of the work in which he was taking part. To publish this *Agenda* would in itself represent a stupendous victory over the forces of ignorance in the world, symbolized in the first place by the current administrators of the Ashram. In Satprem's view, his mission was to rescue this treasure from the grip of all those who would seek to bury it anew. As the principal point man against these forces, it was normal and logical that he should be repeatedly attacked in his inner world, even if these apprehensions would never materialize in his outer life.

Thus, our group, functioning under Satprem's leadership, lived under the constant threat of an "imminent court case" which the Ashram trustees were at least in theory about to launch in order to take over the publishing rights of the *Agenda*. Or perhaps the trustees would send some henchmen to steal the manuscripts? Or else, since we were in India, it would not be unreasonable to imagine Tantric manipulations. For out of sheer necessity we had become expert in occult sciences. Every shrub was the hiding place of an *asura* or his stooges, and the conviction of our cut-and-dried imprecations and anathemas were on a par with their puerility.

Here, it might be appropriate to say a few words about the Ashram and to clear up some misunderstandings by putting its existence and development back on its true foundation. In 1954, during a Questions and Answers session at the Playground, a child had this conclusion to offer to Mother: "Mother, you are wasting your time with all these people in the Ashram now." And Mother replied: "But, you see, from an occult point of view, this Ashram is a sample. From an external point of view, you can say that, in the world, there are people far superior to you, and I would not contradict you, but from an occult point of view, as I said, it is a sample." Then later on, she added: "To tell the truth, I think you have it so easy here that you don't go to much trouble at all! Are there many among you who feel really an *urgent* need to find their psychic being? To know who they really are? What they must do



and why they are here? For you, it's just life as usual." (25/8/1954)

"Life as usual" would not improve over time, as she confided to Satprem a few years later: "There are many—many—who think I will die and they must organise themselves so as not to be completely destitute when I leave. I know all this . . . Some people . . . oh, they would almost wish I would go now, because it's a pressure on them. They tell me quite frankly: 'As long as you are here, we are obliged to do the yoga. And we do not want to do the yoga; we want to live in peace. So after you are gone, we won't have to think about the yoga!'" (22/4/1961)

Of course, Satprem could only be profoundly distressed by Mother's comments. He who had nurtured a life-long rebellion against any form of institutional organization, saw in this Ashram adrift the justification and realization of his worst suspicions, a nightmare come true.

And yet reality has contradicted all his negative forebodings, all the "threats" he sensed in the air after Mother's departure. In some 15 years of very close proximity, I personally never witnessed a single case of physical violence from members of the Ashram against Satprem, not the slightest hint of a court case—and even Tantrism does not seem to have affected an inborn good health, for today, at 83, Satprem is as fit as a fiddle [see note at the end of this text].

As to the question of publishing rights of the *Agenda*, which legally belong half to Mother (as the interviewee), or her beneficiaries, and to Satprem (as the interviewer), it is fitting to note that neither the Ashram trustees nor Mother's family ever undertook any legal action, at least to demand a share of the royalties.

## Satprem

Today, some 25 years later, when I recollect those events, I am mainly struck by what amounts to our own responsibility in the birth and growth of the "Satprem phenomenon." When I say "our," I refer of course to the small group of individuals mentioned earlier, which expanded and

contracted in the course of time, and made, as it were, Satprem as we know him today—as if he fed himself month after month, year after year on our adherence, on our enthusiasm for a cause we knew to be a complex, difficult and radical one.

It is the curious attraction which Satprem exerted on people that I would like to examine here. And since I can only talk of what I felt myself, I will try to describe and analyze the nature of this magnetism as it affected me. This is what I called earlier the "cage of illusions."

To be affected by magnetism, one has to be conductive, sensitive to the magnet, otherwise it does not work. The power of the magnet is in finding the opposite pole in you which will respond to its attraction.

I know of no one who has approached Satprem, especially for the purpose of a specific work, without thinking under his breath that, in doing so, he or she was getting nearer to Mother and the Divine. This is the source of the magnetism, and hence of the illusion.

The spiritual aspiration, which shines at our very core, is our strength and our true self. And yet history—even recent history—is strewn with pathetic instances in which this aspiration is lead astray, bogged down in ludicrous or sometimes disastrous experiences, from which it comes out disfigured or even completely stifled.

But, with Satprem, none of this was likely to happen. The *Agenda* is teeming with Mother's praises for him. Was he not practically the only disciple capable of understanding the physical revolution involved in Mother's experience? To be sure, the *Agenda* is also teeming with Satprem's own questions and doubts, but that only brings him closer to us—a human brother with whom we can more easily identify. It must be said, though, that some *Agenda* conversations will never see the light of day and remain tightly sealed under plastic protection. These were what Satprem called "Personal Agendas"—probably far more piercing comments and estimations made by Mother about him personally, which he felt went beyond the scope of the *Agenda*. In fact, Satprem has

never claimed to be a saint; on the contrary, it is his willingness to assume his share of "ordinary" humanity, together with a stated ambition to go beyond the human, which always set him apart and drew people to him.

Thus, this man who had spent all these years within Mother's intense crucible, listening to her progress in man's future, could only be a perfect, caring, and delicate mentor toward the young people who approached him as a big brother and a role-model . . .

Well, not exactly. Behind impeccably cordial manners of hospitality, the newcomer soon perceives that a sort of test is under way: the test of an unconditional and exclusive adherence. In a flash, he senses that a complete and unequivocal commitment is a necessary prerequisite in order to pursue this relation any further; that he must make a personal sacrifice of fidelity and allegiance, as if he were entering holy orders.

Without a word of definition, a clear-cut choice is being presented: "Here is the Adventure knocking at your door. Open this door in total and absolute acquiescence, disregarding the pettiness of naked reason and of cheap criticism, sensible though it may seem to be. If you can't or won't renounce your little self and open up to this greater dimension offering itself before you, then be gone—but know that you would be renouncing the one opportunity to make your life something other than this grey amorphous thing people call existence."

Such were the words, as I transcribe them today, that I heard more than 30 years ago, at the beginning of my relationship with Satprem. It was a barely perceptible breath, hardly defined, whose stakes were unknown to me. Yet it was there, very real, and wholly determining of future events.

As I was perceiving this "choice" before me, I was also quite aware of the somewhat heretical quality of the world that came with it. I was openly courting controversy, perhaps even scandal, by going counter to the proper, established ways. I was enjoined to trample a community of elders underfoot—the Ashram—to which



Sri Aurobindo and Mother had devoted the best parts of their lives and efforts—in the name of a “higher” truth that I was to accept without a word or adequate comprehension.

In my shoes, others might have wavered and argued, but, on the contrary—and this is where the immature human “vital,” as Sri Aurobindo would say, came into play—all these obstacles and negatives suddenly appeared to me as irrefutable proof that this WAS the real adventure, the one that bypasses grey, boring neutralities to tread the rugged paths full of pitfalls. I was mistaking adventure for controversy, the battle against oneself for the battle against others. Not to mention that all these “enemies,” real or imagined, seem to present an all the more serious picture; they made the whole issue more exciting, credible, and genuine.

Actually, enthusiasms followed by dramatic reversals are the mark of the human

“vital.” My life flowed like a quiet—perhaps too monotonous—river. But all of a sudden I am seized with a sort of internal frenzy; I feel myself plunging into a world I had not even envisioned an instant earlier, which induces in me a complete reversal of my ways of thinking and feeling. This is obviously the sign that a great force has penetrated and is driving me. While the ways of the mind revolve around reflections, procrastinations, hesitations, and time is an essential factor in the process through which it derives its conclusions, “vital” time is almost instantaneous, and hence fraught with all the risks and vagaries that go with this brusqueness.

Furthermore, my vital “enthusiasm” concealed from me all the contradictions of my new situation. It prevented me from seeing the narrow Manichean nature of the world I was joining. Without batting an eyelid, I was about to unleash a whole string of muted resentments toward every-

thing that conflicted with my new-found religion, all the while claiming to draw from Sri Aurobindo’s vision that embraces everything in its scope. From one day to the next, I had become a staunch little Jihadist: the causes of problems were to be sought (and found) in others, outside myself. I remained forever untouchable within the cocoon of my superior certitudes.

In the end, the few objections that a more mature and thoughtful mind might have raised were completely swept away by another vital illusion: the unwritten promises of spiritual enlightenment implicit in my new status. Indeed, was this not a marvelous opportunity to get closer to the real work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo on earth, with all the associated booty of per-

*To be affected by magnetism, one has to be conductive, sensitive to the magnet, otherwise it does not work. The power of the magnet is in finding the opposite pole in you which will respond to its attraction.*

sonal accomplishments? Ultimately the hope was that of reaching beyond the anonymity of the average seeker, and of entering the charmed circle of the Chosen Ones . . .

Before this unexpected Grail, what human “vital” would be pure enough to hesitate and mature enough to draw back and take the time of reflection?

But there is better (or worse, depending on the point of view) and more to this “vital” trap. Now that the cage has closed on me and possesses me, with my full consent and participation, I make a kind of psychological U-turn and reverse the terms of the contract by pretending to own it myself. In order to hide the cowardice and servility of my condition, I integrate and take possession of the mechanism that binds me. Henceforth, I will defend it obstinately against all those who would challenge it in any way. Not only am I ready to offer my life to serve my cause—

and this may include a physical commitment—but I am also prepared to rise up against those who voice the slightest misgivings or veiled objections against its foundation, that is, Satprem himself.

As the first volumes of the *Agenda* were being published, a renowned French literary critic, André B., who had praised Satprem’s books in the Parisian press, suddenly wrote to me to convey his “great distress” before some of Satprem’s plethora of comments about the “horror and darkness of the world,” in which he saw mainly a bout of paranoia. I immediately wrote back to reassure him and convey an informed denial about his diagnosis based on “my profound knowledge of Satprem” etc. In the back of my mind, I was shocked that someone so “intelligent” could question Satprem.

Now if I set my mind on the two “revolutionary” encounters in my life—the first with Mother, the second with Satprem—a dramatic contrast between them appears. After the first few seconds of bewildered stupefaction in Mother’s presence, under her intense gaze, and the sort of stupefied state I experienced afterward for several days, I can see today that this first encounter with Mother could well have ended up as it began, with nothing more than this stupefaction. In other words, it was *up to me* to make it into something else, for the simple reason that *nothing* was demanded or expected of me, no commitment of any kind. More precisely, the “demand” would have to come from me, from my own depths, or else it would not exist at all. In Mother’s presence, I was not confronted by a specific “context” or by life’s “contingencies;” I was confronted by myself.

In my encounter with Satprem, on the contrary, I was not asked to take a stand toward myself but toward him and his inner world, toward his quarrels with the Ashram, toward his history of dissent and



rebellion. Right there and then, I was summoned to accept unconditionally this whole “package”—or be on my way. At bottom, the real “fault” with Satprem may be that he lead you *away* from yourself—ultimately to replace yourself with him.

### The tragedy

I was now fully enrolled and a fully committed member of what might be termed Satprem’s faction. Everywhere I went, I carried my little inner bible, which included the obligatory chapter whereby Satprem was part and parcel of Sri Aurobindo’s work—was in fact an essential, and even indispensable, constituent of his work. His open rebellion, his established dissent had to be the signs of a more profound, more inward difference, from which a new way of living on earth would eventually emerge: indeed, an example of the New Being Sri Aurobindo had hoped and prayed for.

I took it for granted that that an attitude of enlightened yet uncompromising critique towards the world was the key, or at least an essential condition, to personal transformation. For me, Satprem’s consciousness was the perfect crucible for that future birth, for it combined to the highest degree refined critical intelligence and implacability. In him, the endeavor of being human appeared to have found its accomplishment; the circle was complete—and now the slightest effort would enable him to achieve personal transformation . . .

I had probably not meditated enough, or even understood, what Mother was trying to tell him in an *Agenda* conversation of 21 October 1963:

Except for Sri Aurobindo, I always met or was always around dissatisfied people . . . rebels, or people extremely bitter towards life as it is . . . I have seen that this attitude, this way of feeling is like a fortress for everything that stands against the transformation. This morning, I had noted two observations with the idea of

reading them to you. I was clearly told that this very keen sense of discernment, which perceives everything contrary to the divine Truth, is a very good thing to have—not to be disappointed or deceived (and of course not to deceive oneself). But every time one stresses this side of things, one also gives it a POWER OF BEING, a sort of power that augments and perpetuates its existence . . . I feel something is trying to suppress this keen, imperative discernment from my active consciousness . . . so that, constantly and almost exclusively, the active consciousness perceives WHAT MUST BECOME instead.

Throughout the *Agenda*, Satprem complained about this intractable “fortress” in him: “I feel it is like a self-contained power, which will listen to nothing, and is completely outside one’s control, something which is purely negative and whose only aim is destruction . . .” Endlessly, patiently Mother brought him back to the straight consciousness:

That cannot come out of the world. It has to be in the place where it will HAVE to be transformed, necessarily transformed . . . If we could be like a beacon of the Divine, constantly shining, dimmed by nothing—that is the only solution . . . Only the extreme Divine will transform the extreme darkness.” (17/3/1971) . . . It must be expelled from one’s nature. Indeed, it is something that must evolve from life to life—it must be driven out of your personality. It is that part of the past which must disappear, but which desperately hangs on. (2/6/1971) . . . I had seen that, I saw it—I tried to remove it, but I couldn’t. (9/6/1971)

This rebellious fortress, this “self-contained power which will listen to nothing” is worth going into a bit further be-

cause it may well constitute one of the foremost attractions of Satprem’s character in his relations to others. Through his talent with words and the French language, he has succeeded in turning a weighty and harmful trait of his character into an object of fascination and seduction. Even outside the small circle of the faithful, there is no shortage of praise and expressions of admiration lavished upon him in the form of: “Satprem, the Admirable Rebel,” “Satprem and the Poetry of Dissent,” etc. And one can only recall how he himself has titled a recent book of personal letters—*Lettres d’un insoumis [Letters of a Rebel]*—to appreciate the extent to which he played up to that game. A game which is foremost a never-ending source of fascination to others—but remains rather incompatible with what Mother was trying to tell him in that 1971 conversation. Ham acting is not too exaggerated a phrase under the circumstances.

Satprem’s see-saw movement of consciousness between the two tragic poles of “the Irreducible Rebel” and “the Lover of God” was no doubt a great source of inner difficulties over the years—a sort of agonizing struggle between two irreconcilable positions: “My only strength is not to revolt; my only strength is to believe in the Grace in spite of everything. I think I have too much grief in my heart to revolt against anything. I seem to have a great feeling of pity towards the world.” (10/7/1959)

This is the deep-seated ambiguity Mother tried to cure in Satprem for more than 10 years:

. . . sometimes it takes great courage, sometimes great staying power, sometimes . . . genuine love is enough, sometimes, oh, when faith is there, a very small thing is enough to . . . sweep everything away. I’ve done it often; other times I failed . . . But because it is a karma, one MUST do something oneself. Karma is the ego’s creation; the ego MUST do something. It cannot all be done from the outside . . . That’s what I saw for you, the crystallization of that karma, which



took place during a life in India in which you were put in touch with the possibility of liberation and . . . (22/11/1958)

Indeed, the tragedy of Patrice's suicide, as previously referred to, as well as more recent events of the same nature convey a feeling that the pole of "the Lover of God" has not permanently supplanted "the irreducible Rebel" in Satprem.

And paradoxically, this ambiguity served him well in his relations with others, for nothing is more fascinating to human consciousness than the revelation and exploration of conflicts and personal struggles. As the French playwright Jean Anouilh put it: "Tragedy is refreshing, because we know there is no more hope . . . and the only thing left is to scream—to shout at the top of one's lungs what was never uttered before." Rebellion is a *fonds de commerce* like any other, without which anonymity or solitary inner struggle are among the only alternatives. And yet, in the end, even the exemplary model of the Rebel wears thin and falls into obsolescence before the imperative need for each human being to be self-transcendent in a world where everything is increasingly leveled down. Even the old dinosaurs wear themselves out as they shout their demands for attention in a world that has already ceased to be theirs.

It is quite possible that this sense of tragedy was also a powerful lever of creation in Satprem's life. Confronting impossibility is often the trigger to finding the means of conquering the obstacle. This is the way of Yoga. But a perilous line is crossed when a systematic seeking of tragic circumstances—or their total invention—attempts to substitute our dark, momentary impulses to the divine unfolding of our destiny. The terrible sentence of Antonin Artaud—"Tragedy on the stage is not enough; I want to bring it into my life"—is a sinister reminder of the extremes in which the human spirit can sometimes indulge. And the same tone is perceptible in Arthur Rimbaud's well-known sentence: "Rapture is in the breakdown of all the senses."

I do not claim here to supply explanations and answers to the innermost traits of Satprem's character. I am only trying to express what I felt when I was with him and how I see him today. Only the Divine can comprehend the true reason for this bipolarity in him, the need for this double attraction for the Light on the one hand, and darkness or absolute negativity on the other—and why, today, his life is still suspended by the twin poles of the Rebel and the Lover. There lies a mystery, which no doubt Mother would understand, but of which she was unable to cure him. "It may be an ingrained habit of revolt—are you not a rebel by nature?" she asked him in 1963.

I would like to close this topic by quoting Sri Aurobindo: "The work I have to do for myself or for the world or for you or others can only be achieved if I have love for all and faith for all and go firmly on till it is done." This little sentence, which is hardly noticeable among letters dating from 1934 and addressed to his disciple Dilip Kumar Roy, throws a contrasting light on the gulf of consciousness between Sri Aurobindo and Satprem.

Here is a man (Satprem) who spent the greater part of his life in close touch with Sri Aurobindo's thoughts. He wrote books about him, thousands of words to explore, analyze, expound, and praise a whole body of work, a way to bring a different consciousness to the world, the seedbed of a different Future. During almost 20 years, he sat twice weekly with Mother, as the private confidant of her *Agenda*, immersed in the absolute Positiveness which she brought into the 30 square meters of her room. He saw her battles to restore the straight Vibration everywhere, in everything—and yet in none of Satprem's thousands of words, at no single moment of that life absorbed and concentrated and devoted to a unique personal aspiration, does one feel the simplicity of Sri Aurobindo's "love for all and faith for all." The prevailing note is again and again: "The revolt of the Earth" and "The tragedy of the Earth."

This is Satprem's tragedy.

## America

And now my own tragedy was about to begin—largely as a consequence of my blindness. Not only was I not seeing the contradictions staring me in the face, but I was totally under the influence of the power of seduction stemming from them. Satprem's bipolar attitude was infinitely more attractive to the child I was than the difficult pursuit of an Absolute Positive standing clear beyond the shadows . . . Mother was the absolute and irrefutable Goal, but the path to reach her had to encompass all the Satprem-inspired twists and turns. With childish and narrow-minded obstinacy, I turned away from the straight and direct line for an expedient, a seductive stop-gap that had all the appeals and credentials, but in fact shielded me from the full Light by enabling me to postpone until some later date my own confrontation with "that."

Actually, this may be the greatest difficulty associated with the company of personalities such as Satprem. It deprives us of the only hope we have of facing ourselves directly, pure and naked in the light of the Divine. The very attraction we feel for this "Big Brother ahead of us" is akin to being led astray. The hope we invest in him involves the corruption of our own hope. Through cowardice or laziness, we offload on someone else the task that we alone can discharge, which necessarily involves a one-on-one, solitary confrontation with the Divine.

In point of fact, I noticed that being in touch with Satprem was innocuous for no one. It was not the kind of relationship one can store in one's back pocket like a polished stone and extract from time to time to contemplate and caress with one's fingers. Once a first contact had taken place (even a remote contact, through words in a book), once a kind of "magic" rapport was established, it's as if a little independent being took over and began to live its own life inside one—a life that often bordered on obsession. I have known people who traveled uninvited to the Nilgiris Mountains in the hope of catching a glance of Satprem at the bend of the road; others



have spent months or years begging for a sign, a look, a letter, a word of approval or recognition. Even today, I know many people who live day after day in the hell of the contradiction of for-or-against-Satprem, frantically piling up on their inner scales the qualities and defects of a personality that keeps escaping them—instead of doing the only sensible thing and sending packing all “personalities,” however spell-binding they may be, and establishing (or re-establishing) a direct line of communication with “that” which is beyond all personalities and all contradictions.

But I am loath to cast the first stone. I have myself done enough spinning round the cage of illusions to blame anyone for doing the same. Only, a passing, and perhaps momentarily necessary, experience ought not to become a life style—a prison. Again, not everyone has been as fortunate as I, and Patrice’s death is a chilling reminder that the power of certain forces cannot be denied or minimized with impunity.

\* \* \*

Toward the end of 1979, as we were strolling along the straight, green lanes of the Indian tea fields, Satprem began to talk to me about the necessity of publishing the *Agenda* in English, especially with a view to distribute it in America. At that moment, I felt in me the very same impulse that had pushed me in his direction a few years earlier. I knew Immediately I had to propose myself for this “mission,” take up this new challenge, as if, by doing so, I would open a new phase in the adventure

with myself. And I was perfectly right, though I didn’t know what awaited me . . .

After he had whole-heartedly agreed to my proposal, I felt this new responsibility was in perfect coherence with everything I had already lived in the past few years—in other words, with a feeling beyond personal preferences and apprehensions, as if light-heartedly floating above “myself.” Years later, after the spell was broken between us, Satprem bitterly reproached me for openly claiming that he had “sent” me to America, thus accusing me of not facing my responsibilities in

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what was clearly, according to him, a decision I had made alone. But this was the time of misunderstandings when inner readings and dreams are replaced by implacable inventories.

In any case, together we had decided that I would sail for New York as soon as possible, with the goal of finding an American publisher for the 13 *Agenda* volumes, of which only the first was already translated into English. I left the Nilgiris on a stormy day, the roads submerged under water, leaving behind a part of myself—half dream, half unconsciousness—that I would never find again.

Arriving in New York in January 1980, I found my American friend Roger, who had worked on the English translation of

Satprem’s books for quite some time, and together we began to pace New York’s icy avenues in search of the *Agenda*’s future publisher. Unfortunately, all the publishers we visited were scared stiff at the idea of publishing 6,000 pages from an almost unknown author on a topic—self-transformation aiming at a new physical condition—so thorny. On top of it, that year India was no longer trendy—too bad for us! Reality was staring us in the face: no one in America was ready to embark on such an adventure or to take such formidable financial risks. For the *Agenda* to see the light in America, we had to publish it ourselves, by our own means and with our own resources. No small challenge.

In this great city awash with fantastic energy, an individual feels like a minuscule point in the midst of a creative activity that never stops. This is neither the deeper familiarity of India’s inner rhythm, nor the

natural fluency of Europe’s intimate complicity. I felt totally overwhelmed, and very impressed, by the magnitude of the task which without warning had befallen me. But some grace must have been present because, miraculously, the horizon broadened in a smile. And that smile was Susie.

Resident in New York, a long-time friend of French friends of Satprem’s, she seemed to have always been there, on the other side of the ocean, perhaps awaiting something . . . She soon understood the stakes and the kind of challenge involved in publishing the *Agenda* in this “New World,” so receptive to new experiences, but also so ferociously materialistic. It is thanks to her determination and to her family’s material help that the real work was



able to start and the first volumes of the *Agenda* to see the light in America. We got married at New York City Hall and decided to live on Long island, at a reasonable distance from the nuclear reactor called Manhattan!

Thus, the *Agenda* in English was born and took wings right in the middle of the potato fields of Long island, a few miles from the ocean. Our garage was soon not big enough to contain the boxes of books which overflowed into the basement. We had officially become the Institute for Evolutionary Research, a Not-For-Profit Corporation duly incorporated in the state of New York, and we operated as a Small Press Publisher, which is the typical way in America to enable many unknown authors to be published and distributed through a network of alternative distributing agencies.

A single computer (one of the first PCs) ran our accounting, invoicing, and dispatching system. We did everything ourselves, from the preparation and even typesetting of the manuscripts, to supplying the books to bookstores and shipping them to individual customers. I was mainly busy translating the books into English—though it was not my native tongue! While the *Agenda* was mostly translated in India, by other volunteers under Satprem supervision, I was responsible for the translation of his own books, since their publication, alongside the *Agenda*, seemed to me the best introduction to Mother's words.

From 1980 to 1992, ten volumes of the *Agenda* and eight titles by Satprem went very literally through our hands, from conception to delivery. Susie would regularly cram our car full of boxes and take the direction of our small local post office, from where they left for the four corners of the country as well as abroad. It is hard to imagine a bulk of 50,000 books, piled in inadequate spaces, with no lifting gear to move them, and all the juggling to fill and strap and label the boxes . . . How powerful our dream must have been to permit us to maintain this grueling effort for years!

## The sledge hammer

We had, of course, rallied all the disciples of Mother and Sri Aurobindo in America, and many had offered invaluable help to prepare the manuscripts, for instance, or to facilitate the distribution in their area. Yet, we remained curiously aloof, as if some unwritten law compelled us to isolation and to feel ourselves "different." I know today that this vague feeling of a difference between ourselves and the other disciples stemmed from the same feeling of isolation felt by Satprem among his peers in India, as if, once again, we unwittingly took on his experience involving anything related to the Ashram of Pondicherry.

He had stood apart his entire life, from the time of his flights to the Amazon jungle or the Himalayas, to the Ashram in Pondicherry, where he was unable to strike a single friendship outside of Sujata, who became his companion. In Mother, he had found universal Revolt and had quieted his own revolt in the shadow of hers. But Mother's revolt embraced the "love for all and faith for all" without any contradiction, while Satprem's circled feverishly and endlessly about itself. This is the insurmountable obstacle that Mother had tried in vain to cure, which immediately resurfaced in him after her departure, ultimately to get the better of him.

The circumstances of Mother's passing as well as his own expulsion from the Ashram (which incidentally he feigned to ignore) had driven a last nail into his already hardened convictions of rejection. It was evidently this inner feeling of utter isolation that had led him to form a little group of "brothers" around him, to try to fill his isolation and drive back the walls of his confinement and loneliness. There was this marvelous instrument of the *Agenda* and a high mission to undertake, behind which he would be able to dissimulate his own inherent incertitude and failings. "Truth is always schismatic," he told me one day, as if to reassure himself.

And this is how it came about that a little band of "brothers" followed to the letter the "Satpremian schism," and roam the world giving vent to a delectable mood

of paranoia toward anything or anyone that did not belong to the Magic Circle. The only sure ground beyond dry land was the one represented by the "fraternity" as encapsulated by Satprem; the rest of the world was suspect and fraught with dangers. The Jihadists have not invented anything. Maybe this was also a way to strengthen the group about him by maintaining cohesion and preventing its dilution into the environment of sappy spiritual routines. One feels all the more determined and united when all outside seems hostile and laden with menaces. My own difficulties with Satprem would in fact be considerably worsened when a real liking for America began to emerge in me and I mingled without restraint with "ordinary" Americans, and in particular with Sri Aurobindo's American disciples. Although this natural movement of expansion and empathy seems self-evident when one's life seeks to be founded on Sri Aurobindo's universality, it was evidently felt by Satprem as an act of betrayal against his private dogma of entrenchment.

For a while, our house in Long Island was also home to the unfortunate Keya, who Satprem had sent from the Nilgiris to help us in setting up the manuscripts in English. With mind-boggling speed and precision, she had single-handedly typeset the 6,000 pages of the *Agenda* in French. Torn from her routine beside Satprem, she never got used to life in America and began to plunge into depression. But carried away in our bustling activity, we did not understand her distress signals, and when we did finally realize her condition, it was too late. Urgently repatriated to India, definitively cut off from Satprem, she lived a few years in Auroville, ultimately refusing to feed herself and passing away in June 1995, at the age of 51.

This was a first grim warning of what was to come, but we were so busy in otherwise worthy accomplishments that paying attention to Keya was out of the question. It was easier to brand her as "too infatuated with Satprem," and to dismiss her case along with those of daydreamers who confuse their wishes with reality. But of course, we were *all* in this same boat of de-



lusion, except we still did not know it. Keya was merely the first traumatic incident in a long list.

At the end of 1981, all 13 volumes of the *Agenda* in French were published and available in bookstores. In less than four years, in a virtual race against the clock, Satprem had revised and prepared some 6,000 pages of manuscript. In the thirteenth and last volume he had described at length the circumstances of Mother's passing, as he had lived them, mentioning in particular the use of psychotropic substances to sedate her.

It was with great relief that Satprem saw the end of his self-imposed mission and the fulfillment of his inner promise. But he also had to confront a pressing question: what now? What to do with the 24 hours of a day when the tension that had kept him going for so long has disappeared. The translations of the *Agenda* in other languages, of which some were under way, would follow their course almost automatically and would take years to come out. Another activity, another goal, had to be found.

Actually, the difficulty he was confronting had to do with being face to face with himself. Mother was no longer there to show the way, neither physically by giving a tangible indication, nor even beyond death by the suggestion of some pressing task remaining to be accomplished, such as originally must have been the publication of the *Agenda*. In fact, a brand-new future had to be invented, but one that must be coherent with Mother's path.

A first hint came to him when a vision flashed before his eyes of an "island," adequately removed from the world, on which a very small group of human beings would attempt to concentrate their aspiration with the aim of following more concretely in Mother's footsteps—a sort of tiny evolutionary kernel. Hence, in February 1982, Satprem and Sujata left India to tour Pacific islands in search of "Mother's Island." More than a month later, exhausted and disappointed, they had to face the facts. No island could be found for such a project, no island for accelerated evolution—as perhaps Sri Aurobindo had con-

cluded 70 years earlier when he settled in Pondicherry and subsequently declined, on more than one occasion, to move anywhere else.

The next attempt may also appear somewhat strange. It had to do with finding a mantra which Satprem had known many years earlier, as he was walking the roads of India in the orange robe of a Sannyasi, and which at the time had seemed capable of penetrating into the consciousness of the body and breaking down the carapace of our bodily habits. In this way, he hoped to draw closer to Mother's corporeal experience. He went in search of that mantra, which he eventually found in the Himalayas. But there also, he had to face the facts: the mantra he had now found opened the doors to the world of the Indian occult tradition, but that had nothing to do with Mother and her process of descent into the body consciousness. It is strange that a man who was so aware of Mother's experience for having followed it more than anyone else, studied and described it, would then drift in these two distinct directions so foreign to Mother's course. Be that as it may, he was back to square one, back in India, and back face to face with himself.

And this is when something started happening in him which made him so radically different, so foreign to what he was before, that everything exploded around him—and continues to explode to this day.

It is not easy, and perhaps even impossible, to describe what happened in Satprem at that point. And yet I believe I was the one to whom he wrote the first letters attempting to describe what he was experiencing. I must say I was very touched to read those letters. They spoke of a new, more intense kind of concentration taking over his body, of a new, more powerful force descending into him (like a "sledge hammer"), and then of a kind of "ascent" of the body toward a "heaven above" like a great blue Sun, where everything merged into that pure reality, which perhaps is best known as "That."

Day after day, he immersed himself in this experience. Soon he began naming that force the supramental force, to follow

Sri Aurobindo's terminology. It was obvious he was entering into a new consciousness, a new way to see and comprehend the world.

For my part, having read the few remarks that Sri Aurobindo had left concerning the supramental process, I was unable to "match" what he said, in letters to certain disciples, with Satprem's own descriptions, which always seemed to emphasize the Force, the "sledge hammer" nature of the process, while Sri Aurobindo spoke of the supramental as a "truth-consciousness" which hardly needs to struggle or confront the ignorant nature of the world to impose itself. For its very presence is also the dawn of a new determinism—a realization free from efforts because "opposites" have ceased to be necessary.

At the time, not only did I not question for a moment Satprem's conclusions about his new condition, but I marveled at the idea that this supramental condition could actually dawn in this way, so simply and naturally, in another being after Sri Aurobindo and Mother. This was a dream come true, here and now, on two legs and in the flesh; the little nod from evolution for which Sri Aurobindo and Mother had so much hoped and prayed. And thus the logical conclusion to the long preparation Satprem had lived near Mother, a kind of justification after the fact of all the idiosyncrasies that made him an ideal and predestined candidate for that "truth-consciousness"—a perfect outcome.

We all wanted so much to believe in the miracle through Satprem!

But soon Satprem no longer wished to have any relations with the world. He no longer wanted to receive or answer mail, write more books (he later changed his mind), intending instead to explore this new state he lived in. From America, I was in charge of channeling his mail and drawing his attention to anything important or imperative. The fictitious explanation of his departure from the Nilgiris for an "unknown destination" was supposed to justify the abrupt break in his communications with the older members of our group, who had to swallow a rather obvious pill without protest, and accept to write to him



through me. Naturally, no one was fooled for a minute, but all grinned and bore it, playing the game of the “secrecy” out of respect for Satprem and what he stood for. I willingly played the fool, yielding like everyone else to “higher” reason. Satprem was no doubt aware of the discomfort felt by everyone but did not seem to care in the least, giving absolute priority to his new experience.

It is impossible to know the exact nature of this new force Satprem felt within him, which so manifestly transformed his being and his life. But one can certainly wonder about the immediate, visible results of the emergence of this force in him. As time went by, he seemed to become increasingly impatient, almost annoyed and irritated, with anything that was not what he experienced himself (that is, practically the whole world!) This growing impatience tended to make him more distant from us. It seemed as if he had difficulty holding this new life within while accepting a minimum of contact with life here below, its imperfections, its stumbling and inborn dissatisfactions. In a very short time, he had become a very perfect (and very sharp!) sword in a very imperfect world. He had swapped his former human hesitations for an ardent faith, intolerant of the humanity we still represented. While until the very last Mother’s arms had remained open to humanity around her, Satprem’s seemed to close only onto his own experience and himself, as his exasperation

kept growing.

Was the “sledge hammer” going to break the vessel?

However, none of this put the least dent in my faith in Satprem, and in the hope he had fostered. In fact, until the last moment in 1993, I would continue to keep him in my heart, and it is he and he alone who finally managed to convince me of the depth of the illusion I had entertained all these years.



Satprem with his long-time companion, Sujata Nahar. (Photo courtesy Dr. Pascal, Auroville)

Yet another detail had surprised me. It concerned the “Fourteenth Agenda.” Satprem had planned to collect his entire personal correspondence prior to the *Agenda* publication (when he wrote to certain people likely to help, of the value and meaning of the still-unknown *Agenda*) into one or more volumes, which would form a continuation of the *Agenda* proper: Agenda 14, Agenda 15, etc. I admit I was shocked, deep down, that he could put on equal footing Mother’s words—especially Agenda 13, which represents a breathless

entreaty to the Light—and his own battle (however brave it was) to publish the *Agenda*. But he later changed his mind, for these letters are published today under yet another title.

It was also around that time that a rather surprising and unexpected dream came to me.

It was night and guests were gathered around a long table. Sitting in the middle was Sri Aurobindo, looking majestic but without any affectation. Mother was to his right, smiling, and Satprem to his left. Several other guests, whom I did not recognize, occupied other seats around the table. I was sitting near the end of the table, looking intently toward the center, toward Sri Aurobindo. On the table right in front of Sri Aurobindo was an imposing dish filled with an enormous cut of red meat, like sirloin steak. This meat, barely cooked, was even lying in its own blood, according to the way quality meat is cooked in the West. To my utter surprise, I saw Satprem pointing a

finger toward the dish and inviting Sri Aurobindo to taste the meat. He had to insist several times, because Sri Aurobindo did not seem keen to accept the invitation. But Satprem’s insistence finally paid, for Sri Aurobindo made a gesture and took a small morsel of rare steak.

When I told my dream to Satprem he did not seem unduly surprised. But what was he attempting to push onto Sri Aurobindo in the symbol of this rare meat? His own Western ways of looking at and analyzing life’s processes? The rebellious,



schismatic nature of his personality? Or something else?

### The malaise

For me, too, destiny was irremediably advancing. I was about to enter the true reality of my situation. At the end of 1983, Susie and I had decided to move south, to Virginia, partly to escape the massive population growth of the New York area. A big, somewhat ramshackle farmhouse among the green rolling hills around Charlottesville would now give us shelter, with our 50,000 books . . . This new place was also better suited to our publishing activities. It is there that, during the next eight years, we published most of the *Agenda* volumes and other titles by Satprem in English. We were in frequent communication with him through letters and often through telegrams. From time to time, we would even make short

trips to India, which were opportunities to visit the Nilgiris and touch base with Satprem. I was also in weekly telephone contact with my close friend Micheline, who supervised the activities of the French *Institut de Recherches Evolutives* in Paris.

At this point, everything, then, seemed to run as smoothly as possible and the future looked as bright as could be. A small, motivated group, united around material tasks and a tested underlying spiritual ideology: Satprem, sitting in India, true to the image we had formed of him, which our childlike superstition had molded out of the rather fearsome mystery surrounding his new condition of “Pioneer of the New World.” Were we the creator of that image? Or was he? Did he perhaps unwittingly comply with what was expected of him? These questions will remain unanswered forever, but in fact that image was unable to prevail against the test of time

and reality. Today, no one remains of that small group of people, not a single soul to testify to the durability and substantiality of an experience which was supposed to provide answers for an indefinite future. But in reality, some, like me, were excluded under one pretext or another; others died before their time—Keya, Micheline, Patrice—still others turned away without a word but with a heavy heart.

I was thus the first of a long list to live with the frozen knot of disillusionment in my heart. This cold spell lasted for years, without giving its name, while everything appeared to be normal on the surface. This is the long-drawn-out ordeal when every-

*Were we the creator of that image? Or was he? Did he perhaps unwittingly comply with what was expected of him? These questions will remain unanswered forever, but in fact that image was unable to prevail against the test of time and reality.*

thing is felt, but nothing is known—when the inside has yet to meet with the outside to form a coherent and comprehensible whole.

That peculiar period must have started in the middle of the 1980’s, perhaps on the occasion of the writing and publication of “our” book. During one of my visits in India, Satprem had suggested that I record him while he talked about his new experience in the body. We had taken a walk in the surrounding countryside, and there, amidst the tall trees of the *Shola*, I turned on the tape recorder . . .

Back in the United States, still following his suggestion, I had written an introduction to this taped conversation with a view to putting his words in the context of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s yoga. The resulting text, including the interview of Satprem, was later published in Paris by Robert Laffont under the title *La vie sans*

*mort* [*Life without death*] under the dual authorship of Satprem and myself.

To my great surprise, writing this book had turned out to be amazingly easy. I who had never formally written anything could see the words form themselves on the paper without any effort or prior planning. Sentences followed one another as if automatically, and I literally discovered the details of the ideas as they appeared on the page. The only “effort” on my part was to maintain a state of peace and inner receptivity.

To be on the safe side, Satprem had decided to reread my text before giving his assent and sending it to the French Publisher. And this is when I felt the first tear between us. The book ended with these words: “To be continued . . .” Of course, I was speaking of the continuation of that wonderful yogic bodily experience he was undergoing, which held out the promise of canceling death itself

while rendering it unnecessary. Given my faith, I saw no reason why this condition could not assert and amplify itself, eventually replacing the old terrestrial life and making a clean sweep of all our mortal habits. But, oddly, Satprem took this term merely as a claim on my part for more interviews with him and for more books to come. While I saw the sublime in his condition (and tried to describe it), he only saw the bottom line and personal calculations. We could not have been on two more different planets! To make sure I had taken the hint, he even sent me a curt little note confirming that I was not to expect any more conversations with him.

What had taken hold of him? What had he sensed in me that I was not perceiving myself? I had neither asked to record his words nor to write that book. Yet, in a moment’s notice, I was clearly brought down to the role of a schemer. One more



turn of the screw and I would turn out to be a fraud and even a profiteer . . . A strange mechanism indeed. At this point, we may well be near the heart of the problem.

If I had had the courage and, especially, confidence in myself, I would have packed my bags and taken my leave right there and then. But this is where the spell works admirably—Patrice, are you listening? Not only had I wretchedly and piteously accepted the insinuations directed against my integrity, but I began the high acrobatics of actually turning the tables against myself and accusing myself of faults I could not have committed. I used my best yogic knowledge to try and find in my ego the cause of all this trouble. But since the ego is evanescent and elusive, naturally I found nothing. It would, of course, never have occurred to me to look for the cause in Satprem himself. He was forever beyond suspicion, uninvolved in terrestrial pettiness, and to question the sublime in him would be simply unthinkable—an act of sacrilege.

So there we were; the fatal “mechanism” had kicked in and would not stop. Whatever happened, we would now have to go to the end of the dramatic course—there had to be drama to conclude and put a final stop to what had begun under such apparently insignificant appearances. This was in fact a process with an uncompromising, devouring logic to it—one that would only subside with its pound of fresh innocence.

While he could easily have cleared with one word or one gesture the inane and abusive interpretation he had formulated against me, he chose to do nothing and to keep inside him this spark of suspicion and umbrage. Then, with implacable logic, time saw to it to amass more material causes of misunderstanding, which would swell the spark into an irresistible volcano. I spent several years with this weird sensation of an unspoken malaise and growing uneasiness, without ever being able to pinpoint or stop it. My few awkward attempts to seek explanations or “put the cards on the table” only met with yogic admonitions or a wall of silence. I had therefore to resolve myself to live with this

odd contradiction between a still bustling (and still attractive) daily activity and a growing, silent question, which would not divulge its meaning.

At any point in time, Satprem consciously could have put a stop to this malaise, to this ambivalence invisibly taking hold between us. Was he not supposed to stand “above” these emotional whirls, to be capable of viewing things within a larger, more embracing spirit and light, beyond the human-bound heaviness that forever hold us down? Perhaps he did not do it because he himself was caught in that “devouring logic,” or else because he did not see fit to come down to this level of human conflict after his recent breakthrough into such an utterly different dimension? Yet if Mother had never “come down” to Satprem’s level, what would have happened to him? And where would he be today? There are circumstances when one ought to “return the favor,” as it were, even (and perhaps especially) when that appears to involve a diminution of consciousness. Here we are back with the great difficulty of the “love for all and faith for all.”

All the same, it is worth stopping a few moments to dwell on this state of profound ambivalence, almost schizophrenic, in which one part of me desperately sought to salvage something from the wreckage, while the other—deeper and freer from surface illusions—already knew there was nothing to salvage. The truth was right in front of me, blindingly, and the only thing to do was to welcome it with all due respect and gratitude. Failing to know what was happening to me, this state—which I called earlier “the cage of illusions”—became my dwelling place for years, and thus I know all its nooks and crannies. The cost of renting this dwelling is PAIN: the unspeakable pain of not being true to oneself, the pain of choosing appearances over being, the pain of nourishing cherished habits and sweet intoxications which are supposed to make up for the utter destitution of the slack periods.

In the extreme, this pain can become so intense, so unbearable, that any means will seem appropriate in order to evade it—including that to put an end to a life that

merges with it. I am thinking about Micheline, who according to credible witnesses was suddenly stricken with a strange condition which gave her a staggering gait and a slurring voice, in her sixties, after devoting some 20 years of her life to help Satprem. I am thinking about Patrice, whose grief was already smoldering in India, and who breathed his last while calling Satprem and Sujata for help. I am thinking about Keya, one of the first to go, misunderstood and abandoned by all with her “infantile obsessions.” I am thinking of others, too, who even today are there in the shadows, with the weight of their silent questions and restless eyes.

Is Satprem morally, humanly responsible for all those personal dramas, big or small, which we did our best to hide out of fear, out of shame or simply not to “make waves?” He was by far the most conscious among us, the one whose many years spent beside Mother should have endowed him with patience and compassion. And it is futile, or absurd, to deny the facts, which are staring us in the face. So where, in the presence of so many broken lives and abused hearts, is justice?

Let me provide a personal answer. I believe that these events involving Satprem cannot be understood solely by the means of the human legal system. What I am trying to say is that each person must determine his own responsibilities for his actions. And that the essential freedom given to us from the start, though it may sometimes appear to play against us, must be accepted with all its concomitant uncertainties as the price to pay in order to guarantee that a real process of evolution is rooted in human soil.

[It must be said that the preceding text was written between November 2006 and February 2007, well before Satprem’s demise in April 2007. I found it useful—and still relevant today—to reveal this story, not so much because of the context in which it took place, but perhaps more because of the human experiences of a larger nature it entails.]



## Essays

### Yoga, religion, and fundamentalism in the Integral Yoga community

Opening remarks for a panel discussion at AUM 2007

by Lynda Lester

I'd like to focus on the difference between yoga, religion, and fundamentalism in the Integral Yoga community. And because we're all coming from different cultures and orientations, my yoga might be your religion and someone else's fundamentalism. So I thought I'd start out with some definitions.

*Yoga* means union with the Divine, an opening to the higher consciousness . . . it's the awakening to an inner reality, to a Self, a Spirit, or soul that's other than our normal surface awareness.

*Religion* belongs to the human mind. It develops when spiritual experience is translated into mental forms which then become doctrines, standard beliefs, and outer observances that everyone on that path is supposed to follow.

*Fundamentalism* simplifies the religion and limits itself to a narrow core of beliefs, asserting that other perspectives are misguided, wrong, or evil. It paints issues in stark black and white and favors literal over symbolic interpretations. It sees its followers as the chosen few and often demonizes others as sinners, subhumans, or asuras.

Now: Sri Aurobindo and Mother did not want to found a new religion.

The Mother is clear on this. She says, "A new religion would not only be useless but very harmful. It's a new *life* which must be created, a new *consciousness* which must be expressed." And that, she says, is something beyond intellectual limits and



Lynda Lester enjoys a moment of relaxation. (Photo courtesy Lynda Lester)

mental formulas.

When she founded Auroville, she said, "No religion, no religion, no religious forms . . . we don't want religion. . . . we want research through *experience* of the Supreme Truth; a life divine; but no religions."

Sri Aurobindo says, "I may say that it's far from my purpose to propagate any religion, new or old . . . A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in, corrupt the work, or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence." This, he says, is what happened to the religions and is the reason they've failed to transform human nature.

So Sri Aurobindo and Mother did not want to found a new religion . . . and the yoga they developed to help people evolve into a new, post-human consciousness is so supple, wide, and non-formulistic that you'd think it would be hard to make a religion out of it. In fact, Integral Yoga confounds people all the time who are looking for a basic how-to manual—there isn't a set of external procedures, there are no prescribed forms of meditation. The methods are general psychological processes, such as aspiration and surrender—but you have to find your own

way to aspire and surrender. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo and Mother recommended different yogic approaches to different disciples depending on their individual natures.

Also, as Sri Aurobindo and Mother worked in different planes and parts of being from decade to decade, the way they talked about their yoga shifted. The personal yogic practice described in Sri Aurobindo's *Record of Yoga*, which started around 1911, was extremely advanced and complex but didn't mention the psychic being, which became so important in the writings after 1920. Mother's spiritual advice to seekers in the 1950s seemed to her irrelevant when she was working on the yoga of the cells 10 years later.

So again, you might think it would be hard to make a one-size-fits-all doctrine out of the Yoga, or to create a religion out of what Mother and Sri Aurobindo represented. But I think there actually is a spectrum of religious behaviors in the Integral Yoga community. These range from a loose and amorphous religiosity on one end to fundamentalism on the other.

So, amorphous first. At this end of the spectrum is an attitude that says all truths and forms are equal; anything goes—your famous postmodern relativism. This is where you find Integral Yoga equated to other paths; you hear statements like, "The supramental body that Sri Aurobindo talks about is the diamond body of Tibetan Buddhism; it's been known about for thousands of years," or "Jesus, Sri Aurobindo, Adi-da, whatever—they're all saying basically the same thing."

On the other end of the spectrum, the fundamentalist end, we don't have the kind of extremists that carry signs saying, "Behead those who insult Sri Aurobindo"—but we do see a few examples of fundamentalism:

Satprem is one, in my opinion: his later writings reduce the complexity of Integral Yoga to a simplistic formula and are full of angry rants against nearly everyone—the Ashram, Auroville, traditional spiritual seekers, scientists, bureaucrats, and basically all of Western civilization.

The BJP party in India is part of a



right-wing Hindu nationalist movement who are quoting Sri Aurobindo's writings to justify fundamentalist political agendas.

There's a group suing the Archives department of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for revising and updating Sri Aurobindo's books which, they say, were perfect on first publication.

And finally, there's a small but aggressive group of people following Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet who are into esoteric numerology and claim the Matrimandir is a temple of falsehood because the measurements are wrong.

Between these two poles of "anything goes" on one side and fundamentalism on the other there are some conventional, traditional-type religious behaviors in the middle.

One of those is devotion, which we do see in the Integral Yoga community. On Darshan day, for instance, there are huge crowds filing through the samadhi at the Sri

Aurobindo Ashram. Also, many of us do regard Mother and Sri Aurobindo as direct incarnations of the Divine, and we do have altars with photos of Mother and Sri Aurobindo in our homes.

So is it wrong to be religious in this way, that is, to feel a devotion to Mother and Sri Aurobindo? I'd say no, for various reasons. For those who have a strong faith, this type of devotion may bring deep first-hand spiritual experience beyond mentality which is not superficial. Not all people need to approach the Divine through the mind; bhakti is an effective way to open to the inner consciousness—and that's not religion, that's yoga. Our physiological nature has many different parts; the intellect or higher mind in us may love reading *The Life Divine*, but the aesthetic and emotional mind in us may want ceremony, music, flowers, and incense. This is a complex, integral spiritual practice, not a stripped-down, economy version.

But there's another form religiosity can take, which I do see in the Integral Yoga community, and that's a certain mental smugness: a feeling of moral superiority that we in the yoga have the truth and others do not—or at best, have incomplete or lesser versions of the truth. This is the "my God is better than your God" behavior that we find in most religions. (And I want to emphasize that what I'm talking about here is the sense of moral superiority, not the ability to compare or discriminate between spiritual paths.)

Closely related to this is a mental fixity and complacency where we think that Mother and Sri Aurobindo revealed everything once and for all and nothing could be added to the knowledge they brought. If

*But I'd also like to note that Integral Yoga is a multifaceted and subtle process; and we try, we really try. Even so, it may take a long time for us to realize that what we think is yoga may really be just having mental ideas and being religious.*

we feel like this, we may become insular and not interact with others outside the yoga; we may not keep up with important developments in the evolution of consciousness happening in the world around us.

So it's good to remind ourselves that if *all* we do is hold on to the mental formations Mother and Sri Aurobindo left behind, we're not doing yoga or evolving spiritually—we're being religious.

You know, like saying "All life is yoga" over and over (which we do all the time, right? For those who may not know, that's a famous statement by Sri Aurobindo)—saying "All life is yoga" doesn't mean that all of our life is *really* yoga. Mentally knowing how Sri Aurobindo described the planes and parts of being is not the same as being able to navigate those planes and parts of being. And obviously, talking about the supermind is not the same as having the supramental consciousness.

But I'd also like to note that Integral Yoga is a multifaceted and subtle process; and we try, we really try. Even so, it may take a long time for us to realize that what we think is yoga may really be just having mental ideas and being religious.

Anyway, to summarize: religion is a matter of mental belief. Integral Yoga is not about belief, but about a change of consciousness.

This does not mean, of course, that we get rid of the mind or mental formations—the mind is an important tool in yoga, and mental formations can be stepping stones to the higher consciousness. It does mean that if we are serious about our practice, we need to know the difference between mental formations and spiri-

tual experience, and the difference between religion and yoga. As Sri Aurobindo says, "Reason was the helper; Reason is the bar."

In conclusion—there's a famous line in *Savitri* that you

may have heard. It goes, "God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep." Those of us in Integral Yoga love to quote this phrase; we're certain that we're in the know and we'll be the first to see God growing up while the wise men talk and sleep.

But sometimes I think that if we've gotten stuck in the mental forms of Integral Yoga, *we're* actually the wise men talking and sleeping. And God growing up may actually be a scientist discovering the link between consciousness and the brain, an Olympic athlete drawing on a superhuman power . . . or for that matter, someone who's really practicing yoga, but calls it something else.

So what does that mean for us? If we're going to truly do the Integral Yoga, we need to learn how to live in a consciousness that uses forms . . . but is not bound by them.



## A sketch of Satprem's life and work

by M. Alan Kazlev

Satprem was born Bernard Enginger in Paris and had a seafaring childhood and youth in Brittany. During World War II he was a member of the French Resistance. He was arrested by the Gestapo in late 1943 and spent one and a half years in German concentration camps. Scarred by the experience, after the war he became interested in the existentialism of André Gide and André Malraux.<sup>1</sup> He traveled to Egypt and then India, where he worked briefly as a civil servant in the French colonial administration of Pondicherry, on the Bay of Bengal in India. There he discovered Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their “new evolution.” He resigned from the civil service, and went in search of adventure in French Guiana, where he spent a year in the Amazon (the setting for his first novel *The Gold Washer*), with his copy of *The Life Divine*, then Brazil, and after that Africa.

In 1953, at age 30, he returned to India and Pondicherry to put himself at the service of the Mother and settle in the Ashram. He taught at the Ashram school, and was in charge of the French copy for the quarterly *Bulletin of the Department of Physical Education*, which was the Mother's publication, and is still printed in English and French. During this time he met his companion Sujata Nahar.

Then he traveled once more — Congo, Brasilia, Afghanistan, Himalayas, New Zealand, sailed round the world, before once again returning.

On 3 March 1957, The Mother gave him the name Satprem (“the one who loves truly”).<sup>2</sup>

Satprem remained restless and dissatisfied for some years, torn between his devotion to the Mother and to Sri Aurobindo's teachings and his wanderlust, and in 1959 he again left the Ashram. He became the disciple of a Tantric, a priest of a temple at Ramesvaram. Then as the disci-



M. Alan Kazlev working at his computer. (Photo courtesy M. Alan Kazlev)

ple of another Yogi, he spent six months wandering around India as a mendicant *sanyasi* practicing Tantra. This experience formed the basis of his second novel, *Par le corps de la terre, ou le Sanyassin (By the Body of the Earth, or The Sanyasi)*.<sup>3</sup>

After this, he returned again (as he put it, “the bird flew back once more”)<sup>4</sup> to the Pondicherry Ashram and the Mother, who started inviting him from time to time to her room, originally for work in connection with the *Bulletin*. As their relationship developed, he asked more questions, and eventually decided to record their conversations, taking a tape-recorder to her room. The result of this collaboration was the 13 volumes of *Mother's Agenda*, the first volume of which also contains Satprem's letters to the Mother during his wandering days [see next essay for more details on the *Agenda*]. Selected transcripts were approved for immediate publication, in some cases revised by the Mother, and these appeared regularly from February 1965 to April 1973 in *The Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* under the headings “Notes on the Way”, and “A Propos.” They were later compiled and published as volume 11 of the *Collected Works of the Mother*.

Also, under The Mother's guidance, he wrote *Sri Aurobindo, ou l'Aventure de la conscience (Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness)*, published in 1964, which became one of the most popular introductory books to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In 1972 and 1973 he also wrote under the Mother's guidance the

essay *La Genèse du surhomme (On the Way to Supermanhood)*, which she regarded very highly. This was published in 1974.

Satprem relates that on 19 May 1973, six months before the Mother's passing, he was barred admission to her room,<sup>5</sup> the beginning of a serious falling out between the Ashram leadership and himself. Later, after the Mother's passing, Satprem suggested in editorial comments included in the last volume of the *Agenda* that the Mother's passing was due to her attendants' lack of understanding of her condition, their refusal to follow her instructions, and their misguided actions, rather than either voluntary withdrawal from the body or purely physical causes. This included giving her strong ‘antipsychotic’ drugs.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the Mother's attendant Pranab has explained in his book, *I Remember*, that he was very much concerned about the Mother's health, that her heart had become weak, irregular, and finally ceased to beat. He said that he followed precisely the instructions given by her as to what to do when she appeared to have left her body. Accordingly, she was buried in the second chamber of Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi in the Ashram courtyard under the Service tree, which she herself got prepared after Sri Aurobindo's departure in December 1950.

After the Mother's passing, all of Satprem's correspondence from 1962 to 1973 with the Mother was confiscated, and he fled with the tapes of the *Agenda* to Auroville, where, at the age of 50, he edited the 13 volumes of the *Agenda*, while at the same time wrote the trilogy *Mère (Mother)—The Divine Materialism, The New Species, The Mutation of Death*—both a biography of the Mother and his own analyses and commentary on the *Agenda* material.

Satprem became a rallying point for the community shocked by the attitude the ashram leaders had taken.<sup>7</sup> His one-man revolt against the Ashram leadership began in 1974, and involved two issues. One was his wish to publish, unexpurgated, the entire transcript of his talks with the Mother. He saw the resistance of the Ashram trustees and elders in this regard as symp-



omatic of the way they had directed the Ashram from 1962 onwards. The other was his claim that under the current leadership the Yoga had become institutionalized and dogmatic, like the yogas of the past. For their part, the elders wished to publish the transcripts but only in edited form. And where Satprem saw conservatism and dogmatism, they saw a loyal commitment to their gurus to uphold the original truth of their teachings.<sup>8</sup>

During this time, Satprem was looked to by many of the French-speaking Aurovillians and others as the successor and inheritor of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's work, and a number of radicals were drawn to him because of his revolt against the Ashram elders.<sup>9</sup>

After numerous unsuccessful attempts to get the 13 volumes of the *Agenda* published by the Ashram, Auroville, and Sri Aurobindo Society presses, Satprem founded the *Institut of Recherches Evolutives* (Institute for Evolutionary Research) in Paris in July 1977 as a non-profit organization to do so.<sup>10</sup>

In December 1977 (or 1978) the Ashram trustees "expelled" him for "anti-ashram activities" as he attempted to publish the *Agenda*, and he became *persona non grata* in the Ashram.<sup>11</sup> Satprem and Sujata left Pondicherry in 1978.

In 1980 Satprem wrote *Le mental des cellules* (*The Mind of the Cells*), a synopsis and introduction of the whole *Agenda*, with many fascinating and important excerpts, and written with great passion, even if his frequent Darwinian metaphors hardly bear resemblance to the actual scientific theory of Darwinism. He also refers to personal experiences, including the 1976 attempt upon his life, which he only survived by going into a state of complete non-resistance.<sup>12</sup>

In 1982, all 13 volumes of the *Agenda* were published in French, and Satprem felt he had completed all his external work.<sup>13</sup> The following year, he and Sujata decided to withdraw completely from public life to devote themselves exclusively to Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's work of the transformation of the cellular consciousness of the body and realization of the new evolution, and the search for the "great passage" in the evolution beyond humanity. The 1985 book *La vie sans mort* (*Life without Death*) is a follow-up to *Mind of the Cells*, co-written with Luc Venet, and provides a glimpse of Satprem in his post-Ashram life in this period.<sup>14</sup>

After seven years, Satprem emerged and began producing a steady stream of

*Apocalypse* (in French, five volumes published, in English, vol.1, 1973-1978, dealing with the years and his experiences immediately after the passing of the Mother, has just been released), which records his work in the depths of the body consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Satprem died on 9 April 2007. His companion, Sujata Nahar, died soon after on 4 May.

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*During this time, Satprem was looked to by many of the French-speaking Aurovillians and others as the successor and inheritor of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's work, and a number of radicals were drawn to him because of his revolt against the Ashram elders.*

books on his experiences, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings, and the future evolution of humanity. In 1989, he wrote *The Revolt of the Earth*, in which he describes his years "digging" in the body. This was followed in 1992 by *Evolution II*, where he asks "After Man, who? But the question is: After Man, how?" In 1994 came his *Letters of a Rebel*, two volumes of autobiographical correspondence. In 1995 he wrote *The Tragedy of the Earth—From Sophocles to Sri Aurobindo*, an urgent message for mankind to take action against the cycle of death. This was followed in 1998 *The Key of Tales*, and in 1999 *The Neanderthal Looks On*, an essay on the betrayal of Man in India as in the West. This was followed in 2000 by *The Legend of the Future*. In 1999, Satprem also started the publication of his *Notebooks of an*



## The Mother's parting gift

by Larry Seidlitz

As stated by the Mother, *Mother's Agenda* was the Mother's gift to those who love her. Whatever may have been included in, or interjected into, the *Agenda* by Satprem that was destructive, whether for individuals or in creating antagonism among Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's devotees, there is no denying that there is also much that is constructive and helpful. Indeed, the *Agenda* is arguably a document of inestimable constructive value and importance for the world and its future.

Because the *Agenda* includes serious allegations and harsh criticisms made by Satprem against particular individuals in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, as well as personal comments made by the Mother herself critical of various individuals in the Ashram and elsewhere that most probably she would not have wanted to be published, it is understandable that reading the *Agenda* became a taboo in the Ashram and for many disciples. There are other criticisms of the form in which Satprem published the *Agenda*, but the inclusion of these two factors seems to have created the most damage. It is hoped that with the passage of time, the destructiveness and painfulness of the allegations and criticisms will diminish, and that the lasting, even eternal value of Mother's commentaries can take their proper place. It is hoped that the disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can rise above the human foibles of particular individuals—the errors, ignorance, selfishness, or bad will—recognizing the relativity and ephemerality of these things, and read and utilize all in the *Agenda* which is true, enduring, and positively illuminating. In this essay, I hope to communicate something of the tremendous wealth that can be found in *Mother's Agenda* for those participating in or interested in the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



Larry Seidlitz at home in Pondicherry. (Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz)

I think it is important to note at the outset the role that Satprem played in the making of the *Agenda*. It might be argued by some critics that what is of value in the *Agenda* are the Mother's words and that what Satprem contributed was its negative qualities. However, as is made clear by the Mother herself, Satprem's presence and collaboration gave the Mother the opportunity to express her inner experiences and observations, which she otherwise would not have done. On 13 March 1962, she told Satprem:

Listen, I told you once—it wasn't just words—and I thought you understood and would remember: everything I write is absolutely dependent on your work, in the sense that if you weren't here I wouldn't write another word—just letters with “I send you my blessings.” Period. Not that I don't have time or can't do it, but I don't enjoy it. When we do something together, when we write, I get the feeling it's complete and has a certain quality that makes it useful. When you aren't here to write it, I feel something missing . . .

None of this is random chance. It's not that we're taking advantage of circumstances, not at all; it was decreed.

All my life I have always felt I had something to say, but that there had to be another instrument to say it, it give it a kind of perfection of form I myself was unable to give. Because that's not my job. It's not my job.

What I can bring to the world are flashes—something that goes beyond, above and through everything that is presently manifested. But I don't have the patience for the concrete, fixed, material form . . . (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 3, p. 124)

Mother made it clear in this conversation that Satprem had been chosen to put into form Mother's experiences in the *Agenda*. Whereas it may be argued that some of Satprem's editorial comments are inappropriate, it may also be asserted that, for the most part, throughout the *Agenda*, his frequent minor editorial comments bring the conversations to life. These include the little insertions like: “long silence, then Mother shakes her head and goes within;” “Mother laughs, very amused;” “then Mother closes her eyes and smiles, palms open, and goes within.” There are also many footnotes that provide historical context to the conversations. At the start of each volume, chronologies are provided of the major world events that occurred during the year. There are also addenda, the inclusion of various texts or documents that were referred to in particular conversations. At the end of each volume are brief summaries and highlights from each individual conversation. It is clear that much care has gone into making the conversations as living, illuminating, and accessible as possible. It also appears from the comments of people involved in translating the *Agenda* into English that this same care and attention to detail and subtle nuance went into the translations of the *Agenda*.

Furthermore, continually we find in the *Agenda* that it is through her interactions with Satprem that the Mother found the words to speak about her experiences—through his questions, comments,



understanding or misunderstanding, requests for clarification, amplification, extension. And for the most part we see that he was very much in tune with her, that he understood and appreciated what she was saying and experiencing, and that this openness and receptivity was essential for the Mother to express herself. We find that he was often inwardly experiencing the same kinds of things that she was, perhaps on a different level, but nevertheless a reflection of what she was encountering, and that their inner attunement was very deep. As a result, Satprem's comments on his own experiences often stimulated the Mother to discuss her related experience from her own more profound point of view.

It is also important to say something about how the Mother viewed and valued the work of the *Agenda*. Here we run into a potential contradiction, because in two successive conversations with Satprem, the Mother seemed to say quite opposite things. In the earlier one, on 11 March 1962, she expressed what might be interpreted as disinterest, and said that it contained things that were too personal and could not be published. In the next conversation, on 13 March 1962, in response to Satprem's disappointment and bewilderment about her previous comments, she clarified that what she meant was that it was not for widespread circulation in newspapers, magazines and the outside world, because it was something sacred, and she didn't want it to be scoffed at. She said, "I deem this *Agenda* far too intimate, far too near and dear to me, to be thrown as fodder to a bunch of idiots!" She indicated that if she made it through the ordeal to the transformation of the physical, then she might even let it be shown to the public, as the living proof of it would be there. And she added that "if the Lord decides it's not for this time, well, then I will give it to those who have loved me, who have lived with me, worked with me, endeavored with me, and who respect what was attempted. It will be my parting gift . . . if I go. And I don't intend to." And she added, "And I don't intend to give them a worthless gift."

How can one convey what treasures are contained in this 13 volume work, more

than 6,000 pages, in a brief article? Starting with generalities, we can say that it provides a window into the inner life of an Avatar, a direct disclosure and detailed description of the Mother's inner experiences, thoughts, and activities. In this respect one could say it has much in common with Sri Aurobindo's *Record of Yoga*, the personal record and diary of his sadhana during his early years in Pondicherry, and with Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga* and *On Himself*, relatively more informal explanations of various practical aspects of sadhana, and about his life and work, respectively.

In the *Agenda*, there is a special focus on the Mother's experiences of and insights into the most advanced stages of the Integral Yoga, the transformation of the physical. It deals extensively with the changes that were taking place in the Mother's consciousness and body due to the descent of the supramental consciousness and force. At the same time, it deals with the working of the supramental force on the earth as a whole, at various levels. Many of the most important of these elements of the *Agenda* have been highlighted in Satprem's book *The Mind of the Cells*, and more briefly in Van Vrekhem's book, *The Mother*.

A fascinating example of this type of content is her interpretation of her experience on 3 February 1958, which confirmed to her that the birth of a new supramental world was taking place. She said:

Before, I had an individual, subjective contact with the supramental world, whereas on February 3, I went strolling there in a concrete way—as concretely as I used to go strolling in Paris in times past—in a world that exists in itself, beyond all subjectivity. It is like a bridge being built between the two worlds." She said, "The supramental world exists in a permanent way, and I am there permanently in a supramental body. I had proof of this today when my earthly consciousness went there and consciously remained there

between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. I now know that for the two worlds to join in a constant and conscious relationship what is missing is an intermediate zone between the existing physical world and the supramental world as it exists. This zone has yet to be built, both in the individual consciousness and in the objective world, and it is being built. When I formerly used to speak of the new world that is being created, I was speaking of this intermediate zone. And similarly, when I am on 'this' side, in the realm of the physical consciousness—and I see the supramental power, the supramental light and substance constantly permeating matter, I am seeing and participating in the construction of this zone. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1, pp. 137-138)

There are many other examples of the Mother's experiences which demonstrated unequivocally to her that there already was a supramentalized subtle physical world that, as she expressed it, existed as if like a lining to our own world. Somewhat later, with subtle shifts in her consciousness, she sometimes found herself in that supramentalized world very near and parallel to our own, rather than in the physical world in which we normally exist, and after doing something there would find consequences of her action here in this world. It appeared to her that part of the secret to the supramental change of the physical was the interpenetration of that supramentalized subtle physical world into our material physical one. Her discussion of such experiences brings a whole new light and perspective on the nature of our existence and of the supramental change.

More generally, there are numerous, unparalleled insights into psychological processes crucial to spiritual change and realization. One thing that we find is that at least for a period of time, the Mother found the use of a mantra essential, particularly for preparing the consciousness of the body and its cells for the reception of the



supramental consciousness, for concentrating its mechanical discursiveness. She said that the purely psychological method is inadequate and that the repetition of a mantra, is necessary, because only it has a direct action on the body. She said that now with her mantra, she had done ten years of work in a few months. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1, pp. 300-301)

One can also learn a great deal about occultism, for the Mother was a master of this realm to the extent that it was simply a natural part of her life and action. There are recounted numberless inner experiences and symbolic visions, often prophetic and frequently illuminating. On the subject of death, for example, there are not only insights into its reason, purpose and mechanisms, there are also eye-witness accounts of what was occurring on the inner dimensions during the physical passing of various disciples and acquaintances. The Mother also encountered several cases of black magic, even attempts to end her life, and we learn something about the nature and possible dangerous effects of the invisible worlds and how she dealt with these situations.

On the social level, the Mother continually discussed her observations and viewpoints about various world affairs and events, especially those concerning India, viewpoints that saw the subtle forces at work behind the surface events. For example, there is fairly extensive discussion about the formation of Bangladesh, the various skirmishes and wars with Pakistan, and about the threat of the invasion of India by China. We learn about the inner character and the strengths and weaknesses of various nations. At times the Mother discussed American politics, and the policies of Kennedy and Nixon.

We learn not only about her views, but also about many instances of her occult intervention in world affairs. One gets the impression that the Mother's presence during this dangerous period of the cold war was perhaps necessary to prevent catastrophe. One important purpose of Auroville seems to have been to counter the forces leading to conflict between the nations, providing the opportunity to work

together in the cause of human unity and collective spiritual progress.

Auroville figures prominently in the last volumes of the *Agenda*. She recounted her visions, inspirations, and concrete plans pertaining to its inception, as well as her observations and commentary about activities taking place there during its first years. For example, she described her first vision of the inside of the Matrimandir, which she explained already existed on a higher plane of existence. She discussed the need to establish a new kind of economic system in Auroville without the circulation of money and without personal property so as to avoid the distortions and imbalances of present systems. On a more interior level, we see how the Mother was executing the overall project, not from the mind or a personal power, but from the pressure of a higher Force that compelled people and things to arrange themselves in the true way.

On a personal level, there are insights into the Mother's dealings with her spiritual children, countless examples of her love, care, and attention to the smallest details. We find these repeatedly in her dealings with Satprem and his possibilities, difficulties, and revolts, but we also find it expressed in relation to many other individuals, to the Ashramites and Aurovillians in general, and to others in the outside world with whom she came into inner or outer contact. What most characterized her attitudes and interactions with others was patience with their difficulties and ignorance, a powerful inner help to overcome and transform their limitations, and an unceasing, selfless love. She was not at all blind to the limitations and wrong-doing of her disciples, and sometimes expressed her observations in a candid and critical way in her conversations with Satprem. However, her compassion, love, and support never seemed to waver.

But even this rather extraordinary list of recurring subjects and themes does not capture the contents of the *Agenda*. There are countless glimpses into the Mother's own life, inner and outer, beginning from her early childhood. We can also look more closely into Sri Aurobindo's inner and out-

er life, including his personality, and learn about significant verbal exchanges he had with the Mother that can be found nowhere else. From a different standpoint, one can find the Mother's views and commentary on most of the major subjects of human inquiry, such as philosophy, religion, psychology, science, history, sociology, politics, art, and literature.

Perhaps most significantly for us individually, we can find the living example of the perfect yogic attitude and approach to the spiritual life, one of complete surrender and courageous self-giving. It appears that as she came to work on the supramental change of the body, the nature of the inner work became more and more one of a simple and complete surrender into the hands of the Lord. This inner surrender of the body consciousness became an imperative; it was either that or the experience of severe and unbearable suffering. This was repeatedly expressed by such words as "What You will Lord," the attitude that everything depended solely on the Lord's will, or even more profoundly, "You alone exist," the realization that *all* is the Lord. At one point she expressed it thus:

In a certain attitude (but it's difficult to explain or define), in a certain attitude, everything becomes the divine. Everything. And what is marvelous then is that when you have the experience that everything becomes divine, everything that is contrary quite simply disappears (fast or slow, right away or little by little, depending on circumstances).

That's really marvelous. That is to say, becoming conscious that everything is divine is the best way to make everything divine—you understand—to eliminate all oppositions. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 12, p. 268).

The *Agenda* contains a vast and still to be fathomed and assimilated treasure of spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Satprem has done much to summarize, highlight, and interpret its contents in his various books, but other points of view are needed.



## Source material

### On finding the inner silence

by the Mother

*Sweet Mother, why do men take pleasure in making a lot of noise?*

In making a noise? Because they like to deaden themselves. In silence they have to face their own difficulties, they are in front of themselves, and usually they don't like that. In the noise they forget everything, they become stupefied. So they are happy. Constantly man rushes into external action in order not to have time to observe himself and how he lives. For him this is expressed by the desire to escape from boredom. Indeed, for some people it is much more tiresome to remain quiet—seated, or to be still. So for them it represents an escape from boredom: to make a lot of noise, to commit many stupidities, and become terribly restless; it is their way of escaping boredom. And when they sit quietly and look at themselves, they are bored. Perhaps because they are boring. That's very likely. The more boring one is, the more one is bored. Very interesting people usually are not bored. (*Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), Vol. 7, pp. 24-25)

\* \* \*

That is, instead of being in a state of tension, instead of making a tremendous effort to silence the inner machine and be able to concentrate your thought upon what you want, when you do it quite simply, naturally, without effort, automatically, and you decide to meditate for some reason or other, what you want to see, learn or know remains in your consciousness and all the rest disappears as by a miracle; everything falls quiet in you, all your being becomes silent, your nerves are altogether soothed, your consciousness is wholly concentrated—naturally, spontaneously—and you enter with an intense delight into a yet more intense contemplation. This is the sign that you have succeeded; otherwise it is not the thing. (*CWM*, Vol. 4, pp. 120-121)

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The mind must learn to be silent—remain calm, attentive, without making a noise. If you try to silence your mind directly, it is a hard job, almost impossible; for the most material part of the mind never stops its activity—it goes on and on like a non-stop recording machine. It repeats all that it records and unless there is a switch to stop it, it continues and continues indefinitely. If, on the other hand, you manage to shift your consciousness into a higher domain, above the ordinary mind, this opening to the Light calms the



The Mother (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

mind, it does not stir any longer, and the mental silence so obtained can become constant. Once you enter into this domain, you may very well never come out of it—the external mind always remains calm.

The only true solution is aspiration for the higher light. (*CWM*, Vol. 4, pp. 182)

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Of course one can sit down and try... not to meditate, because that's an activity of thought which does not lead to experience, but to concentrate and aspire and open oneself to the force from above; and if one does it persistently enough, there is a moment when one feels this force, this peace or this silence, this quietude descending, penetrating and descending into the being quite far. The first day it may be very little, and then gradually it becomes more. (*CWM*, Vol. 7, p. 79)

\* \* \*

*“Silence is... more easily established by a descent from above.”  
“From above” means what, Sweet Mother?*

From the higher regions of consciousness. You see, if you open to the higher regions of consciousness and the force descends from above, quite naturally it establishes a silence in the lower regions, for they are governed by this higher power which descends. This comes from higher regions of the mind or from beyond, even from the supermind. So when this force and consciousness come down and enter into the consciousness of a lower plane, this consciousness becomes naturally quiet, for it is as though invaded, flooded by that higher light which transforms it.

In fact, this is even the only way of establishing a constant silence in one's mind. It is to open oneself to higher regions and let this higher consciousness, force, light descend constantly



into the lower mind and take possession of it. And here, when this happens, this lower mind can remain constantly quiet and silent, because it is this one which acts and fills the whole being. One can act, write and speak without the mind being active, with this force which comes from above penetrating the mind and using it; and the mind itself becomes just a passive instrument. And in fact, this is the only way of establishing silence; for once this is established, the silence is established, the mind does not stir any longer, it acts only under the impulsion of this force when it manifests in it. It is like a very quiet, very silent field and the force when it comes puts the elements into movement and uses them, and it finds expression through the mind without the mind's being agitated. It remains very quiet. (CWM, Vol. 6, 328-329)

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It is quite certain that to create absolute silence is of all things the most difficult, for many things of which one was not aware, become *enormous*! There were all kinds of suggestions, movements, thoughts, formations which went on as though *automatically* in the outer consciousness, almost outside the consciousness, on the frontiers of consciousness; and as soon as one wants to be absolutely silent, one becomes aware of all these things which go on moving, moving, moving and make a lot of noise and prevent you from being silent. That is why it is better to remain very quiet, very calm and at the same time very attentive to something which is above you and to which you aspire, and if there is this kind of noise passing like that around you (*Mother moves her hands around her head*), not to pay attention, not to look, not to heed it. If there are thoughts which go round and round and round like this (*gestures*), which come and go, do not look, do not pay attention, but concentrate upwards in a great aspiration which one may even formulate—because often it helps the concentration—towards the light, the peace, the quietude, towards a kind of inner impassiveness, so that the concentration may be strong enough for you not to attend to all that continues to whirl about all around. But if suddenly you say, “Ah, there's some noise! Oh, here is a thought!”, then it is finished. You will never succeed in being quiet. Have you never seen those people who try to stop a quarrel by shouting still louder than the ones who are quarrelling? Well, it is something like that. (*Mother laughs.*) (CWM, Vol. 6, 309-310)

\* \* \*

What I have said there (Mother shows “The Four Austerities”) is that one must keep the right attitude and be mentally silent: an attitude not expressed through words or through formulated thoughts, but through a living state of consciousness. An attitude of aspiration, you understand . . . An aspiration for all that is essentially true, real, perfect. And this aspiration must be free from words, simply a silent attitude, but extremely intense and unvacillating. Not a word must be allowed the right to enter there

and disturb it. It must be like a column of vibrations of aspiration which nothing can touch—and in total silence—and therein, if something comes down, what descends (and will be clothed in words in your mind and in sounds in your mouth) will be the Word. But nothing less than this will do. (CWM, Vol. 6, p. 99)

\* \* \*

*How can we establish a settled peace and silence in the mind?*

First of all, you must want it.

And then you must try and must persevere, keep on trying. What I have just told you is a very good means. Yet there are others also. You sit quietly, to begin with; and then, instead of thinking of fifty things, you begin saying to yourself, “Peace, peace, peace, peace, peace, calm, peace!” You imagine peace and calm. You aspire, ask that it may come: “Peace, peace, calm.” And then, when something comes and touches you and acts, say quietly, like this, “Peace, peace, peace.” Do not look at the thoughts, do not listen to the thoughts, you understand. You know, when someone bothers you a great deal and you want to get rid of him, you don't listen to him, do you? Good! You turn your head away (gesture) and think of something else. Well, you must do that: when thoughts come, you must not look at them, must not listen to them, must not pay any attention at all, you must behave as though they did not exist, you see! And then, repeat all the time like a kind of—how shall I put it?—as an idiot does, who repeats the same thing always. Well, you must do the same thing; you must repeat, “Peace, peace, peace.” So you try this for a few minutes and then do what you have to do; and then, another time, you begin again; sit down again and then try. Do this on getting up in the morning, do this in the evening when going to bed. You can do this... look, if you want to digest your food properly, you can do this for a few minutes before eating. You can't imagine how much this helps your digestion! Before beginning to eat you sit quietly for a while and say, “Peace, peace, peace!” and everything becomes calm. It seems as though all the noises were going far, far, far away (Mother stretches out her arms on both sides) and then you must continue; and there comes a time when you no longer need to sit down, and no matter what you are doing, no matter what you are saying, it is always “Peace, peace, peace.” Everything remains here, like this, it does not enter (gesture in front of the forehead), it remains like this. And then one is always in a perfect peace... after some years.

But at the beginning, a very small beginning, two or three minutes, it is very simple. For something complicated you must make an effort, and when one makes an effort, one is not quiet. It is difficult to make an effort while remaining quiet. Very simple, very simple, you must be very simple in these things. It is as though you were learning how to call a friend: by dint of being called he comes. Well, make peace and calm your friends and call them: “Come, peace, peace, peace, peace, come!” (CWM, Vol. 6, pp. 313-314)



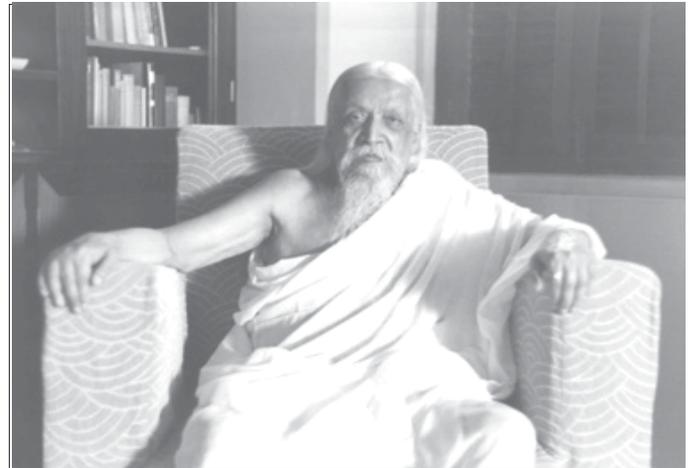
## Silence: the first necessity

by Sri Aurobindo

**T**he first step is a quiet mind—silence is a further step, but quietude must be there; and by a quiet mind I mean a mental consciousness within which sees thoughts arrive to it and move about but does not itself feel that it is thinking or identifying itself with the thoughts or call them its own. Thoughts, mental movements may pass through it as wayfarers appear and pass from elsewhere through a silent country—the quiet mind observes them or does not care to observe them, but, in either case, does not become active or lose its quietude. Silence is more than quietude; it can be gained by banishing thought altogether from the inner mind keeping it voiceless or quite outside; but more easily it is established by a descent from above—one feels it coming down, entering and occupying or surrounding the personal consciousness which then tends to merge itself in the vast impersonal silence. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 636)

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Then for the tumultuous activity of the mind which prevents your concentration. But that or else a more tiresome, obstinate, grinding, mechanical activity is always the difficulty when one tries to concentrate and it takes a long time to get the better of it. That or the habit of sleep which prevents either the waking concentration or the conscious samadhi or the absorbed and all-excluding trance which are the three forms that yogic concentration takes. But it is surely ignorance of yoga, its process and its difficulties that makes you feel desperate and pronounce yourself unfit for ever because of this quite ordinary obstacle. The insistence of the ordinary mind and its wrong reasonings, sentiments and judgments, the random activity of the thinking mind in concentration or its mechanical activity, the slowness of response to the veiled or the initial touch are the ordinary obstacles the mind imposes, just as pride, ambition, vanity, sex, greed, grasping of things for one's own ego are the difficulties and obstacles offered by the vital. As the vital difficulties can be fought down and conquered, so can the mental. Only one has to see that these are inevitable obstacles and neither cling to them nor be terrified or overwhelmed because they are there. One has to persevere till one can stand back from the mind as from the vital and feel the deeper and larger mental and vital Purushas within one which are capable of silence, capable of a straight receptivity of the true Word and Force as of the true silence. If the nature takes the way of fighting down the difficulties first, then the first half of the way is long and tedious and the complaint of the want of the response of the Divine arises. But really the Divine is there all the time, working behind the veil as well as waiting for the recognition of his response and for the response to the response to be possible. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 195)



Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

\* \* \*

One thing perhaps needs to be kept in view—this pure stillness of the mind is always the required condition, the desideratum, but to bring it about there are more ways than one. It is not, for instance, only by an effort of the mind itself to get clear of all intrusive emotion or passion or of its own characteristic vibrations or of the obscuring fumes of a physical inertia which brings about the sleep or torpor of the mind instead of its wakeful silence that the thing can be done—for this is only the ordinary process of the yogic path of knowledge. It can happen also by a descent from above of a great spiritual stillness imposing silence on the mind and heart and the life stimuli and the physical reflexes. A sudden descent of this kind or a series of descents accumulative in force and efficacy is a well-known phenomenon of spiritual experience. Or again one may start a process of one kind or another for the purpose which would normally mean a long labour and be seized, even at the outset, by a rapid intervention or manifestation of the Silence with an effect out of all proportion to the means used at the beginning. One commences with a method, but the work is taken up by a Grace from above, from That to which one aspires or an irruption of the infinitudes of the Spirit. It was in this last way that I myself came by the mind's absolute silence, unimaginable to me before I had its actual experience. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 179)

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It is not an undesirable thing for the mind to fall silent, to be free from thoughts and still—for it is oftenest when the mind falls silent that there is the full descent of a wide peace from above and in that wide tranquillity the realisation of the silent Self above the mind spread out in its vastness everywhere. Only, when there is the peace and the mental silence, the vital mind tries to rush in and occupy the place or else the mechanical mind tries to raise up



for the same purpose its round of trivial habitual thoughts. What the sadhak has to do is to be careful to reject and hush these outsiders, so that during the meditation at least the peace and quietude of the mind and vital may be complete. This can be done best if you keep a strong and silent will. That will is the will of the Purusha behind the mind; when the mind is at peace, when it is silent one can become aware of the Purusha, silent also, separate from the action of the nature.

To be calm, steady, fixed in the spirit, dhîra, sthira, this quietude of the mind, this separation of the inner Purusha from the outer Prakriti is very helpful, almost indispensable. So long as the being is subject to the whirl of thoughts or the turmoil of the vital movements, one cannot be thus calm and fixed in the spirit. To detach oneself, to stand back from them, to feel them separate from oneself is indispensable. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 638)

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Yes, the inward move is the right one. To live within in the peace and silence is the first necessity. I spoke of the wideness because in the wideness of silence and peace (which the yogins recognise as the realisation of self at once individual and universal) is the basis for harmonising the inward and the outward. It will come. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 650)

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It is not possible for the spontaneous silent condition to last always at once but that is what must grow in one till there is a constant inner silence—a silence which cannot be disturbed by any outward activity or even by any attempt at attack or disturbance.

The condition you describe shows precisely the growth of this inner silence. It has to fix itself eventually as the basis of all spiritual experience and activity. It does not matter if one does not know what is going on within behind the silence. For there are two conditions in the yoga, one in which all is silent and there is no thought, feeling or movement even though one is acting outwardly as others do—another in which a new consciousness becomes active bringing knowledge, joy, love and other spiritual feelings and inner activities, but yet at the same time there is a fundamental silence or quietude. Both are necessary in the development of the inner being. The absolutely silent state, which is one of lightness, voidness and release, prepares the other and supports it when it comes. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 648)

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It is by full entry into this wideness of the Self that cessation of mental activity becomes possible; one gets the inner Silence. After that this inner Silence can remain even when there is activity of any kind; the being remains silent within, the action goes on in the instruments, and one receives all the necessary initiations and execution of action whether mental, vital or physical from a higher

source without the fundamental peace and calm of the Spirit being troubled. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 105)

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The solitude of the self in the Divine has no doubt to be active as well as passive and static; but none who has not arrived at the silence and motionless solitude of the eternal Self can have the free and integral activity of the higher divine Nature. For the action is based on the silence and by the silence it is free. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 131)

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The stillness of the mind means first the falling to rest of the habitual thought movements, thought formations, thought currents which agitate the mind-substance, and that for many is a sufficient mental silence. But even in this repose of all thought movements or movements of feelings, when one looks more closely at it, one sees that this mind-substance is in a constant state of very subtle vibration, not at first easily observable, but afterwards quite evident—and that state of constant vibration may be as harmful to the exact reflection or reception of the descending Truth as any more formed thought movement—for it is the source of a mentalisation which can diminish or distort the authenticity of the higher Truth or break it up into mental refractions. When I speak of a still mind, I mean one in which these disturbances are no longer there. As they fall quiet one can feel the increasing stillness and a resultant clearness as palpable as one can perceive the stillness and clearness of a physical atmosphere. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 180)

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The vital mind is usually energetic and creative even in its more mechanical rounds, so it must be the physical that is turning. It is that and the mechanical that last longest, but these too fall silent when the peace and silence become massive and complete. Afterwards knowledge begins to come from the higher planes—the Higher Mind to begin with, and this creates a new action of thought and perception which replaces the ordinary mental. It does that first in the thinking mind, but afterwards also in the vital mind and physical mind, so that all these begin to go through a transformation. This kind of thought is not random and restless, but precise and purposeful—it comes only when needed or called for and does not disturb the silence. Moreover the element of what we call thought there is secondary and what might be called a seeing perception (intuition) takes its place. But so long as the mind does not become capable of a complete silence, this higher knowledge, thought, perception either does not come down or, if partially it does, it is liable to get mixed up with or imitated by the lower, and that is a bother and a hindrance. So the silence is necessary. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 329)



# The poetry room

## Ascent

### 1. The silence

Into the Silence, into the Silence,  
Arise, O Spirit immortal,  
Away from the turning Wheel, breaking the magical Circle.  
Ascend, single and deathless:  
Care no more for the whispers and the shoutings in the darkness,  
Pass from the sphere of the grey and the little,  
Leaving the cry and the struggle,  
Into the Silence for ever.

Vast and immobile, formless and marvelous,  
Higher than Heaven, wider than the universe,  
In a pure glory of being,  
In a bright stillness of self-seeing,  
Communing with a boundlessness voiceless and intimate,  
Make thy knowledge too high for thought, thy joy too deep for  
emotion;  
At rest in the unchanging Light, mute with the wordless self-  
vision,  
Spirit, pass out of thyself; Soul, escape from the clutch of  
Nature.  
All thou hast seen cast from thee, O Witness.  
Turn to the Alone and the Absolute, turn to the Eternal:  
Be only eternity, peace and silence,  
O world-transcending nameless Oneness,  
Spirit immortal.

### 2. Beyond the silence

Out from the Silence, out from the silence,  
Carrying with thee the ineffable Substance,  
Carrying with thee the splendour and wideness,  
Ascend, O Spirit immortal.  
Assigning to Time its endless meaning,  
Blissful enter into the clasp of the Timeless.  
Awake in the living Eternal, taken to the bosom of love of the  
Infinite,  
Live self-found in his endless completeness,  
Drowned in his joy and his sweetness,  
Thy heart close to the heart of the Godhead for ever.  
  
Vast, God-possessing, embraced by the Wonderful,  
Lifted by the All-Beautiful into his infinite beauty,  
Love shall envelop thee endless and fathomless,  
Joy unimaginable, ecstasy illimitable,  
Knowledge omnipotent, Might omniscient,  
Light without darkness, Truth that is dateless.  
One with the Transcendent, calm, universal,

Single and free, yet innumerably living,  
All in thyself and thyself in all dwelling,  
Act in the world with thy being beyond it.  
Soul, exceed life's boundaries; Spirit, surpass the universe.  
Outclimbing the summits of Nature,  
Transcending and uplifting the soul of the finite,  
Rise with the world in thy bosom,  
O Word gathered into the heart of the Ineffable.  
One with the Eternal, live in his infinity,  
Drowned in the Absolute, found in the Godhead,  
Swan of the supreme and spaceless ether wandering winged  
through the universe.  
Spirit immortal.

—Sri Aurobindo

## Descent

All my cells thrill swept by a surge of splendour,  
Soul and body stir with a mighty rapture,  
Light and still more light like an ocean billows  
Over me, round me.

Rigid, stone-like, fixed like a hill or statue,  
Vast my body feels and upbears the world's weight;  
Dire the large descent of the Godhead enters  
Limbs that are mortal.

Voiceless, thronged, Infinity crowds upon me;  
Presses down a glory of power eternal;  
Mind and heart grow one with the cosmic wideness;  
Stilled are earth's murmurs.

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces  
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings;  
Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions,  
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow the heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's;  
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway  
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,  
Ecstasy's chariots.

All the world is changed to a single oneness;  
Souls undying, infinite forces, meeting,  
Join in God-dance weaving a seamless Nature,  
Rhythm of the Deathless.

Mind and heart and body, one harp of being,  
Cry that anthem, finding the notes eternal,—  
Light and might and bliss and immortal wisdom  
Clasping for ever.

—Sri Aurobindo



## Fibers of Light

I do not know why, but when I say 'Hail, Master!'  
The sun and stars seem to run in my breath,  
My muscles are as if fibers of light,  
My being flies to strange lands and waters,  
My lips touch gardens of flowers, my hands I  
exchange with some other hands,  
A stranger moves my tongue.  
The universe runs into me, and I into the Universe.  
I seem a strange misty form. Like vapor I pass into  
the being of others, and they passing within me  
become my guests.  
It seems fair forms of rolling beauty roll as waves on  
the sea—Hail, Lord! All are each other's!  
Our shape and limbs run into each other.  
I find my bones at times strike within me against  
the bones of someone else.  
Our deeds and thoughts jostle and run into each other.  
I see a hundred souls blend in me, and I interchange  
my blood and brain thus with a hundred more  
in a single breath; and, calm in solitude, I find a society.

—Anonymous

## The living God

He who is in you and outside you,  
Who works through all hands,  
Who walks on all feet,  
Whose body are all ye,  
Him worship, and break all other idols!

He who is at once the high and low,  
The sinner and the saint,  
Both God and worm,  
Him worship—visible, knowable, real omnipresent,  
Break all other idols!

In whom is neither past life  
Nor future birth nor death,  
In whom we always have been  
And always shall be one,  
Him worship, Break all other idols!

Ye fools! Who neglect the living God,  
And His infinite reflections with which the world is full.  
While ye run after imaginary shadows,  
That lead alone to fights and quarrels,  
Him worship, the only visible!  
Break all other idols!

—Vivekananda

## From Gitanjali

Leave this chanting and singing and  
telling of beads! Whom dost thou  
worship in this lonely dark corner of a  
temple with doors all shut? Open  
thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling  
the hard ground and where the path-  
maker is breaking stones. He is with  
them in sun and in shower, and his  
garment is covered with dust. Put off  
thy holy mantle and even like him come  
down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance  
to be found? Our master himself has  
joyfully taken upon him the bonds of  
creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and  
leave aside thy flowers and incense!  
What harm is there if thy clothes  
become tattered and stained? Meet  
him and stand by him in toil and in  
sweat of thy brow.

—Rabindranath Tagore

## From Passage to India

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,  
Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty,  
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,  
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and countless  
stars above,  
Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains,  
trees,  
Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.  
[. . .]

Passage indeed O soul to primal thought,  
Not lands and seas alone, thy own clear freshness,  
The young maturity of brood and bloom,  
To realms of budding bibles.

O soul, repressless, I with thee and thou with me,  
Thy circumnavigation of the world begin,  
Of man, the voyage of his mind's return.  
To reason's early paradise,  
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,  
Again with fair creation.

O we can wait no longer,  
We too take ship O soul,



Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,  
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,  
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me,  
O soul,  
Caroling free, singing our song of God,  
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

With laugh and many a kiss,  
(Let others deprecate, let others weep for sin, remorse,  
humiliation,  
O soul thou pleasest me, I thee.  
Ah more than any priest O soul we too believe in God,  
But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.

O soul though pleasest me, I thee,  
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,  
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, with  
waters flowing,  
Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,  
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,  
Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,  
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O Thou transcendent,  
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,  
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,  
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,  
Thou moral, spiritual fountain—affection's source—thou  
reservoir  
(O pensive soul of me—O thirst unsatisfied—waitest not there?  
Waitest not haply for us somewhere there the Comrade perfect?)  
Thou pulse—thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,  
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,  
Athwart the shapeless vastness of space,  
How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how speak,  
if out of myself,  
I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,  
But that I, turning, call to thee O soul, thou actual Me,  
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,  
Bounding O soul thou journeyest forth;  
What love than thine and ours could wider amplify?  
What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours O soul?  
What dreams of the ideal? What plans of purity, perfection,  
strength,  
What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all?  
For others' sake to suffer all?

Reckoning ahead O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,  
The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,  
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,  
As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother  
found,  
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

Passage to more than India!  
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?  
O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like those?  
Disportest thou on waters such as those?  
Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?  
Then have thy bent unleash'd.

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!  
Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling problems!  
You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living, never  
reach'd you.

Passage to more than India!  
O secret of the earth and sky!  
Of you O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!  
Of you O woods and fields! of you strong mountains of my  
land!  
Of you O praires! of you gray rocks!

O morning red! O cloud! O rain and snows!  
O day and night, passage to you!

O sun and moon and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter!  
Passage to you!

Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!  
Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!  
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!  
Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?  
Have we not grovel'd here long enough, eating and drinking  
like mere brutes?  
Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long  
enough?

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!  
O farther farther sail!  
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?  
O farther, farther, farther sail!

—Walt Whitman



## Apropos

The more a man knows, the more he forgives. —Catherine the Great

A loving heart is the truest wisdom. —Charles Dickens

Nature and wisdom never are at strife. —Plutarch

It is easier to be wise for others than for ourselves. —Francois de la Rochefoucauld

The art of being wise is knowing what to overlook. —William James

The fact is, that to do anything in the world worth doing, we must not stand back shivering and thinking of the cold and danger, but jump in and scramble through as well as we can. —Robert Cushing

Every day do something that will inch you closer to a better tomorrow. —Doug Firebaugh

God ever works with those who work with will. —Aeschylus

Heaven never helps the man who will not act. —Sophocles

You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one. —Henry David Thoreau

Be your character what it will, it will be known, and nobody will take it upon your word. —Lord Chesterfield

Reputation is what men and women think of us; character is what God and angels know of us. —Thomas Paine

Sow an act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny. —George Dana Boardman

Men best show their character in trifles, where they are not on their guard. It is in the simplest habits, that we often see the boundless egotism which pays no regard to the feelings of others and denies nothing to itself. —Arthur Schopenhauer

Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of thy mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts. —Marcus Aurelius

Try not to become a man of success but a man of value. —Albert Einstein

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them. —Henry David Thoreau

The power of imagination makes us infinite. —John Muir

First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do. —Epictetus

Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true. —Leon J. Suenes

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for? —Robert Browning

The significance of a man is not in what he attains but in what he longs to attain. —Kahlil Gibran

Every ceiling, when reached, becomes a floor, upon which one walks as a matter of course and prescriptive right. —Aldous Huxley

A strong imagination begetteth opportunity. —Michel de Montaigne

We can always redeem the man who aspires and strives. —Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Arguing with a fool proves there are two. —Doris M. Smith

In absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia. —Author unknown

To rejoice in another's prosperity, is to give content to your own lot; to mitigate another's grief, is to alleviate or dispel your own. —Thomas Edwards

There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong. —H.L. Mencken

You must look into other people as well as at them. —Lord Chesterfield

One who fears failure limits his activities. Failure is only the opportunity to more intelligently begin again. —Henry Ford

Happiness does not consist in pastimes and amusements but in virtuous activities. —Aristotle

You're happiest while you're making the greatest contribution. —Robert F. Kennedy

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined. —Henry David Thoreau

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. —Eleanor Roosevelt

Far away in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead. —Louisa May Alcott

My life has been full of terrible misfortunes most of which never happened. —Michel de Montaigne

Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. —Henry David Thoreau

I never think of the future—it comes soon enough. —Albert Einstein