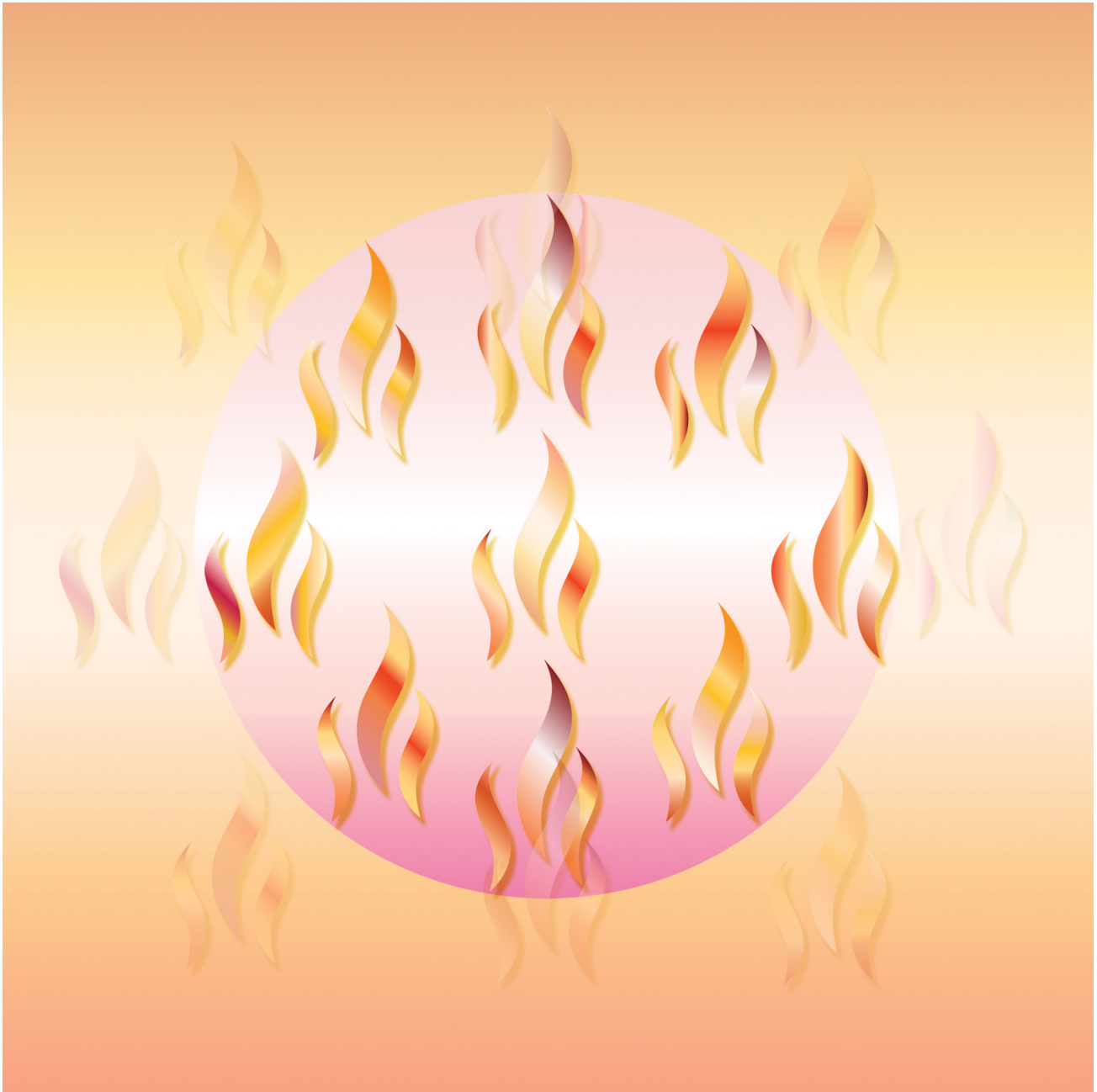


Collaboration

Fall 2015

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 40, No. 2



Seaside: Wayne Bloomquist's big world by Rick Lipschutz •
Land and spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century, *continued* by John Robert Cornell •
What's the right thing to do: A meditation on dharma, reason and offering by Beloo Mehra •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Salon • Source material • Book Review • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Front cover: Soul Agni Fires; back cover: Flame Soul Divine Blue. These are graphic art designs by Margaret Astrid Phanes (phanes@margaret-phanes.com). A selection of her graphic art can be found at her website: margaretphanes.com. Margaret is a trainer and digital artist who has taught meditation for 30 years in classes, workshops, and conferences. Visual Light-Energy Meditations were first exhibited as framed still images in 1989. Since then, she has produced imaginative presentations of stills and slide animations. These works are a dynamic meditation and a concentration of inner forces of Shakti and presence.

The authors and poets

Lesley Branagan (www.lesleybranagan.com) is a social anthropologist from Australia who has been visiting Auroville for 15 years, where she volunteers for Auroville Today, Village Action, and other initiatives.

Emily Bronte (1818-1848) was an English novelist and poet who is best known for her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, a classic of English literature.

John Robert Cornell (johnrobt@cal.net) is a writer and workshop leader living in California. He is secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Association, and is associated with the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham.

Amanda Emerson, distant cousin of RW Emerson, descendant of farmers, Micmac and Penobscot natives, self-described Spoiled Child Of God, doer of odd jobs, poet-dreamer, now edits Rick Lipschutz's book.

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Beloo Mehra (beloome@gmail.com) originally from Delhi, lived in the U.S. for 14 years and then returned to India where she is working as an author. Read her blog here: <https://matriwords.wordpress.com>

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Don Salmon (donsalmon7@gmail.com) is a clinical psychologist, composer, and coauthor of *Yoga Psychology and the Transformation of Consciousness*.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is the editor of *Collaboration*, conducts research on Integral Yoga, and does service in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Table of contents

Collaboration, vol. 40, no. 2, Fall 2015

From the office of Collaboration

Notes on this issue..... Larry Seidlitz 3

Current affairs

CIIS begins online Ph.D. program in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology 4
Institute for Wholistic Education update..... Santosh Krinsky 4
Join our *Collaboration* subscription drive..... Sri Aurobindo Association 4
Sri Aurobindo Centers in the U.S. 5

AV almanac

Village youth reach high..... Lesley Branagan 6

Salon

What I find inspiring about the Integral Yoga..... Don Salmon 7
An anecdote about Jyoti Priya Richard Pearson 7

Chronicles

Seaside: Wayne Bloomquist's big world Rick Lipschutz & Amanda Emerson 8

Essays

Land and spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century, *continued*.....
..... John Robert Cornell 19
What's the right thing to do: A meditation on dharma, reason
and offering Beloo Mehra 28

Source material

Surrender and openness to the Mother..... Sri Aurobindo 34
"I am with you" The Mother 35

Book review

The English of Savitri Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz 37

The poetry room

Who she really is (from *Savitri*) Sri Aurobindo 38
As eagles ride the storm..... Rick Lipschutz 38
Last lines Emily Brontë 39
Compact with the light Narad 39
Community of souls..... Narad 39
Invulnerable Angelo Salerno 39

Apropos 40



From the office of Collaboration

We start off this issue in *Current Affairs* with news of a new online Ph.D. program in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, an institute with ties to the Integral Yoga community. There is also an update on the Institute of Wholistic Education in Wisconsin, and an announcement of the Sri Aurobindo Association's fundraising effort for *Collaboration*. The section wraps up with a listing of the Sri Aurobindo Centers in the U.S.

This is followed by *AV Almanac*, where there is a heart-warming report by Lesley Branagan of a donor-supported program to enable financially challenged youth from the villages surrounding Auroville to go to college, and how it is changing their lives.

In our new *Salon* section, we have one article on the topic, "What I find inspiring about the Integral Yoga," by Don Salmon, and a short anecdote about Jyotipriya by Richard Pearson, which was inspired by the article on her in our last issue.

In *Chronicles*, we have an excellent article about Wayne Bloomquist, a stalwart in the US Sri Aurobindo community, by Rick Lipschutz and edited by Amanda Emerson. It focuses on Wayne's experiences while visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1973, just after the Mother left her body, and its long-term effects on his life. The poem, "Long-distance Elevator," describing an experience of Wayne's, is the actual beginning of the essay, but it was omitted because it was published previously in the Winter/Spring 2014 issue.

In *Essays*, we have another installment of John Robert Cornell's *Land and Spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century*. In this final chapter (two appendices are yet to come in the next issue), we come to a culmination in the spiritual philosophy and psychology of Sri Aurobindo, which is then tied to the perceptions of John Robert and other American writers about the Spirit in Nature. Finally he discusses what may be called an American yoga, the way of finding Spirit in and through Nature.

Our second essay, by Beloo Mehra, is on the nature and role of *dharma*, a concept that is difficult to pin down intellectually, and therefore to put into living practice. It examines how *dharma* is related to spiritual practice, the development of consciousness, the faculty of reason, and the practice of self-offering to the Divine.

In *Source Material*, we have selections from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on perhaps the central issue in Integral Yoga: surrender and openness to the Mother, and the developing awareness of her constant Presence and Grace. We follow this with a *Book Review* by Larry Seidlitz on Shradhdhavan's new work, *The English of Savitri*, with a collection of fine spiritual poems in *The poetry room*, and conclude with *Apropos* quotations.

Margaret Phanes's digital art lights up the front and back covers, and Karen Cornell's drawings adorn John Robert's essay.

Invitation to submit a short essay for publication

With the intention to make *Collaboration* more interactive and participatory, we invite you to submit a short essay of about 300-800 words for the next issue on *any topic related to Integral Yoga*. We would like to publish a few of the best submissions in the new section called "Salon." As with the submission of other articles to *Collaboration*, the editor may require or suggest changes to the essay prior to publishing. We hope that the relatively short length of these articles may inspire more writers who may be reluctant to write the longer essays which have become the norm in *Collaboration*. Depending on the response, we hope to include this new section of short articles in each of our future issues. For the next issue, please email your essay to the editor at: editor@collaboration.org before November 15, 2015.

Artists

Karen Cornell has been drawing and painting since childhood. She was a graphic artist in the software industry for many years. She specializes in computer graphics, pen and ink, and watercolor.

Margaret Phanes, a graphic artist, resides in Lodi, California where she is associated with the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, and is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association, which is the publisher of *Collaboration*.

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Submissions: *Collaboration* welcomes writing, photos, and artwork relevant to the Integral Yoga and spirituality. Submit material by email to: editor@collaboration.org; or by post to *Collaboration*, 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, Suite 203-174, Lodi, CA 95242 USA. *Collaboration* cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Letters and articles may be edited for style and space considerations.

About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Ananda, treasurer; Margaret Phanes, director.

Contributions: Donations for the work of the SAA, Auroville, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram may be sent to SAA. Donations are tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.



Current Affairs

CIIS begins online Ph.D. program in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology¹

Transpersonal psychology is a transformative psychology of the whole person in intimate relationship with a diverse, interconnected, and evolving world. It pays particular attention to states of consciousness associated with spiritual, mystical, and other exceptional human experiences that seem to promote healing, transformation, and connection to the larger world.

As a psychology situated in community and world, transpersonal affirms the value of social action and ecological stewardship. Because our relationships are global, a transpersonal approach challenges the false norms of a psychology that is situated in any one meaning frame. Transpersonal's initial mission to include more than one valid state of consciousness can now be extended to embrace many ways of being human as reflected in culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, spiritual path, and ways of knowing. The integral vision of a whole-person psychology can blossom into a psychology of humanity that celebrates our differences as much as it honors what we hold in common.

The notion that spirituality is an aspect of the human being apart from any specific religion is an idea that comes directly from transpersonal psychology, and it was the first field to examine the practices of Eastern spirituality, such as mindfulness, from a psychological perspective. Transpersonal was also the first psychology to study psychedelics, a field that is now coming back to the attention of mainstream researchers. As an outgrowth of humanistic psychology, it is part of the movement that almost single-handedly invented the field of personal growth and development. As a whole-person psychology, it resonates with the values and perspectives of the complementary and alternative medicine movement, which has become a major force in healthcare.

Integral psychology is concerned with exploring and understanding the totality of human consciousness and personality. It seeks to unify the personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions of human experience to achieve wholeness of personality, multicultural harmony, and collective transformation. Integral psychology was first developed by Indra Sen based on the practical and transformative aspects of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga psychology.

Later formulations of integral psychology were offered by CIIS founder Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, who developed his own unique approach, and others including Brant Cortright, who has developed a synthesis of Sri Aurobindo's thought with the three major streams of Western psychology—behavioral, psychoanalytic, and humanistic-existential—in the context of integral psychotherapy.

1. Used with permission from: http://www.ciis.edu/Academics/Graduate_Programs/Integral_and_Transpersonal_Psychology.html

Institute for Wholistic Education update

by Santosh Krinsky

The Institute for Wholistic Education (www.wholisticinstitute.org), in collaboration with Lotus Press (www.lotuspress.com), is continuing its development and publishing of study guides for Sri Aurobindo's major writings, as well as development of e-books for a variety of platforms. Most of the major works of Sri Aurobindo are now available as e-books on a wide variety of e-book platforms including Amazon Kindle, Apple I-Tunes, KOBO, Barnes & Noble Nook, and Google Play. We have been also adding steadily to the selection of books by M.P. Pandit on these platforms, and are currently finalizing the remainder of the 10 volume series by M P Pandit on *Readings in Savitri* (two volumes already completed, eight more coming very soon).

Our blog at <http://sriarobindostudies.wordpress.com> has daily posts on readings in Sri Aurobindo's major works. We are currently focusing on Sri Aurobindo's book *The Synthesis of Yoga*. We are just finishing Part 1, The Yoga of Divine Works. All prior posts remain archived and accessible for those who want to study earlier chapters, as well as any of the earlier volumes in the series. This section will be sent for publication as the first of four volumes of *Readings in Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Yoga* by the end of August 2015. At that time, the blog posts will continue with Part 2, The Yoga of Knowledge.

August 15, 2015 marks another Darshan Day commemorating Sri Aurobindo's birthday. The Institute will be hosting a gathering including a reading from *Savitri*, meditation, vegetarian lunch and a showing of a video by Sri M.P. Pandit on the Mother, at our facility in Racine, Wisconsin, USA.

The Institute also sponsors regular classes on reiki, levels 1, 2 and 3, conducted by Karuna Krinsky. The schedule is regularly updated and can be found at www.reikiteacher.org

To contact us, write or call us at 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 5340; 262-619-1798.

Join our Collaboration subscription drive

by the Sri Aurobindo Association

Collaboration is an important resource for the Integral Yoga community. It shares the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as news and views of those who are applying Integral Yoga, individually and collectively. We want *Collaboration* to grow and thrive. However, subscriptions do not completely support the journal.



For the past few months, the Sri Aurobindo Association has been asking our whole community to collaborate in this aspiration, and it is working! Subscriptions have increased by 45%! But we have a ways to go to reach our goal.

Through a generous donation, subscribers will receive a free copy of the book *Transforming Lives*, by editor Larry Seidlitz, while supplies last.

Please join us by:

- Subscribing to *Collaboration*
- Extending your current subscription
- Gifting a friend with a subscription
- Asking your yoga friends to subscribe
- Sharing this message with anyone who might help us find new subscribers.

The *Collaboration* subscription link is: <http://www.collaboration.org/journal/subscribe.html>

Thank you for collaborating with us in supporting and expanding *Collaboration*.

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www.mppandit.com



AV almanac

Village youth reach high

by Lesley Branagan

Reprinted from Auroville Today, May 2015 issue

I'm the first graduate in my family, and they feel proud of me," says Vaidegi confidently. As the applicants for the June 2015 scholarship intake mingle in the background at Thamarai community center in Edaiyanchavady, anxiously waiting for their interviews with the *Reach for the Stars* team, Vaidegi is happy to be a role model now she's graduated and working: "We can encourage by our actions," she says about the example set by the program's first graduates.

Vaidegi, from Sanjeevnagar village, completed her Bachelor of Technology in Electronics and Communications last year. She is now working in AuraAuro Design, an electronics company in Auroville, and is determined to climb the career ladder. "Presently I'm concentrating on my work, because I want to grow in that field. I want to do more than what I can do now. I'm in the learning process, so I'm focusing on that." She is also doing volunteer teaching in programming and electronics in two Auroville schools and paying back 20% of her college fees—a requirement of the *Reach for the Stars* initiative. "I want to support *Reach for the Stars* throughout my life," she says. She offers her advice to village students aspiring to go to college. "If you love what you're doing, don't be distracted!"

Reach for the Stars is an Auroville initiative that finances the higher education of young people from poor backgrounds from the villages surrounding Auroville. Talented students are chosen through a competitive selection process, and are funded to achieve their education potential through college degrees. Students generally receive funding from one sponsor, who commits to covering the entire expense of a student's three- or four-year degree. Once they start studying, the students are mentored throughout their degree by *Reach for the Stars* team members, who monitor their progress and provide advice.

As the background noise rises from students relieved at having completed their interviews, founder Stephanie says that this year the programme will only be able to accept a maximum of 10 students out of 50 applicants, whereas it accepted 16 last year. More funds are needed to deal with the rising costs of degrees, which go hand-in-hand with the rising ambitions of village students. "Engineering cost one lakh [approximately US \$1600, eds.] per year," she says. "We have one student who wants to study Aeronautical Engineering, which costs 1200 Euros per year. It's hard to find sponsors for these expensive degrees. We interviewed six applicants who want to study nursing, and we can only choose one or two."

Thirteen students funded by the programme have now graduated, and are working or undertaking further study, and the 20%

repayment scheme is going well.

Many more students are in their final year, such as Savithri from Edaiyanchavady who confesses to having been afraid in her first year at college. Now in the third year of her Bachelor of Civil Engineering, she reflects on her early college days. "Mum gave me some advice: 'Have courage. Don't depend on others. Be yourself.'" Savithri's trepidation about starting college was connected to the gender imbalance in her class: 32 boys to 7 girls. "It's difficult but now I feel comfortable. In the village, students are either in school or watching TV. In college, I entered the city and learnt about society and the outside world. My friends are coming from many cities. I feel proud, happy. It's my dream. I never expected it would happen." Savithri graduates next year, and wants to work in Auroville, inspired by the way in which Auroville housing project Sacred Groves avoids using concrete. Her advice to other students: "Go step by step. It gives confidence. Don't be afraid! Every day we learn a lot."

Suchitra, also from Edaiyanchavady, is in her fourth and final year of engineering in computer science. Her first year was the hardest, until she "learnt how to write a test." She also notes her own personal growth during her studies: "I learnt my boldness," she says. "Nowadays, we should have boldness and good knowledge." She also concedes her major project last year was difficult, as it involved complicated data-mining about brain disease. After graduation, she wants to go to Bangalore or Chennai for work. Her mother is happy for her achievements, but also sad that Suchitra will move to another city for work, as her mother will be left alone in the house—Suchitra's two older sisters are already married and living elsewhere. Suchitra's advice: "Find you field, study, do your best. Don't get married too soon!"

Over the five years of the programme's existence, Stephanie has seen the need for the programme to provide greater support, starting with English classes on Sundays. "We also felt there was a need for a social worker, so a Tamil social worker from Auroville looks after them," she says. "We discovered that bad results were often the outcome of problems at home, such as an alcoholic father, or parents that want to push them into work instead of studies. There are also lots of health problems, especially for the girls. We decided to conduct a workshop on women's health, and other workshops are held for the students whenever a need comes up, for example, a two-day workshop on job application and interviews."

At the time of this article going to publication, the *Reach for the Stars* team announced that they had initially selected 14 students they wished to fund this year, but that due to insufficient funds only seven students can be helped. This leaves the remaining students to reconsider their options or to ask their families to go into significant debt to fund their studies. "We are very upset that we can't help those other ones to go ahead and follow their dreams," Stephanie.

While the selection process is difficult for the *Reach for the Stars* team, the success of the graduates spurs them on. "I'm happy they grow so well," says Stephanie. "They turn into different people, very grown up!"

For more information: <http://www.reach-for-the-stars.org>



Salon

What I find inspiring about the Integral Yoga

by Don Salmon

I am not just inspired, but in awe of the Grace and guidance that seems to be such an “integral” part of practicing the Yoga. I first had a glimpse in my mid-teens of the possibility of there being some kind of evolutionary shift of consciousness in the world—some five or six years before I had read Mother or Sri Aurobindo’s writings. It was amazing to me, when I first read Satprem’s *Adventure of Consciousness* that there were people who could describe so eloquently and so beautifully what I had vaguely glimpsed some years before.

What I slowly began to realize, the more I connected with the Integral Yogic path, was that since this shift was happening throughout the earth, I was a part of it too. In more and more ways, I began to see how, by being sufficiently receptive, I could follow the “hints” that were amply provided (“amply provided, providing I “looked” and was open to them!) to guide me on the path.

Many times over the years, a person has contacted me, a book has been recommended, someone has told me about a talk, a concert, a job—something that was needed at just that time to help me on the “way.”

Since I see this individual guidance (guidance which I experience as supporting my own “evolution”) as being inseparable from the larger evolutionary shift taking place in the world, I find it equally inspiring to witness the changes in consciousness that have occurred over the nearly 40 years I’ve been associated with the Integral Yoga.

Recently, on the online IY forum, “Auroconference”, we’ve been discussing how to “see” this shift—in ourselves, and in the world. In the course of this discussion, I’ve found my own inner process—my inner way of “seeing”—to have been greatly clarified. Looking back over the years, I see that at times, when my heart was not sufficiently open, or my mind insufficiently quiet, I could consciously, intentionally use my mind to get a glimpse of signs of this evolutionary shift. At other times, when my mind was quieter, my heart softer, more receptive and open, it has been easier to simply look and “see” the often startling changes in the world—changes which for me, are profoundly hopeful signs of the increasing pressure of the supramental force on the overall process of evolution.

I think back to the early 1970s, when talking about mindfulness meditation was considered “very strange”—to say the least. Some 40 years later, I read a story about a boy in Kindergarten, who had been moved to another class because he had been bullied. He was later asked about the boy who had been bullying him. Drawing on what he had learned from mindfulness practice and its effects on the brain, he said, “Oh, I understand that his

prefrontal cortex [the physical plane correlate of the buddhi or “intelligent will”] is not well developed, so he can’t control his amygdala [the “fear” center in the brain; associated with the physical plane correlate of the vital mind] when he gets upset.”

I find this profoundly inspiring—to me, this is evidence that the kind of education the Mother spoke of—a vital and mental education informed by the influence of the psychic being, is starting to manifest. In fact, children receiving this kind of education frequently speak of needing to get back to the “hub” or center of their awareness when they are upset—a “center” which is innately calm, peaceful, quietly joyful and where they feel deeply connected to others and to the world around them. There are now thousands of schools around the world that teach such things, wholly in line (to my mind, at least) with what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have written on education.

In the 1970s, who would have imagined that less than a half century later, scientists would have amassed irrefutable evidence that people who are near brain death have had life-altering experiences of the psychic Light, and that millions of people would buy books recounting such experiences. Again, I see this as a clear and profoundly inspiring sign of the influence of the supramental Force on the evolution—leading us more and more toward—if not the supramental age itself (most likely, I think, some thousands of years away) at least, closer to the “True” subjective age Sri Aurobindo forecast nearly a century ago in his all-too-often neglected masterpiece on human evolution, “The Human Cycle.”

As I look—whether with a relatively clear mind or a still clearer intuitive “eye”—I am moved and inspired to see the ever increasing signs of the evolutionary progress so remarkably forecast by the forerunners of the supramental Age, the founders and ever-present guiding Lights of the Integral Yoga.

An anecdote regarding Jyotipriya

by Richard Pearson

Jyotipriya gave a talk in the Ashram Playground soon after coming from Banaras. One incident she recounted was most memorable.

After coming to India and having grown up in America, she was of course used to certain comforts that did not exist here at all in the late forties. Her studies were in the old city of Banaras and the room given her was simple, yet sparse and ascetically bare. In particular she found the bed (called a cot in those days) so very hard! However, she would sense a beautiful perfume around her every night and she could not tell from where it came. This made her quite relaxed in spite of the discomforts and the lack of taste in the room.

When she came down to Pondicherry to see the Mother and seek her blessings, the Mother gave her a flower of “psychological perfection,” (Plumeriachampaca, Frangipani), during the general ‘Blessings’, as she used to for everyone. When she smelled the flower, she immediately remembered the very same fragrance that came to her each night in Banaras!



Chronicles

Seaside: Wayne Bloomquist's Big World¹

by Rick Lipschutz
& edited by Amanda Emerson

Seaside is an ancient mansion owned by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which is not for hermits only, *not* tucked away from it all, but begins in a busy part of town, washed by the atonal honk of taxis and the traffic's boom. The main Ashram building was once four separate houses that were welded together to make one whole structure, all seeming to emanate from a central courtyard. From there, the Ashram doesn't seem to end, but connects with every section of the city that has sheltered it and that it shelters. Let me be quick to assure you that Seaside now, the summer of 2013, is a *beautiful* accommodation. It has balconies and scooter rental, there are biscuits at the desk for your steaming pot of tea, and though possessing old-style white tile floors to complement the mission-brown woodwork, is a seriously remodeled hotel of international status. Seldom have doors so dynamic ever opened. It has done duty for decades as a guest house for no end of visitors to the Ashram, because it is so easy to find, only a few minutes down the road.

Both Seaside and Ashram are in eastern Pondicherry, along the coastal region of its French Quarter. The structures and pastel tones of the buildings, the bicycles in whose machinery an elegant sari may become entangled, the palm and neem trees planted along the shady streets, the tours and contours to be enjoyed by bus and rickshaw pulled or solar, along the shuttered colonial compounds that open onto courtyards with tiled fountains, these accent the architectural influence, and the still unbroken cultural spell, cast by five centuries of French presence. Beware, in this presence the bold revolutionary



Left: Rick's old California Motor Vehicle Department photo. Above: Amanda in her younger years. (Photos courtesy Rick and Amanda)

swagger of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* has grown plaintive and faint, buried in some rougher undercurrent of medieval skull-duggery.

The seaport city of Pondicherry ornaments southeastern India, skirting the Coromandel Coast along the Bay of Bengal. Overlooking Goubert Avenue, which is a broad thoroughfare also known as the Beach Road, towers the elegant lighthouse that served mariners once, for nearly a century and a half. There is the four-meter Gandhi statue with eight granite pillars looking the opposite way from Gandhi beach; not one glance from the Great Soul for the sunbathers. And a large, lifelike, corroded-copper-green figure celebrates the ostentation of the eighteenth-century governor-general Dupleix—ironically, the name of the steamer in which Sri Aurobindo, a political refugee preternatural in his reserve, arrived here in April of 1910 and never left. Directly across from Seaside, and just past the promenade that goes parallel to Goubert Avenue, runs a narrow beach reinforced with boulders, placed there to resist the constant erosion.

Wayne Bloomquist and Surama, soon to be his second wife, came to Seaside sometime in December 1973. Wayne was forty, exactly half the age he is now. *The essence of man is discontent, divine discontent, a sort of love without the beloved*, wrote poet José Ortega de Gasset. Wayne had felt that way for about as long as he could remember. The time had come to do something about it. Then he heard rumors of Sri Auro

bindo, who'd quit politics (politics as we know it) when he was 37 years old in 1910 and left it to Gandhi to lead India's revolt against Great Britain. Sri Aurobindo's revolution would be an entirely silent

one against an even stiffer form of government, that of the cosmos. He would wage his war against that Empire. Complete independence, as he saw it, would set us free from a mightier oppression, that leaves behind more insidious galls than the shackles of our British overlords. Independence would have to burrow inside us and free us from the colonial powers that rule our very nature—to overthrow them would release the power of our greater selves, not all the way out of this world, but rather all the way into it. For this, the soul that makes us matter—the Soul that made matter—will have to come out of hiding, and *even the body shall remember God*. What everyone before him had claimed to be impossible, forever, Sri Aurobindo gave all his strength to make inevitable now.

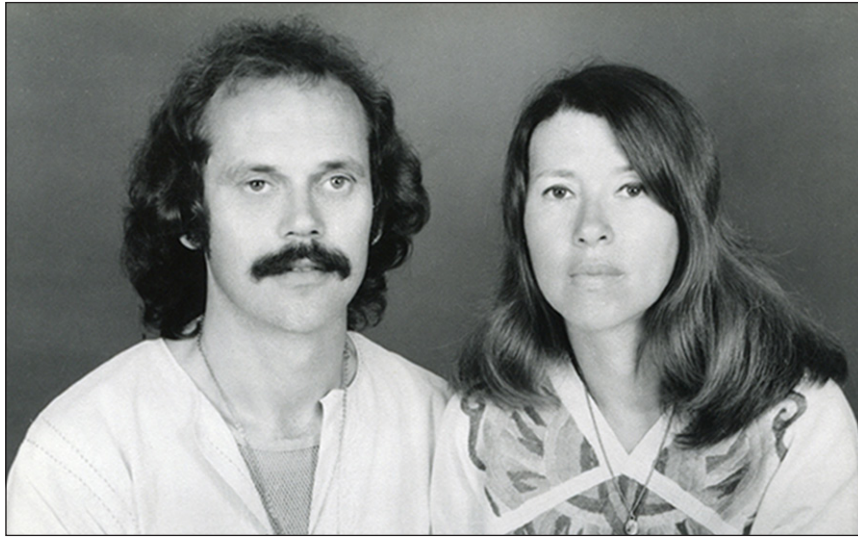
For 24 years, from 1926 to 1950, he remained in his room—wearing two long deep grooves in his floor with that incessant rhythm of his walking, putting “nose to paper” writing thousands of letters in reply to every conceivable question so “even the rocky heart of a disciple would be touched.” And he handled crises. He handled mine. In 1971, which was *after* his death, Sri Aurobindo came to me at my most alone moment. I was crawling in the dirt on a mountain twenty minutes from the coast town of Seaside, Oregon. Why did he come? I never heard of him, but he heard me call out to anyone. Because that night my silent cry went all the way through all the cells of my body, and *they shattered the mountain rock with their cry*,



and he heard me. He would answer a cry in the night, personal or global, it made no difference. It was all the same to him how each distressing circumstance came to meet a compassion without walls.

While all the time he stayed true to his real work: transforming every bit of him into the Force. He would not so much use this force as surrender to it. Allow it to take him over, each part and all of him together. *Become* it. Because, it would take an unprecedented force, the original one, to overturn all that—and all those—who govern our existence. “Which is not so easy to do,” as he put it. “It is, in fact, a revolt against the whole universal Nature and so one must think deeply before enrolling oneself with me.” So then, what would be put in its place? Direct power, an intimate directness—the open rule of Spirit that is one. And how would it all come about? Years before *Star Wars*, Sri Aurobindo was being trained to trust the Force.

What would the new matter, or transformed matter turn into? “Why not seven tails with an eighth on the head!” he joked in correspondence with his physician attendant who after he became a staunch disciple, developed out of no discernible talent the facility to write provocative surrealist poetry. And truly it’s beyond image, accessible maybe only to music, with its light-footed rhythms, its nature of no known physique, because just what we would look like after that...well...that gets a little surreal. But fools like me who, at one time or another, have felt this force that he rediscovered—*harder than the diamond yet more fluid than a gas*, was his one direct description of it—frankly, some of us are ready for a little surrealism! I still remember, back in the oh-oh’s, 2005 I think, over bad hotel coffee in room 29 of the



Wayne and Surama in 1974. (Photo courtesy Wayne Bloomquist.)

Pacific Heights Inn off Union Street in San Francisco, waving my hands in the air, and asking Wayne, *What will we be, how will we look, after this physical transformation?* He folded his arms across his chest and said to me, *Look, this isn’t real estate, Rick! So stop trying to figure it all out. He’s made it his business to transform the universe, so maybe you could start by cutting him a little slack.*

But enough about Sri Aurobindo! he never liked to talk about himself, anyway. This is about Wayne, who likes to talk about himself (*all the time*). To get back to our thread: In the late-late sixties, Wayne had got wind of how the most seditious man alive had hatched the weirdest plot ever, the upshot being that—if the scheme worked—“don’t be a stranger” would go without saying, and life would have a whole new kick to it. That had been all Wayne needed to hear.

One day in 1969 he had, inside himself, committed to Integral Yoga, a body of practices, unique to each person, that has a revolutionary aim: to change what governs you, and start that by putting your own soul in charge. Wouldn’t that be a switch? Integral Yoga was formed by Sri Aurobindo but shaped by the Mother, who, before she left everything to be his collaborator, was Mirra Alfassa, a Parisian impressionist artist and occultist of Egyptian-Jewish and Turkish-Jewish ancestry.

But how do you manage to turn yourself inside out—wouldn’t you have to have an extra dimension to you, for that to happen? And once you’ve turned your life completely around, how would you make ends meet? It doesn’t make any sense, but Wayne’s normal life didn’t make any sense to him, either. So, from that day on, in all decisions, Wayne would do whatever and go wherever the swiftest path to spiritual progress

required. He would leave it to the old him to have one part (Wayne?) that lived his life and another guy (Bloomquist?) that attempted this strangely non-acrobatic yoga where you show what you’re made of so your soul can see right through you and surrender it, and so the Force that generated your soul can go straight through you, all of it, all the time. He would put Integral Yoga first and leave it to the old Wayne to separate life from yoga.

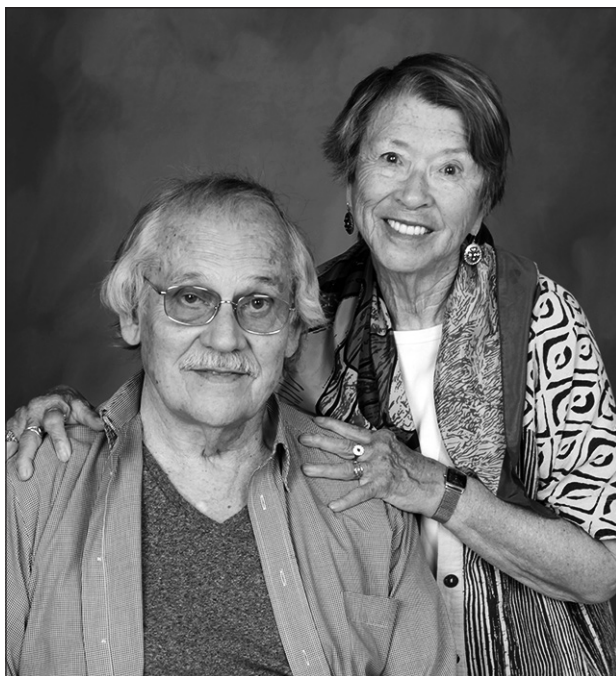
In this spirit Wayne attended a presentation about Auroville—which, as the Mother made clear, means “City of Dawn,” and does not refer to Sri Aurobindo—sometime in the early 1970s. This experimental township had been founded by the Mother in 1968, in ecologically devastated, crazy-hot scrubland on Pondicherry’s outskirts, for those souls adventuresome enough to try and build a “concrete human unity” and intrepid enough to live in such a place. Sri Aurobindo had died in 1950 and the Mother had since then taken the Ashram where “all life is Yoga” on her own small shoulders, and she had then seen the City of Dawn in a series of visions that led her to start the whole new experiment that she called Auroville. You have all you need here but you will have to be resourceful, she told the first “Aurovilians,” with a humor as dry as Auroville was, before its “greenbelt” of three million



trees was planted by the reckless gamblers on the future who built its basis from the ground up. Her vision was of a city, built upon the pattern of our own spiral galaxy, with a population that she projected would reach fifty thousand. Although endorsed by UNESCO and sponsored by the government of India, and rising from the dirt of 124 nations that was poured into its foundation, Auroville began in relative anarchy amid constant infighting. She meant it to be free for all and it was a free for all—hard to believe this could ever become “the city the Earth needs.” Attracted by something in what he saw there—some distant possibility beyond the mud fight that was being projected on the small screen in front of him at the presentation—Bloomquist walked out on the sidewalk afterwards, announcing to no one in particular: “I’m going to India!”

And oh, back then, they were young and beautiful, not even forty-looking in their 1974 photographs. Wayne was a handsome dude with a perfect Old West pioneer mustache and a mane of curly dark hair. And Surama was a wonder, two people who couldn’t be combined but were: she has the earnest visionary look of a pioneer in jazz who also looks like a young woman you wish you went to high school with. They brought to life some lines of the song “I Believe in You” from the Broadway play, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*: “You have the cool, clear eyes of a seeker of wisdom and truth.” Not to forget “that upturned chin,” “that grin of impetuous youth,” the “the bold brave spring of the tiger that quickens your walk,” along with “the sound of good solid judgment in your talk” and the look of faces you can trust.

When he was getting ready to go, he wrote informing the Mother of his plans, and in October he and Surama were en route to Pondicherry to meet her—after first visiting London, Paris, New Delhi and Old Delhi, and discovering the timeless beauty of the Taj Mahal. Then one morn-



Wayne and Surama, still shining. (Courtesy Wayne Bloomquist)

ing their tour guide, Ravi, showed them a picture on the front page of a newspaper: the 95-year-old Mother had died the day before, on November 17, 1973. Wayne was devastated.

He wandered over to a nearby park and began watching some construction workers, and the small woman who was carrying bricks to them on her head. She had piled on so many, she had to get the last ones up with a toss, and she giggled, as she looked over at her baby, who was lying on the sidewalk, on top of a blanket. The workmen saw Wayne watching this Indian woman intently, and still looking at him, and saying something to each other in a language he could not understand, they began to laugh. Something about the whole scene made the welter of his emotions seem somehow insignificant. His spirits lifted, he got up and moved on.

Three days later, during afternoon siesta in a hotel room in Bombay, Surama started feeling hot, though that day was a mild one. She got up to open the window, but to her surprise it was open. She lay down and shut her eyes, and then saw a woman in white, standing in front of her bed. From pictures she had seen, she knew it was the Mother. But this one who

stood before her seemed taller and looked stronger. The woman held out both her hands to Surama and said, *I had to go. It was time. I could not wait for you.* When Surama woke Wayne to tell him, he realized that the Mother had not come to apologize; she was asking where they had been and assuring them, *I am still here.*

So Wayne persisted. Despite the culture shock, the climate that climbed into your clothes, the mosquitoes, the stench, the constant racket, the fatalistic drivers, and the death of the woman he had flown halfway around the world to meet, he and Surama stuck it out. After they had finished visiting Northern India, they took a taxicab from Madras (now Chennai) to visit Pondicherry as they had planned. Well, they tried to take a taxicab there. For thirty-five miles,

a supremely busy compassion steered them clear of the trucks that swerved in front of them, and a very well-organized light of grace kept them from killing the animals that looked right at them while they crossed paths on the road. Then, after making it one third of the way, the engine went dead and the driver put them out on the roadside, insisting, *You pay full fare.* A well-dressed Indian gentleman, who happened to have seen them on the plane from Europe, was parked behind. He witnessed the whole scene, watched Wayne’s indignation boil over, then stepped out of his car and brokered a compromise; they would pay *half* the fare. He helped Wayne see how to keep your cool in India—they weren’t in California, that was for sure—and after they all stopped for tea, they were glad to take him up on his offer to drive them seventy miles into Pondicherry.

They would stay, not near Auroville, the city of the—distant—future, but close to the Ashram, which is where you went in search of self-perfection. First they stayed at The Good Guest House; it was just that way and that is just what it was called. It was run by Reggie, an Austrian chef, who



trained his staff to serve tea and coffee with white gloves, smile like *this*, fix the flowers so, announce your presence, flute your steps, the whole colonial rigamarole, and then would complain they could not remember instructions from one day to the next. Reggie was fascinating and full of stories, but his facility—pricey.

And, at first, Reggie had even insisted they sleep in separate bedrooms, because they weren't married. Or, as Wayne puts it, "Reggie insisted we sleep apart until we agreed not to have sex!" This made them think of an incident they'd just witnessed. Out walking a short time before they'd been accosted by an American driver. He screeched his rattletrap to a halt and did a one-eighty, shouting through a closed window, "I got a woman with me, we're not hitched yet. So where do we sleep around here? Gotta stay somewhere!" It was all so sudden, it jolted them. He was absolutely frantic and drove away before they could say a word. He left tire-tracks and a burning smell on the Beach Road behind him. So at the desk, Surama had spoken up to Reggie, "We're staying in the same room and that's it!"

There must be something more affordable that still had the amenities that matter. Surama and Wayne found their second guest house. It had just been finished, and seemed new. Cozy rooms that seemed reasonably priced, and a name to match. Cottage. But other than that Wayne seems to have no clear memories of it, including why they left.

Next! The International Guest House. The cleaning person spoke no English, but Surama found they could converse with perfect understanding. When Surama threw away a magazine whose cover had a photo of Princess Diana, the Tamil woman took it from the trash and taped it to the wall. In no time at all the two of them became friends. But the place was unfinished, and noisy. A telephone exchange building buzzed all night, and the International seemed to be under construction constantly. After members of a union worked the day shift, a squadron of non-union workers took their place. Ask him why and Wayne says, "Because it's

India!" Ask him how it could have been Princess Di, who would have been only twelve at the time, he says, "Been there over a dozen times, Rick: then, some other wall, some other cleaning woman, some other princess, in some other hotel. Who cares? It's India. It happened!" Now he tells me, "Believe the photo was of Queen Elizabeth and not Diana." After all these years, Surama can still recall the friendly cleaning woman, and the noise.

Seaside, it seemed, would be better. It had come recommended to them. The prices were still more reasonable, and there was no buzz and bang. Or, actually, it was right bang opposite the ocean, and Ananda at the front desk walked them through a wonderful room with an even more wonderful view. It had cheerful-looking beds and sturdy, old-fashioned furniture. "We'll take it!" they both said at once. They would be able to watch the sun rise through the window, and though the temperature still hovered in the eighties in December in South India, they could open the window to the sea breeze: bliss. This would be a highlight of their stay, it seemed. There has always been a quiet dignity to Pondicherry, a peace that pervades the place, and a sign in its French Quarter reads: "Beauty is our city." The Bloomquists (as they were to be after they jetted back to America, legally joined by a California judge, but the truth is India married them) came there as pilgrims of perfection and lovers of beauty. It had taken a few tries, but now, here at Seaside, they seemed to have got the best of Pondicherry.

But once again Pondicherry got the better of them. What they had got was the old bait and switch. Between the time they took it, and the time they got back with their baggage, the room they thought would be their room, wasn't. *All of a sudden the room was not available and we were put in the back.* No ocean, no view, which could have something to do with the fact that it had no windows, at least none Wayne remembers. It was damp, muggy, more than a bit on the dingy side: your basic bed, your fundamental floor, and it came furnished with sturdy mosquito nets. There had to be chairs, because

Surama remembers sitting somewhere while Wayne was in the bed, but for the life of him, he does not recall one detail of those nondescript chairs.

They had a room for the night, anyway, and they could go on outings, as travelers do, see the sights and shop in the evening after spending time in the museums and galleries. And, of course, the Botanical Garden, with its ornate gate, a fountain that makes music, and that magical aquarium that shelters gardens of its own. But soon the night manager of Seaside started accusing them of sneaking in after curfew. A *curfew for adults*, that was a cultural adjustment, and on top of that, you're accused of sneaking around and lying about it? They began to feel harassed, because he really did seem to be trying to get rid of them.

The Bloomquists for their part were beginning to harbor similar feelings about India. It seemed a touch and go affair whether they would even stay much longer in the ancient subcontinent. Sri Aurobindo had hymned India as the Mother of hundreds of millions, as so much more than her material earth, her rivers, and the mountains above her land: not a place, not a thing, but a living being. But now the whole trip seemed to be up in the air—which fortunately lets you catch a whiff of ocean in that seaport town, and is also home to a force that calls up your own dragons from the deep: whatever you need to face but put so much energy into hiding from your own soul. And everyone seems to see it but you.

Soon after they arrived in Pondy, Surama and Wayne started going out for walks after dark along the Beach Road. It was quite deserted in those days. In fact, Pondicherry in 1973 still bore a thousand traces of the old ghost town and haunt for smugglers and thieves that it had been since before the turn of the century: it had not yet become the sort of bustling place it is in the twenty-first century. As they went strolling along Beach Road, the couple heard what sounded to them like kissing, or the sound of a person smacking their lips. They figured out finally where the noise was coming from. Across the street,



they could make out a strange figure, moving on a platform with wheels. He had no legs. They kept encountering this person, night after night, as they walked the Beach Road, or its promenade, to the susurrus of the waves. They believed the legless rider in all probability was an unfortunate beggar. People often don't want to engage with beggars, but it was not that, or even his very deep voice and strong vital presence. There was something deeply unsettling about him, in Wayne's word "Felliniesque," that made them want to stay away. But when someone familiar with him told them who he was, it surprised them. Tutu was no ordinary beachfront beggar: he was the ringleader. He would growl out assignments to the whole outfit of them like a union boss, during *Brahma Murta*, the Hour of Brahma, every morning at four.

After a few days and nights at Seaside, still suffering from the culture shock, and not at all acclimated to India, Wayne fell

sick with fever. No ordinary fever, and it didn't go away. He was burning up, he was sweating. No amount of sweating seemed to do any good. The still muggy air in the room could not have helped. Surama was worried. She tried to give Wayne a little lightly curried rice, but he was in no condition to take any food. He was weak but still conscious and, at least, whatever he had, it didn't seem to be dysentery. All he could do was lie there in bed for three days sweating it out.

Wayne is a Midwesterner who grew up the soot and grime of Granite City, a smoky factory neighborhood near East Saint Louis, Illinois. He has always been grounded or, as he calls it, rooted in the Earth. He seems to have been born with a natural equanimity, an industrial-strength capacity for endurance, and he did not visibly suffer or audibly complain. If he died, he died, and that would be that. He just went through it, the way he has gone through everything else. Their little room in the back at Seaside became, in effect, a makeshift sauna.

Wayne's Scandinavian ancestors have been using the Nordic sweat lodges called saunas for centuries, and during the French and Indian wars in the American colonies of the 1750s, tribes of native peoples actually spared the lives of Finns and Swedes because they were "white men like us, sweat lodge men." But if he was competing with the Swedes who sweated before him, and with the Lakota Sioux who to this day still lie down burning for days seeking visions, Wayne seemed to be winning, hands down. Because he lay there in that damp, small bed, sweating and not eating, and his sweating went on and on, and on some more. *I never knew a person could perspire so much*, he says. It could have been worse, Wayne, Christ sweated blood. For three days the sun roused itself out of the Bay of

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Bengal, unseen by Wayne in that humid room at Seaside. The sheets stayed damp, the fever severe and unrelenting.

Just as severe burned that resolve. No ambush along the trail, only the trail itself; where the road led. That would be his fate. Four years ago he had written his first letter to her, and that same night he had seen the Mother in a vision: swirling colors coalesced into her face, and he felt contact with her. He knew it then: their relationship is permanent, and there is no separation between them. Every evening for a year in San Francisco, he had begun reading aloud from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, whose subject is the conquest of death by divine love, and his body filled up with energy. Perhaps this is the way he endured the series of reversals that met them head on during the first of what would eventually be a dozen expeditions to India, even as his journey into the soul was to be only the beginning of the journey his soul would take him on. In retrospect, all of it, stumble after stumble, seems to be the exacting preparation

needed to undergo an experience of supreme intensity.

Wayne is now an eighty-year-old retired real estate appraiser living with his wife, Surama, in Sparks, Nevada. Sparks is considered a suburb of Reno. Reno bills itself The Biggest Little City In The World on the arch above Virginia Street that is its icon, while below the neon, light upon light, revolve a thousand multid denominational slot machines, a whole raft of roulette wheels turn, and the shooter's crap dice roll in two dozen casinos, one for each hour of the day. Reno rests at near-mile-high altitude in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, stays dry because it lies in a Sierra rain shadow, and a river runs through it, the beautiful Truckee River, sole outlet of Lake Tahoe. The Truckee flows

northeast through high desert into Pyramid Lake, source of life to a sacred valley once home to the Paiute Nation, and a remnant of enormous Lake Lahontan from

the Pleistocene days stretching back well past 10,000 years. Its native peoples have known for centuries what its gamblers don't: this is a magical healing place.

Standing around the water tumbling over stones into a shallow pond in the backyard of their bungalow on Corleone, Wayne looks back forty years and says of it, of his whole life swept up in a single instant, *It stayed, the way bedrock does. It never left me. It's alive, it never died, and I'll take it to the grave with me.*

What was it, what happened to him, and what was it like? Why did it stay with Wayne Bloomquist of Sparks, Nevada, and not with me, or all the other people, for that matter, who have passed through the cloth but slunk back into sloth?

Ralph Waldo Emerson—American soul from the soul of America—stepped to those human mysteries that move our soul to live most fully in matter: *From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.*



But let Wayne tell it his way. On the third day of the fever, in the middle of the afternoon in mid-December, *an intense light suddenly filled my being. I had the sensation I had become the light.* There were colors, too fast for him to see. They were of a translucent pastel, like flowers in the rain.

He got swept up in the light. It was rapid, it was rhythmic, and it rolled his whole world up into itself. He had never felt anything remotely like it.

Everything started swirling, whirling in a cloud, a cloud of light, which covered him and his room, and he lost himself there. He was swept up in that motion and disappeared into that light.

A force came up from below the ground through my feet. Gently and gradually, it rose through my body and came out the top of my head, and then it paused, like it was preparing for something. Then it came back down through my whole body in a rush and exploded. It was abrupt and so power-

ful, but still, it came out of the quiet, like a soft explosion that opened everything. That's when I stopped being aware of what was around me. There was only that, that light. I mingled with it. I merged into it.

Surama was not in the room. She was attending the School for Perfect Eyesight at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

I, parenthetically, in a weird synchronistic touch that's still hard for me to swallow, was right around that time sitting in a chair in the office of the Reno Brotherhood of the Holy Order of MANS on Roberts Street, where my priest, Jim Rule was telling me, "Brother Rick, there aren't but five people on this planet who know what the soul is." And I was telling myself that no rule was going to stop me from finding it out.

So, what was it like to disappear into another dimension? Maybe George Lucas has got an answer to that one.

Many of us have been swept up into Hyperspace aboard Han Solo's starship the

Millennium Falcon, where he also smuggled Princess Leia, and the young Jedi Knight Luke Skywalker, and Chewbacca the Wookiee to help the Rebels destroy the Death Star. Simply by watching *Star Wars* we have a sense of what it might be like to be taken into another dimension. Wayne, similarly, got swept up into the light.

Now, imagine if we could *stay there*, but still live our life in *this* dimension. That's what happened to Wayne. He went into Hyperspace and never came out of it. Why would he want to? Because it's not like he's gone, he's still here, rooted in matter.

After a few seconds, the light was gone, and I heard the words in my head, "Mother, I never knew I loved you so much." I immediately started to sob, the sweetest tears imaginable. I lay there for an hour or two,

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then decided to get up. I felt fine now, no fever or weakness.

But Wayne did not know he loved the Mother before his own tears told him that he did. And it was only after the simple words he spoke that he started to believe them. And he began to develop an inner dialogue with her. He also developed, or maybe was born with, the aspiration to continue her work of letting the light dawn in the brackish cells of this human body. It wasn't a *Star Wars* Force alone with whom Bloomquist began this intimate and lifelong friendship. To him, the Mother is a person, closer than blood, closer than his own breathing.

As I later reflected, I realized that I had spontaneously thought of the Mother because my consciousness was already turned toward her. A Christian would likely have a similar experience with Jesus.

His experience was intense, beyond the pale affair we are prone to call "love." Even more than the eternal sweetness of

the divine presence, beyond brilliance, it was strong; more powerful than power. It was visionary English poet William Blake's *Tyger, Tyger, burning bright*—this love was the burning Tiger of terrible force entwined with the sweet Lamb of God, both, in one and the same embrace.

Forty years later, as he is turning eighty, when I talk with him about the experience, it is still fresh to him and the words tumble out. *I didn't try to do a thing. I just let myself be absorbed. I didn't even think about it. I had touched the fundamental ground of existence, and if you can touch it, you have to be changed. It was only later that I lay there for a few hours and thought about it, and asked myself, What was that? There was the strongest feeling of love that I have ever experienced. I lost all doubt about the existence of God.*

I lost something I never even knew I had and that I've never wanted. I only knew it had been there after it was gone and I felt free from it. I was connected,

healed —I don't mean from the sweats; I mean from the separation. It all happened in a few seconds, but how would I know? Time had no meaning then.

During that moment that seemed endless, he lost consciousness of his surroundings. He was no longer in that damp bed in Seaside, but reclining in another dimension. It felt comfortable, like swinging in a hammock in a big backyard. Except, he didn't put himself there. He'd got himself shanghaied into higher dimensions. When he came back to ordinary consciousness, everything had changed but the humidity. Afterwards, he just lay there limp, not exactly exhausted, but relieved, released from a lifelong constriction that had been so unrelenting he could not fathom how cramped in he had always been.

It affected Surama, too: something in her, also, seemed to turn around. There was to be no more talk about leaving India on the next boat, plane, or raft. They both opened up to the real India, the India in-



side India, the soul of the world, which is slowly beginning to gain the “mastery of the material domain” that we in the West have—terribly misused. In this India, as Surama discovered, time has no meaning. She would often shop at the Standard Stores, which carried an abundance of specialty items. Every time she went there, she would check the status of a certain shipment of goat cheese from the Himalayas; it was taking forever! Then the time came when the same employee that she asked, just about every day, *Do you have any of that delicious goat cheese. No, again? Please, tell me when it's coming*—brought her up short: “Maybe today, maybe tomorrow; maybe never.” But, two years later, when she walked in there for the first time during their next trip to India, and before she'd had time to say a word, the same clerk seemed to recognize her and his response was immediate. “Madam, we have cheese today!”

Toward the end of 1973, the two of them began going to the Samadhi, the white-marble shrine where the bodies of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are laid to rest, in the silent courtyard at the center of the Ashram, under the shade of a huge spreading frangipani tree from which yellow blossoms hang. Surama used to sit on the steps, near the Samadhi and outside the door to the office of one of the trustees, Dyuman, who as he would enter or leave his office, would tap her on the head, a friendly tap. Wayne saw ashramites placing their foreheads on the marble tomb, which struck him as exceedingly strange behavior. He'd seen human beings doing the most bizarre things with their heads, including what we optimistically call thinking, but this was something else entirely. Then he tried it himself. He felt a subtle tugging that got stronger till it became unmistakable—there was a vibratory force, and it was coming up from under the stone. It felt like an earthquake, but one that shook you so your parts fit together better than they ever did before. After all, he thought, it is called “Integral Yoga.” He would take his face up off the stone and could no longer feel that Force, and when he rested his forehead on the

marble again, the Force came back with renewed intensity. *And when I pleaded with her to fill me with consciousness, I felt wave after wave of bliss flowing through me, day after day, for weeks on end.*

Nineteen seventy-four was a new year in the “new town” (that's what “Pondicherry”—or Puducherry in the Tamil—means). Amen! Since his soul had found him, holed up in that back room, bliss didn't make it so long between visits, and suffering bit by bit had begun to lose its charm. Then in the first week of February, as he was leaving the Samadhi after several hours in its energy field, once more it was time for something completely different. Have you ever felt a piece of music, Ravel or rap, a vision of Socrates, or a centipede, or a view from a cliff over the sea, stretch your mind? But do you seriously believe that consciousness is a substance—that your entire awareness can stretch? Neither did Wayne until it happened to him. As he left the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and went strolling along Beach Road, he not only felt but saw—he could *see*, something like particles—his consciousness: it extended nine feet out beyond his body circumference. It was not centered in his body—it had no center. What he felt as “me” was now not in his head or body, it was somewhere—maybe everywhere—now his “me” was bigger and absolutely new, out there somewhere like the atmosphere around him. A strong calm that he could see and touch energized him and streamed out through his fingers and beyond, as if breaking free into the world. He kept walking, and several Tamil children who were crossing his path, some of them riding bikes, began smiling at him; they seemed to be feeling it, too. When he got back to the guest house, Surama likewise could feel it when she placed her hands at the end of his fingers.

He felt calm but intensely calm, and that stretched awareness made him look taller than his measured size of five foot eleven. Ashramites, beggars, and children would see “an American named Mr. Broomstick” coming from blocks away. *Wayne's got this big soul*, an integral adven-

turer once said—she didn't say he had a big ego when well she could have. *The soul, that's the whole shebang!* I remember he once said to me. Now, there's a theory that after the first, original Big Bang created a cosmos the size of a spinning pea, a second Big Bang—called The Inflation—made the universe expand, blow up in a wink so that any rubbernecker on the set would say, *That's more like it!*—a place with room for stars, something more like its present self. The expanded Bloomquist finally figured out what had happened to him at the Samadhi was that his consciousness had separated from his energy. He hadn't tried to do anything; the process, if there was a process, had been effortless. Detachment need not be a cold and humorless place after all, it could be an experience in the body that went beyond acceptable boundaries. His consciousness could not be incarcerated in its old cage, Wayne was busting out all over, and his new state nipped at the sore heels of the soul come into its own. Maybe the trick was to be sincere enough to let that tiny ancient impurity called “me” disappear or merge, be absorbed into this big new conscious force. Then, consciousness would not be frozen separate from its energy, but would be its own warm, intimate source, be one with it, in love with it, slightly bemused at its party moves but wise to all of it: the still-smiling guide of all that streaming ocean. It's a bit like the way a pack of cards accords out between your hands when you shuffle it—who knows what might happen if you play your cards right?

The hours that Wayne and Surama spent at the Samadhi passed like minutes and when they walked back to Seaside, it seemed to them that Surama's feet would barely skirt the ground and Wayne's, if anywhere, hovered a couple of inches above it. Then he found he had the energy to work four hours a day on his doctoral dissertation on sleep and dreams that would earn Wayne, this guy who could pass for a gunslinger in a western, his Ph.D. in East-West Psychology. He learned the power of mental projection, that is, how much more productive he became when he rested from it. Surama worked in Pondy as



secretary for their friend Balkrishna in the Ashram book distribution office on Rue de la Marine.

The old Wayne wasn't one to smile much. Or was God leaning over and smiling at him with His face upside down? He had a sixth sense that something was missing. He was weighed down by the seemingly immovable mass of what *wasn't* there, and it showed on his face. A friend from Santa Cruz, who liked them both, once told Surama, "Wayne is the saddest person I have ever seen." That was *before*. Wayne's face has forever after had a faint, enigmatic smile, more visible to women and children than it is to men. Ever since Seaside, Wayne has had that Mona Lisa look. The Mona Lisa always seems like she knows something that we don't.

Who saw Wayne change? Haridas Chaudhuri did. Let me tell you who Haridas was. A Stanford University professor, Dr. Friedrich Spiegelberg, had requested that Sri Aurobindo select a scholar to join the staff of the American Institute of Asian Studies in 1950. Chaudhuri was an Indian philosopher recommended by Sri Aurobindo to take the position. Spiegelberg invited him to the Institute; and Chaudhuri, once he moved his family to San Francisco, established the Cultural Integration Fellowship right alongside his collaborator, his wife, Bina. Out of "the Cultural," which is the red brick building at the corner of Fulton Street and Third Avenue, the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) emerged as its educational arm, again with Chaudhuri at the helm. Chaudhuri brought Sri Aurobindo's teachings to the West, and for twenty-five years until his early death in 1975 went on to develop his own integral philosophy and approach to life. He was a tireless worker and was very patient with San Francisco's homeless people, who appeared like rainbows in the foyer, having wandered in right across Fulton Street from Golden Gate Park. In the same vein, in the 1980s, Wayne Bloomquist was studying Sri Aurobindo's teachings, meeting weekly with a small circle of people in whose midst sat the homeless poet named Rainbow. He was a patchily dressed person who rocked himself dizzy while he

ran a meeting aground on the shoal of his rambling speeches. Then one evening—they had reached a passage about the perfection of the soul—*Rainbow happened*. A slight tilt in the compass and he became the soul right in front of them. The beauty of the soul sailed before them, it radiated into their eyes. Looking at him, they saw only perfection.

So, when Bloomquist returned to the USA in the summer of 1974 to continue work on his dissertation at CIIS, Dr. Chaudhuri took one look at him and his whole face lit up. It was as if he was saying, "Aha! So it happened." Perhaps you've got to be an Indian, or a Sufi, or someone with heavenly sight, like Blind Willie Johnson, blind to those things that use up all our time so we can no longer perceive what is there behind a person's eyes. Perhaps Haridas lit up because he saw in Wayne what the Mother spoke of when she described how she looked into a person's soul. Or when a small group of God-seekers saw the Rainbow. She said that it's the life in the eyes, very close to the surface—the vital part of a person, that sparkles and shines—that is what the whole world mistakes for the soul. But, she went on to say, deeper down, *there is something warm, quiet, of a rich substance, very still and very full, and exceedingly soft—that is the soul*.

Because now there was something in the depth of Bloomquist's eyes that wasn't there before. It was only there after he spent three days at Seaside sweating out his share of the darkness. And when I look at Wayne—in the picture postcard of him and Surama, taken in a ghost town in Nevada that they sent me after they moved from Berkeley to Sparks in 2002, with cowboy boots and western-style holsters and Colt 44s in their hands, in front of somebody's idea of a covered wagon (a wainwright means a "wagon maker")—I see that different person looking out of his eyes, and aiming straight into mine. After that experience, his life took a 180-degree turn—just as to get to the back room at Seaside that the Bloomquists were given, from the front ocean-view room that they had been shown, took a 180-degree turn—traveling along that thread of love, so thin

and so strong, that runs from dimension to dimension.

He was no longer "Wayne." His life so far had matched the way his name sounds: on the "wane," downbeat. I don't mean *Downbeat* the jazz magazine, though Wayne and Surama are jazz fans—I mean *down*, beat, fed up with being bummed out. The saddest person you ever met was truly becoming Bloomquist, which in Swedish means "flowering branch," or better yet, "a blooming twig."

Better you don't call him that. Wayne has always had some rough edges, and maybe that's why he retired to Nevada in 2002, to work them out. He looks like he could be a cross between your plumber and some gunslinger that Clark Gable, or that other Wayne character, John Wayne, played. For the most part, those rough edges have softened, but, believe me, they're still there.

The beauty of the light takes time to flush through all the unplumbed places we have hidden away from it. And sometimes a look flashes across Wayne Bloomquist's face that makes me keep my distance. And then I start to think this just might *be* the guy who "shot a man in Reno, just to watch him die." Of course, you do understand, don't you? I'm not talking about shooting a man on the streets of Reno! I'm talking about the deep darkness in each of us that must be blown away by the Light it came out of in the first place. *Because soul is "nothing but a burning light," but the rest of us is another matter entirely*.

This is the matter Bloomquist is busy bringing the Star Wars-like Force in contact with, as are other Rebels who have taken on that facet of the Mother's work—not many, but they do exist—trying to destroy the Death Star. Remember, in *Star Wars*, how Luke Skywalker was taught by Obi-Wan Kenobi to *trust the force*?—not shoot down every station in the whole Death Star, but take aim strictly at its core. If you have a dark space weapon the size of the moon facing you, only a direct hit at the center is going to take it down. Have you ever noticed, in your own life, that when you face such a thing, you only get through it by staying focused on the center—that



dissipating your energies on trouble spots, merely multiplies them? So be careful, this world is changing, the Rebels are winning, and harmony is becoming more contagious than any other power.

In the same way, the work of Wayne and others like him is simply to let the Presence from the central soul extend into each of the many trillions of body cells. Microscopic it may appear, but this can only have its “butterfly” effect on this caterpillar world that is slow at shaking off its cocoon. The joy it is sure to bring, Wayne feels, may be worth the infinite taking of pains. This slow pervasion of matter, my matter and yours, and of all matter for that matter, is a stitchwork of soul-threads, compassion at its most material; it is thankless, endless work. Something akin to a single skinflint paying off our national debt. Or hitching your wagon up to a star-like nuclear power that hundreds of millions of people call Sat-Chit-Ananda—hooking that Substance-of-being-alive up to the Force of a greater nature and the Ecstasy of eternal love—and packing it into the cells. *Surrendered matter*—strange phrase, to be sure, but it means the cells themselves *want* to soak in that light. Paradoxically, in Wayne’s work with matter, his only protection is his surrender, to make it sharper, make it deeper, make it vastly more detailed.

Wayne has always wanted to work unnoticed, invisible, and so his wish has been granted. What seems not to have been granted is any wish to meet less stringent resistance, from the opposition, insurmountable and insidious, that comes from running up against established powers that, more often than not, are pathologically nice. The iron laws of life seem to have no “give” to them: everybody must stop growing inside, right? Everybody must get stoned, sick, go rotten, rust, decay, because everybody dies, and everybody knows that. Try “smuggling godhead into humanity” and you keep running into customs! The defeatism, so many layers of wet blankets, the bureaucracy that has embedded itself in our physical mind,

that keeps repeating to all of us, all the time, that full transformation is impossible—sometimes grates on him, ridicules his spirit, and makes him wonder: Was it worth the gamble?

It’s like gardening in the dark—no body knows you’re there, so no one can see you, either to thank you or thrash you. All too often you must come head to head with the opposite of that beautiful complete existence you are to be in the end. And you have to look that beast in front of—or in—you, square in the face, like Shane in the movies, face the insatiable mouth that makes you go weak in the knee, and limp and tremble. Then suppose you start running like a bull with no control and no direction, straight at a solid retaining wall, only to be saved at the last moment by two strong Tamil men

... the work of Wayne and others like him is simply to let the Presence from the central soul extend into each of the many trillions of body cells.

who seem to materialize right in front of you; and you’ve got to gather from somewhere the grit to offer The Thing up. And to know that angels of utter failure guarantee the ultimate success of the whole daredevil enterprise.

Speaking of the devil, Wayne says, “Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Savitri*, *None can enter heaven who has not passed through hell*. He meant right here on this red, red earth. Those rough edges, Rick. That’s why I’m in Reno.” Even when they’re licked and eaten up by Light, some of our inner demons may not be up to an official metamorphosis. In the same way that some of us are partial to an ecstasy that’s got some edge to it, our own severest demons may actually enjoy the process of dissolution into their origin. And, on the other pole, when someone is in the process of being disappeared into the light, turning into gold, you don’t want to catch them in one of those alchemical moments and have them pump you full of lead. So when he’s in one of those places, I give the big Swede

the same right of passage I hope will be given to me when the time comes.

Our every seeming deficiency harbors in it the seed of some hidden aptitude. Deep in our own shadow lies the secret of the shining. And out of every dark thing that directly opposes us, the healing bodies of light are being formed. Mirra Alfassa laid it on the line, *Do not try to be virtuous. See to what extent you are united, ONE with all that is antidualine. Take up your share of the burden; accept to be impure and false yourself, and in so doing you will be able to take up the Shadow and offer it. And insofar as you are able to take it and offer it, things will change.*

The soul itself is formless but is creating a form, a new being that is slowly taking shape around it. Bloomquist has written about the “psychic being” in relation to the creative process. The soul is each person’s own work of art. *It is each individual’s supreme creation, molded out of the essence of life itself.* At a more mature

stage, matter will be spirit because the soul will materialize: this new being will take a body on the Earth. Wayne had to look at it awhile before he could recognize himself, but he was able to catch, or be given, a glimpse of his new being in the mid-1990s. His soul had something like the shape of his body but was formed of another substance, “a shimmering gold.”

Waldo Emerson of Concord in “The Over-Soul” considered or came face to face with “that great nature in which we rest,” each all our own self yet “made one with each other”: *For the soul’s communication of truth is the highest event in nature, since it then does not give somewhat from itself, but it gives itself, or passes into and becomes that man whom it enlightens; or, in proportion to that truth he receives, it takes him to itself.*

Auroville has been “baked in the fire” and emerged a forecomer (as its first settlers were called) in ecologic innovation—water salvation, the ancient way of preservation, of using every precious drop; the use of mud and unfired earth as mate-



rial for building that shows the simplicity of our ancestors for the futurism that it was, and strategies toward a sustainable architecture that is inseparable from surrealist art—"the floating surrealism of Matrimandir takes you to the land of pure glory." Auroville is also becoming an adventure in compassion that is putting the power of creation back into the hands of the children that all of us are, and allowing the amazing minds of the indigenous women in the midst of us to lead us on the way. Will it live up to words the Mother called "A Dream"? *There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property; a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments.*

Auroville is one experiment of the Mother's; Wayne is another one. But the "concrete human unity" he's looking for goes deeper than any state that may come into being when humans settle their differences with each other. It is to be itself—himself—a living unity fixed in matter, with a spirit of settled harmony that, unfolding in a body, is permanent and is one, one in every part of it. And, one would wager, shows its stuff in every physical act that is needed for the Force to be fully effective. As the cowardice we meet in ourselves may be merely an index to the courage we are meant to inspire, so the strength in the way matter stands in our way, its out-and-out rigidity, may index that more chipper counterpart that matter has hidden in her soul, floral in its loveliness and with all the flexibility of light.

June of twenty thirteen is coming to an end, with Bloomquist on the brink of turning eighty. It's been forty years since

he was baptized in sweat and swallowed in light. He's a modest man with establishment goals. They begin with establishing the ecstasy of eternal existence in every cell of his body. But where did that spring go, that bounce in his step back in the nineties when he walked five miles every day in the Berkeley hills? Or the way that he sprung out of his body, like it was the most natural thing in the world, at the inception of his present spiritual life, after he'd just started meditating regularly in 1970 when living in an apartment on Russian Hill—shooting out the top of his skull like a starship to Andromeda? Will he feel winter calling him to travel again to the Samadhi, home of the mystic fire, cradle of the Mother's force, in the courtyard of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry? Or will the mystic fire and the Mother's force cradle him everywhere, making every body cell a traveling Samadhi?

He stays calm, calls on the Mother for help, and perspires. A whole family of quails is emptying out the bird feeder, and someone has to shake out the hammock. Maybe have the brakes checked on the Wagoneer. Later today, he's got to book a flight to the Pacific Northwest, where he's expected to come to an event in Cannon Beach, Washington. Surama and Wayne will stay at a hotel in another Seaside, where they have been before more than once, seeking help for a family member at a substance abuse program. He recalls sitting in on a discussion where he was struck by a mother's words. She was there with one of her daughters, but expressed more concern for another daughter, who wasn't there but maybe should have been: a crisis-prone teenager with a bad attitude. Sorry, wrong problem, only drugs get you to Seaside. She said she actually wished that daughter had abused substances—instead of herself and other people—so she could come to a rehab center that got results! But Surama and Wayne will be flying to Cannon Beach this time for the wedding of his grandson.

Here at home in Sparks, the cherry trees never look lovelier than they do this time of the morning, nor do those snow patches that linger on the Sierra ranges

that Surama and Wayne can see from their backyard. In the late sixties the Mother had wanted some exotic plants, peculiar to the Arctic, to be encouraged to grow in the soil of Auroville: to the puzzled faces of sunburned forecomers, she had said, *You will be seeing snow here.* Nothing seems impossible these days. With the slightest shift, in climate, in consciousness, who knows what could happen? He keeps moving around the shallow pond behind the bungalow. That's where he received his most recent communications, two of them on the same subject, from the Mother.

The Mother told him: *Stay away from those places. You are losing everything you've gained and besides, they're no good for you.* Wayne heard her loud and clear the first time but he didn't get it.

So a week later she said it again. *Stop going to those casinos!*

Was she getting him ready for the ultimate gamble? His last visit to Pondy, five years ago, had gone not so well. As he puts it, "The Mother says, when you get off center you get attacked," and he had been. He had a fever, possibly mosquito-borne, that he has heard called "fever chicken gunya." He was walking behind the main Ashram building, on the way to the pharmacy, when, he says, a force took him over and sent him hurtling toward a wall. His consciousness hazed out, and he can barely recall the two strong Tamil men (the ones conjured up a few pages back were not hypothetical) who at the last second seemed to come out of nowhere and blocked his charge. For the first time, Pondicherry had felt hostile, and he hurried home. This had happened not far from the Mother's balcony, where until 1962 she used to come out every morning at six to initiate the blessing of the day. He said, "I felt no pain from the experience, just a loss of my center and balance and equilibrium. I'm still not where I was before the incidence." Ever since, he'd suffered from injuries to his back, shoulder pains, and it impaired his ability to walk. He has recovered slowly, with diet and chiropractic care, exercise—he singles out Feldenkrais as a great help—waiting for a better time, doing five more years in Reno;



working out a few more of those extra-rough edges to his personality. But now in the summer of 2014, Surama, though battered by more serious health problems than Wayne's, was urging him to go. She said she had a good feeling; this spin of the wheel Pondy was to be a different story. It certainly has been, only nothing like Wayne expected.

Before, it had been something entirely between him and the Mother at the Samadhi. Wayne's in his Pondicherry, and all's right with the world. The rest of us...well, we were the rest of us. But, as he writes in *God Shall Grow Up: Body, Soul & Earth Evolving Together*, "Perhaps the 'real world' is right here, after all." In the real world, Surama's health problems sent her from their subdivision of low-slung bungalows with brown-tiled roofs in the Sierra foothills to the hospital in Reno. Her son, Richard, was worried. So Wayne could stay only 12 days in India instead of the 40 he had hoped for.

He didn't stay long, and it wasn't Seaside. He stayed at Golconde, a young 70-year miracle of international collaboration; a remarkable edifice that is spare and striking, an architectural work of art that pioneers in keeping resource consumption to a creative minimum. The Mother, herself an artist, had commissioned and overseen its adherence to uncompromising construction standards during the late 1930s. Golconde serves as both a guest house and facility for permanent members of the Ashram. Wayne has been to the Ashram so many times more than any other American, that to my mind he's hardly a guest. What he took home with him this time was a series of brief visits with old friends in Golconde. Near the end of his visit, he sat with Sunanda, Balkrishna's wife, and with other old friends, in five separate visits, each lasting no more than ten minutes.

Nothing special, just old friends catching up. What they said was not remarkable; what passed between them, indescribable. "There was a connection that has stayed with me. The Mother is innumerable, and whatever happened there is still here, in me, maybe all of us—something deep and lasting. Maybe all that work on the rough edges in Nevada has come to something..." he trails off.

Could that which is eternal be as elemental as the Earth? Wayne is stolid and Earthlike to outward appearance, Andromedan by inner nature. After finding his soul forty years ago and being left with the most powerful feeling of love he had ever experienced, Wayne left everything behind with no sense of loss, only a sensation of physical wonder at what awaited.

After finding his soul forty years ago and being left with the most powerful feeling of love he had ever experienced, Wayne left everything behind with no sense of loss, only a sensation of physical wonder at what awaited. Without leaving behind the shape and form of your typical washing machine salesman.

Without leaving behind the shape and form of your typical washing machine salesman. In all likelihood, a most unlikely person to represent us all. He's long reminded me of the hero in a Dell comic book I read off the shelves at Safeway in Indio, California, while my parents were busy purchasing food for the coming week (we lived far out in the desert where no supermarkets existed, and had to travel sixty miles every Saturday to stock up on groceries). This installment of the comic series featured a story in which some future space technology had overcome immense challenges: some lucky young person was going to be afforded the opportunity to travel alone to a distant galaxy, where he would stay. The scientific community had chosen for this extreme opportunity a young man with no bad habits, no blemishes on his character, and no family to miss him—so grounded in a unique form of common sense that the world had no

hold on him. Wayne was to me, and will always be, that person.

Back in Nevada, he has laid all his chips down engaged in a lonely exploration of the galaxy of a new physical body that is, he says, "simple, profound." And—can I say—transmundane. Now he would seem to me to have come full circle, to where the worm Ouroboros is turning around to bite his own tail, and in his end is his beginning. Maybe now, for Wayne, normal human social relations loom as far reaches of the final frontier.

When it gets cold enough, and windy, ice and snow can evaporate without melting, and we call this sublimation. You could think of it as a sublime way of getting rid of snow with the least amount of "squishiness." In a similar way, maybe

to avoid the mud and slush that true human communication may involve in a world like ours, those ultimate spiritual experiences have been sublimed into silence. Those

who have them are enjoined—wisely or stingily?—to hold them tightly to themselves—away from all others, away from the good red practical Earth. It's not like they have treasure laid up in heaven, it's like they have socked it away in secret bank accounts in the Cayman Islands! It is to Wayne's glory—to others his gall—that he goes gabbing on about it.

He's back in Sparks now. I feel closer to him than anyone and he never calls me, but since an experience he had sometime in the 1990s, I can call him and he, at least, will pick up. And now Christmas, 2014, he's radiating light even over the phone. His energy is back in fiber-optic spades, the fountains of Wayne are flowing again. Our relationship is permanent, and there is no separation between us.

1. From the book, *The Soul That Makes Us Matter*, Chapter 15, section 5



Essays

Land and spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century

by John Robert Cornell

Continued from the last issue...

5. When Dirt Becomes Stars

*All the grey inhibitions were torn off
And broken the intellect's hard and
lustrous lid;*

*Truth unpartitioned found immense sky-
room;*

*An empyrean vision saw and knew;
The bounded mind became a boundless
light,*

The finite self mated with infinity.¹

The difficulty

We started on a personal search looking for grace in the landscape.

We can find it there, hear it ringing, know that other people have seen it. But, there is a difficulty. We are not free to run to the grace and throw ourselves into its arms. It is illusive. The dirt becomes stars for a few precious moments, but then the stars go out and we boomerang back to the flat, impoverished consciousness of everyday life. The grace slips out of our grasp. We are back in the clay shell. There is a failure of something. We forget. We distract ourselves. We are too small and narrow to sustain the effort. We slip down into the distracting swirls of mass consciousness and float away on "Friends" and fashion and sports and noise. We spin back into the frantic addictive rushing that locks us in the frozen canyons of the mind or dissipates in the shifting dunes of feeling. We bury the hunger, the yearning, and settle for a handful of dust.

We found also that our personal search was a small fragment of a long-



Photo courtesy John Robert Cornell.

standing global conversation about the human adventure and how it relates to nature.

New voices and old from all over the planet are pointing out a big practical difficulty in our current relationship. They tell us that our narrowing of consciousness down to the single vision of economic materialism, to have more, to control more—all of this has practical consequences. That new deck on the side of the house, multiplied by a million decks across the country, means clear-cutting miles of Canada's boreal forest. The planet starts to gasp when we hack up its lungs. We get our deck. We also get an epidemic of asthma and bury the yearning under second cars and third refrigerators and this unbroken rushing around.

We meet our sales quotas for new Fords and Toyotas. We pour miles of new freeways to handle the congestion. But this unrepentant oil addiction means broken lives and polluted villages in Ecuador and Columbia, dead soldiers and children in Iraq, obscene wealth in Texas, epidemics of skin cancer in Australia, and mass bleaching of coral

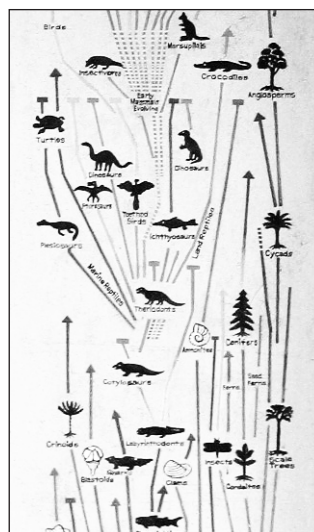
reef across the South Pacific. A Californian living in Marin County consumes so much so fast that it would take 24 earths to support the whole human population at this standard of living. All of the currents and consequences of this consumption are not immediately visible or at a scale easily accessible to human senses, but that does not negate them.

And even if we understand some of these contradictions theoretically, here too there is a difficulty. No one knows how to stop the madness in practice, short of the collapse of the terrestrial ecosystem. The madness is self-sustaining, like alcoholism... for a while.

Some try to understand it, thinking and writing and holding conferences. Cosmologist Thomas Berry and former Vice President Al Gore lay out comprehensive analyses and wide-ranging proposals to stop the assault on nature and point human energies in healthier directions. Robert Pirsig drives the knife of analysis back down through the sediments of personal and social history to find the iron point of separation, the branching of reason and spirit in the Western journey.² Some protest or start political movements. Some take themselves back to the land to separate from the madness or to reconnect with the slower ways of the past. Some champion ingenious ideas to reverse the tide. Atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen proposes releasing particles of sulfur in the upper atmosphere to cool the warm-

ing earth artificially. Architect William McDonough designs houses and office buildings and even cities that give more back to the land than they take, like an apple tree.

Some, like the voices of the land described in the last chapter, start with the dirt. They aim beyond the separation by focusing on the particular in nature, in the land. They find a new wideness and joy worth living for, another level of being





beyond the separation, if only for peak moments.

But these pioneers are outnumbered and outgunned by the hurricane of marketing, promoting and waste that consumes our lives and interests in the developed countries, and consumes the forests, rivers and mountains of the developing ones. That strips the oceans and the forests and the fresh water. That concentrates economic power in fewer and fewer hands.

The human story, the earth story, is a tragedy if numbers are the critical factor. But behind the numbers and the headlines, there is a quiet sustaining force that is full of surprises. It has always been there handing out surprises, throughout the adventure of evolution. No economist takes it into his reckoning. You won't find it mentioned on the evening news. Scientists say—If it exists, it is not testable. It is for someone else to investigate.

The ancient voices communed with it. The new voices of the land are rediscovering this force in their work. They dance around it. They celebrate it. They probe the land for its fault-lines, they marvel at it. They become it. The power in the land, the consciousness and grace that erupt from it, are one manifestation of this force. The brooding song of the land, the One Being that breaks out across human and mallard and lily, the brotherhood of Navajo and bear, the commonality between the glowing face of Half Dome and the visitors from Japan—these are all one force, the same force that has driven matter across time from star dust to trilobite to Picasso. The force behind evolution.

We identified difficulties on both the personal and terrestrial scale, difficulties we have not been able to overcome successfully. They demand something more radical, a new level of being, a jump beyond the pettiness and weakness of current human nature.

That is, in fact, the way evolution works. It makes a leap when enough tension builds up around a difficulty. The difficulty itself, its magnitude, is a predictor of the coming leap. The one force, the

driver of evolution, will inevitably move on to the next level of the earth adventure, personal and global. After 4.6 billion years, there is no reason to think that evolution on earth has suddenly stopped in the twenty-first century.

In the West we have looked only at the outside of evolution. We have seen the mutating finches of the Galapagos, pieced together some of the ancestors of homo sapiens from the fossil record, and unraveled the mechanics of the DNA double helix; but we have not looked into the soul of evolution to see what these multiplying, advancing forms are carrying. Or what is carrying them.

We can hardly imagine what the “soul of evolution” could mean. We are so used to looking only at the outside of things.

It is only the beginning of the One World age, but we can travel anywhere on the globe. We can take advantage of wisdom wherever we find it. So for a look at the inside of evolution, we return for a little while to the East, where we started this journey.

The inside of evolution

In his Integral Yoga, Indian seer Sri Aurobindo discovered a principle that casts light into the dark room of the present time and outlines astonishing possibilities growing in the hidden wells of the future. That principle is the evolution of consciousness. Let's take some time to examine his discovery.

In 1910 Aurobindo Ghose, poet, political leader and revolutionary, fled British India. He had rallied the Indian people to the call of independence while Gandhi was still working in South Africa. He did it with such force and eloquence that Britain's colonial rulers declared him “the most dangerous man in India,” most dangerous, of course, to them.

In April of that year he escaped to the French colonial town of Pondicherry on the Coromandel Coast of south India to take up a new call. He stayed there the rest of his life. Indian politicians and revolutionaries begged him to return to politi-

cal life. They offered him the presidency of the Indian National Congress, which became the Congress Party of Gandhi and Nehru. But Sri Aurobindo, as he was called by then, declined all offers. Inwardly assured of the coming independence of his native land from the superpower of his day, he turned his attention to a bigger, wider revolution. What was needed, he said, was a revolt not against the British, which anyone can easily do, but “a revolt against universal nature.”³ Beyond political freedom for his countrymen, he wanted to establish a new freedom for the whole earth. Beyond even the individual liberation that earlier avatars and teachers had taught, he wanted to change human nature itself, to transform the divisive mind, the quarreling life forces, and even the death-bound physical body.

No one had attempted this before.

Thousands of saints and sages have sought *liberation of the soul* and taught their disciples the way. But the same ignorance, old age, and death still haunt the planet. Sri Aurobindo's intent was to find the key that takes the whole terrestrial evolution to the next level, not out into the white nothingness of nirvana or the heavenly harmonies of the afterlife, but here on earth, in matter. A force that would take the earth beyond the divisions of mind and the inevitability of death. A power that could anchor the next platform of the adventure of terrestrial evolution beyond the occasional glimpse of grace, beyond even the realized saint or Sufi master.

He set out on a “yoga,” a spiritual quest, not for personal enlightenment but for that much more formidable goal: the transformation of the whole earth.

Sri Aurobindo, a synthesis of East and West, was uniquely prepared for this work. Born in Calcutta, he was educated in England from the age of seven. He was already deep into the Western classics in high school. He read Virgil and Homer in their native languages. He wrote poetry in Greek and Latin as well as English. He spoke English and French. At the age of 13, he already knew that he would be part of the great change coming over

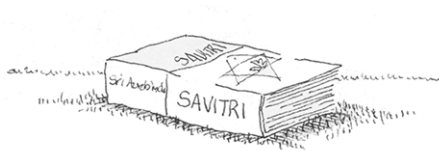


humankind. He earned a scholarship to Cambridge University. He taught himself German and Italian so he could read Goethe and Dante in the original. He could quote Nietzsche, Shakespeare, Homer, Goethe from memory. He digested trunk after trunk of the classics of the West. He made the whole spirit of Western civilization his own.

When he returned to India at the age of 22, he taught himself Sanskrit and began to assimilate millennia of Indian culture that was his birth heritage. He set out on his voyage into the ocean of change ahead.⁴

In 35 volumes, thousands of pages of poetry, philosophy, letters, and social history, he laid out the most comprehensive roadmap produced by the twentieth century, perhaps by any century, in answer to the great questions. Who are we? Where are we going? Where have we come from? Who are our people? What is the way forward?

He wasn't writing theory. He wrote



Drawings by Karen Cornell

nothing except out of his own experience. In fact, writing, voluminous though it was and of such majesty, was not his chief work, but only a translation of the inner work he undertook.

*I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire,
A bed for the golden river's song,
A home for the deathless fire.*⁵

Looking for the key to the difficulty, he drove down to bedrock, down to the abyss, down to the black hole from which everything seems to spring, not only in astronomical time, but also in this instant, in every instant. To the Unknown which casts up the laws of gravity, of energy, of geology, of chemistry and biology, the structure, the organization, the shape and connections that undergird everything,

even these words. Everything is contained, ordered, and driven along by that Unknown. He bore way down there, farther down than imagination can reach into the suffocating blankness of sheer, unformed, lightless, shapeless night looking for the knot, the key.

"I made an assignation with the Night,"
he wrote.

*In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous.
In my breast carrying God's deathless
light
I came her dark and dangerous heart
to woo.
I left the glory of the illumined Mind
And the calm rapture of the divinised
soul
And travelled through a vastness dim
and blind
To the grey shore where her ignorant
waters roll.*⁶

So, yes, there is a difficulty. All the voices we have been considering are not wrong about that. Identifying the full nature of the difficulty is key to discovering its solution. Sri Aurobindo identified it as the ignorance and unconsciousness of our nature. We live in ignorance, he said.

*It is quite evident that we know ourselves with only a superficial knowledge,—the sources of our consciousness and thought are a mystery; the true nature of our mind, emotions, sensations is a mystery; our cause of being and our end of being, the significance of our life and its activities are a mystery: this could not be if we had a real self-knowledge and a real world-knowledge.*⁷

We perceive everything as separate, when the truth is oneness. Objects appear separate in space. To our perception time divides itself into separate moments, and further separates itself into past, present and future. Thoughts are separate from the object of thought, which is different from the thinking subject.

This is our daily reality. We manage only flashes of unity, sparks of creative in-

tuition showing a larger picture. But we don't live there. We stumble into a groove, and then it's gone again. We're back to a part of the unrecognized whole, an infinitesimal fragment.

He called it "the ignorance."

Other sages also saw ignorance, separation, division as the difficulty, and unity as the truth. This was not new. Abandon the world of ignorance, they concluded. Do the best you can and then get out. The ideal we seek is not here in matter and never will be.

But Sri Aurobindo discovered an element not in the old wisdoms: consciousness itself evolving. "An evolution of consciousness... is... the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence." The evolutionary working of nature, he said, has an outward and an inward process: an evolution of physical forms and an invisible evolution of the soul.⁸

The fact of consciousness itself evolving has profound ramifications.

Ignorance and separation, he discovered, are not of the essence of nature and world. Stir evolution into the story, and you get... a new story. Ignorance and separation are a fact of this page of evolution—mind—but they are not the final act. The story is still in the telling. There is much more to come.

In the nineteenth century the master idea of evolution opened up biology, laid bare the exquisite branching architecture of the family of animals and our sisters, the family of plants. It lit up geology. We looked at the unmoving Alps and Andes, and we watched them rise and crest like ocean waves, a tide of basalt and schist lapping the shores of the eons. We saw mountains and stars and gorillas and roses interconnected like we had never seen them before.

But we had never seen evolution from the inside like Sri Aurobindo did. Instead of tracing the development of forms, like Darwin, he looked inside and found an evolution of *consciousness* across the ages, from seep to gusher to shoreless ocean, taking ever newer and more complex and pliable forms for its expression. Con-



sciousness, he said, is the principal fact of cosmic history. The forms it takes are its means of growing in matter. He turned our viewpoint inside out and discovered the journey of consciousness in creation, the great adventure of Spirit in matter.

He looked into the future. He found that from the heights of consciousness he had reached, there was no separation of time. The wave of creation was all a single movement without division into past and future.

But to us, looking from the outside, it is The Future. To us it is the not-yet. We have no idea what could be more than us, what could be the next level of terrestrial being beyond the mental heights reached by humanity. Imagining the future, we are like the baboon on the savannah scratching his ear trying to conceive of a Christ or understand the higher mathematics involved in sending the Apollo spacecraft to the moon.

Words help us make the stretch. They point us in the direction of the effort and of a knowing that is sheer sight, beyond words and concepts.

True, we are not allowed to look away from the Hitlers, the Darfurs, the Rwan-

das, and Stalins. We have lived them in our lifetime. We can find them in the shadows under our collars and on the wrong side of our ambiguous hearts. But neither are we to look away from the dawn, the force of creativity under the pressure of need, the grace of a willow tree or a Mother Teresa. Or the compelling words of a Sri Aurobindo.

*If in the meaningless Void creation
rose,
If from a bodiless Force Matter was
born,
If Life could climb in the unconscious
tree,
Its green delight break into emerald
leaves
And its laughter of beauty blossom in
the flower,
If sense could wake in tissue, nerve
and cell
And Thought seize the grey matter of
the brain,
And soul peep from its secrecy
through the flesh,
How shall the nameless Light not leap
on men,
And unknown powers emerge from
Nature's sleep? ⁹*

There! We catch a glimpse of consciousness' evolutionary staircase. And on into the future: The Power behind history, behind prehistory, behind everything, the Unity, is still driving evolution forward.

How shall it *not* leap on humans? It's unthinkable that unknown powers *not* continue to emerge from Nature's sleep.

The old solutions aimed for an individual realization and then a liberation of that realized soul from time into an eternal nirvana or heaven. This was a mighty achievement for an individual soul, but it did not change earth nature. It exported the solution out of earth nature. People continue to be born in ignorance, live in it, act out of it, suffer, and die. Individual souls may progress, but nature remains unchanged.

This educate-one-individual-at-a-time approach is insufficient now because the difficulty is not essentially at the individual level. Instead Sri Aurobindo saw that the difficulty represents an

evolutionary stage: The previous stupendous leap of evolution, the introduction of mentality into earth nature through higher animals and more fully through human beings, has collided with its own built-in limitations.

The human mind has created huge, unwieldy structures of external life for servicing physical and mental claims and urges, "a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery." But this civilization and its machinery are "too big for his [the human being's] limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites."¹⁰



A new leap is needed, another radical change in earth nature, something that takes evolution beyond mentality, for "the problem is fundamental and in putting it, evolutionary Nature in man is confronting herself with a critical choice which must one day be solved in the true sense if the race is to arrive or even to survive."¹¹

So there is a leap coming, already in progress. But it's not magic. It's not an apparition that leaps full blown out of the sky. It's part of terrestrial evolution. It takes intermediate forms, searching, looking for the passage, hunting its own perfection. It occurs in time. It takes time.

How long, how many turns and blind alleys, did it take that new mental gleam born in some proto-hominoid's eye five or six million years ago to evolve into a Shakespeare or an Einstein?

This is the radical and difficult task Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collabo-



rator in the work, known as the Mother, undertook: Look inside of evolution and find the bridge to nature's next leap, beyond humanity, beyond the limited moral and spiritual capacity of a mental being, beyond separation. A new consciousness beyond the mental—"supra-mental," he called it—but operating here, in matter, in life on earth, not in some beyond.

And become a conscious, willing participant in the transition.

That is what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did.

That is their invitation to fellow adventurers.

Nothing less will solve the difficulty, because the difficulty is evolutionary.

The human being, he said, is a "transitional being, not the final end of the evolution and the crown of terrestrial existence."

This ignorant, imperfect and divided being, with his labouring uncertain thought and half-successful will, this toiling and fluctuating experiment, this field of the attempt at emergence of a thousand things that are striving to be, is no consummation of the struggle of cosmic Force... There is something that he is not yet which he has to be; he is reaching always towards the something yet unrealised; his whole life and nature is a preparation, an endeavour of Nature towards what is beyond him.¹²

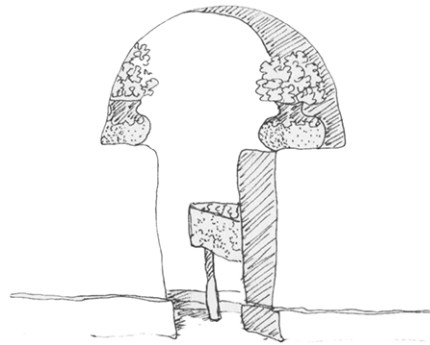
Here and there the new voices of the land have also recognized this need, if not its magnitude, in their own way.

Henry David Thoreau sensed the need for "a new foundation mythology"¹³ if American democracy was going to survive the dehumanizing and despiritualizing collusion of government and big business.

"Nothing can be done without creating a new kind of people,"¹⁴ wrote Aldo Leopold.

The work at hand

We don't know how far into the future a definitive jump to a new terrestrial consciousness lies.



At first sight this insistence on a radical change of nature might seem to put off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future... But what is demanded by this change is not something altogether distant, alien to our existence and radically impossible; for what has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it...¹⁵

Meanwhile, the new voices of the land are telling us something significant about themselves as well as about the nature they are discovering in a new way. Their "implicit, oblique evocation of the transcendent"¹⁶ hints already at qualities required for "a new kind of people."

Here too, the visionary map of the cosmos found in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's work throws into relief the mystery, the breaking through, the personal participation, the slip to the other side that we have noted in the new voices. For the map includes new insight into human nature, a greater psychology full of hope and the promise of humanity's huge potential—unknown powers from nature's sleep already in place, though still mainly hidden. This greater psychology includes the flatland of ignorance and shadow where we normally live but also kingdoms of wideness, unity and beauty beyond the surface consciousness. It forecasts how these kingdoms can be the native grounds of our future here on earth. We can situate the efforts and experiences of the new voices within its prediction of the coming leap to those kingdoms. And it explains how the future is already seeping into the present.

Why do the elders of the Lakota feel such love of the soil? Why are Richard Nelson's feelings of loss at the destruction of an island so personal? What are Ann Zwinger "breaking through" and "seeing beyond" in the warm afternoon? What is the crossing or the veil through which we are thrown by a Kenneth Rexroth poem? What are the boundaries that fall away?

Let's have a look at this new geography of human nature and its potentials, and then circle back to review these experiences in the light of that geography.

Wisdom traditions have long known what modern psychology recently discovered, that our surface being—the body, mind, and personality that we ordinarily consider "ourselves"—is not our totality or full truth. While the unconscious described by Freud lies below the surface of our being, Sri Aurobindo tells us that a hidden inner being lies behind and supports our surface being.

He doesn't just *tell* us that. He writes from there. Once you have a sense of this inner being—and traces of it are strewn throughout this book—you can see that he lives there. He has made it his home. You can read his poetry or prose and sense that he is writing from the golden place that keeps slipping out of our grasp. Because he lives there, let's listen to what he says about the inner being and see how it throws light on the "breaking throughs," the "seeings beyond," and the crossings we have been talking about.

First, however, note that even this inner being, along with our surface self, is not yet the totality of our true being. We are *far* richer than we imagine. Deeper inside than the inner being, even more interior than the inner being, is the soul, the true person behind the mask, each individual's portion of the One Truth and driver of evolution. Sri Aurobindo's greater psychology reaches even beyond the soul, but a brief look at the inner being is enough for our present purposes. He identifies the inner being as the first step inward from the normal separative outer human consciousness toward the One Reality.

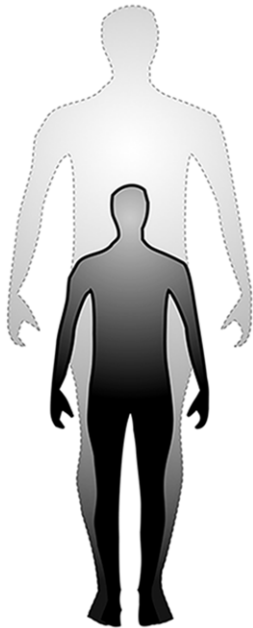


This inner being is ourselves, more truly ourselves than the flatlander we usually call “I,” but it is wider in consciousness and empathy, connected more deeply and concretely with everything around us, more intuitive and less separate, more capable of recognizing immediately the inherent oneness of all being. Its knowledge and experience reach far beyond the scanty crumbs of the physical senses and the cumbersome machinery of reason. It knows more directly, in a flash of intuition or direct contact.

It is the peak moment become the norm. It is that high country from which revelation, art, and creation pour in to flatland. It is a land of powers and experiences considered paranormal by our surface “normal” self, but entirely natural and normal to our true being. When we experience powers like this—telepathy, clairvoyance, or telekinesis, for example, or profound gratitude, compassion, or insight—it is because they slip from the inner being into experience through the cracks in our surface shell of separation.

These powers and experiences, which have no convincing explanation in the materialist scheme of things, are the *expected* result of the inner being described by Sri Aurobindo’s greater psychology.

This inner being, our greater self, does have and use subliminal senses, he says, but it does not depend on them for knowledge the way our surface mind requires the information of the physical senses. “There are here inner senses, a subliminal sight, touch, hearing; but these subtle senses are rather channels of the inner being’s direct consciousness of things than its informants...”¹⁷



And there is a psychological and spatial widening of the being “beyond the limits of the personal mind, the personal life, the body, so that it feels itself more and more a universal being no longer limited by the existing walls of our too narrow mental, vital, physical existence.”¹⁸

In another place he describes the widening and universalizing like this: “[W]e awake first to a larger consciousness and then to a cosmic consciousness; we are no longer little separate personalities with limited lives but centres of a universal action and in direct contact with cosmic forces...”¹⁹

Just as it bridges the separation in space, so the inner being can also dissolve the separations of time. It “can be aware too of the future, for there is somewhere in the inner being a field of cognition open to future knowledge, a prospective as well as a retrospective Time-sense, Time-vision, Time-perception; something in it lives indivisibly in the three times and contains all their apparent divisions, holds the future ready for manifestation within it.”²⁰

These subjective powers and experiences are susceptible to doubt and devaluation in our surface being, especially if there is no external evidence. Nonetheless, in the inner being they come with their own conviction. The greater immediacy of contact and knowledge there leads naturally to “a dynamic intuitive conviction in the inner being of the truth of supersensible things which cannot be proved by any physical evidence but which are a subject of experience.”²¹

Still the powers of the inner being are not magic or miracle, any more than writing a great poem or composing sublime music. Few people can do these things, “not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being.”²²

Keeping the passage clear enables the riches to come through—the artist’s inspiration, the dancer’s direct perception of

the starry universe in Krishna’s mouth, the naturalist’s “inexpensive ticket to another level of being.”²³

Why do the elders of the Lakota feel such love of the soil? The passage is open to that widening of the person. The earth is their own larger being, their Mother. Why are Richard Nelson’s feelings of loss at the destruction of an island so personal? The destruction is of a part of himself. The separation between his surface self and the land is weakened or gone. What is Ann Zwinger “breaking through” and “seeing beyond” in the warm afternoon? What is the crossing or the veil through which we are thrown by a Kenneth Rexroth or Mary Oliver poem? The passage between the outer self and the inner being. What are the boundaries that fall away? The boundaries to our greater self.

We find examples of the extended senses of this greater psychology in, for example, Zwinger’s descriptions. She uses language of the kinesthetic and tactile senses to describe her lily, but the knowing she gains is far more direct:

[I’d] seen all lilies in this lily, known dryness in my roots, spreading in my leaves, sunshine polishing my stalk.

And it is unshackled by time and space. It has a universal quality.

*Because of that lily, which I’d never seen until a few days ago, I knew all about waiting for enough warmth, also about cool dawns and wilting noons, how aroma communicates and stamens speak. Because of that lily I knew about desert heat and winter sleep and what the desert demands.*²⁴

The old materialistic cosmology would probably call this poetic license, relegating it to some flight of imagination with no basis in reality. With no way to explain these larger powers, its only recourse is to ignore or deny them. We know, however, even from science’s own evidence, that they exist and recur. Sri Aurobindo’s psychology accommodates



them easily in our inner being. There they enlarge and complete some of the powers of our small surface world and fulfill some of its dreams.

Besides their immediate benefits, forays into the inner being foreshadow the coming evolutionary leap. "To know our inner being is the first step towards a real self-knowledge,"²⁵ Sri Aurobindo writes.

The first step suggests the next, beyond the temporary breakthrough or the peak moment: *staying* there, learning to live there.

...[W]e have to go into our inner being and learn to live in it and from it....

[T]he consciousness has to shift its centre and its static and dynamic position from the surface to the inner being; it is there that we must find the foundation for our thought, life and action. For to stand outside on our surface and to receive from the inner being and follow its intimations is not a sufficient transformation; one must cease to be the surface personality and become the inner Person....²⁶

Living in the inner being is a step toward the larger leap to come, "but still not the supreme or the whole sense of our being, not its ultimate mystery."²⁷

...[Our] inner being makes us inheritors of the higher heights of mind and life and spirit: the more we open inwards, go inwards, live inwards, receive from within, the more we draw away from subjection to our inconscient origin and move towards all which is now superconscient to our ignorance.²⁸

New voices of the land, and the old voices, in their pursuit of the mystery, the breaking out or the breaking in, are uncovering this inner Person, this larger truth of themselves. They sometimes reach that edge where "myself" and this lily or that island merge. On these breakout peak moments, they slip through the cracked shell of the surface self into a wider, sweeter playground of unity and delight. One can

hear it in the lyric quality of the writing when the breakthrough happens. They are no longer rationally describing mere facts. Instead, song comes through the prose, the song of the land and the song of the soul reunited, the joy of reunion.

The song of the Future.

That is where we are going in evolution. Progressively. Step by meandering step. The inbreaking of the future. A future that will one day be simply a new now, a radically new foundation. A shift in center from the separate self we now think we are to the inner unity.

These writers and artists, and everyone who relates to their song from their own experiences, are the eyes and voices of nature seeing and speaking to its very self. They are both voices of the land and explorers of a larger humanity innately closer to the land, more directly kin to or even one with all things. The kinship is immediate and natural, because a veil of ignorance—*not knowing* the unity of being—is thinned or gone. That "other" is now recognized to be in fact and in truth, not "other," but my very self. The "other" is a viewpoint only; it wavers like a mirage in the experience of unity. It collapses when unity becomes the new standing ground. That other person or maple tree or houseplant that previously I thought was separate from myself and my concerns, is no longer outside the gate. The world is different. My sight is cleansed.

It is from this root of inner kinship that a new environmental action and protection begins and lasts. It doesn't flag or peter out because the ignorance, the separation, the ancient autism at the heart of the difficulty, now is healing at the core of one's being. In this new world appearing on the horizon, protective action arises from the unitary nature of things, no longer from a vague or a fiery but unsustainable moral should. Environmental

protection becomes as natural and normal as carrying your toddler across a busy street. Environmental renewal is as obvious as washing your face or watering your garden.

There is still work to be done, but it has become joyful, obvious work, at one with one's fundamental nature.

All the programs, all the laws, all the movements, all the protests cannot take us to a new harmony between humanity and nature without such a fundamental healing of the spiritual autism at the core of the problem.

An American yoga

This larger inner being is latent in human beings everywhere. Breakthroughs from the inner being can arrive on the surface in the material dimension, the life dimension, the mental dimension—the three major flowerings of terrestrial evolution so far. Across the globe they burst out, but differently in different places.

Some parts of the world may reach their high points in mental life, for example, with soaring philosophies and brilliant systems of thought. Other lands may be most richly creative in the vital and esthetic domains of music, drama, art, literature, social organization.

In America we have a penchant for dealing with matter itself. Here much of the inspiration and breakthrough coming to the surface from the inner being focuses on the *material world*. If there is an American yoga, this must be its first principle.

Before the European conquest of the New World, native peoples living here made communion with the forces and presences in their natural surroundings an organizing principle of their life. Vision quests, ceremonies, pilgrimages, and the role of the shaman were means of accessing the powers of the inner being and connecting it with the greater-than-surface





Presence in the earth.

Folklorist and Karuk Indian Julian Lang once asked his great-grandmother about the Indian's view of God. Her answer both acknowledges this immanent Presence in the earth and presupposes a subject capable of perceiving it:

Once I asked my one hundred and eleven year old great-grandmother, Bessie Tripp, "Who did the old Indians say was God, Grandma?" She said, "Why the Earth! Ever'thin'. The rocks, the leaves, the mountains." Our sense is that all of nature grows from the Earth as strands of long hair connecting the present with the beginning of time and original knowledge.²⁹

Anthropologist Richard Nelson reflects on a similar recognition of his Koyukon teachers:

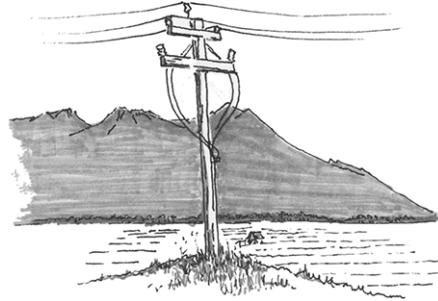
I've often thought of the forest as a living cathedral, but this might diminish what it truly is. If I have understood Koyukon teachings, the forest is not merely an expression or representation of sacredness, nor a place to invoke the sacred; the forest is sacredness itself. Nature is not merely created by God; nature is God. Whoever moves within the forest can partake directly of sacredness, experience sacredness with his entire body, breathe sacredness and contain it within himself, drink the sacred water as a living communion, bury his feet in sacredness, touch the living branch and feel the sacredness, open his eyes and witness the burning beauty of sacredness. And when he cuts a tree from the forest, he participates in a sacred interchange that brings separate lives together.³⁰

During the vision that set him on the medicine path, Lakota medicine man Black Elk lived in the sacredness that we have been calling the inner being, "seeing in a sacred manner" the underlying Unity in all things:

While I stood there I saw more than I

*could tell,
and I understand more than I saw;
for I was seeing in a sacred manner the
shapes of all things in the spirit,
and the shape of all shapes as they
must live together like one being.³¹*

The European immigration brought something different to the shores of America. True, it brought religious traditions from the Old World, but more importantly a tremendous energy paired with an attitude of mastery. The rebels, the seekers, the hungry, the daring, the adventurers swept across the land, learning its ways enough to survive and to exercise the mastering impulse they brought from the old countries. This impulse did not



include the intention to enter into a living communion with the land. The immigrants were masters rather than partners. Sweeping aside the native peoples, they raced across the continent, Europeanizing it in their own image.

The invasion of America from Europe rested on the assumption that the masters have the right to take what the land has to give.

The taking was work; it demanded discipline. Our ancestors worked hard. They *worked* the new land, made it work—for them. We still use this expression today—*work the land*. One is reminded of the potter image in Genesis, shaping the land as if it were a mass of clay without inherent form, to be molded in any way the potter chooses. And always we have assumed that the land is there for our use above all else. Everything that does not

serve that use must be gotten out of the way, regardless of the means.

The world-changing successes of the Industrial Revolution multiplied the means unimaginably. During the last two centuries, coal and then oil and gas transformed cottage commerce, craft, and farming into industries of undreamed-of power and reach. Everywhere hewing, carving, digging machines replaced hands and eyes touching the land. Less and less could we even conceive of a partnership with or a living communion with the landscape which our machines tore up and reshaped. This effort was in full force as recently as the beginning of the last century, when there were still unexplored wildernesses and territories not yet formalized into states. It continues today in "development" of farmlands and forests and deserts into malls and industrial parks, gated communities and tract housing. There was so much land. It was so rich, so luxurious. And there seemed to be a whole continent for the taking, an unlimited sandbox for shaping and building.

We of European ancestry have arrived here in the "New" World comparatively recently. We have not yet listened to this land. New immigrants carry the land of their birth or their ancestors' birth with them. Still listening to the echoes of the old home, they are half deaf to the subtleties of the new. But the old ways of Europe were not appropriate or sufficient for the new situation.

New England is not old England. It carries seeds from old England, tries to extend it, looks back to it with nostalgia, incorporates the old ways and old knowledge into the new land, new people, new climate, history and sensibility of the new place. But the new place is not really a copy of the old place.

Its countryside, its nature is different. The creative force of evolution is differently expressed here. It uses a different language. It expresses different qualities. Its trees, rivers, ocean, thunderstorms, clouds and sunshine, rocks and hills, soil and valleys, animals and flowers and grasslands and seasons differ from the old place. They



have their own patterns, their own movements and migrations, their own distinct arrangement of colors and sounds and seasons. Their own voices and their own distinctive voice. If the land speaks, is conscious, as the Native Americans say, listening to it and responding with love and respect is crucial to the health and destiny of both the land and its people.

In this new place the newcomers had something else to do, some purpose other than simply repeating the old. Some of our wisest took the best seeds from Europe and from the Indians and formulated new political scriptures and structures of equality, freedom and human rights. But the wisdom of the local peoples and the land was mostly ignored and overwhelmed by the inrush of people and ideas from across the seas.

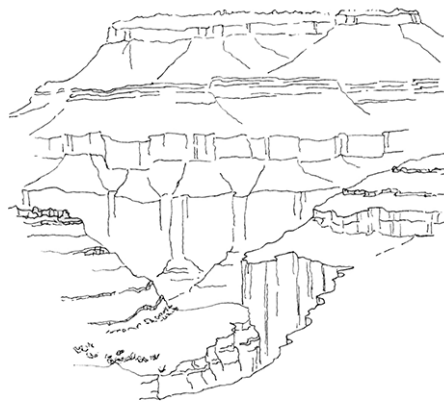
America is not Europe. It is something else. The farther west the newcomers went the more the American land stretched them, slowed down their advance, undermined their assumptions. "The European culture from which the ancestors of many of us came," says Barry Lopez, "has yet to ... understand the wisdom, preserved in North America, that lies in the richness and sanctity of a wild landscape, what it can mean in the unfolding of human life, the staying of a troubled human spirit."³²

Most of our cultural life today—our industry, our education, our food, our entertainment—still reflects the energy and the domineering assumptions that came from Europe. We take what the land has to give but listen to what she says only enough to pile up the riches from her wealth. But we have not learned what she wants in return for her abundance. We are masters without love, dictators, pirates, rapists.

This continent is not Europe. It will have its say. It is speaking now, its voice is roaring in some places. The roar is growing. It is demanding change. It is time to listen to the land, to become native to America in a way that includes *both* ancient and new.

Our time is nothing if not a time of change. In many areas of contemporary life, old comfortable boundaries are falling away. We thought the earth was solid.

Instead it moves and quakes and explodes. It is more akin to a living being than a stone foundation or a great machine. We thought we could count on the solidity of matter itself. Instead it slips from our grasp like water. It dissolves into energy or simply dematerializes at the atomic level before our best instruments. We thought that we had an unlimited continent to exploit and make us rich. Instead we have a limited land linked by an unlimited web of interconnected relationships that barely touch our awareness. We thought we knew who we were. Instead there are vast, unknown forces at work in us at this moment, archetypal forces of dark and light



that we notice only in dreams, if at all.

Old personal boundaries too have to slough off. Without the breakthrough to a larger inner being, we are like a nerve cell trapped in its own miniscule perspective, yet trying to control the whole body for its narrow purposes. Without changing perspective from neuron to organ or organism, everything tilts out of kilter.

But this changing perspective is more than having different thoughts or beliefs. It is knowing in a different way, seeing differently, a new consciousness. Having a different "seen" in front of you while you are looking at the same front door or the blue jay that you saw a moment ago in the old habitual way. Having new sight that not only changes what you see looking at that blue jay, but also discovers a dif-

ferent seer looking through your eyes. So that you see and know yourself to be more than a bag of skills or a bundle of fears and aches and limitations, more than your little personal history that runs 45 or 80 years and then a few more dim years in someone else's memory before it fades to nothing and vanishes.

India has highly-developed methods to accomplish this change. The methods collectively are called Yoga, "the art of conscious self-finding,"³³ in Sri Aurobindo's phrase. Yoga refers to more than the physical stretching exercises that it commonly means in America. "Yoga is in its essence," he says, "a passage from the ordinary consciousness in which we are aware only of appearances into a higher wider deeper consciousness in which we become aware of realities and of the one Reality. Not only do we become aware of it, but we can live in it and act from it and according to it instead of living in and according to the appearance of things."³⁴

Do we have an American yoga in that sense? Do we have even the first glimmerings of a native path for becoming aware of the one Reality and living in it, already appearing not just in our universities and in the publications of our scholars but on the roads and in the hearts of America?

Glimpses of grace on our journey and the undercurrent of recognition in so much of American nature writing point toward the same answer. If the new voices of the land are expressing what many more Americans sense or intuit, then we already have a beginning American yoga, a spirituality native in the sense that it's not imported from anywhere else.

A tradition of spirit is growing out of this soil, American matter, we could call it, probably practiced in this hemisphere for thousands of years. It erupts right under our feet. It speaks to us in the forest, awes us in the ocean and the night sky. The mountains sing, the land speaks. They wait for us to listen—to listen in the other way.

We modern Americans may be slow to hear and recognize the tradition. We may think it is just a backpacking trip or a vacation at the lake. We may not call it a



vision quest or pilgrimage. For us it doesn't have the depth of preparation or the conscious intention of a mature spiritual endeavor, but some of us put an inordinate amount of dedication and effort into these trips. And we come back refreshed, our perspective changed, a secret longing satisfied, at least for a while.

Something more than mere spectacle is drawing tens of millions of people to our cathedrals, the Grand Canyons and the Yosemite of the American West, every year. When they get there, some of them see more than a spectacle and hear more than they say.

Writer Barry Lopez notes "that what lies at the heart of the religion of hunting peoples is the notion that a *spiritual landscape* [emphasis added] exists within the physical landscape."³⁵ Eruptions of that sacred landscape are the driving force that pulls many of us back to places like Yosemite over and over.

No doubt other elements will contribute to the American way of spirit.

In this country we have nearly five hundred years of Christianity, brought by the European settlers. It contributed to the dreams and the political foundations of the European experience in this land. But today it doesn't afford a clear path to the experience of the sacred for some. An individual may have a personal relationship with his concept of God, while remaining in flatland, going through the narrow path of life as a separate person, and then dying, hoping to find grace in another world.

While much of Christianity is disconnected from our contemporary cosmology as envisioned by the scientific side of ourselves and from eruptions of the inner being that we discover in the old and new voices of the land, there are signs of change. The creation-centered work of pioneers like Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry are examples. Berry embraces the fruits of contemporary astronomy and physics as the new creation story. Then he puts his own twist on it. "The universe," he says, "is a collection of subjects, not a collection of objects."³⁶

Psychology has also shown us worlds beyond our surface states of mind. Along with the more common traditions of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, a transpersonal psychology has appeared that points beyond our littleness and animal roots toward a greater, nobler life.

Some argue that America's recurring dives into "mindless materialism" disqualify it for any pretense to spiritual genius. Our reputation for material excess and destruction is legendary and well-earned. But the argument misses the target.

The obsession with matter of the American experiment has its lower keys, like everything in the flatland of separation. Our infatuation with matter, with material things, besides stretching and distorting over into rampant materialism on the lowest notes of our scale, assumes the form of a dedicated shaping of matter and mastery of its forms on the middle notes, and a focus on immanence higher up the scale. The vast energy brought by immigrants has often turned towards working matter. The size of the New World made it a playground for building. And the *kneading* of matter, the preoccupation that European-ancestry Americans have had with working and molding and mastering the material world, accounts for recognized value in American research, technology, medical science, construction methods, tool making and other material enterprises.

Driven underground for so many years, the recognition of the presence in the living land is now reappearing in the children of the invaders. Immanence is the recognition that the Mystery, the Beloved, is present in the material world or just behind its surface appearances. This presence of the Mystery in the land itself, given such rich expression in Native American religions, has re-emerged in the testimony of the new voices of the land. So, in America, even our spirituality is deeply involved in the material world. We have not invented the high systems of metaphysics or unembodied, transcendent Spirit that other peoples have explored. Instead we are builders and workers and

believers and lovers of this material world. And our native spirituality emerges from there, too, from the land or is directly connected to our relationship to the land, the Mother Earth.

Today the world is bringing to birth a new cosmology from the global efforts of science. A crucial extension of that new story comes from our world-brother Sri Aurobindo. And we can see a flavor of this new reality that is peculiarly American in this country. It's a material flavor.

If this is what we are doing, let's do it openly. Let's say it openly. Let's say to America that you need not be ashamed that you don't have 2000 years of European cultural history to stand upon.³⁷ You have your own work to do in the physical: working matter and at the same time being worked by it, that is, rediscovering its inner truth. This work in the physical promotes personal joy and spiritualization, and it's your soul's work.

This work has a personal inward dimension, an inner anchoring change of perspective, a yoga. The work is this: Move the focus of consciousness inward from the outside. Redirect attention away from material consumption and hoarding, to the higher values of working matter as craft and discovering and celebrating matter as robe of the Great Mystery. This combination will reveal a newer, much wider science and a technology of respect—or one could dare to say *of worship*—as well as mastery. We appear to be already teetering on the brink of this new discovery.

This work has a social and political outward dimension that grows out of this yoga: reining in and turning around the engines of environmental destruction and exploitation to prevent the complete collapse of the world's ecosystem until the inner change takes hold.

Outward and inward are mutually reinforcing. In the larger consciousness that we need, that we are working toward, we experience them as dimensions of the same oneness.

If the song of the land is a chorus of America the Beautiful here, elsewhere the song may be of the sky or of the rhythm



of the ocean or of the crystal palace of thought or of what reaches up high beyond thought to the next level of evolution. The One World age does not want uniformity. Every part of the world, like every individual, has to find its unique gift, its genius, to contribute to the one Earth, the new story.

We have the outline of the story and the symbol. The truth symbol of the miraculous blue-white globe spinning through the night of space is imprinted on us all since the advent of the space age. It shows the beauty of our earthen home and the integrated nature of its parts. The One Earth has many parts, parts that are one and yet each unique, each with something precious to offer to the mystery of the future.



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What's the right thing to do: A meditation on dharma, reason and offering

by Beloo Mehra

"Do what feels right to you, to the real you inside."

"Listen to your inner voice, and act accordingly."

"Don't give in to the societal pressure, hear the voice of your soul."

We hear such advice so often these days. From practically anybody and everybody!

But let us think about it deeply for a minute. Is it that simple to access that inner voice? That voice of the real 'me' which will inspire me to do the 'right' thing?

How many individuals are actually able to organize their lives according to the law of their truer/inner self? Only the rarest among rare are actually able to live in their true self that is beyond their emotional and mental selves and their demands. Rest of us, the vast majority are driven by impulses, preferences, biases, prejudices, instincts and perhaps a bit of rationality too in our saner moments.

The ancient Indian Rishis knew very well about this problem of human nature. So they came up with the ideal of Dharma, which covered basically all natures, all aspects of life, all situations and stages of life, and even allowed for maximum freedom, continuity and greatest possibility of contextualization, adaptation and adjustment. Sri Aurobindo in his *Essays on the Gita*¹ defined Dharma as follows:

Dharma in the Indian conception is not merely the good, the right, morality and justice, ethics; it is the whole government of all the relations of man with other beings, with Nature, with God, considered from the point of view of a divine principle working itself out in forms and laws of action, forms of the inner and the



outer life, orderings of relations of every kind in the world. Dharma is both that which we hold to and that which holds together our inner and outer activities. In its primary sense it means a fundamental law of our nature which secretly conditions all our activities, and in this sense each being, type, species, individual, group has its own dharma. Secondly, there is the divine nature which has to develop and manifest in us, and in this sense dharma is the law of the inner workings by which that grows in our being. Thirdly, there is the law by which we govern our outgoing thought and action and our relations with each other so as to help best both our own growth and that of the human race towards the divine ideal.

We find that there is an individual dharma (different for different roles, functions, and stages of life), group-dharma (dharma of an organization like a guild of craftsmen or a regiment of soldiers or a *gurukulam*/educational institution) *kula-dharma* (dharma of an extended family lineage), *jati-dharma* (dharma of a collective of lineages), *yuga dharma* (dharma appropriate for a *yuga* or epoch—implying that dharma changes with time, what is appropriate today may not be relevant tomorrow). Dharma also varies by the *varna* (*varna* does not mean caste), and by the stage of one's life (dharma of a householder is different from dharma of a social recluse/ascetic or from dharma of a student).

The society was meant to be organized around this ideal truth of Dharma and the idea was that if people truly acted and lived according to the truth of their dharma they would be able to live harmoniously with others and eventually work towards their own self-fulfillment gradually coming closer and closer to discovering their *swabhava*, true nature and *swadharma*, the deeper purpose of their life. This gradual progress in one's life and living by the dharma appropriate to age, station and place in life and society, helped one grow inwardly and spiritually.



Beloo contemplating in the garden. (Photo courtesy Beloo Mehra)

Thus Dharma ensures stability and continuity of the society. But in the imperfect human hands/minds, it can also result in society's stagnation by restricting individual freedom and free expression and by pushing people back in their fixed 'place' if they tried to transcend their so-called dharma. Dharma is often confused with the English word 'Duty' which automatically brings in the opposition to the other idea of 'Right'. Given below is another clear and powerful description about Dharma given by NoliniKanta Gupta² which helps us see how the terms Right, Duty and Dharma are better understood as "degrees of an ascending consciousness."

We may perhaps view the three terms Right, Duty and Dharma as degrees of an ascending consciousness. Consciousness at its origin and in its primitive formulation is dominated by the principle of inertia (*tamas*); in that state things have mostly an undifferentiated collective existence, they helplessly move about acted upon by forces outside them. A rise in growth and evolution brings about differentiation, specialisation, organisation. And this means consciousness of oneself of the distinct and separate existence of each and every one, in other words, self-assertion, the claim, the right of each individual unit to be itself, to become itself first and foremost. It is a necessary development; for it signi-

fies the growth of self-consciousness in the units out of a mass unconsciousness or semi-consciousness. It is the expression of *rajas*, the mope of dynamism, of strife and struggle, it is the corrective of *tamas*.

In the earliest and primitive society men lived totally in a mass consciousness. Their life was a blind obedience—obedience to the chief—the patriarch or pater familias—obedience to the laws and customs of the collectivity to which one belonged. It was called duty; it was called even dharma, but evidently on a lower level, in an inferior formulation. In reality it was more of the nature of the mechanical functioning of an automaton than the exercise of conscious will and deliberate choice, which is the very soul of the conception of duty.

The conception of Right had to appear in order to bring out the principle of individuality, of personal freedom and fulfilment. For, a true healthy collectivity is the association and organisation of free and self-determinate units. The growth of independent individuality naturally means at first clash and rivalry, and a violently competitive society is the result. It is only at this stage that the conception of duty can fruitfully come in and develop in man and his society the mode of *sattwa*, which is that of light and wisdom, of toleration and harmony. Then only a society is sought to be moulded on the principle of co-ordination and co-operation.

Still, the conception of duty cannot finally and definitively solve the problem. It cannot arrive at a perfect harmonisation of the conflicting claims of individual units; for, duty, as I have already said, is a child of mental idealism, and although the mind can exercise some kind of control over life-forces, it cannot altogether eliminate the seeds of conflict that lie imbedded in the very nature of life. It is for this reason that there is an element of constraint in duty...



One has to compel oneself, one has to use force on oneself to carry out one's duty—there is a feeling somehow of its being a bitter pill. The cult of duty means *rajas* controlled and coerced by *sattwa*, not the transcendence of *rajas*. This leads us to the high and supreme conception of Dharma, which is a transcendence of the *gunas*. Dharma is not an ideal, a standard or a rule that one has to obey: it is the law of self-nature that one inevitably follows, it is easy, spontaneous, delightful. The path of duty is heroic, path of Dharma is of the gods, godly.

The principle of Dharma then inculcates that each individual must, in order to act, find out his truth of being, his true soul and inmost consciousness: one must entirely and integrally merge oneself into that, be identified with it in such a manner that all acts and feelings and thoughts, in fact all movements, inner and outer—spontaneously and irrepressibly well out of that fount and origin.

To reiterate, “each individual must, in order to act, find out his truth of being, his true soul and inmost consciousness...” Not an easy thing to do. Not at all easy.

The above passage also helps us be wary of that advice—listen to that inner voice, because it helps us remember that it takes a whole lot of silencing of other voices of Right, Duty, Law, Religion, Rule, Standard etc. before the voice of the inmost consciousness can even have a chance to be heard.

But then the question arises—what to do, how to decide our actions, make our choices till one is living in one's soul, one's truth of being.

Before we address that, let us meditate a little more on the idea of Dharma through these words of Sri Aurobindo:

Dharma is generally spoken of as something eternal and unchanging, and so it is in the fundamental principle, in the ideal, but in its forms it

is continually changing and evolving, because man does not already possess the ideal or live in it, but aspires more or less perfectly towards it, is growing towards its knowledge and practice. And in this growth dharma is all that helps us to grow into the divine purity, largeness, light, freedom, power, strength, joy, love, good, unity, beauty, and against it stands its shadow and denial, all that resists its growth and has not undergone its law, all that has not yielded up and does not will to yield up its secret of divine values, but presents a front of perversion and contradiction, of impurity, narrowness, bondage, darkness, weakness, vileness, discord and suffering and division, and the hideous and the crude, all that man has to leave behind in his progress. This is the *adharma*, not-dharma, which strives with and seeks to overcome the dharma, to draw backward and downward, the reactionary force which makes for evil, ignorance and darkness. Between the two there is perpetual battle and struggle, oscillation of victory and defeat in which sometimes the upward and sometimes the downward forces prevail. This has been typified in the Vedic image of the struggle between the divine and the Titanic powers, the sons of the Light and the undivided Infinity and the children of the Darkness and Division, in Zoroastrianism by Ahuramazda and Ahriman, and in later religions in the contest between God and his angels and Satan or Iblis and his demons for the possession of human life and the human soul.³

The above passage throws light on what may be dharmic as opposed to ad-harmic choices or actions. But more importantly, it emphasizes that the various forms that the ideal of dharma may take in the lived world are changing and evolving because human beings, for the most part, are constantly aspiring toward the ideal of dharma, not really living in the ideal. This evolving nature of dharma

however is not in contradiction to the eternal and unchanging nature of what Dharma in its essence is.

Dharma, therefore, is not an easy concept to intellectually comprehend and analyse. It has to be actually ‘lived’ as per our level of consciousness and its ascending journey. However, in order to at least mentally comprehend it, we must first develop an intellectual practice and habit that accepts multiple truths co-existing simultaneously.

For example, while *Ahimsa* (non-violence) may be the supreme Dharma on a very high spiritual plane, it cannot and should not be applied universally as a moral principle on each plane of existence and action. When a soldier kills in a battlefield, he too is following his dharma. Failure to do so will mean abandoning his dharma. When a colonized people start an armed revolution against their colonial masters their action is not *a-dharmic*. Passively accepting oppression and unjust foreign rule may actually be against the spirit of the group-dharma which enjoins the group members to live and discover their individual dharma in freedom.

We have seen so far that Dharma is universal and individual at the same time. It is eternal and ever-changing at the same time. A tiger kills and devours others as per its dharma, a flower gives fragrance and beauty to all as per its dharma. It is only human being, however, who perhaps is often not sure of his or her dharma and feels a sort of evolutionary crisis within. There are times when one must abandon the dharma that seemed right and true at an earlier time or stage in life, and go toward a higher dharma, a higher law of being. And this creates an inner tension of sorts, an inner battleground where dharma alone can help resolve the crisis.

But how?

We must remember that we are not one single, unified being. Instead we are a composite of many parts—physical, vital, mental, each with its own dharma, a true law of being—held together by a central, true inner being, the psychic being within. The body, vital and mind can be seen as instruments of the soul, the true inner being.



It is this inner being, which is a spark of the Universal Spirit, the Supreme, which alone can be the source of that Right Inner Voice, the voice that can guide our other parts to their right and true action and way of being. But since ordinarily, this inner being remains hidden under many thick veils of our physical-vital-mental nexus, we in our ignorance continue to follow the whims and fancies of these parts in their un-illuminated forms.

Only when the light of the inner being shines upon these parts can they find their true law of being, their dharmic action. And the extent to which this light can enter is dependent upon the extent to which these parts are open and receptive. The openness and receptivity, in turn, are a function of the development and refinement of these parts. The more fine-tuned, shaped up and refined these instruments are, the more they will be receptive to the voice of their master, the true being within.

What does this all mean for how we should make a decision? Or how we should resolve the crisis within when we don't know what is the right thing to do?

Man is not like the tiger or the fire or the storm; he cannot kill and say as a sufficient justification, "I am acting according to my nature", and he cannot do it, because he has not the nature and not, therefore, the law of action, *svadharma*, of the tiger, storm or fire. He has a conscious intelligent will, a *buddhi*, and to that he must refer his actions. If he does not do so, if he acts blindly according to his impulses and passions, then the law of his being is not rightly worked out, ... , he has not acted according to the full measure of his humanity, but even as might the animal.⁴

In order to facilitate the right working out of our inner law of being, we must act according to a decision or choice based on the highest light we can reach in our present state of conscious evolution. In most cases, the highest light we have access to is the light of our Reason. The more developed our Reason is, the more light it

can shine upon the other parts of our being, particularly the vital-emotional part which most of the time is being pulled in different directions by its many desires, passions and impulses. Sri Aurobindo tells us that while the human reason is not capable of leading humanity—individually or collectively—to their highest perfection, yet there is an important role that intellect or reason plays in opening the gate to a greater self-consciousness. He writes:

The rational or intellectual man is not the last and highest ideal of manhood, nor would a rational society be the last and highest expression of the possibilities of an aggregate human life, —unless indeed we give to this word, reason, a wider meaning than it now possesses and include in it the combined wisdom of all our powers of knowledge, those which stand below and above the understanding and logical mind as well as this strictly rational part of our nature. The Spirit that manifests itself in man and dominates secretly the phases of his development, is greater and profounder than his intellect and drives towards a perfection that cannot be shut in by the arbitrary constructions of the human reason.

Meanwhile, the intellect performs its function; it leads man to the gates of a greater self-consciousness and places him with unbandaged eyes on that wide threshold where a more luminous Angel has to take him by the hand.⁵

The more refined our Reason is, the more open it will be to higher inspirations and the light from regions above itself, making it inch closer to its dharma, its spontaneously right way of being. How to make the instrument of Reason more refined and well-developed is a question worth serious reflection, but that's better left for another article. Suffice it to say here, that a well-honed reason will not be easily swayed away by the conventional norms, family expectations or societal pressures, factors which often discourage

an individual (or a group) to decide freely when facing a dilemma. Reason would throw light on the peripheral nature of these and other 'vital-emotional' factors that cloud decision-making process, and not allow them to influence the decision waiting to be made.

When faced with a dilemma, the best we can do is step back and give ourselves a mental and emotional space from the situation at hand. Only then we can see the situation and its associated dilemma in the calm light of Reason and decide how to act. Choose we must, and then act we must, based on the choice we have made. This is the most reasonable thing to do.

Then comes the most important part. Remember and Offer. This is what makes the reasonable thing into a dharmic one. Once we have made a decision in the highest light of our reason, we must remember to offer it to the Highest Source. Because as Sri Aurobindo reminds us:

...reason is in its nature an imperfect light with a large but still restricted mission and that once it applies itself to life and action it becomes subject to what it studies and the servant and counsellor of the forces in whose obscure and ill-understood struggle it intervenes. It can in its nature be used and has always been used to justify any idea, theory of life, system of society or government, ideal of individual or collective action to which the will of man attaches itself for the moment or through the centuries.

...For it is really that [the spirit in man] which decides and the reason is only a brilliant servant and minister of this veiled and secret sovereign.

...The root powers of human life, its intimate causes are below, irrational, and they are above, suprarational. But this is true that by constant enlargement, purification, openness the reason of man is bound to arrive at an intelligent sense even of that which is hidden from it, a power of



passive, yet sympathetic reflection of the Light that surpasses it.⁶

How to open enlarge, open and purify the reason so as to arrive at an “intelligent sense” of that which is hidden and is guiding all the decision and action? One simple practice is that ‘Remember and Offer’. Let us take a brief look at this and see how it may help us get closer to our understanding of what is the dharmic thing to do when we are faced with a dilemma, with a choice between right and right, perhaps.

First, we must remember that the true being hidden inside whispers to us very softly through the light it shines upon its outer instruments; the intellect and Reason being the instruments of concern at present. We must also remember to become more aware and conscious of these very subtle hints we receive, and to stay open and receptive to the light we receive in our intellect and reasoning capacity. Placing our trust in that Light which is guiding us, let us without any bias or preconceived notion, accept the voice of this Intelligence. Let us find strength in these words of Sri Aurobindo:

...the action of the intelligence is not only turned downward and outward upon our subjective and external life to understand it and determine the law and order of its present movement and its future potentialities. It has also an upward and inward eye and a more luminous functioning by which it accepts divinations from the hidden eternities. It is opened in this power of vision to a Truth above it from which it derives, however imperfectly and as from behind a veil, an indirect knowledge of the universal principles of our existence and its possibilities; it receives and turns what it can seize of them into intellectual forms and these provide us with large governing ideas by which our efforts can be shaped and around which they can be concentrated or massed; it defines the ideals which we seek to accomplish.

...every enlarged attempt of the intelligence thus dealing with our inner and outer life increases the width and wealth of our nature, opens it to larger possibilities of self-knowledge and self-realisation and brings us nearer to our awakening into that greater consciousness.⁷

With a calm confidence and complete trust in the Divine, let us make a sincere offering to the Divine of the decision we have arrived at using our Reason or Intellect. Let us offer all the consequent actions, all the difficulties that arise in the path, the choices we make as we pursue the action, the results of our efforts, any successes and failures we face. Let us leave the consequence of our decisions and actions on the Divine alone.

If we can remember to do this, and if we can do this with as much sincerity and humility as we can find within, we can go through all conflicts or dilemmas with a sense of calm equanimity. But what is it that prevents us from practicing this advice of “remember and offer?”

What prevents us from doing this is our mixed-up, egoistic outer nature.

A lot of stuff occupies our daily lives and keeps us away from remembering. How often have we said—oh, let me finish this work and then I’ll sit down and meditate for half an hour; now I have this one more thing to do, so where’s the time for my prayers; after I am done with this I need to go and do this other thing, so there is no way I will be able to sit quietly for ten minutes and remember the Divine. We keep postponing the act of remembering. We get so occupied by forgetfulness, that it becomes super-convenient to forget and stay forgetful.

From cleaning our bathrooms to preparing the dinner, from folding the laundry to entertaining the guests, whether it is working outside the home, or driving back home in the evening—the task in front of us can be a means to grow in our consciousness, if we can do it in the right attitude. This right attitude is not easy to acquire, it takes a life-long practice and an utmost sincere effort.

It requires us to spontaneously remember that it is not the separate ‘I’ that is doing all this work, but that all this is part of the Larger Work of the Divine, and that I am only a mere instrument through which it is being done.

It requires us to always remember that the Divine is always present around us, inside us, everywhere, that all work, all action is nothing but an offering of oneself and everything that one is to That.

We don’t offer because we ignorantly perceive that what we are doing, feeling, thinking, including the crisis or dilemma we are faced with, are not the ‘stuff of Gods’, but the ‘stuff of us’. We forget that it is all Her Stuff, it is all She, She is in All, and is All. So how can the ‘stuff’ be ours?

We forget that by not offering we keep living under the illusion that the stuff is ours, the outcomes of our actions are determined by us, the responses to emotions and thoughts are ours and the consequences are ours. We keep getting sucked in by this ignorance and keep living with the pain and suffering of ‘owning’ our ‘stuff’.

By remembering to offer, we let go of this ownership of stuff. We become uninvolved, we begin to evolve. We begin to gradually live and act as per our level of consciousness, as per the dharma of our being in its evolutionary journey.

We begin to grow in dharma.

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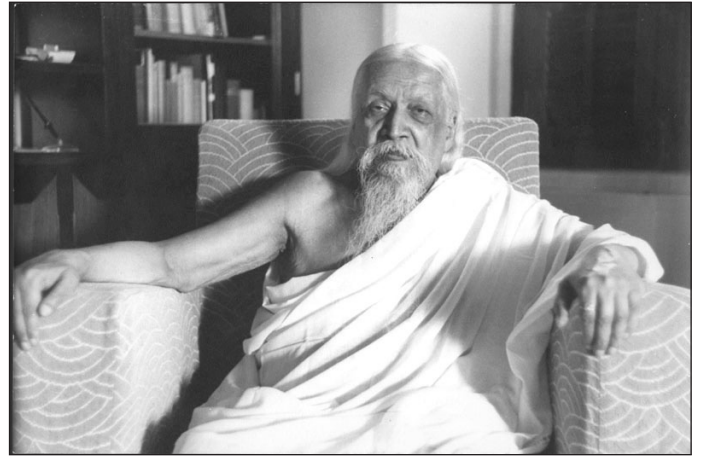
Surrender and openness to the Mother

by Sri Aurobindo

The following selections are from the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 32 (The Mother with Letters on the Mother), Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2011.

The supramental creation, since it is to be a creation upon earth, must be not only an inner change but a physical and external manifestation also. And it is precisely for this part of the work, the most difficult of all, that surrender is most needful; for this reason, that it is the actual descent of the supramental Divine into Matter and the working of the Divine Presence and Power there that can alone make the physical and external change possible. Even the most powerful self-assertion of human will and endeavour is impotent to bring it about; as for egoistic insistence and vital revolt, they are, so long as they last, insuperable obstacles to the descent. Only a calm, pure and surrendered physical consciousness, full of the psychic aspiration, can be its field; this alone can make an effective opening of the material being to the Light and Power and the supramental change a thing actual and practicable. It is for this that we are here in the body, and it is for this that you and other sadhaks are in the Asram near us. But it is not by insistence on petty demands and satisfactions in the external field or on an outer nearness pleasing to the vital nature and its pride or desire that you can get the true relation with the Divine in this province. If you want the realisation there, it is the true nearness that you must seek, the descent and presence of the Mother in your physical consciousness, her constant inner touch in the physical being and its activities, her will and knowledge behind all its work and thought and movement and the ever present Ananda of that presence expelling all vital and physical separateness, craving and desire. If you have that, then you have all the nearness you can ask for and the rest you will gladly leave to the Mother's knowledge and will to decide. For with this in you there can be no feeling of being kept away, no sense of "gulf" and "distance", no complaint of a unity that is lacking or an empty dryness and denial of nearness. (pp. 86-87)

It is quite possible for you to do sadhana at home and in the midst of your work—many do so. What is necessary at the beginning is to remember the Mother as much as possible, to concentrate on her in the heart for a time every day, if possible thinking of her as the Divine Mother, to aspire to feel her there within you, offer her your works and pray that from within she may guide and sustain you. This is a preliminary stage which often takes long, but if one goes through it with sincerity and steadfastness, the men-



tality begins little by little to change and a new consciousness opens in the sadhak which begins to be aware more and more of the Mother's presence within, of her working in the nature and in the life or of some other spiritual experience which opens the gate towards realisation. (p. 186)

What is real opening?

It is the receptivity to the Mother's presence and her forces.

What is the right and perfect rule of opening?

Aspiration, quietude, widening of oneself to receive, rejection of all that tries to shut you to the Divine.

How shall I know that I am opening to the Mother and not to other forces?

You have to be vigilant and see that there is no movement of disturbance, desire, ego.

What are the signs of a real opening to the Mother?

That shows itself at once—when you feel the divine peace, equality, wideness, light, Ananda, Knowledge, strength, when you are aware of the Mother's nearness or presence or the working of her Force, etc., etc. If any of these things are felt, it is the opening—the more are felt, the more complete the opening.

What is the way to open all the knots of the being?

By aspiration, by consent of the being to the workings of the Divine Force, by the descent and working of that Force.

To be open is simply to be so turned to the Mother that her Force can work in you without anything refusing or obstructing her action. If the mind is shut up in its own ideas and refuses to allow her to bring in the Light and the Truth, if the vital clings to its desires and does not admit the true initiative and impulsion—that the Mother's power brings, if the physical is shut up in its desire, habits and inertia and does not allow the Light and Force to enter in it and work, then one is not open. It is not possible to be entirely open all at once in all the movements, but there must be a central opening in each part and a dominant aspiration or will in each part (not in the mind alone) to admit only the Mother's workings, the rest will then be progressively done.



To remain open to the Mother is to remain always quiet and happy and confident, not restless, not grieving or desponding, to let her force work in you, guide you, give you knowledge, give you peace and Ananda. If you cannot keep yourself open, then aspire constantly but quietly that you may be open. (pp. 151-152)

You have only to aspire, to keep yourself open to the Mother, to reject all that is contrary to her will and to let her work in you—doing also all your work for her and in the faith that it is through her force that you can do it. If you remain open in this way the knowledge and realisation will come to you in due course. (p. 154)

Openness is not always complete from the first—a part of the being opens, other parts of the consciousness remain still closed or half open only—one has to aspire till all is open. Even with the best and most powerful sadhak the full opening takes time; nor is there anyone who has been able to abandon everything at once without any struggle. There is no reason to feel therefore that if you call, you will not be heard—the Mother knows the difficulties of human nature and will help you through. Persevere always, call always and then after each difficulty there will be a progress.

That is what must be done. Trust in the Mother and will only to be open to her always and as quietly confident as may be. The work to be done is too great for the outer mind to understand how it is to be done; it is only by growing light and experience that one day it begins to understand—it is also too great and difficult for it to do by itself,—it can only help the Power that is working by its readiness, aspiration, faith, quietude. But in no sadhak are these things constant—the aspiration gets suspended, the faith wavers, the quietude is disturbed or shaken— but still the Mother is there at work and one has only to persevere,—finally the perseverance will be justified by the result. To give up is the one thing one must never do. (pp. 156-157)

If an adverse Force comes, one has not to accept and welcome its suggestions, but to turn to the Mother and refuse to turn away from her. Whether one can open or not, one has to be loyal and faithful. Loyalty and fidelity are not qualities for which one has to do Yoga; they are very simple things which any man or woman who aspires to the Truth ought to be able to accomplish. (p. 160)

The experience you had of the power of the Name and the protection is that of everyone who has used it with the same faith and reliance. To those who call from the heart for the protection, it cannot fail. Do not allow any outward circumstance to shake the faith in you; for nothing gives greater strength than this faith to go through and arrive at the goal. Knowledge and tapasya, whatever their force, have a less sustaining power—faith is the strongest staff for the journey. The protection is there over you and the watchful love of the Mother. Rely upon it and let your being open more and more to it—then it will repel attacks and always uphold you. (p. 308)

“I am with you”

by the Mother

What is meant exactly by, ‘I am with you.’ Are we really always heard when we pray of struggle with an inner problem—in spite of our blunders and imperfections, even in spite of our ill will and mistakes? And who hears? You who are with us?

Is it you in your supreme consciousness, an impersonal divine force, the force of the yoga, or you, the embodied Mother with your physical consciousness—a personal presence really intimate to our every thought and act, and not some anonymous force? Can you tell us how and in what way you are present with us?

It is said that Sri Aurobindo and you are one and the same consciousness, but are the personal presence of Sri Aurobindo and your own personal presence two distinct things, each playing a particular role?

I am with you because I AM you or you are me.

‘I am with you’ means a world of things, for I am with you at every level, on every plane, from the supreme consciousness to my most physical consciousness. Here, in Pondicherry, you cannot breathe without breathing my consciousness. It permeates the atmosphere in the subtle physical almost materially and extends right to the lake, seven miles away from here. Beyond, my consciousness can be felt in the material vital, and then on the mental and the other higher planes everywhere. When I came here for the first time, I felt Sri Aurobindo’s atmosphere, felt it materially, ten miles from the shore—ten nautical miles, not kilometers! It was very sudden, very concrete, a pure and luminous atmosphere, light, so light that it lifts you up.

A long time ago, Sri Aurobindo had this reminder, with which you are all quite familiar, put up everywhere in the Ashram: ‘Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because she is, indeed, always present.’

This is not some mere sentence, these are not just words, it is a fact. I am very concretely with you, and those with a subtle vision can see me.

Generally speaking, my Force is constantly here at work, constantly changing the psychological elements of your being to put them into new relationships and to make clear to you the diverse facets of your nature so that you may see what must be changed, developed or eliminated.

But besides all this, there is a special personal bond of affection between you and me, between all who have turned towards Sri Aurobindo’s teaching and me—and of course, distance does not count; you may be in France, at the other end of the world, or in Pondicherry, but this bond remains just as real and as living. Each time there is a call, each time I need to know something to send out a force, an inspiration, a protection or whatever else, a sort of message suddenly comes to me, and I do what is needed. Obviously, these communications come to me at any moment



whatsoever, and you may have seen me more than once suddenly stop in the middle of a sentence or some work: it means something, some communication is coming, so I concentrate.

There is more than a bond with those whom I have accepted as disciples, those to whom I have said 'yes'—there is an emanation of myself. Whenever necessary, this emanation notifies me as to what is happening. In fact, I know constantly, but all these things are not registered in my active memory, otherwise I would be flooded—the physical consciousness acts as a filter: things are recorded on a subtle plane and remain there in the latent state, rather like music that is silently recorded, and when I need to know something with my physical consciousness, I plug into this subtle plane and the tape starts playing. Then I can see things, their evolution and the present result.

And if, for some reason or other, you write asking for my help, and I answer, 'I am with you,' this means that the communication with you becomes active, that you are even in my active consciousness for some time—the time needed.

And this bond between you and me is never cut. There are people who left the Ashram a long time ago, in a state of revolt, and yet I continue to know them and to take care of them. You are never abandoned.

In truth, I feel responsible for everyone, even for people I have met for only one second in my life.

Now, you know that Sri Aurobindo and I are always one and the same consciousness, one and the same person. Only, when this unique force or presence is felt in your individual consciousness, it assumes different forms or appearances depending upon your temperament, your aspirations, your needs, the particular cast of your nature. Your individual consciousness is like a filter, a pointer, as it were; it makes a choice and settles upon one possibility in the infinity of divine possibilities. In truth, the Divine gives to each one exactly what he expects from Him. If you believe the Divine to be distant and cruel, He will be distant and cruel, because it may be necessary for your supreme wellbeing to feel the wrath of God. He will be Kali for the worshippers of Kali, and bliss for the bhakta. He will be the All-Knowledge of seekers after Knowledge, the Transcendent Impersonal of the illusionist. He will be an atheist for the atheist, and the love of the lover. He

will be fraternal and near, an ever faithful friend, ever helpful, to those who feel him as the inner guide of each movement, at each minute. And if you believe that He can erase everything, He will erase all your faults, all your errors, tirelessly, and at each moment you will feel his infinite Grace. In truth, the Divine is what you expect of Him in your deep aspiration.

And once you enter into this consciousness where all things are seen with a single look, the infinite multitude of the Divine's relationships with men, you realize how wonderful everything is, in every detail. You can also look at the history of mankind and see how much the Divine has evolved depending upon what men have understood, desired, hoped for or dreamed; how he was materialistic with the materialist, and how each day he grows, draws nearer, becomes more luminous, as the human consciousness widens. Everyone is free to choose. The perfection of this endless variety of relationships between man and God throughout the history of the world is an unutterable wonder. Yet all this together is but a second in the total manifestation of the Divine.

The Divine is with you according to your aspirations. This does not mean, naturally, that He bends to the whims of your outer nature—I am speaking here of the truth of your being. Yet sometimes He does fashion himself according to your outer aspirations; and if, like the devout, you live alternately in estrangement and embrace, ecstasy and despair, the Divine too will be estranged from you or draw near, according to your belief. Therefore, one's attitude is extremely important, even one's outer attitude. People do not know just how important faith is, how faith is miracle—the creator of miracles. For if at each moment, you expect to be uplifted and drawn towards the Divine, He will come and uplift you, and He will be there, very near, nearer and nearer. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1, pp. 116-119)

* * *

I have said somewhere, or maybe written, that no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world.

As soon as you are in contact with It, there is not a second in time, not a point in space, which does not show you dazzlingly this perpetual work of the Grace, this constant intervention of the Grace.

And once you have seen this, you feel you are never equal to it, for you should never forget it, never have any fears, any anguish, any regrets, any recoils... or even suffering. If one were in union with this Grace, if one saw It everywhere, one would begin living a life of exultation, of all-power, of infinite happiness.

And that would be the best possible collaboration in the divine Work. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 8, p. 251)



Book Review

The English of Savitri

Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz

Published by Savitri Bhavan, Auroville in 2015, available from SABDA as a hardbound book of 526 pages (ISBN 978-93-82474-00-5) for Rs. 500, or as an e-book from Auro e-books (<http://www.auro-ebooks.com/product/the-english-of-savitri/>) for \$6.

The *English of Savitri* is based on a series of talks by Shraddhavan, the project coordinator of Savitri Bhavan in Auroville, on Sri Aurobindo's literary masterpiece, the epic poem *Savitri: A legend and a symbol*. While based on a series of talks, I found the book to be very well-edited, such that the writing is crisp and clear and devoid of errors. This book of detailed commentary covers just Book One of the epic, the first 91 pages of an 825 page poem, but this first book both sets the stage for the entire poem, and deals with an immense range of spiritual truth and yogic experience in a relatively condensed form. Presumably other books of commentary will follow this one. As Shraddhavan explains in the Introduction, she first started classes on *Savitri* in 1980. The talks on which this book is based were held during 2009-2010, in other words, after long study and giving many, many classes on the poem. She is now most probably the foremost living teacher of *Savitri*, and was herself a student of Amal Kiran, who had first prompted Sri Aurobindo to reveal drafts of the poem while it was still being written, and who had entered into a long correspondence with Sri Aurobindo about it extending over many years. Shraddhavan occasionally refers to Amal's commentaries and to what Sri Aurobindo had written to Amal about specific lines or passages, and she also sometimes quotes the Mother's comments or those of other commentators on the poem. Indeed, Shraddhavan brings a wealth of background knowledge from decades of dedicated study and teaching of *Savitri* into this wonderful book.

The approach Shraddhavan takes to the poem is both circum-spect and deeply enriching of the reader's understanding of the poem. Rather than giving speculative interpretations of the poem, Shraddhavan takes us through a careful analysis of the meanings of the words and lines. *Savitri* is a difficult poem to understand on different levels. It is a spiritual and mystical poem which depicts the inner experiences of a master Yogi. These experiences include contact with and travel through planes of existence and inner worlds experienced only in a highly developed and refined consciousness using the subtle inner vision and other senses of an accomplished yogi and seer. At the same time, it presents a cosmology, an ordered understanding of these worlds and their interrelations with each other and with the material world in which we live. It is also highly philosophical, in the sense that it addresses the fundamental questions of existence such as its purpose, its origin, its

unfolding through the process of evolution, the nature of life and death, of knowledge and ignorance, the reason for suffering and pain, and mankind's higher possibilities of spiritual consciousness and transformation. But all these complex and subtle issues are addressed in the poem through its language, which while also difficult, is certainly more tangible and definable. So through providing a penetrating analysis of the words and lines, this book helps us to grasp the profundities of the poem more readily.

Understanding the language of *Savitri* is no easy matter, even for well-educated native English speakers, and it is a still greater challenge for its readers throughout the world for whom English is a second or third language. Sri Aurobindo's first language was English, and he had a very exceptional English vocabulary which he utilized to the full in *Savitri* to convey most vividly and compellingly the subtle experiences and hidden realities of existence. Words in English often have several different possible meanings, and often carry subtle nuances or suggestions beyond their different outward significances. Shraddhavan helps clarify the most relevant surface meaning of the words, and often brings out these secondary meanings and suggestions that are so easily overlooked in a casual reading of the poem. In this way she increases the depth and richness of our understanding of the epic.

Of course, poets often take some license with the language, and Sri Aurobindo is no exception. There are often antiquated or unusual words or forms of words, and the meanings of words are often stretched beyond their ordinary usage, or combined in unusual ways, to convey subtle, spiritual truths or experiences. This can be baffling to the reader, but Shraddhavan's explanations of the various words and lines help to untangle these possible confusions. Beyond this, in poetry, and especially in epic poetry, there are often allusions or subtle references to other poems and to various myths. In *Savitri* in particular there are many allusions to both ancient Greek and Vedic (ancient Indian) myths. The poem as a whole is based on an ancient Vedic legend. These myths are often timeless in their quality because they depict eternal truths or at least enduring realities of human consciousness. Unless we have studied these myths, we are likely to miss out on many of the subtle significances of lines and passages that allude to these references. Again, through her deep study of the poem, Shraddhavan brings these underlying and often complicated ancient stories and nuances into the light of day for the modern reader.

As we read through the poem, we can easily "miss the forest for the trees," as they say; we can easily lose the overall picture through our focus on the difficult lines with which we are presently occupied. Often we find in *Savitri* that various themes may be developed and then later in the poem are taken up again and described in somewhat different way, often giving a new angle of perception on the issue. Shraddhavan in her commentary helps us to make the interesting connections between related passages or lines which we might otherwise easily overlook. This kind of broad stroke commentary helps us to bring together different strands of thought or image in the poem into a larger whole, and thus into a more well-rounded understanding and comprehension.



Poetry room

Who She really is (from *Savitri*)¹

At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;
Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.
Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;
She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent,
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
The joy that beckons from the impossible,
The Might of all that never yet came down.
All Nature dumbly calls to her alone
To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.
All here shall be one day her sweetness' home,
All contraries prepare her harmony;
Towards her our knowledge climbs, our passion gropes;
In her miraculous rapture we shall dwell,
Her clasp shall turn to ecstasy our pain.
Our self shall be one self with all through her.
In her confirmed because transformed in her,
Our life shall find in its fulfilled response
Above, the boundless hushed beatitudes,
Below, the wonder of the embrace divine.

—Sri Aurobindo

As eagles ride the storm

They are the red cry
come out of the ashes
of the fire that predates the dawn.
They arrive before the air,
they ride above high places
ever blessed with rest in motion.
Here ascend the promontory eagles.
They swoop and jump the sun
to taste the sun's elixir.
There is no range of stone
their talons have not touched,
no race of heaven
they have not descended from,
unfallen to these headlands.

There they stretched grazing the waters,
there crossed over.
A time to stand in place,
a time to stand
in places of the thunder.

The first alphabet
in tongues of fire descended
to this beach where we play on.
Old shell games.
Our inert rebirths.
Our floating driftwood shelter split,
our fool selves shifted off the sands,
with thick brown seaweed live as us
prehensile to our ankles.
It is enough to know
when an eagle takes us,
or pulls us from the sea,
it will not let us go.
Though winds blow out the mouths of hell
my chick shall be hid from the storm.
And when we come up
from the deep cleft,
the rock shall be lifted
and thunder's trumpet muted
to the braille of the breeze.

The moment's always there,
we throw ourselves out
this blind tiny night scream.
We walk these far Pacific waters,
swoop down crags
and draws; where, drawing up,
lizard crawls down his lightning bolt.
The silent one who dreams us awake!
She wills to us enduring flight
awheel in clouds above white towers
to feel this current flowing.
Through force of nature, nature comes
to know what sky holds hidden—
strange turns of cliff,
to peer through worlds
that old man tortoise carries.
We are bringing to Her
aerie, green leaves
She shapes around Her eggs,
fresh sticks of silent grace.

—Rick Lipschutz

¹ Poetry selection and title suggested by Parashar Dwivedi



Last lines¹

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life—that in me has rest,
As I—undying life—have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thine infinity;
So surely anchor'd on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears,

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void:
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroy'd.

—Emily Brontë

Compact with the Light

I have loved and nothing more need be said
To honour the living or to praise the dead.
Time is a tunnel through which the soul must go
To find the more than we already know.
Life seems a pendulum on which we swing
The heart a world containing everything,
It breaks and heals and wider grows through love
And the many peaks and pitfalls through which we move.
I have come to a place of silence utterly new
Where a witness-self observes all in its view,
Unmoved and calm it sees the storm arise
Responding with fury to earth's embattled cries.

I have known the predilections of the night
And seen the coming dawn through inner sight.
By this love I hold I shall one day embrace
The enemy in love's most sacred place
Behind the heart where we in union dwell
To make a heaven of our created hell,
The rift dividing soul from soul to heal,
Our promised compact with the Light reveal.

—Narad

Community of souls

A meeting of souls on the avenues of time,
A massed affinity calling to descend, the Grace
And world-transforming apogee of Love,
Embracing, accepting all with humility.
Subtle harmonies sound on the wakened ear,
The promise of new canticles to come,
Recalling to the truth-awakened few
Voice of a silver flute alone in night,
Unearthly strings attuning the prayerful heart,
Diapason of the soul's unending song
In its lone ascent to the summit-steps of God,
Companioned by the unseen hand of Light.

—Narad

Invulnerable

Invulnerable against the wounds of Time,
Its rage of storm and clash of titan wills,
Uncloven by the foeman's sword which kills,
Unsullied by our mortal dust and grime.
An innocence which knows not sin or crime,
A pure white flame which never can be quenched,
Though by a hundred lives of sorrow drenched,
A silver pearl unblemished and sublime.

Our bodies fail, or in earth's strife we fall,
Our hearts have suffered every ill and shame,
And tears would drown us and life be in vain,
And beauty hard to bear if this were all.

A flame of God, the soul of man survives,
Invincible, the master of its lives.

—Angelo Salerno

¹ Jacobs, A. (Ed.) *Poetry for the Spirit*. London: Watkins Publishing, 2002.



Apropos

If there is a constant use of the will the rest of the being learns however slowly to obey the will and the actions become in conformity with the will and not with the vital impulses and desire. As for the rest (the feelings and desires etc. themselves) if they are not indulged in action or imagination and not supported by the will, if they are merely looked at and rejected when they come, then after some struggle they begin to lose their force and dwindle away. —Sri Aurobindo

I have rarely had this experience of renunciation—for there to be renunciation, one must be attached to things, and there was always this thirst, this need to go further, to go higher, to feel better, to have something better. And rather than having a feeling of renunciation one has the feeling that it is a good riddance—you get rid of something cumbersome that weighs you down and hinders your advance. —The Mother

Folks, it's time to evolve. That's why we're troubled. You know why our institutions are failing us, the church, the state, everything's failing? It's because, um—they're no longer relevant. We're supposed to keep evolving. Evolution did not end with us growing opposable thumbs. You do know that, right? —Bill Hicks

And the time came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. —Anaïs Nin

Let nothing disturb you, Let nothing frighten you, All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices. —Teresa of Ávila

How hurtful it can be to deny one's true self and live a life of lies just to appease others. —June Ahern

Stop acting so small. You are the Universe in ecstatic motion. —Rumi

Love is our most unifying and empowering common spiritual denominator. The more we ignore its potential to bring greater balance and deeper meaning to human existence, the more likely we are to continue to define history as one long inglorious record of man's inhumanity to man. —Aberjhani

We tend to be preoccupied by our problems when we have a heightened sense of vulnerability and a diminished sense of power. Today, see each problem as an invitation to prayer. —John Ortberg Jr.

Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives. —Brené Brown

Be afraid of nothing. Hating none, giving love to all, feeling the love of God, seeing His presence in everyone, and having but one desire—for His constant presence in the temple of your consciousness—that is the way to live in this world. —Paramahansa Yogananda

Make peace with silence, and remind yourself that it is in this space that you'll come to remember your spirit. When you're able to transcend an aversion to silence, you'll also transcend many other miseries. And it is in this silence that the remembrance of God will be activated. —Wayne W. Dyer

Success will be within your reach only when you start reaching out for it. —Stephen Richards

The only time you fail is when you fall down and stay down. —Stephen Richards

