



NexUS

Newsletter for the USA Centers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

INSIDE:

- **New letters on Yoga**
- **Reader profiles**
- **Salon: Yoga in America**
- **Cellular transformation odyssey**
- **Sri Aurobindo: The silent years**

Vol. 2, No. 1 • June 1994

This is not a Yoga in which abnormality of any kind, even if it be an exalted abnormality, can be admitted as a way to self-fulfilment or spiritual realisation. Even when one enters into supernormal and suprarational experience, there should be no disturbance of the poise which must be kept firm from the summit of the consciousness to its base; the experiencing consciousness must preserve a calm balance, an unfailing clarity and order in its observation, a sort of sublimated commonsense, an unfailing power of self-criticism, right discrimination, co-ordination and firm vision of things; a sane grasp on facts and a high spiritualised positivism must always be there.

It is not by becoming irrational or infrarational that one can go beyond ordinary nature into supernature; it should be done by passing through reason to a greater light of superreason. This superreason descends into reason and takes it up into higher levels even while breaking its limitations; reason is not lost but changes and becomes its own true unlimited self, a coordinating power of the supernature.

—Sri Aurobindo

"All the action of man in life is a nexus of the presence of the soul and the workings of Nature, Purusha and Prakriti."—Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga



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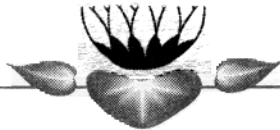
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Yoga is not a thing of ideas but of inner spiritual experience. Merely to be attracted to any set of religious or spiritual ideas does not bring with it any realisation. Yoga means a change of consciousness; a mere mental activity will not bring a change of consciousness, it can only bring a change of mind.

—Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, Vol. I, p. 161



EDITORIAL

From the SAA

This issue of *NexUS* marks a turning point in the development of the newsletter as an instrument of networking in the Sri Aurobindo/Mother/Auroville community in this country. The responsibility for producing these bimonthly efforts passes on from the founding coordinator, R. Celest Powell, to a new editor, someone familiar to many of us: Lynda Lester.

Celest founded *NexUS* for the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA) in the fall of 1992. At that time there was a crying need for a short, lively newsletter that could communicate center news and upcoming events in a timely manner. Celest stepped into the breach. Working with Wayne and Surama Bloomquist at the SAA office in Berkeley, Celest brought forth a new creation: *NexUS*. Our gratitude goes out to Celest for her pioneering labor, and we wish her the best in her future endeavors.

Now *NexUS* is growing in new directions. We hope it can develop into the kind of forum where people can express a variety of insights, opinions and experiences without being ridiculed or attacked (or simply dismissed!), where people with sincere aspirations can disagree while respecting each other's perspectives. *NexUS* can be a place where ideas that we may not feel comfortable sharing in the larger world can find a compatible audience, where this family of seekers can find its voice.

To Lynda, our enthusiastic welcome and thanks for picking up the gauntlet in the name of community building and networking. Just talking with her personally, I know I've been affected by her excitement at the possibilities that present themselves in this new challenge. We are eagerly looking forward to seeing what the future holds for this still-fledgling newsletter, and hope you are also. Stay tuned!

William Moss, President

From the editor



Welcome to Volume 2 of *NexUS*. As Will said, the newsletter is growing in new directions; maybe it has to do with consensus. Perhaps a critical number of us have been thinking that yes, the Force is moving in our land; yes, the Ineffable is perceptible in the U.S. atmosphere; and yes, there can be spiritual experience in the suburbs. Perhaps we are finally developing

an American voice with which to talk about our experience—hence, the evolution of this vehicle.

As you peruse these pages, you will see that we have kept some things the same and changed others. We have retained "New letters on yoga" and delineated a "Current affairs" section to cover recent and upcoming events, news, and briefs. "Center to center" offers a closer look at featured Auro-groups and organizations; see the section at back for a comprehensive list of centers and their ongoing activities.

"On the personality plane" becomes "In person," which includes reader profiles as well as stories of personal quests and meetings with Mother and Sri Aurobindo. "To inspire" becomes "The poetry room."

In this issue we introduce "Salon." Here we can imagine ourselves sipping tea and eating sweets (gulabjambo, Twinkies, or tortes, savoring the *rasa* with requisite detachment)—and spiritedly discussing the topic of the hour. Today's topic is "Yoga in America." Nine brave souls have nine different outlooks.

"Notes from the field" is a section for examining developments in the Integral Yoga. Keywords are *experience* and *realization*. If you reach a milestone in sadhana or find an effective way to commune consciously while commuting, let us know. "Essays" is the place for clarified mental analysis, study and interpretation, and scholarly papers. Either of these two departments might host investigations into quantum physics, body/mind research, or other topics as related to consciousness and transformation.

To be true to our source, we have added a section called "Source material"—original passages from Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Finally, we have put in a back page of quotes from hither and yon, since the net is wide, the universe is holographic, and (according to chaos theory and the *Agenda*), everything is relational and touches everything else.

Enjoy! See you at AUM!

Comments and submissions welcome. If nothing is submitted, you will be getting a call from me.

Lynda Lester

P.S. I, too, would like to thank Celest for creating *NexUS* and opening it to the community; pathfinders always have the hardest job. *NexUS* today is built on the foundation she laid.

Also, as a grateful reader, I would like to thank Gordon and Jean Korstange, and before them Eric Hughes, for their relentlessly heroic efforts in publishing *Collaboration* for the last 20 years—and the many spectacular issues they have produced. Those of us in the outlands would have been lonely indeed without *Collaboration's* persistent light.



NEW LETTERS ON YOGA

Observations on NexUS

The past issues of *NexUS* look very good to me in their attempt to be inclusive and newsworthy. The small and informal type of item, the brief letter or poem or comment on yoga or report on a meeting is the strength of a newsletter: these keep the community connected and aware of itself. I think Celest Powell did the best job so far in this regard, printing things of a more wide and diverse view than anyone else has to date.

The Integral Yoga at its core will never be one of a single book or catechism or doctrine, and that means being open to different interpretations of the truth. For example, I was impressed that Celest published both Luc Venet's praise of Satprem and Hadassah Haskale's criticism of that praise. In my opinion this yoga needs more honest airing of differences; in the past, controversies have been kept behind closed doors, discussed among the inner circles while a united front was presented to the public. Why this should happen, when there is nothing to protect, has always baffled me.

The fact that the *NexUS* printing is about 300 is significant, in my eyes. Although some people see the Integral Yoga growing and reaching out to vast numbers of people, it hasn't done so in the past. Unless we happen upon a charismatic leader/teacher (which Satprem hasn't become) or in some other way become more accessible to the public at large, I think the numbers aren't likely to change dramatically.

The Integral Yoga is not, after all, pop psychology. It may have its general principles, such as aspiration, but it also has its more integral and inclusive view that is difficult to grasp, and even more difficult to convert into a practical yoga. This has always been the case, as far as my historical eyes see. Sri Aurobindo or the Mother were not (thank God!) teachers such as Rajneesh.

The size of the audience is something to take into consideration when planning our newsletter. Our audience is relatively small, and can be counted upon to keep up contacts in ways ancillary to *NexUS*, such as meetings like AUM, phone calls, or the proposed electronic bulletin board. This tells me that *NexUS* can be more personal than it might be if the audience were wider or less connected. And in fact, it has moved into the personal realm already.

Along with simple information flow and news, one of the things *NexUS* can do is serve as an inspiration, in the mundane sense of showing people that there are others out there, people who share an aspiration and some vision, but who are, like themselves, fallible and human. Mystic grunge poetry like Leslie Levy's is perfect for this. Or the letter published awhile back by Bob Zelman, who related his extraordinary experiences. I think the airing of such is inspiring for the community as a whole.

A newsletter is also a great boon for the newcomer who just happened upon the writings of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, or has

met someone of our community. And a newsletter is especially useful for a person who is a solitary, who doesn't enjoy going to meetings but who wants to stay connected to the community as a whole.

And there is also a real need for an editor with judgment and perspective. Neither the Mother nor Sri Aurobindo would have let anything and everything go out under their name that others wanted to send out, and (to a lesser extent) the same editing and choice is necessary for *NexUS*. For example, does one publish accounts by people who claim to be divinely inspired by Sri Aurobindo/Mother, such as Satprem? What if such a person has never been heard from before, and claims that Sri Aurobindo told him in a dream that flying saucers were landing next month to set up a one-world government? The editor's consciousness can be a strong force (or lack of it) in a published work, even one that only claims to be a newsletter.

—David Hutchinson, Sacramento, CA

Food for thought

I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said, "Stop! Don't do it!" "Why shouldn't I?" he said. I said, "Well, there's so much to live for!" He said, "Like what?" I said, "Well . . . are you religious or atheist?" He said, "Religious." I said, "Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?" He said, "Christian." I said, "Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?" He said, "Baptist!" I said, "Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?" He said, "Baptist Church of God!" I said, "Me too! Are you reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879, or reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?" He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915!" I said, "Die, heretic scum," and pushed him off.

—Comedian Emo Phillips

Reflections on "Man"

Stimulated by the letter from Man Ravikant in *NexUS*, February 15, 1994, with all due respect to its author, I take it upon myself to reply.

Ravikant's plight probably typifies that of numerous devotees of Sri Aurobindo and Mother: not knowing where one



stands in the Yoga or not being sure of what is the next step.

How often have I dreamed of writing a letter to Sri Aurobindo or taking the Darshan of Mother, absorbing their Wisdom and Force as was the inimitable opportunity of the early Ashramites. But that is not to be, not for me or for the devotees who come after me.

Left without our spiritual leaders walking amongst us on the earth, from whence can come our guidance?

I came to the Mother in the early 1970s, but involved with work and a young family, a trip to Pondicherry was out of the question. My love for Mother and Sri Aurobindo was nurtured by some very dear friends who are long-time devotees and by my own reading into Their works. By then I was firmly planted on my path and eagerly awaited each new book from Satprem and each new volume of the *Agenda*.

It may be that we can follow the path of Satprem only in a general outline. Satprem, unlike the vast majority of us, for years had the unparalleled benefit of Mother's personal presence and guidance. On many occasions she transmitted her Force into him. And after she left her body, his way was clear, to attempt the physical transformation.

Ravikant wonders if this transformation can be attempted by those of us who have not yet opened to the highest supramental Force and in his *NexUS* letter, he quotes excerpts from *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo.

For successful physical transformation, including victory over death, an ability to ascend to the supramental consciousness and open to "only the very highest supramental Force descending from above, that can victoriously handle the physical Nature and annihilate its difficulties" seems to be a prerequisite.

Then Ravikant remarks:

Those few who may be sufficiently advanced in the sadhana should try to emulate Satprem's breakthrough. But as for the rest of us, could we leap-frog and engage in the same meaningfully? Or would it be premature and no more than an unrightful attempt!

I do not know Satprem, other than through the *Agenda* and through his own writings. And even there, he lets us know only a fraction of what is happening to him.

It seems to me that we could not "emulate Satprem's breakthrough," or anybody else's for that matter. What happens in an individual sadhana is so intimate and personal that it seems to me it would be different for every individual.

As I understand it, what Satprem is doing is allowing the Mother's Force to work through him. He may be taking a pounding, but so are humanity and the earth taking a pounding. One

would have to be quite insensitive not to see the chaos and upheavals that abound toward the end of this century. That Force is pushing the hidden sores of our civilization to the surface where they fester and break open, revealing what it is that must be changed.

On an individual level, our process may be totally different from that of Satprem, follow different lines, and focus on different aspects of ourselves in different time frames.

How do we know what the Supramental will do with us? We don't.

What we can do is open, be receptive to the Force. How this can be done, by a stroke of synchronicity, is magnificently outlined by David Hutchinson in the very same issue of *NexUS* in which Man Ravikant asks his pregnant question. [*David outlined several chapters on the Yoga of Perfection in Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Yoga.—Ed.*]

We already know what to do: purify the lower nature, purify the mind, heart, and desire-soul, realize that all is the Mother's energy flowing through us on every level. With this firm conviction, let the ego and the thought processes subside and dwell in equality, peace, and faith.

The question of how will be answered as we open more and more to the Mother and ask the Mother to help us. Her help and guidance are always available. The consciousness of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is just as alive and vibrant as it was when they walked the earth—maybe more so. They are not gone from us.

Life, too, is a great teacher as we became mindful of what each situation has to reveal to us and learn how we can grow closer to the Divine through each crisis, through relationships, work situations, money, illness, and all the rest of it.

For each devotee, our work is to open to the Divine Mother and then let her do her work in and through us, according to her Will.

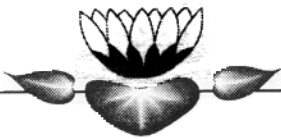
—Janis Coker, Safety Harbor, FL

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Recent events .

Dr. Ramchandra Gandhi speaks on "The Seven Sages of Modern India"

The California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) presented a program in San Francisco on March 13 at Gaylord's restaurant in Ghiradelli Square. The Sri Aurobindo Association was a sponsor and Wayne and Surama Bloomquist were in attendance. The featured speaker was Dr. Ramchandra Gandhi, who occupies the Haridas Chaudhuri Chair of South Asian and Comparative Philosophy at CIIS. Dr. Gandhi is grandson of Mahatma Gandhi.



Dr. Gandhi spoke on "The Seven Sages of Modern India": Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi, Krishnamurti, Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda.

SALC offers four-day program in Colorado

The Sri Aurobindo Learning Center (SALC) presented a four-day program called "Springtime in the Rockies" to coincide with Earth Day and Darshan, April 21–24. The program featured presentations on Tibetan Buddhism, earth changes, *Savitri*, and a round table called "Journey into the Holy Land." Also featured were music, Bharat Natyam dance, meditation, tai chi, hiking, an outdoor potluck, and a solar-cooked supper.

Darshan gathering held at Matagiri

A Darshan gathering was held at Matagiri on April 24. Eric Hughes played a video of Mother's Darshan and a tape of Mother reading questions and answers and playing the organ. This was followed by a meditation.

A magnolia tree was planted, with Tom O'Brien and Julian Lines doing most of the digging and Jurg Hunziker supervising. Muriel Spanier's ashes will be placed at the base of the tree on July 3 during the All USA Meeting (AUM).

Connie Buckley, Ray and Jane Gombah, and Arya Maloney joined in a meeting chaired by Rudy Phillips to work on the next phase of Matagiri. Jean Finney was among the attendees.

Upcoming events . . .

AUM goes head for New York

The tenth annual All USA Meeting (AUM) will be held June 30–July 4 at the Phoenicia Pathwork Center, Phoenicia, New York, 2-1/2 hours north of New York City. The gathering is for people interested in the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and its myriad manifestations, including the international community of Auroville, India.

The conference theme is "Unity in diversity: Knowledge, devotion, work, and synthesis." The program will include workshops, talks, and time for meditation and recreation. In attendance will be a number of friends from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Pondicherry, India), Aurobindo scholars, and center and study group leaders active in the work in America.

For more information, contact Julian Lines, 23 Mill Hill

Road, Woodstock, NY 12498. Phone: (914) 679-2926; e-mail: jhl@aol.com

Agenda/Savitri seminar and Global Village Conference set for August

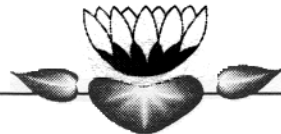
Rod Hemsell and Luc Venet will present a seminar on *Mother's Agenda* and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* in Crestone, Colorado, from Aug. 6–12. The seminar will lead into the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center's (SALC) Global Village Conference Aug. 13–15.

The *Agenda/Savitri* seminar is being sponsored by SALC, the Gaia Esprit Academy of Colorado Springs, and the American Institute for Evolutionary Research. The program will feature morning, evening, and afternoon sessions of study and meditation. *Savitri* and the *Agenda* will be explored deeply and correspondences between the two will be amplified. *Savitri* can be a doorway into the *Agenda*, according to the presenters, who will approach the works as ways to enter into realms of conscious experience and integral transformation.

A 10-day board-and-lodging package for the seminar and conference is being offered for \$250. For more information on the seminar, call Rod Hemsell at (719) 471-7860. For conference information, call SALC at (719) 256-4917. For lodging reservations, call Joyce Weis at the White Eagle Lodge, (719) 256-4865.



Matagiri drawing
by Lynda Lester



News . . .

Institute for Evolutionary Research undergoes change

Due to unforeseen and unsolicited events, some organizational changes have recently occurred in the original setup of the American Institute for Evolutionary Research. Today the American Institute is no longer affiliated in any way with the French Institute or with Satprem.

However, the Institute remains fully dedicated to the work of promoting *Mother's Agenda* in America. In fact, we see *Mother's Agenda* as one of the prime forces to bring about a radical transformation of the American collective consciousness. On January 27, 1971, Mother is quoted in the *Agenda* as saying:

I have the feeling that America is where the center of transformation will be.

In every volume Mother is also quoted as saying:

This *Agenda* . . . is my gift to those who love me.

Taking our clues from her, we will endeavor to continue promoting her extraordinary gift in this country in the way she clearly intended: free from unreasoning allegiances and individual or collective partisanship, whether it be the Institute's or anybody else's.

We welcome any comments or suggestions you might have on helping us spread Mother's incredible work in this country. Let's get to work!

—Luc and Susie Venet
Institute for Evolutionary Research
1621 Freeway Dr., Suite 220
Mt. Vernon, WA 98273

Luc and Susie Venet have been translating, publishing, and distributing Mother's Agenda in the United States for 14 years.

Briefs . . .

Simine and Larry Tepper (Boulder, Colorado) are the proud parents of Eric Thomas Tepper, a St. Patrick's Day baby born at 6:56 P.M. on March 17. He weighed six pounds even. • **Luc and Susie Venet** came to Boulder for a weekend in April, visiting with **Joe Spanier, Lynda Lester, and Simine and Larry Tepper.** • **Rod Hemsell** is developing a curriculum for a charter school in Colorado Springs. The curriculum, which spans elementary through high school, is based on ecology and world cultures.

Kathleen Sophia Glomski would like to be included in all

prayers and healings at centers. • Eileen Giltinan is offering a 30-volume **Sri Aurobindo Centenary Set**, in good condition, for \$350. Call (215) 752-3551. • **Balkrishna Poddar**, founder of Sri Aurobindo Books Distribution Agency (SABDA) recently passed away. He had a heart condition and had been in the nursing home for a number of months.

CENTER TO CENTER

In this section, centers, organizations, and study groups can share their vision with NexUS readers. What is your group doing? What is your approach to the Yoga? We invite you to send in a short writeup; be sure to include contact information.

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham

Pomona, CA

In Sanskrit, a *peetham* is a seat or place, a pedestal in general, or a foundation. Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham endeavors to be a place whose sole purpose for existing is to provide a locus for the practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of Integral Transformation.

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham is a new, nonprofit corporation, formed in May 1993 to hold the resources of an intentional residence community in trust for Mother's work. We are a group of people dedicated to her purposes, concentrating on the future; praying, planning, working, hoping, and helping to manifest the vision and ideal that Mother holds for this collective and for humanity.

Inwardly, as much as each is individually capable, everyone feels that they are here for Mother's work, aspiring to become conscious instruments of the Divine, open to the influence of the psychic being, receive Mother's Force in the *adhar*, and allow the Force to work in us—individually and collectively—to effect the triple transformation of Sri Aurobindo. Outwardly, as in any undertaking, there is work, karma yoga.

What is each one's work in the Ashram? We look to Sri Aurobindo for direction. "The Mother and I are equal. Also she is supreme here and has the right to arrange the work as she thinks best for the work; no one has any right or claim or proprietorship over any work that may be given to him. The Ashram is the Mother's creation and would not have existed but for her . . ." In this spirit, we would utilize the fruits of the collective labor to promote the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The goals and dreams are numerous and multiplying. As each seed of inspiration is planted and nurtured, a new one incubates, percolates to the surface of our conscious aspiration. Our wish is to provide a haven of protection, as in



Mother's dream to create "... a small world where people would be able to live without having to be preoccupied by problems of food and lodging and clothing and the imperious necessities of life, to see if all the energies freed by this certainty of an assured material living would spontaneously be turned towards the divine life and inner realization."

From within that refuge comes the first step. The need to build grows into the aspiration to turn a piece of property into a sanctuary dedicated to Their realization; to work in orderliness and skill to discover the means of right working and allow that to manifest; and ultimately, to master the energies of this world through Their vision, by allowing the Divine to work in us.

We are currently involved in the slow transformation of a farm property into something beautiful, efficient, sustainable, and survivable. Already the ideas are pouring in as to how to utilize the abundance of a divine life. We want someday to build and staff a guest house in Pondicherry; we would like to provide business, publishing, study, and financial opportunities for Sri Aurobindo devotees and other Sri Aurobindo centers in the U.S. and abroad.

Mother often said that she was in search throughout the world of people with a perfect basis of material knowledge (industrialists, financiers, writers . . .), but who would agree to do their work in another way, opening themselves up to another force—this is the field of experiment of tomorrow's world. Through their consent and call, if they tune in, Mother could bring into play another operating process.

—Satprem, footnote in *Agenda*, Vol. 5, p. 21

* * *

There are four conditions for knowing the divine Will.

The first essential condition: an absolute sincerity.

- 2) To overcome desires and preferences.
- 3) To silence the mind and listen.
- 4) To obey immediately when you receive an order.

—The Mother, *Questions and Answers*,
March 14, 1951

Conditions for Ashram life

There are very few conditions for living in the Ashram, yet they embrace the full spectrum of a disciplined life of renunciation in the world. It is our hope to adhere as closely as possible to those set forth by Sri Aurobindo and Mother, as we discover and understand them.

"If I said things that human nature finds easy and natural, that would certainly be very comfortable for the disciples, but there would be no room for spiritual aim or endeavor. Spiritual aims and methods are not easy or natural (e.g. as quarrelling; sex indulgence, greed, indolence, acquiescence in all imperfections are easy and natural) and if people become disciples, they are supposed to follow spiritual aims and endeavours, however hard and above ordinary nature and not the things that are easy and natural." (Sri Aurobindo)

As in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a few things are strictly forbidden: politics, smoking, alcohol, and sexual relations.

For those who strive to know God in everything they do, who find they need to live in an ashram environment, but whose inner destiny may not be to stay permanently in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, we are hopeful that Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham may be a place for them where complete surrender could be possible.

It seems that words of caution given by Mother about her ashram in India may apply to this one in America: "There is in the Ashram no exterior discipline and no visible test. But the inner test is severe and constant, one must be very sincere in order to be able to stay here. A complete surrender is not outwardly exacted but it is indispensable for those who wish to stick on, and many things come to test the sincerity of this surrender."

And by Sri Aurobindo: "To practise Yoga as a member of the Ashram is to push yourself into the centre of a pressure for transformation of the whole being . . ."

However, there are the rewards which inspire us to stay and the true reward is the joy of the Divine. "... the Grace and the help are always there for those who aspire for them and their power is limitless when received with faith and confidence."

It is hoped that this letter will be a means by which we may share the vision with our friends, both present and future, and extend a welcome to come and offer your uniqueness in a work for the Divine together with us.

For information, write to Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, 1291 Weber St., Pomona, CA 91768; send e-mail to SASP@aol.com; or contact Dakshina at (909) 629-0108.

—Vishnu Eschner and Prapanna Smith

Vishnu Eschner and Prapanna Smith are residents of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham.



Sri Aurobindo Nivas National Memorial

Baroda, India

Immediately after Sri Aurobindo completed his education in England, he returned to India to join the Baroda state services and worked in administrative departments, the secretariat, and finally as a professor and vice-principal of Baroda College. He also worked as personal secretary to H.H. Sir Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwar of Baroda. He stayed in Baroda from 1893 to 1906, which is the longest stay at one place in India except at Pondicherry.

During his stay in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo acquired mastery over Sanskrit and learned other Indian languages; studied political, cultural, and other problems of India; started doing yoga; and realized essential truths of Indian spiritual experiences of the past. He also read the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Kalidas, Bhavbhuti, and Bankim, as well as Homer, Dante, and many others. He wrote or initially started some of his literary and philosophical works.

As a state officer, Sri Aurobindo was allotted a bungalow as residential quarters. The government of Gujarat donated the bungalow to the Sri Aurobindo Society of Baroda in 1971 to develop it as a permanent memorial to Sri Aurobindo, now known as Sri Aurobindo Nivas.

Sri Aurobindo Nivas is a beautiful, capacious building built in red brick with 23 rooms. Devotees and tourists from India and abroad come to the memorial daily. Visitors with some inward opening experience the serene calmness and vibration of deep quietude pervading the atmosphere.

About the Sri Aurobindo Society, Baroda

The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo embraces all aspects and fields of human life. The Sri Aurobindo Society, Baroda promotes various programs for physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural educational, and spiritual development of the people. Various activities undertaken at Baroda include yogasana classes, health care, youth council and women's councils, lectures, publications, a library, Sanskrit studies, meditation facilities, a guest house, and a photographic exhibition.

Invitation

Do you aspire to contribute to the realization of a new world? Do you have an inspiration to become a better individual, have an improved collective life, evolve spiritually? If yes, then Sri Aurobindo Nivas welcomes you.

For further information please contact:

Ambapremi Shah, Chairman, Sri Aurobindo Society
Sri Aurobindo Nivas, Dandia Bazar
Baroda 390001 INDIA



Mule deer by Michelle Mara

IN PERSON

What kind of person reads Nexus? Send us your profile. Use the following examples for inspiration (add or omit items as desired, or make up your own).

Reader profiles

Michelle Mara

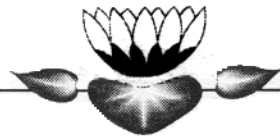
Location: Near Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

No. of years in the yoga: More than a decade

Occupation: Nature artist and writer; also field research in wildlife ecology

Interests: Besides my work, I am very much interested in the causes of conservation and the protection of wilderness lands. I do whatever I can to help the work of humane societies and wildlife organizations. My personal philosophy is reverence for the earth and all living things, so I am naturally interested in anything that advances this reverence. I love camping, hiking, caring for my dogs and cats, living outdoors as much as possible.

Recent books: About half of my reading material is by or about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Am rereading *The Life Divine* for the third time and learning many more things from it. The other half of my reading includes a wide assortment of nature magazines, and books about Buddhism, ecology, ornithology, and people who live and work in wilderness areas. At present I am studying Spanish, so I try to read anything I can find that is printed in Spanish.



Recent accomplishment: Achieving a level of equanimity, through yoga practice, which seems almost indestructible and which greatly enhances the quality of my life.

Current projects:

- Organic gardening
- Designing doll clothes—a fun hobby when time permits
- Planning another trip north—it may be Montana, the Yukon, or Alaska

Idea of a good time: Walking alone through dense, deep, conifer forest; especially at dusk, or in a summer morning after an all-night rain.

Yogic philosophy: I think that, as Sri Aurobindo has said, the longing and striving for perfection and mastery are inherent in the human species, and I am much aware of it in myself. My purpose is to always keep progressing and to be all that I can be, in all aspects of my life—mind, body, skills, and most of all in the expression of reverence for all life. As human beings, we possess the most incredible potential for future evolution and development, and this fact delights me. I love the anticipation and challenge of the future.

Parting thought: I would like to share my personal motto, which is: “I stand at the dawn of eternal morning.”

It may be good to remind you that we are here for a special work, a work not done anywhere else: we want to come into contact with the supreme consciousness, the universal consciousness; we want to receive it and manifest it. For that, we need a very solid base, and our base is our physical being, our body. We therefore need to prepare a solid, healthy, enduring body, skillful, agile, and strong, so it may be ready for anything. There is no better way to prepare the body than physical exercises: sports, athletics, gymnastics, and all other games are the best means to develop and strengthen the body.

Therefore I invite you to participate in the competitions beginning today wholeheartedly, with all your energy and will.—Mother’s message for the opening of the Ashram sport season, March 1966, *Agenda*, Vol. 7, p. 67

Physical perfection in no way and by no means proves that a single step has been made towards spirituality. Physical perfection means that the instrument that will be used by the force—any force—will be sufficiently perfect to be remarkably expressive. But the important point, the essential point, is the force that will use the instrument, and that’s where a choice will have to be made.—The Mother (from a talk on April 17, 1951), *Agenda*, Vol. 7, p. 50

Lynda Lester

Location: “Edge Abbey” (the name of my house), Boulder, Colorado

No. of years in the yoga: 20

Visit to Ashram/AV: Three months in 1974

Occupation: Technical writer/editor for the Scientific Computing Division of the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Manage a newsletter on supercomputing and write “getting started” documentation for clustered workstations.

Interests: Ballet, hatha yoga, art, writing. Reading (science fiction, culture, history, lay physics/cosmology, fairy tales, literature, poetry, magazines). Rock and roll, string quartets, composing music on the piano. Movies (e.g., *Mediterraneo*, *Field of Dreams*, *Henry V*—metaphors for *ananda*, *shradda*, *tapas*). Friendships that evolve the consciousness.

Number of Grateful Dead concerts attended: 55

Recent reading: *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estés; *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Neil Postman; *A Soldier of the Great War*, Mark Helprin; *Fractals: The Patterns of Chaos*, John Briggs; *Evolution II*, Satprem; *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo (round #6).

Recent accomplishment: Performed onstage in dances from *Swan Lake* and *Gaite Parisienne*; started dancing in toe shoes again after a hiatus of 26 years (goal: increase receptivity, strength, and expressive capacity of the body).

Current projects: Just beginning volume 132 of my journal, which I’ve kept since I was 11; editing *NexUS*; acquiring Internet navigation and hypertext skills. Also: transformation of the vital; surrendering not only the fruits but the doership of action. Melding yogic consciousness with the U.S. milieu; working on surrender and maintenance of the silent mind while at the Mall.

Idea of a good time: Sitting in a chair for a few hours after midnight, soaking up the quiet, looking out at the stars and pines—thinking, meditating, and experiencing the Divine.

Yogic philosophy: You can drink Diet Coke, listen to the Smashing Pumpkins, surf the Internet, take the kids to Water World, and still see the One everywhere. Access to higher consciousness is not restricted to ashrams and meditation rooms. Our job is to “Just Do It!”, not to let better qualified people do it.

Quote: “I like it when I experience floods of golden light and get ravished by the Saguna Brahman when I’m walking down the hall to ask a programmer a question about vector intrinsics.”

Parting thought: *It could happen* [the transformation]. We don’t have to be spiritually macho, correct, worthy, or wise; we don’t have to be French, Indian, or Aurovilian—we can be “American”: enthusiastic, open to the New, ready to go for it. The Contagion has jumped continents. The Supermind is alive and well in Nebraska.



Chronicles and recollections

This section is for autobiographical musings, first-person accounts of the spiritual journey, and tales of meeting Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna), veteran sadhak, poet, writer, and editor of Mother India magazine, joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry in the late 1920s and had close contact with Mother and Sri Aurobindo for decades. Nirodbaran, a personal attendant of Sri Aurobindo for twelve years, has published a number of books, including several volumes of correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. The following accounts are excerpted from a series of talks Amal and Nirodbaran gave in 1970–71 to the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. These talks are published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in *Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry*, available from the SAA.

See the upcoming issue of *Collaboration* for a recent interview with Amal by Gordon Korstange and a talk given by Nirodbaran in Auroville. (Note: Amal's mention of his habit of "falling," below, is a reference to a physical disability which occasionally caused him to lose his footing.)

First interview with the Mother, 1927

by Amal Kiran

The Mother had engaged for me a house just opposite the Ashram: it was the house on Rue Francois Martin, in which Vasudha had been staying for nearly four decades. I had the entire place for Rs.12 a month! (*laughter*) In those days the room where Kamala now stays was the Mother's store-room; and she used to come from her room every now and then to her store-room across the open passage on the first floor, and I used to see her from one of my windows. It went on like that and then I asked for an interview. She gave it to me. She sat on one side of a table and I sat on the other. She asked me: "What have you come here for?" I made a dramatic sweeping gesture with one hand and replied: "Mother, I have seen everything of life; (*laughter*) now I want nothing except God." (*laughter*) She said: "Oh yes? How old are you?" I said I was 23. (*laughter*) "Oh, at 23 you have seen all of life? Don't be in such a hurry, you must take your time. Stay here, look about, see how things are, see if they suit you and then take a decision." I was much disappointed at this kind of cold water poured over my dramatic gesture. But I said: "All right." When I was talking with her I felt as if from her face and eyes some silver radiance were

Nirodbaran: I won't fume any more or tear my hair.
Sri Aurobindo: Don't. Losing one's hair is always a useless operation. Keep your hair on.

—From *Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry*

coming out. I am very critical and skeptical, you know, but I could not make out how this was happening—nor could I doubt that it was happening. Apart from this impression of light, there was another—of something out of ancient Egypt.

After our brief talk, the Mother got up. "I am going," she said and moved towards the door. "No, please wait," I urged. Then I started to indulge in my habit of falling. It was talking a new turn, for I was preparing to fall—as I have already told you—at her feet. She seemed a little surprised at a man clad in European clothes, with a necktie and so on, wanting to fall like that. Seeing the surprise on her face I made an explanation: "You see, Mother, we Indians always do this to our spiritual Masters." (*laughter*) I taught her what was the right thing to be done. Afterwards I learned that the Mother at that time couldn't move from one room to another without 20 people falling at her feet! (*laughter*) When she found me determined she said: "All right"—and let me go down. Then she put her hand on my head and I got up. At home I thought I had done something very important: I had asserted my Indian-ness, I had shown my Indian-ness in spite of those clothes, and I was sure the Mother must have appreciated it. It seems the Mother went and told Sri Aurobindo: "There is a young man here who came to see me and taught me how Indians do pranam!" (*laughter*) Sri Aurobindo was much amused.

The big burst

(An exchange of notes between Nirodbaran and Sri Aurobindo)

Nirodbaran: Tomorrow, by the way, I am going to burst.
ATTENTION!

Sri Aurobindo: Eh, what! Burst? Which way? If you explode, fizz only—don't blow up the Ashram.

Nirod: I am sending my explosion—the result of Darshan!

Sri Aurobindo: Man alive (or of Sorrows or whatever may be the fact), how is it you fell on such a fell day for your burst? There has been an explosion, as X merrily calls it, beginning in the [indecipherable] but reaching now its epistolary climax and have been writing sober letters to Y for the last few hours. Solicit therefore your indulgence for a guru besieged by other people's disturbances (and letters) until tonight. Send back the blessed burst and I will try to deal with it.



SALON

The enemy say that Americans are good at a long shot, but cannot stand the cold iron. I call upon you instantly to give a lie to the slander. Charge!

—Winfield Scott, address to the 11th Infantry Regiment, June 5, 1814, Chippewa, Canada

Society so habitually thinks on a plane lower than is reasonable that it behooves us to think and to hope on an even higher plane than seems to be reasonable . . . Now, while everything that is respectable in America seems to be putting its effort, with a sort of joyful perversity, into the technique of destruction, are there no desperate spiritual outlaws with a lust to create?

—Randolph Bourne, American radical during WWI

Excerpt from a draft of a letter found in a notebook kept by Sri Aurobindo in 1926:

... Here [in India] the difficulty we experience is due rather to the inability to go beyond ancient ideas and forms. Plenty of money can be had in India for orthodox religious purposes and, also, although not on the American scale, for Asramas or other spiritual institutions which take the ascetic form or repeat established and well understood formulas. But the mind of the people is not as yet sufficiently open or receptive to have even a vague idea of what I am doing here with an entire departure from the old forms and an absence of the accustomed paraphernalia and a breaking of old barriers and habits.

That is the one great advantage of America, a great eagerness and openness of mind to new things; whether it will be sufficient to open it eventually also to the deep and true things in the experiment we have to make. Nothing can be said very definitely about the spiritual future of America. A great possibility is opening to it, but it depends on the Americans themselves whether they will receive and realise it. India and America stand at the two poles that have to meet and become one, the spiritual and the material life; one has shown a pre-eminent capacity of realisation in the spiritual, the other in the material world. America must be able to receive freely the riches of the spirit from India and must be able to give freely for the material organisation of a higher life from her own capacity and achievement and riches. That is at present only a possibility; let us see whether we can make it an achieved and perfect symbol.

NexUS readers may live far away from each other, but in "Salon" we can gather to discuss a variety of topics in relation to Integral Yoga and the spiritual endeavor. Topics are broad to allow for a wide range of interpretations. Next issue's topic will be "A choice," for which the deadline is July 15, 1994. Please aim for 500 words.

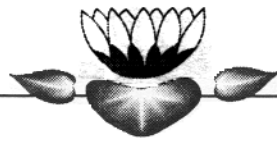
Readers discuss "Yoga in America"

The light of the world

America is the light of the world. Surprisingly, not India, which is all monsoons and memory—the earthy moistness of the World-soul. Or perhaps India is really the world's heart, though I often hear the beating in the drums of Africa, or naked feet stepping rhythmically in walkabout over the red Australian deserts. But America is something other, something as splendid as the sun. And something as dangerous as a star exploding into a supernova. The brilliance of this mad, marvelous, doomed civilization dazzles me, sears my soul. The light. Sometimes it has been the dark light of slavery or the muzzle-flash of the slaughter of the Indians. Too often it is the mind-dulling glow of our color TV sets or corporate offices or computers. We have prayed, all of us, that it won't be the final, nuclear light of hydrogen bombs bursting in air. But I have beheld the flames of rockets blasting their way to the moon, and once, on the snowy shore of Wonderland Lake above the city where I live, beneath the blue winter sky, I have been struck by lightning and blinded by wild joy and utterly melted away into and interfused with a deeper, purer, more universal light—or however it is that we wish to talk about these things.

Now, here, I choose light. It is everywhere. All of reality blazes with light. The rocks, the trees, the eyes of a child, even the dirt on the tires of our gas-burning trucks and cars—everything shimmers and shines. Everything is *enlightened*. Everything tells us that this is so. Quantum mechanics tell us that there is a oneness to all things, that two photons at opposite ends of the universe in some way will share an interconnectedness with each other, superluminally, instantaneously. Our physicists have broken matter down to atoms, protons, and charming, colorful quarks that no one will ever really observe; it seems that there is no final bit of matter, so what finally underlies the fields and the forests, the frozen lakes and all the rest of the material world that we see on a bright, winter day? Some call it—It—an implicate order of mindstuff or God. It is suchness or Self or *sat*, pure being. I call it light, not the incandescence that pours from a hundred-watt bulb, but a finer light, a more metaphorical and mystical light.

There is a Japanese word from Zen Buddhism, *honsho*, which means original enlightenment. Everything is enlightened at its



origin, at the ground of its being, in its deepest self. And there, where all is brilliance and splendor, at the lightning bolt's marvelous source, there is nothing but *chit*, the undifferentiated consciousness of the universe. Consciousness and being, *chit* and *sat*, there is no real separation. Sri Aurobindo has written: "All is *chit* because all is *sat*; all is various movement of the original consciousness because all is various movement of the original Being." *Sat*, light; *chit*, light; *satchidananda*, the joyous light of realizing this in becoming who we really are. This is the movement godward that our spiritual teachers have been telling us about for ten thousand years. But how to move? Where? Everywhere. And in every and any way both necessary and possible. Sri Aurobindo has also written, "The principle of Yoga is the turning of one or all powers of our human existence into a means of reaching the divine Being."

Here, in America, we've been reaching for a long time. It began with the Pilgrims and the Puritans. (Though in this beautiful land out of which America was forged, the Native Americans had longer arms than we, and they reached for the sun. They haunt our memory, but they call us dreaming to the future, too. We see them dancing on the prairies, feet firmly connected to the earth while their hands are outstretched to the sky, touching the divine.) It continued with the Shakers, Quakers, Transcendentalists, even Christian Scientists. Out of the Burned-over District in western New York, there emerged the Mormons and Perfectionists and others who burned for God. All this artless enthusiasm and lights that blazed too quickly, like bonfires. All this movement and energy. And all this in the spiritual infancy of America.

But now we are no longer innocents, not we. Here, now, in my city alone, there are Zen practice centers, Buddhists temples, the Arica School, the Church of Gaia, and the Creative Light Center. There is the Johrei Fellowship, and Sufi mystics, and the Free Daist Communion. There is the Eldorado Mountain Yoga Ashram and Siddha Meditation Center and much, much more. This is the great East-West synthesis. The mystics of the East meet the new spiritual pioneers.

What happens when the insights of yoga unite with the vast American energy and a forward-looking people? An explosion of consciousness happens. This is the true power of America. This is our purpose. Evolution—we sense it happening here, accelerating here like a comet falling into the sun. The true American Dream has always been to create something new, something that has never existed before on this world. And above all things, we create ourselves. This is what matter or mindstuff does, to organize itself, to create. This is the cosmic dance, the movement of the original Being into new forms that express the original consciousness in ever new ways. This is consciousness itself moving Being into new beings of potentially infinite consciousness, on and on without limit. How do I, myself, move? How do I will myself to move? As I move myself, so I move within the dance of the universe. As my self—or Self—moves, so I move the universe.

I have been struck by lightning and blinded by wild joy and utterly melted away into and interfused with a deeper, purer, more universal light.

Yoga is this eternal movement into the Self. This is life, evolution, the explosion into infinite possibilities. The light only burns brighter and brighter.

I have said that this civilization of ours, this brilliant America, is doomed. All things are. We rush to our fate like moths into a flame. But dying, we live. Out of the ashes, the phoenix is reborn. If we would shine brightly, we must endure burning. America shines. Of course, everything, everywhere shimmers with light, but America is *the* light of the world. What kind of light? A beacon, a star in the night. Nothing more, nothing less. It calls us into the future, into our quickening. The eyes of the world turn our way, watching, waiting, always hoping, always wondering when the starchild will be born.

—David Zindell, Boulder, CO

David Zindell writes science fiction. His two recent books, Neverness and The Broken God, deal with spiritual, religious, and evolutionary themes and are available in paperback from Bantam Books.

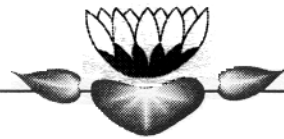
Comparing spiritual life in the Americas

I have been involved in the spiritual journey since 1978 when I met Rolf Gelewski, the founder of Casa de Sri Aurobindo in Brazil, a spiritual community under the direct guidance of the Mother. Rolf was a spiritual dancer, teacher, and writer, and represented the greatest expression of Integral Yoga I have seen.

In the beginning, there was a community of 15 young people under his spiritual direction. There we lived a monastic life of discipline based upon transformation of the being. Starting with the physical, we went for daily conscious exercises and spiritual dance. Working with the vital, we tried to be impersonal in our relationships, with a consequent refinement of emotions. The mental faculties (organizing, making decisions) that form, with the physical and the vital, our complete instrument, were tuned daily, to allow the psychic—our essential being—to materialize a divine life on earth, which was Sri Aurobindo's purpose.

Working hard with concentration and silence, we tried to form centers of conscious energy that would express through arts, music, and creative movement—as part of our daily affairs, bringing that concentrating energy to focus the will.

The results were fantastic, promoting always an expansion of being, destroying limiting patterns, and bringing the vastness that



is the essence of Aurobindo's teaching. Always I remember him saying: "I am not a *jnani*, I am not a *bhakta*, I am not a worker. I am a flute played by the divine shepherd." This vision of totality motivated us to go further in self-realization, expanding in consciousness, knowledge, and love.

When I came to the U.S.A. five years ago, I was surprised to see the enormous influence of Christianity here. It retains traditional dogmas and empty rituals, thereby limiting the vision of spirituality. How incredible for the country that leads the world! But at the same time, this openness for the new, this welcome for people from all over, this reception of immigrants, makes all the difference in the spiritual arena.

No wonder all the spiritual teachers of the East are here now. We live in a time of contrasts: we talk about enlightenment, instantaneous realization, all the New Age stuff—sometimes too rosy and too easy—but at least it ameliorates the constant "becoming" that is dividing the worlds and bringing about the suffering of our time.

I like to be here. I see this as a place for spiritual realization. We have already realized ourselves materially; we can achieve a good and easy life with our material needs supplied. Now we are looking for that full realization in all levels of our being.

As Sri Aurobindo said, the advantage of democracy is liberty, the security of the life, and the individual's good against the power of one selfish dictator or minority. Its problem is the decline of greatness into mediocrity.

—Niede D'Aquino, Boulder, CO

Niede D'Aquino was a lawyer in Brazil, where she wrote for newspapers and magazines and authored a book called You Are Music for the Casa de Sri Aurobindo. She works with children as a music teacher and music therapist.

A new dimension:

Some stream-of-Consciousness remarks

The following comments were transcribed from a phone interview.

There's a new dimension here. The integral consciousness is so completely different—it's as if a valve were flipped and it just come pouring in, as if everything up to that moment was just an approximation. It's an indescribable fill-up of our whole being. And no matter what the experience, there is such a stillness . . . surrounded by Power, by Truth. The Truth is still, but moving.

Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*, "I cherish God the fire, not God the dream." Being fire is lots of fun. That's our true nature: our nature is fire. Not fire in the material sense, but conscious fire, the fire of the sun descending, the descent of the Supramental, Agni.

The supramental consciousness is the hinge between the

*The Supermind is a luminous edge to God,
the edge of God's face.*

manifest and the unmanifest, the translator of timelessness and spacelessness and infinity using time space as the medium. It is the point that can translate what is unknowable and unimaginable into what is known, what can't be measured into what can be. The Supermind is a luminous edge to God, the edge of God's face. Everything it touches becomes that Truth, which can create for its next reality or manifestation or moment a betterment, an enlargement.

All we have to do to enter that dimension is perfect who we are by becoming who we are not. That occurs by giving it all to who we become; and who we become is the Mother.

What sadhana is, is a private wonderworld: absolute stillness in a one-on-one audience with Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Everything is such a joy in the world of sadhana. Everything is so responsive, it speaks to you, in a learning experience. Life becomes so different it doesn't need to be discussed . . . like all the faces you see in the Ashram, bursting with the joy of Mother's Truth.

—Name withheld

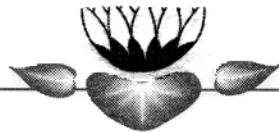
Ideals, reality, and learning to fly

On my fifth birthday my parents gave me a Superman outfit. Though I recall being thrilled, I most remember the admonition on the garment tag: "Warning! This uniform will not allow you to fly."

On my walk today, 33 years later, I passed by a mother and her daughters. One of the little girls, who couldn't have been five, presented a bundle in her arms and said, "I've got a bunny . . ." As I was remarking how nice, she hastened to add, "She's not a *real* bunny!"

America has a fascination with the Real and the Ideal. But like the recent Florida school board ruling that pupils will be taught the American way is "superior to other foreign or historic cultures," we mistake our ideals for the reality. This error can be partly attributed to the extended amount of time Americans spend living in front of the tube and silver screen. Hollywood and the rest of the entertainment industry is our way of convincing ourselves that reality is our idea about reality.

I can hear the reader smugly thinking that this may be true of those clueless slobes across the street but certainly not of their own yogic eminence. But it is subtle. The "programming" starts early, and though we soon discover there is no Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, or Superman, other beliefs remain intact. So, like the little girl with the stuffed bunny, the garment tag *seems* to be leveling



with us about the unreality of Superman. But wait! The tag reads in full: "Warning! This uniform will not allow you to fly. ONLY SUPERMAN CAN FLY!" Aagghh! What other culture would even think of saying that on a garment tag?

Perhaps the greatest obstacle for Americans on the path of yoga is this: As long as we think that believing in our ideals and dramatizing the struggle to achieve them through great media works is enough to bring lasting personal or societal transformation, then we're still believing in Superman. These things can inspire, they can motivate, but the real work of learning to fly—a thankless, seemingly endless, microscopic ordeal invisible to the hero's fans—remains undone.

Are we, to pursue the metaphor, looking to Superman's cape as the solution to flying? Can external conditions ever be the key to our salvation? More money, the right relationship, a new president, more efficient energy sources, better schools . . . More than any other country we trust in progress to solve our biggest problems. We are too distracted by the glitter, buzzed by the caffeine, busy working and driving at high velocities, and dazzled by the complexity to question the wisdom of relying on the cape to allow us to fly.

There is a bright side: the opportunity this affords is great. If an individual can find a way to fly without a cape, amidst all the cape vendors, and in spite of overwhelming propaganda to the contrary, something truly unique and powerful will have been achieved; being dependent on a supportive milieu to practice yoga is as serious a crutch as needing any other external circumstance. After all, I happen to know, Superman can fly WITHOUT A CAPE!

—Stuart Garry, Boulder, CO

Stuart Garry plays the harp and composes music using MIDI technology. He is working on his master's degree in educational technology and is currently a graduate instructor at the University of Northern Colorado.

The worst place on earth

The following comments were transcribed from a phone interview.

The situation in the States is always upheaval, chaos, stress. I think it's the worst place on earth! [laughs] Life there is struggle. Nobody seems to like each other, they're always competing—it's the opposite of the life divine.

There's no inner life, everything pulls you out. The quiet, the balance is always being broken. There's always a fear because your material existence isn't secure, you're always at risk. There are too many material things to take care of, to absorb your energies and drive you nuts. Life isn't simple enough—but since you don't have the choice, you run into trouble all the time.



Georges Dandrimont

At its origin the spirit of America is a search for freedom, and probably, at the end, the joy of living—but it doesn't seem to work that way. The efforts are being ruined because of greed and pressure, appropriation of the results.

If you really want to do the yoga, you should live in some community, protect yourself from the outer world as best you can. Don't live in the ordinary life without protection, or you won't have a chance. It's just too risky. Before you can take advantage of

the freedom in America, the independence for each individual, you have to build some kind of group where you support each other—otherwise it's in vain, you can't do anything.

The beauty of the land is a help, and that feeling of vastness. When you have a vastness, you have to be strong to occupy the place with your consciousness. That means stature. You need power in the same proportion to occupy the space and bring life into it. When you are in good health and have all your strength you can enjoy it, you can breathe deeply. But if you get sick, it's better to be in a small place, like a nest, to recover.

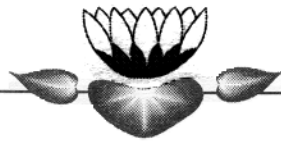
The energy of the country is strong—but if you don't use it properly, it may simply kill you. It's like a blade with two sharp edges: double-edged. Everything depends on the purity of your mind and your being. If you mix with the lower-vital stuff that's so prevalent there, it becomes sordid. If you get too close to it, if you're not being clear, if you have some answering vibration within yourself, that's going to disturb your vision. Then you won't have spiritual experience, it gets darker and darker, you self-destruct. It's a matter of purifying the being. If there's too much impurity inside you, the temptation will be too great not to succumb.

The basic mode of North America is action. But the divine dynamism is realizable only if there is a certain degree of purification in the being. As long as you still have to clean up your being, it won't work, it will be too murky.

The U.S. is a good place for material realization. It's not much of a place for meditation. If you really need the spiritual experience, go to the Himalayas.

—Georges Dandrimont, Reims, France

Georges Dandrimont, a native of France, visited Auroville several times. He lived in the U.S. for nearly ten years, spending time at Matagiri and working in Colorado, Wyoming, and Massachusetts.



Human, Spirit . . . computer

There is more information available today to the common man/woman than in any other time in history; you've probably heard that before. But does this information create healthy food for thought and opportunities for development, or does it present an overwhelming array of choices that add to stress and confusion? Yes, I'd say so—I mean the potential for *both* is there.

With commercialism force-feeding us daily with useless data, and the ethics of greed causing us generally to mistrust much of what we hear, I'm not surprised to see many of my friends lose interest in tracking down spiritual options available to us today. The way I look at it, I pay a high price for living in the city at a pace that challenges my peace of mind—but unlike many who would like to turn back the hands of time, I believe there are unique opportunities for spiritual development right here and now.

One of the most exciting advances in information technology for me is the interfacing of biofeedback equipment with computers, which allows me to "track" my daily meditation. I have been practicing meditation for fifteen years now, yet I feel I have only begun to tap my potential for growth. For me, all the gains made through experience involve some form of "biofeedback"—that is, the endless trial and errors of life. However, exploring the inner realms via meditation is at times like navigating a vast, uncharted sea. The subjective cues are so subtle and unfamiliar that advancement seems to demand concentration and a commitment of time that is often at odds with a modern lifestyle. By recording EEG brain-wave states, I am able to actually watch my progress over time, and these inner cues start to take on tremendous significance.

Interestingly, the clinical studies conducted on yogis and other accomplished meditators show striking similarities in a brain-wave condition termed "the fifth state" (used by Maxwell Cade, an early pioneer in biofeedback). As this state is developed, a subject's electrical patterns in both hemispheres of the brain begin to synchronize and produce an unusually high amplitude of alpha and theta brain waves. Often these meditators are able to demonstrate advanced control over their internal states and autonomic nervous system as well.

To develop this degree of faculty in meditation once took decades of tutelage under a master. When meditation techniques developed, society did not have the frenzied pace and stressful lifestyle we have today; seekers had more time to spend in their practice. I often meet people who feel they would be more spiritual if they could live up in the mountains and meditate for hours each day.

But one thing about Sri Aurobindo's yoga is that you do not shun the world, you bring your practice into daily life. You work within that framework and develop in your own way. So while life in America is a series of distractions playing on our desire to be mentally occupied, and technology is often seen as negative, if



Hanne Strong, Trudi King, and John Powell at the Baca

you separate the static of commercialism from the new possibilities, you may find some amazing things to take advantage of.

Athletes training for the Olympic routinely hook themselves up to computer monitors and work in wind tunnels to learn how different moves affect their performance. They see, for instance, that if they navigate a turn and keep their head down 10 more degrees, their aerodynamic resistance falls by 20 percent.

Similar benefits accrue when you combine computer biofeedback with the centuries-old practice of meditation: the feedback allows you to learn much faster. I believe you can make progress in two years that in the old traditions might have taken ten.

I think people should not be afraid to take a look at the variety of new spiritual opportunities now available. You may have to do some research to find what might be pertinent to your own development, but the opportunities are there.

—John Powell, Menlo Park, CA

John Powell is a facilities administrator for the YMCA. In 1988–89 he spent six months in Baca Grande with Trudi King, a long-time former resident of the Los Angeles East West Cultural Center.

Musings on the land of the free and the home of the brave: We've got Them outnumbered

As one who never met Mother in person, I have felt that missed opportunity loom over my path the past 24 years. Instead I arrived one year afterwards, called to the deathwatch of my own mother. She died on her father's birthday in June. Mother died on Findhorn's birthday in November. Ramakrishna died on Sri Aurobindo's birthday. So?

Sew. The monkey mind links events, "not mere coincidence,"¹ into the web, the play . . . "an eternal Child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden."²



The thought for the day is the Matrimandir Crystal. I've always comforted myself with the thought that even if other life goals are not achieved, I had some small role in moving that process forward. That Crystal is the legacy of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, the turning point, the center of the center of the city.

But that comfort is a false premise. And even the premise is false. Are we not interested in who is living in the city and how they manifest the ideal?

And it is the effort to change how I think; live my life. Yes, there is a goal in the Yoga: transformation. But the path is not goal oriented. It is being mindful, not just in the Zen way of being aware of what one is doing from moment to moment, but there is the aspiration, the offering, the living gratitude: "that we may never forget even for a moment . . ."

Another false premise is that somehow the real work is being done there in India. We limit Sri Aurobindo and Mother to particular bodies at a particular place. John Kelly saw them on the battlefield during World War II, where they directed him to safety on a number of occasions.³ That is not a limiting experience.

It is one of the great blessings of the AUM gatherings that somehow a moment comes when the "atmosphere" is so "thick" with them. Even those who had their Darshan and sat at the samadhi realize that the presence is not limited to a courtyard in Pondicherry or a marble room in Auroville.

So what are they doing here? How is it that we are so successful at limiting them? If these people are God-realized Divine beings, how is it we can get so close to them and resist? A good rule of thumb for me during my seeking years and general gossiping and guru-watching is that the ones closest to the guru need the most work. And there's lots more of us than there are of them. We've got Them outnumbered. It's not just that we're a bit dull and hypocritical. We've got company.

The reverse anecdote is Ramakrishna approaching Vivekananda in the subtle realms calling him to the spiritual work to be done on Earth. Vivekananda is at the edge of the Infinite Oneness, in deep meditation, unresponsive. Ramakrishna manifests as the divine child, beguiling and playful, crawling into Vivekananda's lap and charming him into consciousness, luring him into the descent into the relative planes.

And then the Divine on earth uses our appetites, our ego, our desire for the ultimate fame and recognition, to be in with the ultimate "in crowd," God's own inner circle, as a lure to put us to work, to get growing.

The Divine is busy as hell. So you know why they need those extra arms and heads and multiple manifestations. Working both ends towards the middle, to get this evolution leaping. It's the ultimate conscription/seduction. "The world is preparing for a big change, will you help?"⁴

1. On Sri Aurobindo's 75th birthday, he wrote the following: "August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we

can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began my life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hope to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at their fruition or on their way to achievement."

2. Sri Aurobindo
3. As recounted in Maggi Lidchi's *Great Sir and the Heaven Lady*
4. Mother's New Year Message of 1970

—Julian Lines, Woodstock, NY

Julian Lines manages the Auroville Information Office and "Pondicherry," a gift shop that sells Ashram and Auroville products, in Woodstock, NY. He is one of the coordinators of this year's All USA Meeting.

Work! Karma! Action!

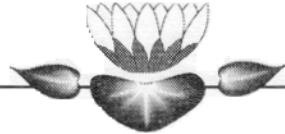
In my thinking about the nature of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I came to the realization that if one asked 100 people their opinion as to what this yoga means, one would possibly get 100 different answers. That is the beauty of this spirituality. It is personal to the sadhak, for there are no limitations, rules, or regulations, no dogma, ritual, or creed; there is virtually no fixed and required path.

The usual meditation of sitting in the lotus position may be the way for many sadhaks, but it was not necessarily the way for Muriel and me. We took the view that this is a karma yoga, a yoga of work. To embrace this broad concept of yoga, one should perform even tasks such as scrubbing the floor with a sense of consciousness and perfection. The pragmatic work to which we dedicated ourselves, from 1968 to the time Muriel passed away (October 1993) was the materialization of Mother's dream: Auroville.

And so Muriel and I set out to do our little part—helping Auroville survive the early years of deprivation—by work, by action (selling Auroville products, giving slide presentations at colleges and universities across the U.S., publishing and distributing *Auroville Voice* so that those interested would get a feel

Each man on this path has his own method of Yoga.

—Sri Aurobindo, *Gems from Sri Aurobindo*



of what was going on in Auroville). We did this with joy in our dealings with people, for in the very essence of the act we were the representatives in this country of that dream. Thus, the inner person was also fulfilled, and we transformed our work into our meditation.

—Joseph Spanier, Boulder, CO

Joseph Spanier wrote the legal brief that resulted in Auroville being recognized by the Indian Government as an International Trust.

“The giant of the future . . .”

Yoga in America? Without a shadow of a doubt, yoga is flourishing here today! Many of us are having classical yogic experiences in the midst of our busy, everyday lives. The Divine is giving us a tremendous opportunity to make spiritual progress at this very moment.

For this reason, it is important that we remember and honor our spiritual roots. Many Divine Personalities have given their lives in service so that we can practice yoga more easily today. They have done the groundwork and paved the way. When Swami Vivekananda came to America over a century ago and “shook the world,” he saw America as a land of unlimited opportunity, where people’s minds were free from the encumbrance of castes and classes. He saw an America full of optimism, wealth, and generosity. Idyllic as this may sound, he was seeing with a Divine Eye! He understood that America could receive the ancient wisdom of India.

Later on, Sri Aurobindo would write in the *Karmayogin*, “. . . the main flood of the new thought and knowledge has been diverted to America, the giant of the future, which alone of the nations has shown an active and practical sympathy and understanding of our nation.” In this way, Sri Aurobindo was already hinting at our spiritual role.

To walk the yogic path is a great blessing, and we must do so with love, discrimination, and right understanding. In doing so, we will be prepared by the Divine to fulfill our spiritual role as a nation.

And above all, yoga belongs to no country in particular; it is the Divine’s gift to humanity.

—Lisa Rachlin, West Palm Beach, FL

Lisa Rachlin spent six years at the Gurudev Siddha Peeth in Ganeshpuri, India, and has visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. She is interested in Vedic astrology and is a certified hatha yoga instructor.

* * *

The idea for this department came from a literary/spiritual magazine called The Sun. Subscriptions are \$32 a year from The Sun, 412 West Rosemary Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

As for those who can live in the true Divine Consciousness, certain powers are not “powers” at all in that sense, not, that is to say, supernatural or abnormal, but rather their normal way of seeing and acting, part of the consciousness—and how can they be forbidden, or refuse to act according to their consciousness and its nature?

—Sri Aurobindo in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy,
Pilgrims of the Stars, p. 299

I might say a word about Sri Ramakrishna’s attitude with regard to the body. He seems to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilize it for taking care of the body or curing its ailments. Other yogis—I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop yogic *siddhis* [powers]—have not had this complete disregard of the body: they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga. I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others. . . .

I put a value on the body first as an instrument of *dharma*sadhana, or, more fully, as a center of manifested personality in action, a basis of spiritual life and activity as of all life and activity upon earth, but also because, for me, the body as well as the mind and life is a part of the Divine Whole, a form of the Spirit and therefore not to be disregarded or despised as something incurable, gross and incapable of spiritual realization or of spiritual use. Matter itself is secretly a form of the Spirit, and has to reveal itself as that, can be made to wake to consciousness and evolve and realize the Spirit, the Divine within it. In my view the body as well as the mind and life has to be spiritualised or, one may say, divinised, so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realization of the Divine. It has its part in the Divine *lila*, even, according to the Vaishnava sadhana, in the joy and beauty of Divine Love.

That does not mean that the body has to be valued for its own separate sake or that the creation of a divine body in a future evolution of the whole being has to be contemplated as an end and not as a means—that would be a serious error, which would not be admissible.

—Sri Aurobindo in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy,
Pilgrims of the Stars, pp. 298–299



THE POETRY ROOM

from **The Meditations of Mandavya**

Lo, I have cursed Thee, lo, I have denied
Thy love, Thy being. Strike me with Thy rod,
Convince me that Thou art. O leave it not
To Thy dumb messengers that have no heart,
No wrath in the attack, no angered love,
No exultation in the blow that falls,
The cry that answers. Let me feel a Heart,
Even though an evil one, that throbs and is
Against our tears, our pressure and our search.
Beware, for I will send my soul across the earth
And all men turn against Thee at my word.
There is no sign, there comes not any voice.
And yet, alas! I know He will return
And He will soothe my wounds and charm my heart;
I shall again forgive, again shall love,
Again shall suffer, be again deceived.
And where is any end, O Heaven, O Earth?
But there is never any end when one has loved.

—Sri Aurobindo

from **The Divine Comedy,
Paradiso, Canto I**

The glory of the One who moves all things
permeates the universe and glows
in one part more and in another less.

I was within the heaven that receives
more of His light; and I saw things that he
who from that height descends, forgets or can
not speak; for nearing its desired end,
our intellect sinks into an abyss
so deep that memory fails to follow it.

Nevertheless, as much as I, within
my mind, could treasure of the holy kingdom
shall now become the matter of my song.

—Dante Alighieri
(trans. by Allen Mandelbaum)

Mother Almighty,
I have finished all my tea.

—Note to the Mother from Dara, an
Ashram poet, when he ran out of tea

from **Lines composed a few miles
above Tintern Abbey . . .**

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

—William Wordsworth

from **Ash Wednesday**

Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jeweled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.

—T.S. Eliot

Stay with me, God. The night is dark,
The night is cold: my little spark
Of courage dies. The night is long;
Be with me, God, and make me strong.

—Poem found on a scrap of paper
in a Tunisian trench during the
battle of El Agheila, WWII

Yoga

I asked her, "Why stand on your head?"
"To raise my consciousness," she said.
So tell me, where's the psychic seat—
In the head or in the feet?

—G. Lester



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Cellular transformation odyssey

by Wayne Bloomquist

O my man, you do not know how to till!
If you knew! Oh, you have such a piece of land—
This human life of yours!
You could have reaped gold from it.

—Ramprasad

In the early part of this century, Sri Aurobindo began writing about physical transformation upon earth, i.e. bodily/cellular transformation and the ultimate conquest of death. Many of us have been reading his and the Mother's discourses on this subject for many years now. Some have been praying to be part of this grand experiment. What happens, however, when it is time to "put up or shut up"? Many believed the physical transformation was years, perhaps hundreds of years away. It wasn't as though one could step right in and continue the Mother's work of transformation.

Evolution II was published late in 1992 and Satprem stated he was doing the transformation. This is quite startling, and I was thrilled to read the first published account of someone other than the Mother who was more like one of us. A senior disciple of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram reported that Satprem was carrying on the Mother's work of the physical transformation.

Evolution II caused quite a stir at first, but now the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA) receives few requests for it. Perhaps one of the problems is there is no method, no way to do the transformation. *Evolution II* is too Castaneda-like, where there seems to be something real about the process and yet an extreme vagueness. Don Juan's leap between the two worlds becomes the ultimate puzzle.

And yet Sri Aurobindo never showed us the way. He indicated but never said you do this, and this, etc. It had yet to be worked out on the physical plane. The Mother, on the other hand, plunged in and the *Agenda* is replete with her experiences. But some said she failed. In January 1992 at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a disciple sought me out for some inexplicable reason and told me, "The Mother held up her arm to show me. It was glowing with what appeared to be supramental consciousness-force, and she declared, 'I have done it but they don't know it!'"

After all the volumes written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we are left with the simple formula: Aspiration-Rejection-Surrender for the process of Integral Yoga. It is only now that we can begin to appreciate this—that the transformative process has to be open ended. One can only aspire by concentrating on the Divine in the heart region, reject the ego and desires, and surren-

der or offer one's being to the Divine Mother, preceded by a process of purification. While appearing naively simple at first glance, the process creates the most profound relationship with the Divine—individual, cosmic, and transcendent. The process leads one to a most intimate and loving relationship to all one is.

Is there then no other process that gives us more detailed guidelines? Shortly after *Evolution II* appeared, many people could relate to some part of the process described by Satprem. There was something there that resonated with people. After all, it has been 44 years since Sri Aurobindo's passing and 21 years since the Mother left her body. Isn't it possible that something has emerged to give us a new direction? What about the power of the collective?

A wave of Force

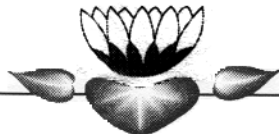
Last September at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, a small group of devotees met one evening at our ersatz meditation corner in Ariel Browne's room at the Palmer House Hilton. Luc Venet announced he had the idea to create an organization for the transformation called ALER (American Laboratory for Evolutionary Research). This seems innocent enough, but when he announced it and passed around the sheet of paper that ALER was written on, a wave of Force descended upon us that was incredible. Even writing about it now brings tears to my eyes. The Force was felt by all.

As a result of this simple little meeting, we decided to meet in Baca (Crestone, Colorado) in October to initiate the grand experiment. About 25 or so attended, where we met in what is called by Seyril "Savitri Solar Dome." That Saturday in October in Baca was quite phenomenal. Many there related extraordinary visions and experiences. We were in another zone. But all was not sweetness and light. There was also an undercurrent of anxiety and fear. What was this we were doing? Do we have to take the leap now?

A workshop in San Francisco

In spite of the auspicious beginning for many of us, we have not met again as a group. Last March, Ariel Browne and William Moss met in Berkeley for the SAA board meeting. Ariel indicated an interest to meet a healer in San Francisco named Rev. Joseph Martinez. I had never met him, but I was especially interested because SAA sells a lot of books to his Spiritual Healing Center and I was intrigued by one of his workshops, "Resurrection of the Body." Rev. Martinez graciously consented to visit with us on very short notice, and we were all impressed with his sincerity and humility.

A week later, I was able to attend this workshop, which Rev. Martinez has ingeniously divided into a five-session over two days. A few of the processes discussed are:



- Meditation connecting with supramental consciousness
- Use of divine light frequency—to activate cellular center
- Use of supramental unity vibration to unify and establish oneness
- Supramental meditation: divine descending force
- Creation of the divine communication centers containing blueprint of immortality for cellular programming
- Use of supramental force to balance energy systems
- Creation of supramental double to superimpose on the physical for transformation and merger
- Symbolic supramental breathing vibration
- Use of supramental elements of fire to cleanse emotions
- Creating supramental absorption force
- Use of supramental double stationed in vertical time to turn back time to reverse the aging process

This is quite an astounding program in content, comprehensiveness, and ingenuity. But how does it work? In the workshop, Rev. Martinez discusses and explains each aspect. At the end of each session, the group meditates and the process is “installed” or fixed in each participant by the supramental guides.

Does it work? There is definitely a shift in consciousness during the meditation. And I can still feel some of the process working. Rev. Martinez advises this is a lifetime’s work and we need to be quiet each day to allow the process to continue. A thought will invoke the process. Time will tell if it is actually the supramental consciousness that is operative.

Experiences in cellular transformation

There may well be other individuals and/or groups that are immersed in cellular transformation. Dr. Ariel Browne works with her clients and trainees on physical transformation in Atlanta. We need to hear from others. It seems that bringing this to a conscious awareness hastens the process.

Satprem has reported to have personally made significant and revolutionary strides in the process, but he is inaccessible and indicated it is for each of us to find the way. Interestingly enough, he does not talk about doubles and their manifestation as does Rev. Martinez. The Mother stated that our psychic being and its formation could provide us with the double of our new being as well as the continuity toward the new species. “But the psychic being, that is what will become matter and become the supramental being.” (*Agenda*, July 1, 1970.)

Rev. Martinez has an astonishingly simple and possibly effective system for such a herculean task. Its effectiveness, however, will depend in part upon how well one lays the groundwork in the Integral Yoga: purification, aspiration, rejection and surrender, infused with faith and practiced with perseverance.

I believe the collective can be effective in this sadhana if the group is kept small and the participants are committed. I would be

delighted to hear from all of those who would relate their experiences in the cellular transformation or who know of others attempting it. People are having illnesses that do not fit the medical model; something is different. Some are feeling suffocated. Others are feeling strong pressure or force acting on them. Visions and experiences relating to the “gold” are occurring with increasing frequency. We can begin a *body of evidence*. Please write or fax the SAA office in Berkeley (fax: 510-848-8531). Please specify if you will allow your material to be published in *NexUS*.

Wayne Bloomquist is secretary of and coordinates book distribution for the SAA. He lives in Berkeley, CA.

Excerpts from the collected letters of Muriel Spanier

Muriel Spanier was one of the early residents of Matagiri in Mt. Tremper, New York, where she lived and worked for several years. Muriel wrote many letters during her life that influenced people and changed lives. When she wrote a letter, she would copy it into a spiral notebook by hand—often at 2:30 in the morning. These letters filled three notebooks; her husband Joe Spanier has shared with us the following excerpts.

At 10 A.M. on July 3, 1994, a memorial will be held for Muriel at Matagiri as part of the All USA Meeting (AUM). Muriel’s ashes will be placed beneath a beautiful magnolia tree, and the excerpts below will be read. Those who loved Muriel and cannot attend the ceremony are invited participate in silent meditation.

April 26, 1971

Thoughts from a letter to Joe

So much living is packed into one day here—so many outer happenings, so many projects talked about, started, finished, so many inner awarenesses arrived at, so many outer falsehoods cast off—each day is being born again, each hour is a matter of fact. How wonderful to be alive and awake and filled with joy and purpose, to find in each moment, whether the so-called “good” or “bad,” the means to free oneself from all the excess luggage, the garbage of personality and ego which has grown up around one through the years . . .

The strange thing is that when one is conscious or “awake” as Gurdjieff used to say, one becomes centered in oneself, detached from the outside forces which are destructive, one is able to be the truth of oneself functioning from the base of one’s true being, in touch with the source of all of life, the all-existent energy force, the creative force.

It is this force which the Mother symbolizes, possesses, manifests, is, whatever, and when we speak of surrender to the



Divine, it is to this force that we must surrender because it is here that Truth lies. We are actually surrendering to the truth within ourselves, to a self which knows, which has always known. All unhappiness comes from not living and acting from that truth. What better thing can one do with one's life than devote it to finding the truth of one's being and manifesting it. That is what we are trying to do at Matagiri.

January 1972

On awakening from a dream

We are all one. We love those individuals who invoke that feeling of oneness, of union in us, with whom we really feel united on an inner level because they liberate our highest selves.

When all becomes one in this way, then there will be heaven on earth and all sorrow, all pain, all war, all ignorance will be gone forever.



Muriel Spanier

January 30, 1972

From a letter to a friend

This is a wonderful time of great awakening and new awarenesses. Many teachings, many new ways of being, many openings. Sri Aurobindo's great value is as a teacher of synthesis. He expands one's thinking and takes one as far as it is possible for the human mind to go, he exposes the infinite possibilities of all that ever was, that is, and then synthesizes all. He brings a wonderful message of hope. He brings together the individual and the cosmos. He brings together man's two aspirations—his spiritual (let's call it inner) searchings and his need to create a better world for all, a one world. Neither the traditional religions nor radical politics have been able to achieve even one of these goals. Now we are beginning to realize that one cannot exist without the other. Man must change himself before the world can change. But while this is going on there must be a greater and greater synthesis between the two. The city of Auroville is such an experiment.

August 8, 1974

From a letter to a prisoner

The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother makes great demands on us. Even if an instant and complete change of consciousness occurs we must still manifest this in all aspects of our outer being, we must still deal with and live in the material world. And all the problems of the material world are still ours to handle. It is our way of handling all this which must change.

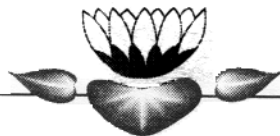
ESSAYS

From every nerve: Shakti in the sapta chatustaya

by David Hutchinson

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo sketches an outline of this integral yoga into seven parts, the *sapta chatustaya*. Many of us lose the drift of this path between the first part, equanimity, and the third, the mysterious Supermind. Perhaps the solution to understanding the process lies in the intervening step, which Sri Aurobindo labels "Shakti." Sri Aurobindo details this step in chapters 14–18 of Book IV of *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

The fundamental goal of this part of the sadhana is "to raise all the active parts of the human nature to that highest condition and working pitch of their power and capacity, *sakti* . . ." We must perfect our active parts because the instrument of the Divine is the formed person, the individual. It is necessary therefore to have a nature as clear and strong and responsive as possible, so that it can



support and manifest the Divine Shakti. The ultimate purpose of this stage of the Yoga of Perfection is to be able to support the highest power of the spirit, the Shakti; to have "a rapid and divine capacity for all kinds of action that may be demanded from the instrument, oneness, a participating sympathy, a free identity, with all energies in all beings and therefore a spontaneous and fruitful harmony with all the divine will in the universe."²

In psychological terms the practice of "right Shakti" is a matter of letting ourselves be moved and guided by the highest and purest consciousness we are capable of. This is easier to understand if we look at its opposite. Think of talking with a group of friends, and getting pulled into trivial or mean-spirited gossip. Or allowing the fast pace of work to create a nervous, frazzled state. We lose whatever stance we may have gained in quieter moments, and the part of ourselves that is in the front, the energy of our consciousness that is guiding our actions, is lower than we are capable of in better moments.

We are open to the world despite our best intentions: a multitude of energies, thoughts, emotions are constantly pouring into us above and beneath the level of awareness, and we respond according to the makeup of the individual nature, the strength and purity of the inner being, the familiar track of formed habits.

In general we must straighten out the misguided movements of the body, desire-soul, heart, and mind. The body must be responsive to the higher members, which at first means to the mind. We see a high pitch of this response in hypnosis, where the force of the mind can control bleeding or prevent a flame from burning the skin. The body must be taught a "passivity in the hands of the higher instruments."³ This principle is basic to the whole Yoga: at each stage, one opens to a higher or deeper consciousness. This openness in the body should lead to the "power to hold whatever force is brought into it by the spirit and to contain its action without spilling and wasting it . . ."⁴

What does he mean, to waste or spill the force that comes into oneself? Some events give us a surge of energy—perhaps the prospect of a new friend or a new book, a vacation after long months of work, or the clear calm energy that comes down in meditation. If we slip into a frantic pace, run around town all day, talk with everyone we meet—we have wasted the force, and may wake up listless and depressed the next day, and wonder why. Talking indiscriminately about a recent illumination from meditation is a classic way to dull the experience, to waste its energy in outward movement rather than allowing it to effect an inner work.

Shakti comes in all colors and forms and though all energy can be used, there are lower and more dangerous forms that twist and deform the being. Fear is a powerful stimulant: the heart races, the skin crawls, a surge of glucose energizes the muscles. A good scare gets you going better than a cup of coffee. But its effect on the spirit is harmful, and it weakens the nervous system. Similarly, the short-term physical energy given by alcohol, nicotine, and

Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm for the ideal, perplexity and a baffling of the hope for the future are the common features of the difficulty. In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure, to the exclusion of higher things, and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world. All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking; after a time, the darkness will fade and being to disappear and the Light will come.

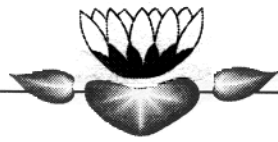
—Sri Aurobindo, April 9, 1947
Centenary Edition, Vol. 26, pp. 169–170

other drugs may for a time free the mind from the inertia of the body, but repeated use dulls the body and weakens the will.

On the other hand, there is a great benefit to being in the presence of a person with a large and developed mind, or the strong support of a deep heart. The sympathy of friendship, the vast health of nature, the concentrated beauty of poetry, the clear gladness of laughter, the golden gift of *Savitri's* voice: all can bring uplifting forces into us.

Of the desire-soul, the front of the vital being, Sri Aurobindo says that it ought to be clear and full of strength. "This dynamis must not be a troubled, perfervid, stormy, fitfully or crudely passionate strength."⁵ Again equality is absolutely necessary to remove the disturbance of desire. When the vital is powerful *and* without the compelling tug of desire, it can follow the mind or spirit swiftly and effectively rather than drive them into wrong actions. The traditional religious path seeks to weaken or kill the vital part of ourselves, because its strong tendency toward desire is a primary obstacle to inner peace; but the vital "is not intended to be a slain or mortified thing, dull in its receptive power, dreary, suppressed, maimed, inert, or null. It must have a full power of possession, a glad power of enjoyment, an exultant power of pure and divine passion and rapture."⁶

For the emotional side of ourselves, closer to the psychic being, Sri Aurobindo states the essential powers: a high calm



sweetness, an ardent intensity, a will to the universal good, and a large capacity for love. These are more in line with the movements of the true psychic, and enable it to emerge.

So far we have been talking of the movements and energies of the fourfold lower nature. Still within that nature, but closer to the spirit, we find the temperament of an individual. Sri Aurobindo speaks here of the force of the soul, the purusha, "presiding over and filling the powers of its nature."⁷ And here also there are grades and types of energy, of force, that can influence or predominate in an individual. The purpose of developing a full and rounded personality is to allow the Shakti to act unhampered, free, not limited or obscured.

*While it is easy to develop a program
of exercise to fashion a stronger body, it is
harder to create an integral temperament.*

While it is easy for us to develop a program of exercise to fashion a stronger body, it is harder to understand how we can create an integral temperament. In fact, very few people try. The stamp of personality is remarkably stable through life, and parents can often predict with great accuracy what the temperament of a five-year-old will be twenty years later. But all the possibilities are "more or less present in all men, here manifest, there latent, here developed, there subdued and depressed or subordinate."⁸

What are the basic powers of the soul-in-nature that we should strive to develop? They are a power for knowledge, for strength and courage, for active interchange and skill in works, and for service and labor. The one-sidedness of the meek saint, or the ignorant but faithful worker, or the skillful businessman blind to anything but profit—these are common enough, but the sadhaka of the integral yoga should seek to round out the temperament on all sides. To be carriers of the highest force, to be fit vessels for the supramental glories, we must have or develop a mind of light, quick and vast and open; a courage which will not back down from any obstacle or retire in defeat; the skill of the dedicated artisan in working with people and things, an ability to arrange them for their best use and mutual harmony; and a capacity for detailed labor, for minute attention to detail in whatever work we are called to do. Why must we have all these qualities? Because "our life itself is at once an inquiry after truth and knowledge, a struggle and battle of our will with ourselves and surrounding forces, a constant production, adaptation, application of skill to the material of life and a sacrifice and service."⁹

Beyond temperament (*virya*) one comes to the relationship of the soul to nature, the multilayered dance between Purusha and Prakriti, Isvara and Shakti. In these further explorations many different paths and realizations are possible, and for that reason Sri Aurobindo constantly presses for a kinetic yoga, one that does not

rest content with the quiet mind or the passive, detached purusha, but rather is open to the influence of the active Brahman, the power of the spirit in its free and open ranges.

On the way to this shakti we find universal energies of lower form, not free and inevitable as the Supramental but immense and effective nevertheless. The universal pranic shakti is all around, and it "will pour as much of itself as we can hold into our being."¹⁰ There is also a higher formulation, a "pure mental energy," which can use and direct the lower pranic shakti. And finally there is the Mahashakti, the "timeless power of the Divine," which we can learn to feel behind and within and around everything, and which is always available to the pure in heart.

But this is too vague and impractical, we say; where is the central principle, the guiding movement that will be the key to these glories of the spirit? The body is slow, the vital cries for gratification, the heart sinks down, the mind stumbles . . . what inner movement can one fasten onto that will set right all the rest, that will harmonize these varied efforts and raise the nature to its highest pitch? That central inner movement is faith, *shraddha*—an "assent of the whole being and all its parts to the presence and guidance of God and the Shakti."¹¹ This *shraddha* unlocks the engine of Shakti and brings it into our lives; indeed, "without it man cannot move a single pace in life, much less take any step forward to a yet unrealised perfection . . . the Gita can justly say of it that whatever is a man's *shraddha*, that he is, *yo yacchraddah sa eva sah*, and, it may be added, whatever he has the faith to see as possible in himself and strive for, that he can create and become."¹²

This is no abstruse secret requiring years of Himalayan rigors to realize. Through sincere introspection we can find out what it is we *really* have faith in. Not surprisingly, most people believe in the power of money, the dominance of the physical body, the intellectual structures of science, or the laws of material nature. How many can honestly say that they have a stronger working faith in the soul than in a good combination lock? But we are all aware of something we believed in so strongly that we made it come true, despite a poor beginning or our own ineptitude or formidable odds. Examples are all around of people who have an inner certitude of something, whether it be the possibility of a harmonious marriage or a trip to the moon, and that certitude, that *shraddha*, opens the door for its manifestation.

The *shraddha* Sri Aurobindo is talking about is not belief in a doctrine, not an adherence to a set of rules or metaphysical constructions. It is the presence of the One in all our life and work; it is "faith in God and the Shakti, faith in the presence and power of the Divine in us and the world, a faith that all in the world is the working of one divine Shakti . . ."¹³

And when we are more and more secure in that assent, that dynamic YES! to the omnipresent Brahman, when our natural being more and more follows its guidance and opens to a higher inspiration and forces, *then we* will become ready for the third stage—for the Supermind to enter and transform the nature into something wonderful and mysterious.



End notes

1. *Synthesis of Yoga*, Centenary Edition, p. 666.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 753.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 702.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 704.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 707.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 707.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 721.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 715.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 721.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 727.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 751.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 743.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 743.

David Hutchinson lives in Sacramento and hosts a Savitri reading and meditation group.

The "silent years" of Sri Aurobindo's integral life-sadhana, 1910–1920

by Nelson Castro

Part I of this article describes Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry in 1910. Part II, in the next issue of NexUS, will document the arrival of Paul and Mirra Richard.

Part I

He is never overjoyed though often coming to good things; he stands firm as Meru under the direst calamity; he walks the world like a god, finding Self in the bliss of Self in everything whatever.

—Svasajyasiddhi

On April 4, 1910, after receiving "a command from above," Sri Aurobindo secretly arrived at the port of the seaside town of Pondicherry (then French territory), leaving behind him an illustrious career as a prime figure in the fight of India's freedom and independence from English rule.

During this period of his revolutionary tasks, he had already received strong promptings in the midst of his work. This plus the strong urges of his heart drew him to leave his journalistic and other activities in favor of higher yoga. Aurobindo had come from his retreat at French Chandernagore (where he had fled to avoid arrest), his flight to safety and asylum arranged by his disciple Sri Motilal Roy, who was to play a pivotal role in Aurobindo's following years.

By an irony of fate, his incognito travel was discovered by the

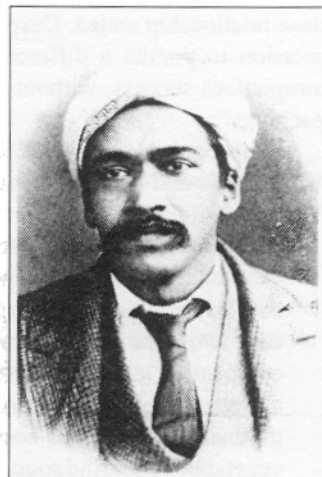
police on the very day of his arrival, betrayed by the grandiose reception that his fellow self-exiles had unwittingly arranged at the landing pier. As a consequence, he was virtually made a prisoner in his own home under British police surveillance for a number of years. Nevertheless, Pondicherry proved to be at once a sanctuary and an ashram for his unique sadhana and exceptional siddhi.

Thus ensued what has been called the "silent years" of Sri Aurobindo's integral life-sadhana, the period from 1910 to 1920. These "veiled" years represent a crucial chapter, some of which is not well known by the general public, in the spiritual life of one of India's seer-prophets and an incarnate soul-symbol of Indian nationalism.

Because of the nature of his flight from Calcutta, Aurobindo had neither time nor opportunity to think of or make any financial arrangements for himself and those who would be staying with him. So financial difficulties occurred almost from the beginning and continued for some years, easing as his freedom enlarged. If he wrote for money in harrowing snippets, one must realize that he had his companions' pressing needs in mind, that he was constantly spied on to the point of immobility, and those who could help him were beyond communication. The only reliable person he could turn to was Motilal Roy, not only for the upkeep of the Pondicherry establishment but also for contact with friends in Bengal unprotected by the safety of the French territory that Roy enjoyed.

A few words here on Motilal Roy. It was Roy who hastened to meet his future spiritual guru and charismatic guide on the morning of February 21, 1910, at the river ghat at Chandernagore, where Aurobindo had come in a country boat from Calcutta. In the 39-day retreat at Chandernagore, and in days to come, Aurobindo made Roy his trusted friend and instrument through whom for some years his politico-revolutionary activities, guided from Pondicherry, seeped and fanned out to his followers in Bengal. Roy's house functioned as a hotbed of subversive activities—often independently of Sri Aurobindo in later years.

Roy, in his own right, founded an ashram, the idea and spirit of which came from Aurobindo. He was the *samgha-guru* founder-president of Prabartak Samgha in Chandernagore between 1910 and 1920. The friendship with Aurobindo grew into—or rather revealed itself in the course of time as—a spiritual relationship, pure and profound, that had far-reaching meaning and consequence for India as well as humanity. A difference of approach to



Sri Aurobindo



their common task, however, drew them apart, and in 1921 their close relationship ended. Despite this seeming rift, Roy used the occasion to pursue a different creative field of his own with conspicuous success, without deviating from the master's basic teachings.

In his book *Mahayogi*, R.R. Diwakar gives an account of Sri Aurobindo's early days in Pondicherry:

... he was completely absorbed in Yoga and so begged to be excused (from work of a political nature). He would not see anybody without some important cause. He lived on the first floor and came down but once a day for his bath. He had three companions and they worked for and served Aurobindo. They all led a very hard life. All except Aurobindo slept on the ground. At lunch the host supplied a simple dish of rice, vegetables, tamarind soup, and dal curry. In the evening, a cup of kheer or milk pudding was taken by Aurobindo. Houses had to be often changed. In one there was hardly any furniture, except a camp cot, two chairs, and a table. It was only after publication of *Arya* that Aurobindo was able to engage a servant and continue to stay in one house, which he did from 1914 to 1922.

In his asylum in Pondicherry, Aurobindo did not give up his revolutionary activities. They continued but lessened in time and finally ceased altogether. Initially, from his home, he set up a living channel of communication, arranged with meticulous care and attention, to pass on news and secret revolutionary actions to be carried out in the manner enjoined to his friend Roy and the group in Bengal. He also worked out with Roy and Bengal a secret code system that was to be used when corresponding on important political matters.

The British police continued to harass and tried to entrap him. On a trumped-up complaint, they searched his house but found no seditious material. In another attempt, a police spy posing as a nationalist managed to convince Roy to give him an introductory letter to meet Aurobindo. When he arrived in Pondicherry, Aurobindo refused to see him on "a warning against him from within" confirmed by external facts.

As Aurobindo's vision of the future grew clearer, he saw the eventual independence of India was assured, that Britain would be forced by the pressure of Indian resistance and international events to concede her independence. On the political situation of the time, he wrote: "Revolution paralyses our efforts to deal peacefully but effectually with Repression. Repression refuses to allow us to cut the ground from under the feet of Revolution. Both demand a clear field for their conflict. Let us therefore stand aside. . . ."

Other than what Aurobindo himself and others have written of these "silent years," valuable source material was published for the first time in 1972 during the Sri Aurobindo Centenary Year. *Light to Superlight* consists of a series of 26 letters written between 1912 and 1921, all addressed to Motilal Roy, except the

second which was to Anandrao. Explanatory notes are supplied by Arun Chandra Dutt.

These letters are important as written records during this decade of revolutionary-evolutionary turmoil of the stages of Aurobindo's spiritual and supramental self-discovery as well as self-preparation for his new divine mission. They also reveal the changing phases of his national and spiritual leadership in the light of his inner ongoing yogic development and transformation.

The first of the 26 letters we refer to is the second one addressed to Sri Anandrao (circa 1912-14), whose identity has never been determined. It seems Anandrao had been approached by a friend of Aurobindo in Baroda for a contribution in support of his life-mission. Anandrao asked the friend on what grounds Aurobindo could collect money now that he had become a *sannyasin*.

When Aurobindo learned of this, he replied to Anandrao in unmistakable language:

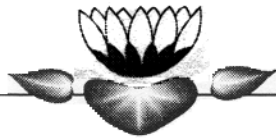
I cannot understand why on earth people should make up their minds that I have become a Sannyasin. I have even made it clear enough in the public Press that I have not taken Sannyasin but am practicing Yoga as a householder, not even a Brahmacharin. The Yoga I am practising has not the ghost of a connection with Sannyasa. It is Yoga meant for life & life only. Its object is perfection of the moral condition & mental & physical being along with the possession of certain powers—the truth of which I have been establishing by continuous practical experiment—with the object of carrying out a certain mission in life which God has given me.

The exposition that immediately follows is an elaboration of his own yogic process, its evolution and working out in his own original manner, a clear outline of his integral spiritual endeavors:

There are four points of the siddhi, roughly, moral, mental, physical, and practical. Starting from December 1906, the moral has taken three years and a half and may now be considered complete. The mental has taken two years of regular sadhana and will be [closed?] for the present purposes. The physical is backward and nearing completion only in the immunity from disease, which I am now attempting successfully to perfect and test by exposure to abnormal conditions. The physical also does not matter so much for practical purposes, as the moral, mental, and a certain number of practical siddhis are sufficient.

The reason Aurobindo goes into such detail is because Anandrao had also wanted to know what Aurobindo saw as his future, the time it would take to effect his siddhi, and the amount of money he would need to accomplish it. Anandrao then gave the amount of money he would try to collect on Aurobindo's behalf.

Aurobindo continues giving a fore-vision about his future work that has proved itself accurate and true:



If however, it refers to my future work, that is a big question and does not admit of a full answer. I may say briefly that I have been given a religious and philosophical mission to explain the Veda and Vedanta (Upanishads) in the ancient sense which I have recovered by actual experience in Yoga and to popularise the new system of Yoga (new in arrangement and object) which has been revealed to me and which as I progress, I am imparting to the young men staying with me and others in Pondicherry. I have also to spread certain ideas about God and life by literary work, speech, and practises, to try to bring about certain social changes, and finally, to do a certain work for my country in particular, as soon as the means are put into my hands. All this is to be done by God's help only and not to be begun till things and myself are ready.

This is indeed a grandmaster view of a great life mission, embracing a new vision of the past, present, and future of Indian culture and spirituality—and in the same light, the revaluation of the religious and philosophic thought and social life of mankind based on a deep and growing self-realization, full of dynamism, ever ready to expand, act, and materialize.

Sources

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Light to Superlight (unpublished Letters of Sri Aurobindo), explanatory notes by Shree Arun Chandra Dutt. Calcutta: Prabartak Publishers, 1972.

Nelson Castro lives in Valley Stream, New York. He is a frequent contributor to NexUS.

Sri Aurobindo and the Nobel Prize

Sri Aurobindo was nominated for the 1951 Nobel Prize in Literature by Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Laureate of Chile. The nomination was seconded by Pearl S. Buck, Nobel Laureate of the United States. A statement supporting the nomination was submitted to the Swedish Academy and signed by leading Indian citizens including government ministers, governors, premiers, maharajas, university vice-chancellors, a former president of the Indian National Congress, and other public figures.

Source: *Sri Aurobindo Tributes*, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press

Aurobindo's *Savitri*: A comprehensive vision

by Daniel Ross Chandler

In Chandler's 46-page essay on Savitri, he discusses Sri Aurobindo as a poet-mystic and yogin, the Mahabharata legend of Savitri, and The Life Divine as a companion volume to Savitri. He analyzes the experiences of King Aswapathy and Savitri and examines philosophical perspectives implied within the epic. Future issues of NexUS will excerpt other portions of the essay; in this issue, we present only the introduction.

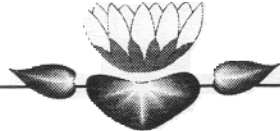
Introduction

Sri Aurobindo's spellbinding poem *Savitri* evokes a powerful, unforgettable impression. Around the world, distinguished scholars praise this literary classic. When Prema Nandakumar compared and contrasted Dante's fascinating quest through hell, purgatory, and paradise described in *The Divine Comedy* with Aurobindo's pondering an expanding consciousness transversing eternal night, double twilight, and everlasting day, Nandakumar concluded that these two poets are the supreme laureates depicting the divine in world literature and that Aurobindo's *Savitri* contributes to the twentieth century the inspiring insight that Dante's masterpiece gave to medieval Christendom.¹

Rameshwar Gupta said that as poetry these two compositions are unique, both confirming that philosophical speculation and mystical experience are describable through written expression and conferring poetic concreteness and credibility upon their spiritual and supernatural visions.² Iyengar indicated that Dante's triple worlds are superficially geographical but actually psychological states existing within and without persons, and that Aurobindo's *Savitri* neither catalogs sins nor pigeonholes indiscretions within hell's circles or purgatory's slopes.³ Instead Aurobindo traces the lines of descent of consciousness from Spirit to Matter and the corresponding lines of ascent of consciousness from Matter to Spirit.

Deshpande described *Savitri* as imparting an inexhaustible mystical inspiration when approached with spiritual receptivity; Aurobindo's poem presents the awesome wonders of the deep and the astounding ecstasies of the height when people avail themselves to these powerful inrushes.⁴

Gokak summarily suggests that in *Savitri* the poet creates the epic of a new age more revealingly autobiographical than *Paradise Lost* or *Hyperion*, more radiantly inclusive than *The Divine Comedy*, and more intimately and intensely human than *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.⁵ Manoj Das believed with passing time and an extended perspective, individuals will recognize that amid a contemporary creativity corrupted with worldwide bloodshed,



Aurobindo created a complete vision heralding a golden tomorrow; within the sombre labyrinths of a contemporary world wailing with despair and anger, *Savitri* brings a wonderful Bhairav welcoming a new dawn.⁶

Collins contends convincingly that *Savitri* occupies a unique position as neither a philosophical statement written within a poetically dramatic framework nor simply another poem composed by this twentieth-century poet from India.⁷ Instead Aurobindo presents an account of his inner experiences and realizations, what Collins considers as an extraordinary seeing unlike the common kind and dramatically different from what most humans experience.

In another source Collins described *Savitri* as the culmination of Aurobindo's creativity and the poet's most extensive and profound attempt to articulate his spiritual experiences.⁸ In *Savitri*, the author records events that are actual for him; images are realities. These are encountered within his inner spiritual self and are regarded by Aurobindo as more true and real than phenomena experienced by the physical and mental self exclusively. So intimate is *Savitri* that a reader might regard this epic as a poem written to be read by nobody but Aurobindo. [*Of course, many readers regard it otherwise.—Ed.*]

Like the medieval Italian Dante, modern Indian Aurobindo wrote a poetic epic describing the quest of an aspirant through realms of consciousness seeking spiritual reality. Initially readers appear overwhelmed with unfamiliar images, journeys exploring spiritual spheres, occult mysteries, iridescent splendors, numerous illuminations, ancient legend, and eloquent expression.

However, Aurobindo's *Savitri* provides religionists with a precious opportunity to ponder a mystic's writing, writers with a distinctive literature that remains aesthetically and intellectually challenging, skeptics with a provocative description of spiritual reality, and the ardent aspirant with an awesome affirmation.

As Gupta wrote:

It is the kind of poetry that makes us hear sound rise out of deep silence; see worlds rise out of vacuity; ultimately giving us, if we be not obstinate, to sense the mysterious tremendum of the creative process itself. It is no hallucinations or degenerate mystical sights. It is seeing gestation going on in the cosmic womb as a botanist would see a bud burst.⁹

End notes

1. Prema Nandakumar, *Dante and Sri Aurobindo: A Comparative Study of "The Divine Comedy" and "Savitri"* (Madras: Affiliated East-West Private Limited, 1981). See Prema Nandakumar, *A Study of "Savitri"* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1962).
2. Rameshwar Gupta, *Eternity in Words: Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri"* (Bombay: Chetna Prakashan, 1969), pp. 162–163.
3. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Dawn to Greater Dawn: Six Lectures*

on Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975), p. 44.

4. P.S. Deshpande, "Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*: A Key to Integral Perfection," *Indian Readings in Commonwealth Literature*, eds. G.S. Amur, V.R.N. Prasad, B.V. Nemade, and N.K. Nehalani (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1985), p. 63.
5. Padma Sri Vinayak Krishna Gokak, *Sri Aurobindo: Seer and Prophet* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications 1973), p. 4.
6. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo* (New Delhi: Sahita Akademi, 1982), p. 74.
7. John Collins, "Some Religious Symbols in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3 (Spring, 1976), pp. 48–51.
8. John Collins, "Savitri: Poetic Expression of Spiritual Experience," *Six Pillars: Introductions to the Major Works of Sri Aurobindo*, ed. Robert A. McDermott (Chambersburg: Wilson Books, 1974), pp. 9–13.
9. Gupta, *Eternity in Words: Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri"*, p. 136.

Daniel Ross Chandler lives in Chicago. He was the academic conference coordinator of the 1993 Parliament for World Religions.

SOURCE MATERIAL

The following passages are from Mother's Agenda, Vol. 5. Mother's comments are in regular type; Satprem's annotations and spoken comments are in italics.

The Mother on mechanisms, methods, and laws

August 5, 1964

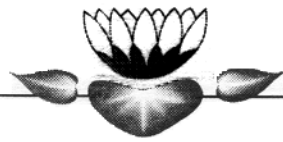
(D., a disciple, sent Mother an eighteenth-century account by a Japanese monk of the Zen Buddhist sect describing a method called "Introspection," which enables one to overcome cold and hunger and attain physical immortality. Mother reads a few pages, then gives up.)

It's better to work out your own system—if you want to work one out at all.

That's what people have always reproached Sri Aurobindo for, because he doesn't tell you, "Do this in this way and that in that way. . . ." And that's precisely what made me feel that there was the Truth.

People cannot live without reducing things to a mental system.

They need a mechanism.



Yes, but as soon as there's a mechanism, it's finished.

The mechanism may well be very good for the person who found it: it's HIS mechanism. But it's good only for him.

As for me, I prefer not to have any mechanism!

The temptation comes sometimes, but . . . It's far more difficult without, but infinitely more living. All this [the Zen account] seems to me . . . I immediately feel something that's becoming dead and dry—dry, lifeless.

They replace life with a mechanism. And then it's finished.

(silence)

The mistake everyone makes is to consider—to believe—the goal to be immortality. Whereas immortality is just ONE of the consequences. In that Zen story, the goal is immortality, SO THE WAY has to be found—hence all these methods. But immortality isn't a goal: it's just a natural consequence—if you live the true life.

You see, I am sure that D. (she doesn't say so, but I am sure of it) imagines that my goal is immortality! At any rate, it's the goal of many people here(!) . . . Actually, it's something secondary. It's ONE of the consequences, it's the sign (it can be regarded as a sign) that you are living the Truth, that's all. Though that's not even certain!

Immortality in this bag of bones, that's no fun!

(Mother laughs) Oh, indeed! . . . First it would have to be changed.

September 16, 1964

[The numbered quotes at the beginning of this conversation are aphorisms from Sri Aurobindo. "Sannyasa" is renunciation of worldly life; Janaka was a king known for his divine realization, even though he led a worldly life.—Ed.]

106—Sannyasa has a formal garb and outer tokens; therefore men think they can easily recognise it; but the freedom of a Janaka does not proclaim itself and it wears the garb of the world; to its presence even Narada was blinded.

107—Hard is it to be in the world, free, yet living the life of ordinary men; but because it is hard, therefore it must be attempted and accomplished.

It seems so obvious!

It's obvious, but difficult too.

You see, to be free from all attachments doesn't mean to run away from opportunities for attachment. All those people

who assert their asceticism not only run away, but warn others that they shouldn't try!

It seems to me so obvious. When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means you aren't above it, you are still on that level.

All that eliminates and diminishes or lessens doesn't free. Freedom must be experienced in the totality of life and sensations.

In this connection, there has been a whole period of study of this subject, on the purely physical level. . . . To rise above all possibility of error, you tend to eliminate the opportunities for error; for instance, if you don't want to utter unnecessary words, you stop speaking. People who make a vow of silence imagine it gives a control over speech—that's not true! It only eliminates the opportunities to speak, and therefore of saying unnecessary things.

For fear of acting wrongly, we stop doing anything; for fear of speaking wrongly, we stop saying anything; for fear of eating for the pleasure of eating, we stop eating anything—that's not freedom, it's simply reducing the manifestation to its minimum. And the natural outcome is Nirvana. But if the Lord wanted only Nirvana, there would be only Nirvana! He obviously conceives the coexistence of all opposites and that, to Him, must be the beginning of a totality. So, of course, you may, if you feel that you are meant for that, choose only one of His manifestations, that is to say, the absence of manifestation. But that's still a limitation. And it's not the only way of finding Him, far from it!

It's a very widespread tendency, which probably comes from an old suggestion, or perhaps from a poverty, an incapacity: to reduce and reduce—reduce one's needs, reduce one's activities, reduce one's words, reduce one's food, reduce one's active life, and it all becomes so cramped! In the aspiration not to make any mistakes, you eliminate the opportunities of making them—that's no cure.

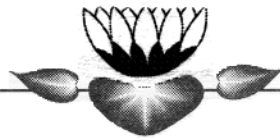
But the other path is far, far more difficult.

Yes, I am thinking, for instance, of those who live in the West, who live the Western life: they are constantly swamped with work, with appointments, with telephones . . . they don't have one minute to purify what constantly falls on them and to collect themselves. In those conditions, how can they be free men? How is it possible?

That is the other extreme.



The Mother



(silence)

No, the solution is to act from the divine impulse alone, to speak from the divine impulse alone, to eat from the divine impulse alone. That's what is difficult, because, naturally, you immediately confuse the divine impulse with your personal impulses!

That was the idea, I think, of all the apostles of renunciation: eliminate all that comes from outside or from below, so that if something from above manifests, you will be in a fit state to receive it. But from the collective point of view, it's a process that may take thousands of years! From the individual point of view, it's possible; but then the aspiration to receive the true impulse should be kept intact—not the aspiration to total “liberation,” but the aspiration to the ACTIVE identification with the Supreme, in other words, to want only what He wants, to do only what He wants, to exist only through Him, in Him.

So the method of renunciation may be tried, but it's a method for someone who wants to cut himself off from others. And can there be an integrality in that case? . . . It doesn't seem possible to me.

...
All those things are methods, stages on the way, but . . . true freedom is being free from everything—including from all methods.

(silence)

It's a restriction, a narrowing, while the True Thing is a blossoming, a widening, an identification with everything.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

CALIFORNIA

Auroville International USA

P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816

A nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation founded to support the Auroville project in India. Contact Jack Alexander, (916) 452-4013.

California Institute of Integral Studies

765 Ashbury St., San Francisco, CA 94117

An accredited graduate school offering M.A. and Ph.D. programs in philosophy, religion, psychology, counseling. Call (415) 753-6100 for information. An Integral Yoga study group meets alternate Thursdays in the president's office. Contact Brenda Dobia, (915) 661-5619; Megan Thomas, (415) 753-6100 x297; Christina Zubelli, (510) 215-6761.

Cultural Integration Fellowship

360 Cumberland St., San Francisco, CA 94114

2650 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94118

Draws inspiration from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as other great prophets of modern India. Offering lectures, residence facility, musical events, book sales. Contact Bina Chaudhuri, (415) 626-2442.

East Bay Center and Sri Aurobindo Association

2288 Fulton St., Suite 310, Berkeley, CA 94704

Devoted to the realization of the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Facilitates visitors to the Ashram and Auroville and publishes *Collaboration* and *NexUS* newsletters. Offering Darshan services, meditation, lectures, library, bookstore, meditation hall. Contact Wayne and Surama Bloomquist, (510) 848-1841.

East-West Cultural Center

12329 Marshall St., Culver City, CA 90230

Human Cycle study group Monday, 8–10 P.M.

Beginning Sanskrit Thursday, 7–8 P.M.

Synthesis of Yoga study group Thursday, 8–10:00 P.M.

Advanced Sanskrit Saturday, 2–3:30 P.M.

Chanting Saturday, 3:30–4:30 P.M.

Savitri study group Saturday, 4:30–6:00 P.M.

Karma yoga Sunday, 3–5:30 P.M.

Inquiry into collective yoga Sunday, 5:30–7 P.M.

A 30–40 minute meditation is held after each study group. Call (310) 390-9083 for information.

San Francisco Study Group

Meetings alternate Thursdays, 12:15–1:15 P.M., reading *Synthesis of Yoga*. Contact Jan Stein, (415) 751-1307.

Savitri Reading and Meditation Group

A *Savitri* reading for 30 minutes and meditation following to complete the hour. No discussion held, but attempt to make the reading a sadhana as much as possible. Meets weekly, sometimes more. Contact Dave Hutchinson for schedule, (916) 452-4380.

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham

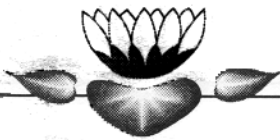
1291 Weber St., Pomona, CA 91768

Collective residential facilities for concentrated sadhana in an ashram atmosphere. Community is self-supporting through sales of books, incense, and Ayurvedic products. Currently organizing a sustainable farm, residence, and devotional center in northern California. Contact Dakshina, (909) 629-0108; e-mail: SASP@aol.com.

COLORADO

Informal meetings in Boulder

A few people meet alternate Thursdays at 6 P.M. for brief meditation and tea. Contact Joe Spanier, (303) 444-4578, or Larry Tepper, (303) 447-2755.



Sri Aurobindo Learning Center at the Baca
Savitri House, P.O. Box 88, Crestone, CO 81131
Hosts regular conferences and events towards its purpose of becoming a collaborative center of research for a "living embodiment of an actual human unity." Savitri House and the Savitri Solar Meditation Dome are the first structures in a proposed campus for a new education for a new world. Weekly meditation and readings from *Savitri* and *The Mind of the Cells*, Wednesdays, 7:30 P.M. Contact Seyril Schochen, (719) 256-4917.

FLORIDA

Integral Knowledge Study Center
221 Clematis St., Pensacola, FL 32503
Dedicated to the elevation of human consciousness in the light of Sri Aurobindo. Offering Darshan gatherings, meditation, lectures, study groups, karma yoga, library, book sales, residence facilities, meditation hall. Publishes books and a quarterly newsletter. Contact Rand Hicks, (904) 433-3435.

GEORGIA

Aurientation Integral Healing Center, Atlanta
Hosts a Mother and Sri Aurobindo study group the second and fourth Sundays of the month, 5-7 P.M., June through September. Call (404) 728-9807 for information.

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Study Group
91 Kilmarnock St., Boston, MA 02215
Study group meeting Wednesday, 7 P.M.
Reading from *Savitri*, group meditation, unstructured discussion about yoga. Group on yoga in the local prison at their invitation. Contact Eugene Finn, (617) 262-6390.

NEW JERSEY

Sri Aurobindo Center
25 Hill Street, Bloomfield, NJ 07003
Works closely with groups in New York; provides an opportunity for the local community to gather for discussion, fellowship, and devotion in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Often hosts guests from Pondicherry Ashram. Offering meditation group, meditation hall, Darshan gatherings, library, special events. Contact Dushyant Desai, (201) 748-0639.

NEW YORK

Auroville Information Office
23 Mill Hill Road, Woodstock, NY 12498
An East Coast branch of AVI-USA located at "Pondicherry," a gift shop specializing in Auroville handicrafts. Sponsors talks and fund-

raising events and is focused on completion of the Tibetan Culture Pavilion in Auroville's International Zone. Contact Julian Lines, (914) 679-2926; e-mail: jhl@aol.com.

Matagiri
Box 98, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457
Maintains a library of the complete works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Offering Darshan observances, book shop, special programs. Regular Tuesday evening meditation at 7:30 P.M. Call (914) 679-8322 for information and directions.

New York Study Circle of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother
124 W. 60th St., New York, NY 10023
Monthly gatherings in Manhattan include a reading, study of a selected work, and meditation. All are welcome. Contact Miriam Below, (212) 965-5683.

SOUTH CAROLINA

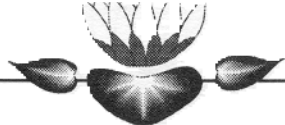
Sri Aurobindo Center Southeast
c/o JHM Enterprises
880 S. Pleasantburg Dr., Greenville, SC 29607
Founded to provide an opportunity to learn about and experience Sri Aurobindo and Mother's grace and power. Offering meditation, Darshan gatherings, study group, residence facilities, book sales, newsletter. Contact R.P. Rama, (803) 232-9944.

WASHINGTON

Pacific Northwest/Puget Sound Center
2020 Roosevelt Ave., Enumclaw, WA 98022
Psychic being study group (Enumclaw) Sunday, 7-8:30 P.M.
Savitri study group (Seattle) Tuesday, 7-8:30 P.M.
Vedas study group (Seattle) 1st Tuesday, 7-8:30 P.M.
Purpose is to further the development of Yoga in all members and nourish the spiritual aspiration of visitors. Offering Darshan services, meditation, lectures, library, book sales, workshops, retreats, musical and cultural events, meditation hall. Contact Ron Jorgenson, (206) 825-3413.

WISCONSIN

Wilmot Center
Institute for Wholistic Education
33719 116th St., Twin Lakes, WI 53181
Purpose of center is study and implementation of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. The nonprofit Institute focuses on Vedic knowledge of all types, including Ayurveda. Offering Darshan services, meditation, extensive library, book and other sales, educational programs, meditation hall. Contact Santosh Krinsky, (414) 877-9396.



"I asked myself, why do I love, and what is the power of beauty, and I understood that each and every instance of beauty is a promise and example, in miniature, of life that can end in balance, with symmetry, purpose, and hope—even without explanation. Beauty has no explanation, but its right perfection elicits love."

—Mark Helprin, *A Soldier of the Great War*

This world we live in is but thickened light.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Earth's crammed with heaven.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it *feels* like a real fight.

—William James

Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being.

—Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel,
address to U.S. Congress, Feb. 21, 1990

I learned this at least by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live that life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

[*A description of obstacles in yoga?*]

They had become tangled in brambles by now, and the trees of the forest they had entered were tall and thick. Thorns began to tear the Prince's raiment. Lightning flashed and thunder rolled, and all paths vanished. The prince took out the rose and held it in his hand. The stem began to turn and twist, and pointed . . .

The brambles and the thorns grew thick and thicker in a ticking thicket of bickering crickets. Farther along and stronger, bonged the gongs of a throng of frogs, green and vivid on their lily pads. From the sky came the crying of flies, and the pilgrims leaped over a bleating sheep creeping knee-deep in a sleepy stream, in which swift and slippery snakes slid and slithered silkily, whispering sinful secrets.

—James Thurber, *The Thirteen Clocks*

My opinion is that Allah is great and great is the mystery of the universe and things are not what they seem, etc.

—Sri Aurobindo

SRI AUROBINDO ASSOCIATION

2288 Fulton Street, Suite 310
Berkeley, CA 94704

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