

Collaboration

Fall 1996

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 22, No. 1



**A home for the ancient traveler • Auroville journal • Oneness and multiplicity
Sri Aurobindo's life divine • Integral Yoga: What, why, how**

Each one—this totality of substance constituting your inner and outer body, the totality of substance with which your being is built from the outermost to the inmost—is a field of work; it is as though one had gathered together carefully, accumulated a certain number of vibrations and put them at your disposal for you to work upon them fully. It is like a field of action constantly at your disposal: night and day, waking or asleep, all the time—nobody can take it away from you, it is wonderful! You may refuse to use it (as most men do), but it is a mass to be transformed that is there in your hands, fully at your disposal, given to you for you to learn to work upon it. So, the most important thing is to begin by doing that. You can do nothing with others unless you are able to do it with yourself. You can never give a good advice to anyone unless you are able to give it to yourself first, and to follow it. And if you see a

difficulty somewhere, the best way of changing this difficulty is to change it in yourself first. If you see a defect in anyone, you may be sure it is in you, and you begin to change it in yourself. And when you will have changed it in yourself, you will be strong enough to change it in others. And this is a wonderful thing, people don't realise what an infinite grace it is that this universe is arranged in such a way that there is a collection of substance, from the most material to the highest spiritual, all that gathered together into what is called a small individual, but at the disposal of a central Will. And that is yours, your field of work, nobody can take it away from you, it is your own property. And to the extent you can work upon it, you will be able to have an action upon the world. But only to that extent. One must do more for oneself, besides, than one does for others.—The Mother, *Collected Works*, 5:303–4

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Collaboration does not mean that everybody should do the will of the man who asks for it. True collaboration is a non-egoistic union of all personal efforts to express and realise the Divine's Will.—The Mother

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About the cover: *The cover photo shows a water lily, given the spiritual significance "wealth" by the Mother. "True wealth is that which one offers to the Divine." (Photo by Ginger Hein)*



BEGINNINGS

The Integral Yoga: What, why, how

These quotes by Sri Aurobindo are from "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Yoga," a booklet published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1973.

The object of the yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine, and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great yogi or a Superman (although that may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride or pleasure. It is not for Moksha though liberation comes by it and all else may come, but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object.

* * *

I have never said that my yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it the integral yoga and that means that it takes up the essence and many processes of the old yogas—its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method. In the earlier stages which is all I deal with in books like the "Riddle" or the "Lights" or in the new book to be published there is nothing in it that distinguishes it from the

old yogas except the aim underlying its comprehensiveness, the spirit in its movements and the ultimate significance it keeps before it—also the scheme of its psychology and its workings: but as that was not and could not be developed systematically or schematically in these letters it has not been grasped by those who are not already acquainted with it by mental familiarity or some amount of practice. The detail or method of the later stages of the yoga which go into little known or untrodden regions, I have not made public and I do not at present intend to do so.

* * *

I know very well also that there have been seemingly allied ideals and anticipations—the perfectibility of the race, certain Tantric sadhanas, the effort after a complete physical siddhi by certain schools of yoga, etc., etc. I have alluded to these things myself and have put forth the view that the spiritual past of the race has been a preparation of Nature not merely for attaining the Divine beyond the world, but also for the very step forward which the evolution of the earth-consciousness has still to make. I do not therefore care in the least—even though these ideals were, up to some extent parallel, yet not identical with mine—whether this yoga and its aim and method are accepted as new or not; that is in itself a trifling matter. That it should be recognized as true in itself by those who can accept or practise it and should make

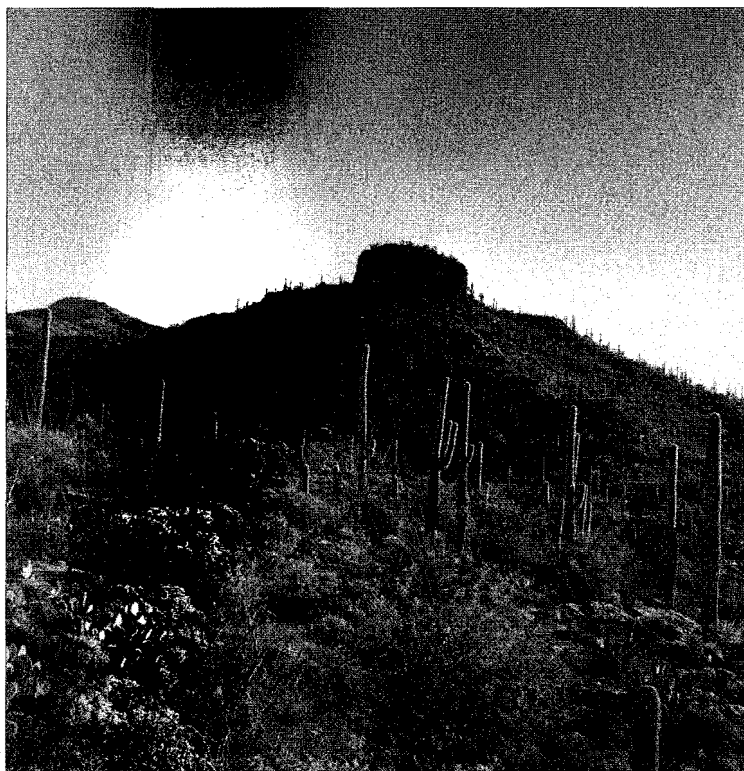
itself true by achievement is the one thing important; it does not matter if it is called new or a repetition or revival of the old which was forgotten. I laid emphasis on it as new in a letter to certain sadhaks so as to explain to them that a repetition of the aim and idea of the old yogas was not enough in my eyes, that I was putting forward a thing to be achieved that has not yet been achieved, not yet clearly visualised, even though it is the one natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.

* * *

It is new as compared with the old yogas:

(1) Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent—the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the sadhana. Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.

(2) Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a



"All here where each thing seems its lonely self / Are figures of the sole transcendent One . . ."—Sri Aurobindo, Savitri. (Photo by Paul Lisseck)



Primrose, given the spiritual significance "growth" by the Mother. "It will multiply and assert its right to be." (Oil painting by Louise Carroll)

cosmic, not solely a supra-cosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a power of Consciousness (the supramental) not yet organised or active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organised and made directly active.

(3) Because a method has been preconceived for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and present aid to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or anything like it professed or realised in the old yogas. If I had, I should not have wasted my time in hewing out paths and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.

* * *

Our yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth-consciousness.

* * *

By Yoga we can rise out of falsehood into truth, out of weakness into force, out of pain and grief into bliss, out of bondage into freedom, out of death into immortality, out of darkness into light, out of confusion into purity, out of imperfection into perfection, out of self-division into unity, out of Maya into God. All other utilisation of Yoga is for special and fragmentary advantage not always worth pursuing. Only that which aims at possessing the fullness of God is Purna Yoga; the sadhak of the Divine Perfection is the Purna Yogin.

* * *

Our aim must be to be perfect as God in His being and bliss is perfect, pure as He is pure, blissful as He is blissful and, when we are ourselves siddhas in Purna Yoga, to bring all mankind to the same divine perfection. It does not matter if for the present we fall short of our aim, so long as we give ourselves wholeheartedly to the attempt and by living constantly in it and for it move forward even two inches upon the road; even that will help to lead humanity out of struggle and twilight in which it now dwells into the luminous joy which God intends for us. But whatever our immediate success, our unvarying aim must be to perform the whole journey and not lie down content in any wayside stage or imperfect resting place.

* * *

All Yoga which takes us entirely away from the world is a high but narrow specialization of divine tapasya. God in His perfection embraces everything; we also must become all-embracing.

* * *

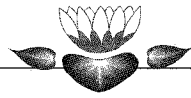
The object of our Yoga is self-perfection, not self-annulment.

* * *

There are two paths set for the feet of the Yogin, with drawal from the universe and perfection in the universe; the first comes by asceticism, the second is effected by tapas; the first receives us when we lose God in Existence, the second is attained when we fulfil Existence in God. Let ours be the path of perfection, not of abandonment; let our aim be victory in the battle, not the escape from all conflict.

* * *

The very aim and conception of an integral Yoga debars us from adopting this simple and strenuous high-pitched process. The hope of an integral transformation forbids us to take a short cut or to make ourselves light for the race by throwing away our impediments. For we have set out to conquer all ourselves and the world for God; we are determined to give him our becoming as well as our being and not merely to bring the pure and naked spirit as a bare offering to a remote and secret Divinity in a distant heaven or abolish all we are in a holocaust to an immobile Absolute. The Divine that we adore is not only a remote extra-cosmic Reality, but a half-veiled Manifestation present and near to us here in the universe. Life is the field of a divine manifesta-



tion not yet complete: here, in life, on earth, in the body,—*ihai-va*, as the Upanishads insist,—we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it. Life then we must accept in our Yoga in order utterly to transmute it; we are forbidden to shrink from the difficulties that this acceptance may add to our struggle. Our compensation is that even if the path is more rugged, the effort more complex and bafflingly arduous, yet after a point we gain an immense advantage. For once our minds are reasonably fixed in the central vision and our wills are on the whole converted to the single pursuit, Life becomes our helper. Intent, vigilant, integrally conscious, we can take every detail of its forms and every incident of its movements as food for the sacrificial Fire within us. Victorious in the struggle, we can compel Earth herself to be an aid towards our perfection and can enrich our realisation with the booty torn from the powers that oppose us.

The foundations of yoga

This selection is from The Signature of Truth, a compilation of writings and talks by the Mother (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1978).

It has been said that in order to progress in Yoga one must offer up everything to the Divine, even every little thing that one has or does in life. What is precisely the meaning of that?

Yoga means union with the Divine, and the union is effected through offering—it is rounded on the offering of yourself to the Divine. In the beginning you start by making this offering in a general way, as though once for all; you say, “I am the servant of the Divine; my life is given absolutely to the Divine; all my efforts are for the realisation of the Divine Life.” But that is only the first step; for this is not sufficient. When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that the whole of your life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it and carry it out in all the details of your existence. You must feel at every step that you belong to the Divine; you must have the constant experience that, in whatever you think or do, it is always the Divine Consciousness that is acting through you. You have no longer anything that you can call your own; you feel everything as coming from the Divine, and you have to offer it back to its source. When you can realise that, then even the smallest thing to which you do not usually pay much attention or care, ceases to be trivial and insignificant; it becomes full of meaning and it opens up a vast horizon beyond.

This is what you have to do to carry out your general offering in detailed offerings. Live constantly in the presence of the Divine; live in the feeling that it is this presence which moves you and is doing everything you do. Offer all your movements to it, not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions such as eating; when

you eat, you must feel that it is the Divine who is eating through you. When you can thus gather all your movements into the One Life, then you have in you unity instead of division. No longer is one part of your nature given to the Divine, while the rest remains in its ordinary ways, engrossed in ordinary things; your entire life is taken up, an integral transformation is gradually realised in you.

In the Integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, “When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it.” To persist in this attitude means that you will remain untransformed and never have the true union; always you will be divided; you will have at best only glimpses of this greater life. For although certain experiences and realisations may come to you in meditation or in your inner consciousness, your body and your outer life will remain unchanged.

An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life is of no great use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world, they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force.

An ideal of this kind may be good for those who want it, but it is not our Yoga. For we want the divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here. But if we want the Divine to reign here we must give all we have and are and do here to the Divine. It will not do to think that anything is unimportant or that the external life and its necessities are no part of the Divine Life. If we do, we shall remain where we have always been and there will be no conquest of the external world; nothing abiding there will have been done.

From the non-being to true being, from the darkness to the Light, from death to Immortality. OM Peace! Peace! Peace!—*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, I.3.28



NEW LETTERS ON YOGA

More on Cellular Evolution conference

I just received the Spring issue of *Collaboration*, and am responding to issues raised by Richard Stein in his letter. I also attended the Cellular Evolution conference in San Francisco. However, I had a very different experience from Stein's relief "to hear Dr. Basu set the record straight." Stein apparently saw Basu's talk as a needed counterweight to the previous presentation by Ariel Browne on Cell Talk, which he seems to include in the category of body practices that "oversimplify the depth and revolutionary nature of Sri Aurobindo's message." As Stein describes it, Arabinda Basu "delineated in clear terms the

stages of the yoga as outlined by Sri Aurobindo that precede any serious consideration of the transformation of the cells." At the time, I expressed the following views to select people I met at the conference. But I was intimidated by the atmosphere around Dr. Basu as an authority figure to dare question what he said in the larger group. It did not feel safe to do so. I suspect others may have felt similarly. Despite this, I believe it is important to respond now publicly to this issue in *Collaboration*, because I suspect this experience affected many others who were present and may have damaged our collective receptivity to the transformation. At least, I would certainly be interested in hearing about the experience of other people who were there.

My experience of Ariel's presentation was an affirming experience of Divine presence and an opening in those assembled, a facilitating of the Divine within us all to have room to emerge. My experience of Dr. Basu's talk—and I believe this was shared by others in the audience—was of a cutting off of the expansive consciousness present in the group, a drastic shrinking of the divine consciousness amid a set of thought forms that—whatever the intent of the speaker—had the effect of creating an unbridgeable separation between the Divine as manifested in the supramental transformation process and those of us in the room. It had a chilling effect.

This thought form did not affect me as much as many of those around me because just at that moment I happened to turn to a passage from the Mother in the little pocket edition titled *The Synthesis of Yoga: The Mother's Talks*, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which I had picked up at the literature table. The relevant pages are pp. 210–212. This passage—which I will excerpt here at some length because I believe it is key, given that Mother's consciousness and Sri Aurobindo's consciousness were the same—articulated my own innate sense that the stages Dr. Basu was presenting were out of context in the present, and represented the period before the supramental descent of Feb. 29, 1956, and all that has happened since then. Basu's remarks created the impression, intentional or not, that there was no possibility for those of us in the audience to communicate directly with the supramental, while I believe, from my own experience, as well as the following passage, that this is not true. The passage is in reference to a question posed to Mother regarding a passage from pp. 138–139 of *The Synthesis of Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo, which refers to the successive stages of consciousness and asks whether the supermind can directly communicate with the rational mind:

Sri Aurobindo is describing here what was to be done to enter into contact with the supermind and prepare the ground for its manifestation; but now that it has entered the earth atmosphere, I don't see why a single, precise procedure should be inflicted upon it in its manifestation. If it chooses to directly illuminate an instrument which it finds suitable or ready or adaptable, I don't see why it should not do so.

And I repeat this: Who has said that it cannot be other-

Just for fun

Monk gloats over yoga championship

Lhasa, Tibet—Employing the brash style that first brought him to prominence, Sri Dhananjai Bikram won the fifth annual International Yogi Competition yesterday with a world-record point total of 873.6.

"I am the sereneest!" Bikram shouted to the estimated crowd of 20,000 yoga fans, vigorously pumping his fists. "No one is serener than Sri Dhananjai Bikram—I am the greatest monk of all time!"

Bikram averaged 1.89 breaths a minute during the two-hour competition, nearly .3 fewer than his nearest competitor, second-place finisher and two-time champion Sri Salil "The Hammer" Gupta.

The heavily favored Gupta was upset after the loss. "I should be able to beat that guy with one lung tied," Gupta said. "I'm beside myself right now, and I don't mean trans-bodily."

Bikram got off to a fast start at the Lhasa meet, which like most major competitions, is a six-event affair. In the first event, he attained total consciousness (TC) in just 2 minutes, 34 seconds, and set the tone for the rest of the meet by repeatedly shouting, "I'm blissful! You blissful?! I'm blissful!" to the other yogis.

The defeated Gupta denied that Bikram's taunting was a factor in his inability to attain TC. "I just wasn't myself today," Gupta commented. "I wasn't any self today. I was an egoless particle of the universal no-soul."—Excerpted with permission from *The Outon*, a humor newspaper published in Boulder, Denver, and Milwaukee; available by subscription: (303) 449-9785.



wise? Nobody. What Sri Aurobindo has described here is quite another thing and, indeed, this is what did happen. It was the preparation necessary for the manifestation to take place. But now I don't see why or on what basis a particular process should be imposed upon the supramental action and why it should not have the freedom to choose its own means. . . .

In fact, anything, everything that is ready to receive even a particle or a particular aspect of the supramental consciousness and light must automatically receive it. And the effects of this consciousness and light will be innumerable, for they will certainly be adapted to the possibilities, the capacity of each one according to the sincerity of his aspiration.

The more total the consecration and the intenser the aspiration, the more integral and intense can be the result. But the effect of the supramental action will be countless in its manifestations—multiple, innumerable, infinitely varied, not necessarily following a precise line which is the same for all. That is impossible. For it is contrary to the very nature of the supramental consciousness. The very quality of the atmosphere has changed.

I believe this captures what was missing from Dr. Basu's presentation, resulting in a misrepresentation that had potentially serious impacts in terms of encouraging a defeatist mentality, a divide between us and the supramental that we on the path of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother aspire to, however meagerly in terms of what is possible.

Again, I would be interested in feedback from others who were there; I am eager to communicate with other people on this path.

—Mike Wyatt, wyatt@danenet.wicip.org,
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NET DIGEST

Unusual experiences

The following message (posted to Auroconf, an online discussion group on matters related to Integral Yoga), shows one use of the Internet as a "virtual sangha."

Dear friends,

If anyone could answer me in the group or share his/her experience in this work . . .

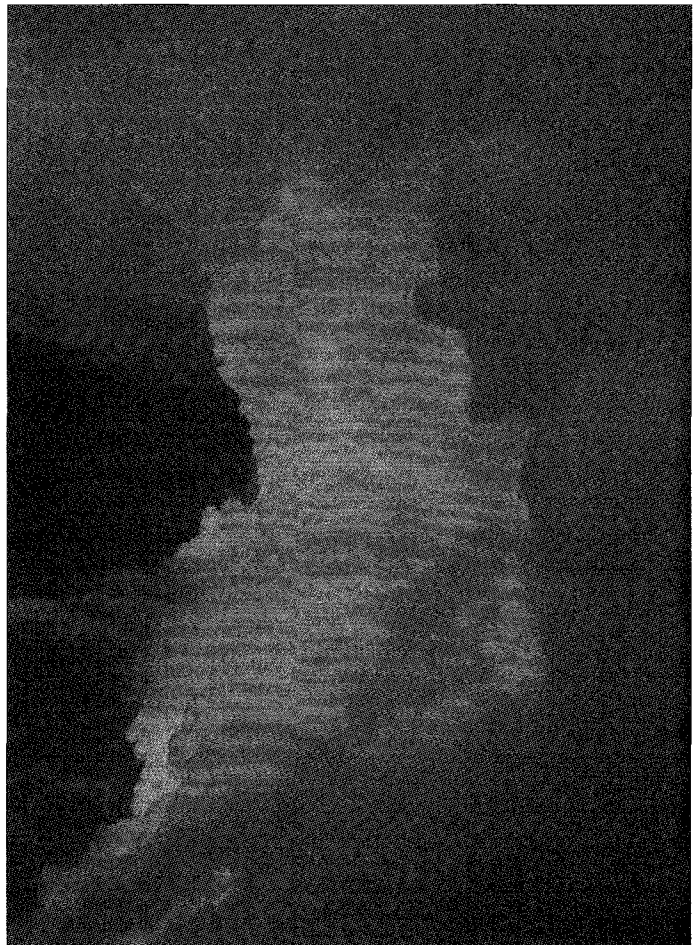
When I discovered Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, there was immediately a force pushing on the top of my head wanting to come in. At the beginning, I thought I was under an illusion after my reading, but it continued. Then I envisaged that maybe I should see a doctor, that there was something wrong with me—blood pressure, etc. (I did not go to see any doctor). The phenomenon carried on for days and days and grew stronger; I had physical pain between the eyes much of the time.

Then I started going out of my body. Usually between three and four o'clock in the morning when I was asleep, I saw things that would happen to me a day or two beforehand. I even heard the sound of a flute (I don't have a musical ear and never heard musical sounds in ordinary dreams). It was like going deep down, although it was obscure (it could not continue, something pulled me to the external consciousness)—but I am sure it was the psychic.

After two or three years of sadhana, once when the body was asleep, I was drawn upward and there passed rapidly a golden color; then I touched a white light that gave me something like an "electric shock," if I can say. (I could not enter it, I think maybe it was too dense.) I woke up back in my body. Is that the white light that some talk about, experienced when entering samadhi, or where one goes when the body sleeps?

A few days later my thoughts stopped (I was having lunch and busy eating) and something opened at the top of my head. A part (I presume) of my consciousness began to lift over the head. But I got scared, feeling that maybe I would leave the body, and tried to bring back thoughts; I succeeded.

All those experiences then stopped gradually, and I wonder



"Face in the Clouds." (Photo by Carlye Calvin)



All propensity to make me figure in the big Barnum circus of journalistic “features” along with or in competition with Joe Zones the prize-fighter, Douglas Fairbanks, H.G. Wells, King George and Queen Mary, Haile Selassie, Hobbs, Hitler, Jack the Ripper (or any modern substitute of his) and Mussolini should be strictly banished from the mentality for evermore and the day after.—Sri Aurobindo, Sept. 24, 1935, excerpted in *On Himself*, p. 377–8.

Editing Collaboration is not without its lighter moments. The following two items were discovered during proofing:

- There are two paths set for the feet of the Yogin, withdrawal from the universe and perfection in the universe, the first comes by asceticism, the second is effected by typos.
- Boulder group meets monthly for medication.

if I am right to think that I am dealing now with the physical consciousness. If I have any experience, it comes maybe every six months, and I am a bit scared.

I have read *Letters on Yoga*; they are very helpful, but I still don’t know what to think of this standstill of sadhana. Is there anyone who has had more or less what happened to me? Can someone help me with the question?

—Jean-Jacques Vanhoutte, Sri_Aurobin@msn.com

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Darshan meeting held in Camaldoli, Italy

From April 25–28, 1996, more than 80 people from all parts of Italy took part in a Darshan meeting in Camaldoli, an ancient monastery situated in the middle of one of the most important and beautiful forests in Italy. The four days were devoted to study, discussion, and knowing each other—and then, of course, to meditation, silence, concentration, and japa.

The covered sky and a thin spring rain reinforced the concentrated atmosphere that pervaded the meeting, which is by now a regular yearly event for those who follow Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s teachings.

This year we had many participants who were only recently attracted to Sri Aurobindo’s thought. They were at the beginning of their practice and knowledge of a yoga that “starts where the other yoga usually end.” For this reason, we had three one-hour sessions devoted to the foundations of Integral Yoga.

The topic of this year’s meeting was “The Practice of Meditation in Integral Yoga.” A booklet was prepared containing different passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s works. (In 1995 the topic was “The Psychic Being—The Finding of the Soul.”)

Another main topic was communication among sadhaks. Most people complained about the utter isolation of their sadhana and heartily approved the proposal of creating an Italian Sri Aurobindo Association, with a documentation center and a newsletter. The Internet was mentioned as one of the main communi-

cation structures of the to-be-born association. Some mailing lists in Italian are already active.

Other topics were discussed—for instance, holistic education and the “sun-eyed children,” and the current status of Auroville. One of the most intense moments of the meeting was the reading and narration of parts of the seventh book of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo’s epic and spiritual legacy. A deep silence fell on the people fascinated by Sri Aurobindo’s verses.

Following many requests for more frequent meetings, another Darshan meeting was scheduled for November.

—Maria Grazia De Cola

Thoughts on Camaldoli

I’d like to add something to Maria Grazia’s note; I think it may be of interest for people outside Italy who are somehow involved in this kind of events.

First of all let me say the meeting went beyond our most optimistic expectation. It was the third national meeting, and it showed a steady growth in participation. This year we had 80 people staying over for three nights.

Success, of course, is not measured by numbers. The real success was the open and friendly atmosphere, the interest and intelligence of the people, the aspiration they showed to know more about yoga and about each other, the sincere desire to practice. There were no sectarian tracts; the bhakti was intense but quiet; people had all kinds of different backgrounds (Buddhism, other yogic practices, an interest in science, and so on).

Before the meeting there had been a considerable amount of worry in the organizing group. After the meeting I found myself wondering if the problems I had foreseen were nothing more than personal projections. As an example, we had expected to have many objections to the proposal of creating the Italian Sri Aurobindo Association. We cautiously proposed the idea and said we would later contact the interested people. But we had to rush to print a subscription form because people wanted to subscribe right at the meeting.

Another example was when we asked people to introduce themselves, thinking they would be shy and would refuse to speak.



Many people confidently and simply came forward to tell their stories of unexpected depth and interest.

In my opinion, several key factors contributed to the success of our meeting. First, we chose to advertise the event outside the small world of Italian sadhaks (meaning those we knew personally and who have a decades-long relation with the Ashram). Second, we chose a practical topic for the meeting: the practice of meditation. I think it called many people with an interest in Sri Aurobindo's yoga and in meditation. Third, we chose to introduce ourselves. We were a group of diverse people, all on a peer level, so it was clear that there was no hidden guru among ourselves and no hierarchy. All these activities were organized as study groups with discussion, experimentation, and sharing of experiences.

One more point was that each person with an activity (e.g., introducing the foundations of yoga, talking about Auroville) had complete responsibility for it. This called them all to give their best.

Finally, there was the choice of location. The monastery of Camaldoli is not only an ancient building or a beautiful place in a forest. It was one of the most important centers of religious thought in the Middle Ages, and is now the diamond head (along with Assisi) of interreligious dialog in Italy, one of the (unhappily few) points where the Christian thought is sincerely open to different spiritual paths.

— Carlo Chiopris, Verona, Italy

New edition to be published

To commemorate Sri Aurobindo's 125th birthday in 1997, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram will bring out the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* in a uniform library edition consisting of about 35 volumes. The edition will contain all the works hitherto published and those that have not yet been published in book form. All the texts are being checked for accuracy by consulting the manuscripts and the editions published in Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

The volumes will start appearing from mid-1996; most of the major works are expected to be ready in 1997. They will be sent to subscribers in batches of two or three as they come off the press. The volumes will be printed on acid-free paper to ensure their longevity. The paper will be specially manufactured for the edition. The prepublication price for the complete set will be Rs. 6,000 postage-paid in India and U.S. \$400 outside India. This prepublication offer is good until February 21, 1997. All payments must be made by demand draft on the State Bank of India or any other nationalized bank in Pondicherry, payable to SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002.

Public trusts, societies, and the corporate sector are welcome to subscribe on behalf of educational institutions, cultural centers, and research bodies of their choice. If any other information is needed, we shall be pleased to supply it.

— Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust
Pondicherry, 605002 India

Passings

Gene Maslow. Gene Maslow, 70, a painter, sculptor, and environmentalist who worked in Los Angeles, Europe, and Asia, passed away on February 28, 1996, in Pondicherry, India, of cancer. A native of New York, Maslow was a lecturer and art counselor for many years at Otis/Parsons Art Institute of Los Angeles and was director of Artists for the Environment in Laguna Beach. He also guest-lectured on contemporary art at the University of California at Berkeley, New York University, and the Gutai Group in Kyoto, Japan. Maslow's art was exhibited at the Los Angeles County Art Museum, the Pasadena Museum of Art, and the Laguna Art Museum, as well as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hirshorn in Washington, DC, and other museums across the country and abroad. [*This information appeared in the Los Angeles Times and Auroville Today. For a more personal recollection, see "Remembering Gene" on page 18.*]

Michael Henry of Mesa, Arizona, died March 8, 1996. She was born Feb. 21, 1939, on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota. She graduated from Loretto Heights School of Nursing in Denver and was a registered nurse for a number of years. She founded Yankee Yarns and the Red Brick House in Brunswick, Maine, in 1972. She was involved for many years with Auroville and also served as president of the Threshold Foundation. In recent years, she worked as an advocate for American Indian spiritual traditions.

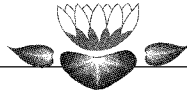
George Thomas, a good friend to many Aurovilians and friends of Auroville, died on July 1, 1996, in Boston. George was the father of AVI-USA president Megan Thomas. His big smile and generous heart will be remembered.

Briefs

• In June, **Man Ravikant** was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer. He writes: "I must acknowledge that the foreknowledge of my fate has released me into a heightened state of consciousness enabling me to live my remaining period of life at a blown-out accelerated pace with deepened intensity . . . What a grace!"

• **Anne Leggett Walker** wishes to start a Sri Aurobindo/Mother reading and study group in Dallas. Meetings will include meditation and reading of *Savitri* and Mother's journals. It is hoped that through the Mother's help, participants will observe a high level of consciousness and be aided, healed, soothed, and made stronger for daily life. Write to Anne at The Stratford, 5969 East Northwest Highway, #3083, Dallas, Texas 75231; or call (214) 369-4448.

• V. Murugesu reports that the **Sri Aurobindo Center of Colombo, Sri Lanka**, has begun construction on a building for the center. They recently published a brochure about the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, and the Sri Aurobindo movement in Sri Lanka.



CENTER TO CENTER

Report from AVI-USA

At the summer 1996 Auroville International meeting in Sweden, Larry Tepper submitted this report on the activities of AVI-USA.

by Larry Tepper

These individuals comprise the board of directors of Auroville International USA (AVI-USA): Megan Thomas, president; Constance Walker, vice president; Larry Tepper, secretary/treasurer; and Jack Alexander, Mary Alexander, Bill Leon, and June Maher, members at large. Some previous board members have been Jocelyn Elder Gray, Lynda Lester, and Paula Murphy.

AVI-USA as it currently exists is not a membership organization. Several years ago AVI-USA had a membership that paid annual fees. The board has always felt that if we are to have a paying membership, AVI-USA ought to provide something in return, such as a regular newsletter. As an all-volunteer organization, we have had a difficult time providing such return on a regular basis.

Through a previous grant from the Foundation for World Education (FWE) and matching funds from the state of California, we were able to hire college students to work in our office on a part-time basis. This effort proved to be a mixed success. Our first student was an excellent worker, interested in Auroville, who was able to take up a lot of work that we had not been able to accomplish. Unfortunately for us, she graduated the following year. The students who replaced her were not as dedicated, and took as much time to train and manage as it would have taken to do the work itself.

Following the summer 1995 AVI meeting, we felt that AVI-USA needed to refocus, search for a new direction, and invite more people to share in the work. The community of Auroville-related people is much larger in San Francisco than it is in Sacramento. We agreed that if we were going to attempt to "recharge our batteries" as an organization, it would be better to hold the meeting there. The board discussed the focus of the meeting. Originally, we were all thinking of a working, results-oriented meeting; what do we have to do, and how do we do it. However, after talking to many of our friends about past meetings, we realized that what people appreciated most about them was the sharing that occurs at them. To that end, we agreed that we wouldn't push for results, but would use the meeting as a way to explore.

We organized the meeting for January 20, 1996, at the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco. We sent out an invitation to hundreds of people inviting them to the meeting. While only fifteen people or so attended the meeting, which was a bit of a disappointment, about six of them were "new faces." And while we didn't get many "results" from the meeting, peo-

ple were in general pleased with the meeting. We have been recently contacted by one of the new people, asking when we would have another meeting.

While AVI-USA by itself hasn't been a raging success at organizing hordes of people and raising hundreds of thousands of dollars of donations, in the United States there is a large and active community of people drawn to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The annual AUM (All USA Meeting) has been a wonderfully eclectic gathering, hosted on an entirely volunteer basis by groups all around the country. Each meeting has been different, reflecting a bit of the communal psychic being of its hosts.

Some other organizations in the U.S. related to Auroville and the Integral Yoga are:

- Cultural Integration Fellowship, Berkeley, California
- East West Cultural Center, Los Angeles, California
- Foundation for World Education
- Lotus Light, Wilmot, Wisconsin
- Matagiri, Mt. Tremper, New York
- Sri Aurobindo Association, Berkeley, California (publishers of *Collaboration*)
- Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, Crestone, Colorado
- Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham and Auromere, Lodi, California

Here's a summary of our current organizational structure. Jack Alexander resigned as president of AVI-USA just before the 1995 AVI meeting. Megan Thomas was elected as president. In April, Mary stepped down as treasurer, whereupon Larry Tepper took up that work. Currently, the work load of the office, which had been undertaken almost entirely by Jack and Mary for more than ten years, is now distributed across members of the board.

AVI-USA still maintains its post office box in Sacramento; Jack forwards the mail for handling. June Maher takes messages from the office phone, which is forwarded to her. Larry maintains the computerized mailing list data base and coordinates updates with Julian Lines at the Auroville Information Office in Woodstock, New York. Constance handles basic requests for information (those that can be answered with one of the standard Auroville brochures), while June handles requests requiring more personalized responses. Constance and June send information requests to Larry for database entry. Larry takes care of bills and checks for donations and purchases.

AVI-USA plans to close down our physical office soon, but will maintain the post office box in Sacramento.

The Auroville Information Office, managed by Julian and Wendy Lines, works directly with AVI-USA. Almost all of AVI-USA's stock of Auroville videos and books have been shipped to the AVIO, where Julian fulfills orders for them. Auroville hand-crafts are available through the retail shop "Pondicherry," 74 Tinker St. Woodstock, New York.

Larry Tepper is a software engineer in Boulder, Colorado.



"A step, and all is sky and God." (Photo copyright 1995 by Gregory Thompson)

THE POETRY ROOM

On the threshold

It is getting late
toward the end of the twentieth century.

I rest beside the blue ocean.

I wait in this sea city
in touch with global news.

It is getting late
as we explore—

O progressive world of luminous release!

Is it not late on the threshold
of ascent?

—Joseph Kent

One day

The little more

One day, and all the half-dead is done,
One day and all the unborn begun;
A little path and the great goal,
A touch that brings the divine whole.

Hill after hill was climbed and now,
Behold, the last tremendous brow
And the great rock that none has trod:
A step, and all is sky and God.

—Sri Aurobindo



Starry night

(San Francisco)

*The secret of happiness lies
in a creative fusion of the
unique and the cosmic.*

—Haridas Chaudhuri

Starry night in June

I climb to the silence
of my roof overlooking the bay.

Above, the stars . . .

Galaxies adrift. A sublime
arching over and under
of this cosmos.

And here, this terrestrial sphere—
this earth awaits release

of her silvery realities
to come.

—Joseph Kent

Matagiri

(Mother's mountain)

Beautiful mountain
what do you do

what do you do
when pewtered clouds
obscure you
from my view

when lightning
thrills the sky
I wonder
what ancient mantras
do you chant
within the sound of thunder . . .

Or do you pray
and bide the time
till each man knows
The Way to climb.

—Deirdre Maguire

Wind's rapture of being

May I live like a movement of the wind
Free and unbound, swiftly moving with its sound.
Birth and death seemingly mysterious in their origin
Yet as sure happenings for the life to move forward.
Life manifesting in myriad forms and shapes and colors
Intricately patterned with all their grandeur and grace.
All events and happening linked together
Uniquely express life's freshness and freedom
Leaving the refreshing marvel touch
Of that gentle breeze for the moving mortal's play.
Let 'me' disappear and vanish into the nothingness
Of the sweeping gentle breeze.

—Smt. Malati Jani

AUROVILLE ALMANAC

Auroville journal

by Gordon Korstange

Author's note: I went to Auroville on December 15, 1995, and stayed for three weeks. During that time, I worked with the eight middle-school students of Suzie O'Dell's Last School class, producing pieces of writing about growing up in Auroville. I gave them as models similar writing by my seventh graders in Vermont. Some of these growing-up narratives will be published in an upcoming issue of Collaboration, but what follows are some of the "moments" that I experienced during those three weeks in Auroville, moments that I have tried to recapture.

December 19, 1995

I am in the van going to Auroville. Outside the sun is going down and the world is crazy. Exhaust fumes are beating against the windows like a black snowstorm. I push the windows closed against the stuff, but I can feel it coating my lungs.

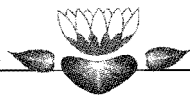
There are vehicles on all sides: buses, lorries—a lorry with water buffalo stuffed together in the back—rickshaws, bicycles; all of us pushing and bluffing our way through Tambaran, and the markets overflowing with people and noise, all seen through the smoky windows, the smoky carbon exhaust, the smoky dusk.

I am dazed, just off a 747, just off Apollo 13 come back from the cool moon to hot chaos. Like a turtle the van crawls through the maze of traffic, the cacophony of horns, film music, vendors, and then we are out, in the country and I see the big curving bridge that means freedom from the smoky tentacles of Madras.

December 22

I am zooming into Grace on the road that used to be a confusing web of paths. I follow the van tracks.

On the first night we pulled in here, branches brushing the van



windows, pulled into the Auroville darkness. We couldn't find the interior lights of the van, and there were no flashlights to be found. After the rumbling, mumbling van, the silent darkness of Auroville was disconcerting. Various Europeans appeared out of the night to greet my fellow travelers who were from Germany. Finally one of the kids located the interior (solar) lights.

As I motor into Grace now, in the rapidly cooling afternoon, it seems as though there are housing projects on all sides, mud brick clusters coming out of the trees.

Auroville is having a building boom. Suddenly it seems that everyone wants to stake out their inner city piece of turf, and there is no shortage of westerners with the six lakhs (600,000 rupees, about \$18,500) necessary to put up the minimum shelter—three to four rooms, a kitchen and a couple of terraces—hopefully surrounded by a canopy of trees.

The new townhouses at Grace are particularly graceful, linked to one another by common walls thick enough to insure a measure of quiet; and constructed so that no one is looking in your bathroom window. Unfortunately, the would-be residents ran out of cash so their upper terraces have no cover. Summertime will be hot up there.

For some people on the edges, many of them Tamil Aurovilian, the building boom presents a problem. How can they ever come up with the money to build a house in the inner city? "I've asked the housing group for money," I hear over and over. But like the USA, the common fund of money available to those on the edges is given out grudgingly. Some of my friends have been in Auroville for over 20 years. It galls them to see someone with outside money waltz in and set up housekeeping so easily.

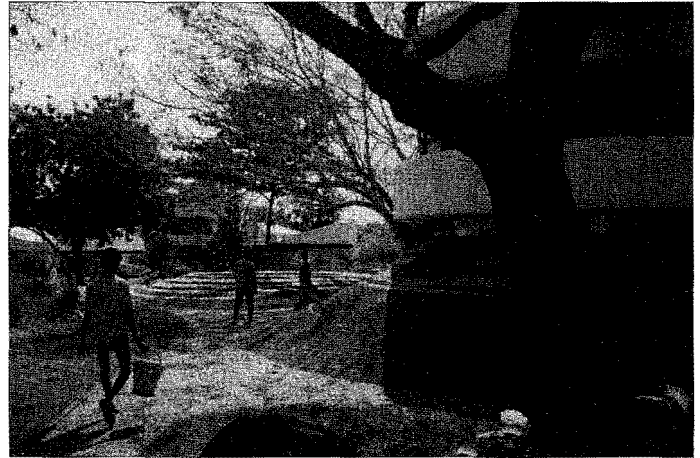
Later, I am walking up the Matrimandir information booth to find Dhanalakshmi, my guide into Mother's Temple. The parking lot is full of cars, motorcycles, a bus or two, and jeeps. Uniformed drivers hover near their vehicles. Tourists are getting their photos taken under a banyan tree. People all over the place.

There is a line of visitors (those staying in Auroville guest houses) waiting for Malika to give them their entrance chit. I talk my way into the booth, and, after chatting, after getting my own little chit, I'm walking through the gate.

The path is long. On my right the gardens are grass—cool in the early evening, the roses fading into twilight. Finally I turn a corner and see it—the Matrimandir, like a deep-sea diving bell, cement-white in the last caress of the sun. The huge red petals sweep away from it and the round bubble windows embedded in the cement cover remind me strangely of a huge soccer ball.

I walk down the incline to the entrance, and there is A, an old friend from the early days of Auroville. Once he was on the blacklist of Satprem's fanatics, hounded and reviled; now he is at the center of the city, checking passes, making gardens. It's like that old Indian game, Snakes and Ladders. You hit the right square and up you go to another level.

He tells me stories about trying to regulate the flow of visitors into the inner chamber, and how, for some Aurovilians, the possibility that they can't do what they want, when they wanna,



Auromodele in Auroville. (Photos in this article by Wayne Bloomquist)

causes noisy breast beating. He muses on his climb up the ladder like one who keeps an eye out for the downward snake. But his smile is broad and genuine for each one entering, balm for the frustration of endless chit-showing.

Inside, a huge dark cavern, a maze of sawhorses and blind alleys through which I stumble like a drunkard. Indeed, by this time, after two days of jet-lagged existence, I am having trouble focusing.

I end up on the other side of the barrier from where I should be, backtrack, and then find the "Leave Shoes Here" place. There is the not-so-faint smell of bat scat in the air, just as in the big temples of Tamil Nadu. I walk up the inclined circular ramp, put on the white socks and go in.

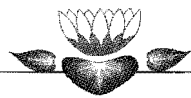
Silence and light flood the crystal. Distant hum of air-conditioning from the vents at the top of the room. Someone has mentioned that the monthly AC bill approaches 11 lakh rupees and, of course, I think of it now, and see dust on the crystal—or what seems like dust (actually it's the white reflection of the walls).

All this whiteness. White marble walls. White pillars shooting up to the ceiling, like albino redwoods in a circle. White carpeting. White cushions, white skin . . . There is no escape in here for the senses. They start to shut down. The gaze rests upon light only; nothing for the mind to start juggling . . .

On the way out I again take a wrong turn, go out the back entrance and pick my way around the channels and footpaths that circle the Matrimandir. This is still a construction site (for how many more decades?), but inside there is a room of Her own.

December 23

I am at the information center for the Big Splash, Fertile Johnny and Co.'s annual Christmas fair for the Auroville community. It's 2:15 p.m. The sun is not hot, but intense. An AV rock band is set up in the courtyard and beyond is the fair: something like your local firemen's fund raiser, very homemade. A



dunking machine with a pint-sized AV kid perched in the sun, waiting for the splash. For three “whoopies” you get to hurl three balls at the lever with the painting of a demon on it.

Then there’s a cloth stretched across a wooden wall that one can paint on and a “used objects” sale that doesn’t seem to have many customers. For another few whoopies you can swing a sledgehammer to ring a bell, a feat most manly men can’t seem to do. There is a tea stall, face painting, and children’s games. Overhead, regularly, people of all sizes swoop down a zip wire.

The first event of the fair is a small circus in the dust of an impromptu ring. Circus music by sax and trumpet leads in the performers, most of whom are acrobats. The first act, however, is Johnny himself, bare chested, dressed in his familiar colored dhoti and tundu tied around his head. He plops down in the dirt and begins to “play” a snake charmer’s flute. From out of a bucket a writhing black and yellow “snake” starts to rise (after some coaxing). If I look closely I can see the fishing wire that’s pulling it. The snake rises higher and higher, Johnny’s playing and swaying grows wilder and suddenly the snake strikes him and won’t let go. There is a struggle, but the snake’s bite makes him grow rigid, his eyes glassy. Attendants rush in, pick him up and carry

him out of the ring as the audience applauds with gusto.

After the acrobat family has performed, people just mill around. I find myself sitting with Francis Neemberry in the middle of the whole show, drinking tea, listening to him expound on the incredible complications of trying to get Aurovilians working together on land and housing.

I look around. A quintessential AV gathering, with a mixture of attendees from all sides: greenbelters in dhotis and tundus; Tamil AVian women in bright saris and the men in dark shorts or pants with short sleeve shirts or t-shirts; western AV women in

pants or pedal-pushers; other Indian women in Punjabis, the long, flowing kurta-dress that is worn over pants; lots of kids, western and Indian, in shorts and t-shirts.

Francis says that he really likes the intensity of AV at this time of year: this fair, Christmas, New Year’s day, the February with Darshan and AV’s birthday. He just wants to sit in the center of it and feel the intensity all around him.

Later I find myself on a dais to help judge a cake contest (why cake? It’s Christmas, after all). There are eight of them, ranging from very tasty orange-chocolate to greenbelt chewy varagu to a green-frosting-smearred one that I pretend to run away

from. We, the judges (“objective” visitors) give the two top prizes to children-made cakes, and then all the cakes are raffled off to the large crowd.

Almost dusk. The fair will go on, but I start my recalcitrant moped and head back to Aspiration.

December 25

Christmas at Aspiration. The community has been cooking, decorating, and cleaning since yesterday. A large casarina tree that almost touches the ceiling is set up at one end of the dining hall and all the presents are underneath. Everyone drew a name, including those of guests.

The huge dinner is in two courses and in between the gifts are given out and everyone goes around to admire them. There are well over 100 people here. Aspiration puts on these extravagant parties from time to time, at Christmas or Pongal, the south Indian harvest festival in January.

It is a community of mostly young people, many of them Tamil AVians, and they love to spend time together in the dining hall, chatting and making fun of each other. Even though the predominant language is Tamil, there is always room at a table for just about anyone and the language can switch to French or English instantly. Aspiration prides itself on being a “real” Auroville community and tonight they are demonstrating that claim.

December 26

The body stretches out, cell by cell, and the tropical air seeps in to fill spaces that two weeks ago were contracted, stiff, holding tight against the cold.

“We can warm up in 10 minutes here—not 30,” a dancer tells me. The sciatica on my left side begins to lessen, the knot in my right shoulder has dissolved, untied itself. Easy to enter a state of semi-languor, going with whatever breeze blows, in which one can spend hours on the verge of lassitude, whereas in the USA I seem to go forward full tilt and coiled through the day, then collapse at home in the evening.

December 27

A list of what I saw on and near the road going to Madras and coming back: two puppies, butt-to-butt in the morning sun; a bus without a driver, parked in the middle of the road; people walking; a rooster; crows; craters; a man, woman and boy (standing) on a bicycle; an old man hunkered on the edge of the road, clinging to the pavement like a bird on a branch; people walking; rice paddy; three men squatting and peering under a lorry (truck); women walking to a well, holding brass pots in arms and on heads like garlands; a naked lorry with only a bed and without a cab, the driver sitting on a wooden platform in a wooden seat, holding a steering wheel completely visible; an ABT Parcel lorry nose-down in a ditch, the picture of Hanuman flying through the air on its side now pointed straight towards earth; bullock turds; people walking; a boy wheeling a lorry tire; a standing lorry surrounded by a pond of glittering broken glass; a bullock cart with over-





flowing hay, a man high up in the middle; a sudden rain shower coating the road and air with coolness; a lorry full of rocks with men sitting on them; a man herding ducks with a long stick; a dead water buffalo on its side, the right legs stuck up in the air exposing its entire reddened underbelly; a sign reading "Accident Zone Proceed Slowly"; a standing lorry, its driver's side agape, its windshield broken out, nose-to-nose with a tanker ("Highly Inflammable" written on the side) cab, neither vehicle the winner in their game of chicken; people walking; people squatting on the side watching the road as though it were a stage and they the audience; women dressed all in red saris, with shaved heads, walking toward the large Adi Parashakti temple near the road; a toll booth for the divided highway with seven attendants who want our five rupees; people walking; people walking; people walking.

December 29

Jackals are howling somewhere—a pack of them looking for a snack. A cry like a baby, high pitched, unmistakable above the soft whispers of the night, the night of 3 a.m., after all the lingering human sounds are sucked into the stars. Only the ocean's roar is left, the waves rolling into the sand again and again. Smash. The beating, the retreating, and then, in the space of the retreat, the jackals cry on the scent of some prey—pray, you creature—unworldly jackals, ghost dogs of the night.

January 1

For once this old moped starts up right away—only four tries, pushing the pedal down with my left foot, not too fast, letting the clutch out with the lever on the left handlebar and turning the accelerator on the right handlebar toward me, simultaneously.

It's 5 a.m. I have slept through my watch's alarm and missed the bus from Aspiration to the amphitheater bonfire. I think of the Thirupavai, the ancient Tamil poem by Andal, the woman saint, that is sung on the radio here in the early morning. In that series of poems, one for each day of the month, Andal calls upon other young girls like herself to arise, bathe in the cold, purifying December waters, and aspire for Krishna's grace.

So here I am, having struggled out of bed, sleep still clinging to me, perhaps as pure as I can be. The moped hums out on the road as I negotiate the craters, my headlight picking out old men squatting by the side, too old, probably, to learn how to use the new Kuilapalayam toilets put up with Auroville's help.

Other lights beside mine are on the road, most heading for the Matrimandir, but a few going the opposite way to the Ashram to hear the new year's music at 6 a.m.

Suddenly, as I pass the outskirts of Kuilapalayam village, I hear an awful clunking noise coming from somewhere in the moped's drive mechanism, and the thing stops. The engine roars lustily, but the vehicle responds with what sounds like a death rattle to me. Breakdown.

I turn and pedal it back towards the village. Just then Selva comes by on his motorcycle and shouts that he will return for me

after he's deposited his sister and child. I park the now totally silent moped and decide to walk to meet him.

So I am on the road, under the stars, walking towards a bonfire. Scorpio's rising in the east. Vehicles still pass me; I guess I won't be that late. I relax. The night is wonderful and I'm now awake, even more purified without the moped noise, walking in the dark, senses alert. I begin to think that I won't mind walking all the way to the Matrimandir, chanting a mantra, never mind when I might arrive.

We are going up the path to the amphitheater. Candles in bags glow by its side. Who is looking out through the windows of the Matrimandir diving bell. Everyone is there already. I can see sparks from the fire floating up to the stars.

A woman walks ahead of us. She has short hair and is smoking a cigarette. The smoke trails behind her right into my face. She flicks ashes onto the path. Is it legal to smoke here? Somehow I can't stand this—especially at 5:15 a.m.—to smoke. I suddenly want to say something to her, like—like what? My friends don't say anything. The smoke hits me in the face and tickles my nose. Our feet crunch the gravel.

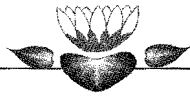
The fire burns. In the center of the amphitheater, they have made a large, elevated, round fire pit that looks like the one at an Olympic stadium. This makes it less like a bonfire and more like a ceremony. It's harder for kids to mess around with.

So simple, this New Year's/Darshan ritual. Just Aurovilians sitting in a circle watching a fire; like sitting in a circle watching the crystal. So simple. Is this enough to create a sense of unity among this sampling of ordinary earthlings? Shouldn't we chant, sing or dance? Shouldn't we listen to music or hear *Savitri*?

The fire burns and each of us sees in it the shapes and hues of our aspirations; each remembers, for a moment, that we are in Auroville to burn up the used lumber of our old lives; each waits for the rising sun of a new year, to greet the dawn in silence and perhaps prayer—not the way of the West, to make noise at some artificial point called midnight.

It grows lighter. The shapes around me are more recognizable. The children grow restless. People begin moving closer to the dying fire. The east lightens. Two crows perch in a tree. With the fire down, the damp cold of dawn seems clammy. It is time to get up and greet each other, to break the silence, greet each other as new year Aurovilians.





January 3

I am bicycling today. Pondicherry is closed up with a fisherman's bundh (forcible closing of shops and offices), and there is no petrol. It's 10 a.m. I push my pedals on the road between Aspi and Certitude. Motorbikes pass me. Many. Every AVian seems to have a motorbike today, except me. They have petrol. They fly by and I decide to count. How many will pass me in the 10–15 minutes it takes to go reach the turn-off towards Forecomers. 18. Later, someone tells me that it was a mini-Pour Tous rush hour shopping run that most people were making. Oh.

Then I'm coasting down the tree-lined road to Forecomers. No motorbikes here, just a "work" tree forest on either side that provides shade.

I find Ed's house just outside the main gate to Forecomers. It's tea time of course. He and Mindy have a great stereo system. They've got phone and fridge. They've got e-mail. Now, one can contact an increasing number of AVians via the Internet. Some, like Ed, have their own computer setup, so that they receive it directly. Others have it delivered to them.

Ed takes me into the famous Forecomers canyon. I remember it long ago as being rough and red earth. Now, trees old and new, have given it a green cast and native vegetation is growing back. Auroville rents it each year (since it's technically government land) so that the goats can be kept out.

But what about the people? We climb a far edge of it and there, in a field, are the stone markings for housing plots—Pondicherry territory beyond Jipmer hospital; bustling Pondicherry beginning to lap up against Auroville, an intimation of things to come.

Ed tells me of the sinking water table. The rains don't come. AVians want lawns. But then there are the Tamilian farmers who get cheap electricity and pump water all day long, selling it on the sly to others in their villages. One such farmer was found to be pumping one million liters a day.

We climb out of the canyon. Once, Ed tells me, he came to blows with a local guy who destroyed trees in the canyon. The police were called in; the guy went to jail; his family came and pleaded with Ed to help get him back. Every greenbelt community has tales like this. Reclaiming the red earth of Auroville has been a tree-by-tree, day-by-day endeavor. I look back on the tops of green trees swaying in the sea breeze.

January 7

It's time to leave already. Am I ready? Yes and no. I spent seven years here. On the second day that I was back I looked around and said to myself, "This is really different." Then I looked again. Beneath the big houses, the "paved" roads, the motorbike tires, the automobiles!, the Matrimandir, is the same red earth I remember, the same bird song in the morning, sunlight from the bay, sea wind, termite castles, thorn bush fences, bullock carts, bicycles, sound of a twilight volleyball game, cool evening, stars in a clear night, crickets, dangling light hanging from a thatched roof.

The land, the climate, the culture lay claim to this place. Auroville, to its credit, still exists within this context. In the

Auroville of 1996, even with its TVs, motorbikes, computers, noisy parties, is still the Auroville of 1971, 25 years ago, when the faint cries of jackals were borne from the bare canyons on the evening sea breeze.

January 8

India isn't going to let me get away without one more test. I'm in the Madras airport. I've said good-bye to Selva, surrounded by the hordes of people who seemingly wait in this airport all day and night on the other side of the rope, creating a certain frenzied atmosphere in which we look at each other knowing that it's time to say something important, but the crowd noise is swelling in upon us and we don't know what to say, and his eyes, those deep eyes that contain his soul so palpably, brown, liquid, flashing with feeling, looking into my own blue ones, there in the airport with a thousand people crowding around.

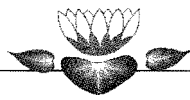
It's hot. No, it's sweltering. No, it's absolutely stifling. Outside, an exceptionally cool Tamil Nadu evening. Inside this airport the air-conditioning is broken and none of the windows can be opened. Sweat pours down my face. My polo shirt is soaked. No air. I hurry to the departure lounge, hoping that it will be cooler. No. The temperature must be about 105 degrees Fahrenheit. I go to a shop which sells an incredible assortment of Indian gew-gads, from cheap musical instruments to cheap jewelry to gaudy clothes. As I buy an ankle bracelet and a kurta, the owner tells me that the air-conditioning has been broken for two weeks!

People are beginning to panic in this stifling heat. Especially the westerners. The fans don't work either. I'm pacing the place, heat-frantic, wondering how long until the plane is called. Suddenly, as they try to start the air-conditioning, the entire airport is plunged into darkness. Complete. I stop. Outside, the jets are lit up, the only things, and they glow like galaxies. The electricity comes back on, stays for a moment, and then goes out again. No one moves in the darkness. Jet lights twinkle outside.

Soon I will be safe and cool on that British Airways 747 out there, but right now I am standing in the sweltering Madras airport darkness. I have been here before—on a train so crowded that I had to walk out of it stepping on people's shoulders; in a meals hotel sleeping on one of the tables because the bus broke down; trapped in a cheap Madras hotel room because a Tamilian politician, MGR, had died, and his supporters were making sure that nothing moved in the city for three days. India throws these extreme moments at you when you least expect them, to show you just how much you can stand and then stand some more. I am standing—standing and waiting—waiting for the inner quietude that will sustain me even through these moments. What else do they come for? What else did I come for?

End note: A massive snowstorm closed the Boston airport for three days, and I just managed to get a change of flight from London to Montreal, leaving my luggage behind, and arriving in 5-degree weather wearing only the light pants and polo shirt that I had put on in India.

Gordon Korstange lives in Saxtons River, Vermont.



CHRONICLES AND RECOLLECTIONS

Looking back

by Auro Arindam

In 1969, Auro Arindam set out on a cross-country tour across the United States to introduce Americans to Auroville and its aspiration for the future. This account is excerpted with permission from the May 1996 issue of the electronic newsletter Attempt; to subscribe, send e-mail to avliaison@auroville.org.

There were so few devotees in North America in those days that each one stood out like a beacon of light in a world resistant to change—each standing firm in a community that considered them alien as they attempted to live with an honesty society was not yet prepared to deal with. These warriors for the Divine have come and gone and been ignored, but without their presence, the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo would never have gained a foothold in North America. And they did it before it was popular to do so.

This was a time before there were Sri Aurobindo centers. The “centers” were the central part of each house I was visiting—the kitchen. The devotees were possibly two or three other people in the town or city. They had become an underground of individuals dissatisfied with the world as it existed, feeling the impetus of evolution in a time suspicious of anything different; uniformity had become a form of security.

As I sat on a bus crossing Montana, I mused to myself that I was on my way to meet a man that I had never seen before, in a town that I had never visited, because Ida Patterson [a devotee in Minneapolis] had said a man had somehow heard of Auroville and had been calling her for more information. He had promised to meet me at the Billings bus station.

This was to become one more event in my grass roots reintroduction to America of the late 1960s.

My trip across the U.S. meant visiting middle-aged people bewildered with the social change that was happening at the time, upset by the revolt of the youth against the establishment, of which these people considered themselves a part by default rather than by choice: hardworking individuals, simple and honest, many aware of the need for change but wanting to know what would replace the change. They were asking what the youth were offering as a replacement for the present, which had required so much hard work to achieve. They didn't know that the youth themselves couldn't explain it, knowing only that they were pushed by the power of evolution, to which they were particularly sensitive because of their youth.

It was the first time I faced looking at a social condition that I and a handful of others had instigated.

In 1946 as a returning serviceman in New York's Greenwich Village, I spent nearly a year—every night from midnight



“Grace.” (Computer art by Margaret Astrid Phanes)

to 4 a.m. (closing time at Herbert's Cafeteria)—talking to a small group of other returning servicemen, telling them that we should not be intimidated by family or friends and forced to return to the past: the war had freed us to make change, we did not need to return to traditional family interests and parental dreams; we had earned our own dreams by defending our country and must exercise this right. For myself, I decided that instead of becoming a banker, I would become an artist. I would go to the Art Students League in New York City instead of Yale University, as my family had planned.

Gradually, what had started as a small intimate group became larger and larger. Sometimes we would have 50 to 100 people a night, the owner tolerating us because his business increased tenfold.

This ferment in the youth in the aftermath of the Second World War created another Paris of the 1920s. This was the time of Jack Kerouac hanging out in the Kettle Bar . . . the time of the beatniks and the San Remo Bar, which became the first meeting place for Greenwich Village. Then, as the San Remo became too crowded, part of the crowd moved on to Louis Tavern in Sheridan Square and later split into groups of writers, artists, and actors. One only had to spend an evening in the Louis Tavern to meet everyone doing anything creative in New York at the time.

I had one of the first two lofts in New York; Bob Rauschenberg had the other. They were in the Wall Street District. My second loft at 31st Street and Fifth Avenue was the first loft in New York to be issued an “artist in residence” permit. This meant that finally an artist could live legally in a loft, and it started a whole loft trend in New York.

Twice a year I gave a party for the initiated artists, writers, actors, and musicians, attended by about 400 people. It was a party that precipitated marriages, divorces, annulments, and elope-



ments. At the last party I gave, there were three bands: Stan Kenton's band and two other bands I can't even remember now. Also present were the West Side Story dancers and every major show business personality in New York. I kept the loft for many years, no matter where I happened to be in the world. So many keys were made for it that I had no idea who was living there at any given moment. (The last person besides myself was Gene Maslow.) When I left for India in 1965, I remember having a last look and seeing Charlie Parker's desk and personal tapes (which I had inherited) and many other souvenirs, and wondered if I would ever return. The loft was demolished to become a parking lot while I was in India.

Eventually, what had started as a small independence movement of the youth in New York spread to the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco. It was initiated by a few people moving from Greenwich Village to San Francisco, and for a short time, I was one of them.

And as I sat in the bus on my coast-to-coast trip in 1969, watching the landscape whip by, carrying Mother's force, it felt like karma was burning at an accelerated pace, moving the world into the future. The trip became a voyage of discovery for myself. I began to understand for the first time the continuity of my life: Leaving home at 16, driving to California . . . joining the U.S. Navy at 17 for four years. . . . being sent overseas for three-and-a-half years during the Second World War . . . being helmsman on U.S. destroyers and light cruisers and participating in five major sea battles . . . growing up, becoming a disciplined adult long before my civilian teenage peers . . . emigrating to Australia in 1959; returning to America in 1963 to start one of the first communes in Southern California.

By the time Auroville started, I knew my whole life had been directed toward this end—a life that had been a great adventure, my having been moved like a chess piece in a divine plan not quite understood by myself.

I finally threw up my hands and said, "Mother I am yours, I could not have dreamed the life you have given me. Your consciousness creates dreams that I cannot attempt to understand, but can only follow with delight."

Knowledge of the way is not enough—one must tread it, or if one cannot do that, allow oneself to be carried along it. The human vital and physical external nature resist to the very end, but if the soul has once heard the call, it arrives, sooner or later. For those who have within them a sincere call for the Divine, however the mind or vital may present difficulties or attacks come or the progress be slow and painful,—even if they fall back or fall away from the path for a time, the psychic always prevails in the end and the Divine Help proves effective. Trust in that and persevere—then the goal is sure.
—Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*

Auro Arindam lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1965–1968 and in Auroville from 1968–1974 and 1978–1980.

Remembering Gene

by Jan Maslow

A notice about Gene's passing in *Auroville Today* paid homage to his life as an Aurovilian but, understandably, did not address his life as an artist. And Gene Maslow was quintessentially artist. The Mother once said to him, "I have always seen you painting and doing other artistic things." I knew him as a font of creative force—burgeoning with inventive ideas, and making of life an aesthetic work-in-progress.

To the delight of many an artistic spirit (and the chagrin of some not so inclined), Gene could rapturize at great length about the particular play of light and shadow around an object or grove of trees, making palpable the subtle presences housed therein. An aesthetic sensibility was so at the fore of his being that even transient stays in the likes of a roadside motel would see him rearranging furniture to allow Beauty her fullest possible reign. In our little loft on East 21st Street in Manhattan, four times a year the space would be revisioned and reconfigured to greet and graciously accommodate the spirit of each new season. And one spring, I feared for his life as he hung out the window rigging up an elaborate branch he'd found, determined to create an aesthetic and vibrational hedge between the sanctuary of home and the streets of the city.

For better than 20 years, art was Gene's yoga. He walked away from a promising career with MCA, a major talent agency, to pursue it. And later, when Mother appeared to him in the subtle physical during a meditation, he left a nascent career on the New York art scene to head for the Ashram. Although he had previously been accustomed to working on a large scale, while in the Ashram he created bookmarks—little hand-painted gems of birds and natural things—the fineness and delicacy of which stunned those Ashramites who knew him by his large Western vital. In 1967, Mother sent him to Auroville to help pioneer a new city. While in the throes of building some of Auroville's first dwellings, his good friend Amal (K.D. Sethna), who had previously published some of Gene's poetry in *Mother India*, asked why he wasn't writing lately. Gene responded with this letter, which Amal published in *Mother India* under the title "A Poet's Letter from Auroville":

Amal

I will write poetry, —
but not yet awhile . . . the fields of peace
from which much future poetry must spring
to reach the hearts of men are not yet quite laid.

I will write that poetry
and perhaps now that poetry of the future
prepares itself . . .
in the experience of events never before encountered



on the face of the earth . . . or, perhaps
now that poetry of the future is being etched on some
far-guided heart and by another's hand it will be written
once it finds a place of love to come to rest—
a poetry then that will be a torch of truth
calling the world to the arms of Her love and unity.

That place must be a bed prepared for a bride
of the new morning . . . some place above the horizons of life
where the poet of the future may be opened to dream only
of the sacred delight for which he was especially born.

That poetry is to be . . . but to be and live and mature,
to reach its destined heights, a place must be made
for its birth, a cradle of consciousness prepared
from the new stuff of heaven and earth.

I will write poetry,—
but not yet awhile . . .

for the future of poetry and the world depends now on
the nature of something She is establishing here in Auroville,
and for that to become more concretely sure
the hands of action are called foremost.

Now the building must take place; a progressive seeding
of the green fields of consciousness to grow more deeply
than the proliferative weeds of chaos are growing widely,
a preparation for the bloom of peace in a life lucid,
filled with the opportunity for faith and cheerfulness
and the ways divine.

So I will write poetry, but first the plowing, the growing
and the tending of the fields divine. Is that not better
left to the artists, than to the businessmen alone or to
the uninitiated? If the artists do not care enough for the
substance
of the matter how can we expect the roots and the tree
to grow with the poise of a natural harmony, a dynamic
integrality, a touch or spark of something from beyond?

Something more than practical conveniences devised
only for the ease of mind and body. Something more
than getting stopped short, caught in the charmed net of transient
pleasures lost in Prakriti's round of passions.

To you, Amal, I can say that, 'that something' is tangibly
related to the poet of the future, and whether he is in
my breast or another's, I dedicate myself to preparing the ground
upon which he can be born, in the name of Sri Aurobindo,
who, above all his work and ways, enjoyed knowing
himself as The Poet.

I will write poetry . . . or perhaps I am trying to help
create a poetry in Life, whatever, it is not quite yet awhile,

O Lord, not until the waters flow over these harsh desert
grounds
and a garden grow with an air on which may cling
all love's responsive things.

Thank you for enquiring,
Yours, Gene

After returning to the States in 1972 at Mother's behest, Gene
poured the force of his being into sharing the yoga and his expe-
riences in Auroville with "those who are ready" according to Her
charge. Many lives were touched and changed by his "Advent-
ure into the New Consciousness" series at the New School. That
was where I first encountered Gene in 1975, and mine was one of
the lives he touched and changed. Those talks were spontaneous
offerings which invited one to partake in an act of creation, as his
intuitive nature painted a multidimensional tableau of subtle
realms of truth and beauty. It was as if being completely absorbed
in the texture and intensity of pigment as it sought and found its
inevitable place upon a canvas, not knowing what picture was
taking form, but not caring because the process itself was so en-
gaging. And then, at the end of an hour or two, by dint of some
magic inaccessible to the intellect, the painting was complete,
and an indelible experience of some new possibility had been
had.

Lest I sound overly laudatory, let me acknowledge that Gene
also had his hefty share of human nonsense. And when that large
force that made his positive presence so compelling aligned it-
self behind his frailties, he could be one very difficult human
being. That said, I choose to celebrate the gifts of beauty and
delight that he brought us and has left us, along with the spirit of
enchantment by whose power he believed we would be trans-
formed, whose instrument he aspired to be, and which at his
heights, he embodied. Thank you Gene—and may Mother hold
you ever tenderly.

Jan Maslow lives in New York City.

One day the Mother asked two of her attendants, Va-
sudha and K, to help her find a letter that Sri Auro-
bindo had once written to her. It had been kept in her
safe, along with other precious things. The Mother and
Andre seated themselves in front of the safe, and the
two ladies started to take out the meticulously arranged
contents. One of the things which K removed was a
small flat, squarish packet, wrapped in silk. Thinking it
might contain the letter they were looking for, she
opened it. She was moved to tears when she discovered
inside a copy of the first edition of *The Mother*—for
Sri Aurobindo had written in it simply two words: "To
Her."—from *Vignettes of Mother and Sri Aurobindo*



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

A home for the ancient traveler

by John Robert Cornell

This article is excerpted with permission from the Fall/Winter 1995 issue of Sunseeds (Vol. 9, No. 2).

You have just spent two years . . . oops—it *seemed* like two years but was only two weeks by the calendar—in Pondicherry, the City of the Soul in South India. Now it's time to go home. Wait a minute . . . Home . . . ?

You *are* home. Nothing could be *more home* than this. The ancient traveler in you is home. He is already there! He doesn't want to go anywhere else. Since you arrived he has been breathing in a sustaining silence like a subtle ambrosia. In the courtyard of the main Ashram building, around the samadhi, the silence is gently massive. You don't have *to try* to be quiet there. It's not like church, where you may have to restrain yourself to maintain a respectful silence. You walk into the courtyard and the silence *already there* turns down the racket in your head and heart. It happens without effort. It feels like walking into a cloud of down. Every raw edge of you is soothed, every corner is rounded by troth-peace, every thin, shriveled flake of you is moisturized by a settling dew that has no denial in it. And it's *such* a relief.

Not that this city is quiet. Horns slice into the air incessantly, bicycle bells jingle. Miniature cars, jeeps, and three-wheeled motorized taxis belch the smoke and roar of internal combustion. Donkeys bray, kids shout, dogs bark far into the night. Even rock music blares from the seaside cafe in the evening. Long-time residents complain about the increase of noise since the motor-scooters came to town 20 years ago. But the silence is palpable in the midst of the noise, behind it, smoothing the corners and edges from it.

The first time you went to the samadhi was late in the evening. You could feel the calming silence even before you turned the corner of the sidewalk and came into full view of the courtyard. Only a few people were still there. You had very strong surges of emotion in those first moments of pilgrimage. The feelings didn't disperse the silence nor even disturb it. Its calming influence is not imposed; it does no subtle violence to you. It does not restrain the lunging want or the nagging need. Instead it calls out *something else* in you; it calls the secret you to the front.

In the Ashram quarter of Pondicherry, you had unspoken permission from everyone you met to be your truth, your secret self. The people here are living it. They shine on you when you meet them. Some kind of radiance, sister to that soothing silence, pours out of their eyes when they look at you. Rather they look into you, and you cannot find the subtlest hint of social exploitation in their gaze. You didn't even know you watched out for



The samadhi, Sri Aurobindo Ashram. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Trust)

that exploitation until you realized that something familiar “was missing” in this meeting of the eyes. Here the inner being is richly more than a cliché, more than a passing emotion. Here soul fills out, grows substance, raises its head and looks out at you from those eyes.

She is here and He. People pour out stories about them into your willing ear. They were living a miracle, a living miracle, a sustained miracle that lasted in this spot for 60 years. The fragrance of it is everywhere. People will tell you stories for hours about their grace, their compassion, their laughter. Seekers came here attracted like bees to a meadow bursting with wildflowers. There are books and books of collected stories emanating that special fragrance. You feel like you have landed in Capernaum just in time to hear the stories from the lips of Jesus's companions, the stories that will make their way into the New Testament in the second century. Or you are on Mt. Carmel and, with Peter, you don't ever want to leave.

Go home? You can't seem to comprehend the idea.

Their presence in this city has changed the very air, which seems to carry a silent, sustained devotion. You think that the change has seeped into the stones on the streets and the mortar in the buildings. Even the beggar with no legs outside the Ashram dining hall shines up at you, eyes brimming with something that you could make a home in. You could curl up in it like a cat in a down comforter and go to sleep, safe at last. You could drink it like cream soda; it smoothes everything behind the fizz.

But this is not paradise. A travel guide comments that India is essentially an ungovernable society. It is too big and unwieldy. A friend remarks that the Indians are a long way from *mastering matter*. That's easy enough to see. Garbage rots in the streets, and it is too hot to keep the windows closed if there happen to be any glass windows to close. There is corruption, wretched poverty, dirt, pollution, ugliness, homelessness, exploitation, caste discrimination, theft—chaos on a scale that is simply incomprehensible. The peace and silence here, at least here in Pondicherry, are *in the midst of that*, not separated off in some cloister!



You feel it walking down the streets or shopping in this leather shop or that silk shop or this furniture store, especially ones run by people touched by Them, people dedicated to this path.

These are quiet, radiant, purposeful, sad, privileged people. They live inside an envelope of grace. Walking the streets of the town, you begin to sense its outlines. You feel it thinning when you cross into the commercial district of Pondicherry. The closer you get to the samadhi, the more substantial it grows.

Inside the envelope, everything seems to be orchestrated. It's a different kind of time, a different style of movement. You don't need a Daytimer. It's not that kind of time. It is the flow you have heard about, that you have floated in yourself on occasion. It is here *all the time*. But this flowing time is not here just to lie down and luxuriate in. There was a profound work going on here behind the scenes. He and She were on a mission. For 60 years without letup they engaged life and matter in the most stupendous effort of conscious evolution. They didn't want to just find the divine spark within, declare victory and be done with it. Both of them had found the spark within themselves and united with it long ago. The distinction of their spiritual path is their labor to uncover the Divine, not only in the soul, but also in mind and life and body. A life divine *on earth*, clearly visible and sustainable even in the lower reaches of human nature, even down to this chaos, even down to the cells of the body! A stupendous work, revolutionary at the time and, if it seems less so today, that is only because of the far-flung influence of their work.

And you sense that it is still going on today, behind the scenes, without the slightest hype. It was never the kind of work held up to public opinion. Nobody's going to broadcast it. It is done inside the silence. The growing busloads of tourists that come here are brought by government tours for the politicians' purposes, not by Ashram public relations.

But it is time to go home, to the *other* home, to little brother's home address. You have to leave the envelope.

You look back toward that other home and you see a dense, dirty grey smog. That is what you are going back into. You will vanish into it like a speck in a brown river. You will suffocate. Each day you have been saying, "We are still here. We are still in India"—more frequently and desperately as your time here grows shorter. Now it's gone, and every part of you is dug in, trying to hold back the river as it rises inexorably toward your head. Your heart is a leaden, sweating stone in your chest.

Then a memory comes back to you: of when you came to this planet at the beginning of this life, trying to put on the brakes before you landed here. There *were* no brakes. There was nothing to hang onto. You were in free fall. You disappeared into the river and forgot where you came from. You forgot that there was anywhere else for a long time. You were a speck of silt in a brown river. You couldn't breathe. In fact you had terrible asthma as a child and almost died of it as a two-year-old. A little later you tested allergic to every substance that the medical technician tried, including the sterile needle itself.

But this time, you think, you could do it awake. You could

die into the grey mass with your eyes open. You would see things if you kept your eyes open when you landed. You could go back there and remember where you came from.

The grey mass that you see from here is not California. It is not the land itself. It is not any part of the beaches and deserts and shining mountains of California. It is not the soil nor the rocks nor the oak trees and the soaring pines. It is the *other* California and the lid. There is a grey lid that lies over one's consciousness there. It works like a thermal inversion in the Sacramento Valley. Energy, tremendous energies go out from the body for survival, sex and power there. They move out horizontally, spreading to the horizon, mixing together. The lid traps these lower energies and cuts off the higher ones. They stir up dust and turn sour. They become stagnant and dense. Trees, mountains, and other people become indistinct in that air. You can't see them very well. And eventually you forget that they are real.

Your ancestors came there to survive, to avoid persecution, to escape poverty and famine. From Europe a tremendous immigration blew across the American continent from east to west like a prairie fire before a windstorm. They were like a stampede of horses in a desert valley. Their dust is now thick in the air and their descendants are milling about not sure where to race to next. The new world was "empty," and now it is filled. There is no horizon left.

We are *here*, but we scarcely know this place where we have landed.

But *it* is beginning to know us. The old voices say that it watches us. It is even beginning to call us. . . .

John Robert Cornell lives in Sacramento, California.

ESSAYS

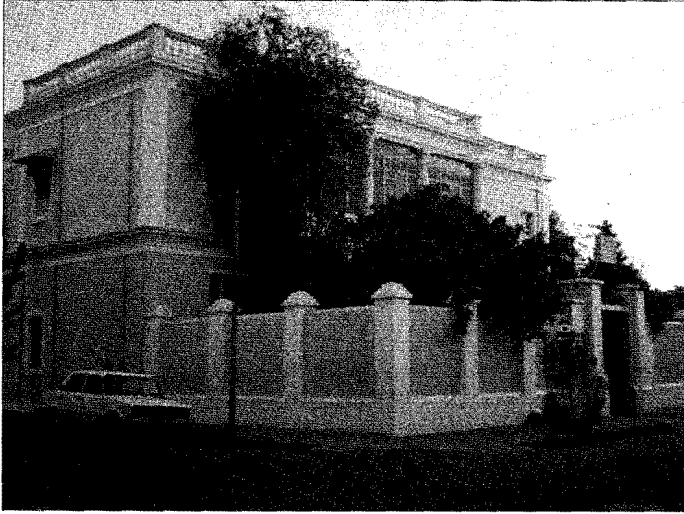
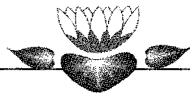
Sri Aurobindo: A journey into his life divine, Part 1

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by Vishnu Eschner

Nothing in my life had prepared me for India. I struggled to stuff it into the suitcases of familiar experience, but the luggage would not zip closed. The airport in Madras felt like Superbowl stadium at half-time when 20,000 people surge to the hot dog stands at once. I clung to my bags and was compressed into the mass of humanity inching onward towards the three distant customs gates.

Outside was no different, only now the arriving passengers were the Superbowl team running a frenzied gauntlet through the crowd. Everyone watched us with frank faces of gaping cur-



Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India. (Photo by Wayne Bloomquist)

iosity, as if wishing to turn us into an arriving aunt or cousin. The throng was held back by flimsy ropes, makeshift rails, and arm-linked soldiers in white gloves to whom this seemed an ordinary evening's duty. Our friends somehow saw us in the crush, signaled and guided us to their van through waiting fists of boys and men: the army of porters who tugged our bags relentlessly threatening to help us!

Soon we were lurching along a two-lane, carnival-lit black-top strip of shops, cigarette stalls, huts, and billboards. It was after midnight, but there were more people milling about than on a Manhattan avenue at noon. Brightly painted wooden carts, bullocks, cars, and pedestrians all competed for the same piece of highway. Bells, horns, buzzers, and loudspeaker music blared and then receded into the night. A jovial atmosphere and excitement infused the evening crowds.

Tucked within it all was the shameless face of suffering: scrappy children at home in the brawling circus seemed to stare with flat-faced incomprehension at a fate that placed me warm and fed and sheltered and left them forlorn and friendless on the seething midnight streets. I had stumbled into the real world.

Something happens to those of us who make a place for the Divine in our lives. One day we come to realize that what we have been hungering for all our lives is something beyond all that we have seen and known, a longing for an intensity deep within us, an awakened experience of life in every activity, a fullness in each moment.

I began my quest in college, almost 20 years ago. Stalking bookstores. I needed something to do: an asana, a mantra, a mudra, a way to meditate or method to silence the mind. I discovered one method after another. I didn't know what I was seeking, only that I was marching towards something supremely beautiful, joyful, and true, the answer to life's eternal questions. In a book by Sri Aurobindo, I found:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation . . . is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality.

Most traditions, ancient or modern, can furnish us with rituals, chants, or practices to reach the chosen Goal. I found myself drawn more and more to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and began seeking the way of spiritual practice from his books. I came away baffled. I insisted on a clear-cut system, a place to begin, but no formula is delineated within the volumes—more than 16,000 pages—that Sri Aurobindo wrote.

When later I entered the ashram for Sri Aurobindo's yoga in America, I was still lugging along the methods and beliefs I had gleaned from other sources: the Upanishads, the Vedas, and Christian mysticism. Whatever worked, I kept. In the ashram, the path seemed to continue on that same course, though it widened eventually to the understanding that my own particular route might not be for someone else, or for anyone else. But no belief was abruptly uprooted, nothing was cast out to make room for another of "standard issue":

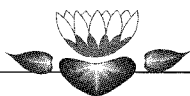
The spiritual aim will recognise that man as he grows in his being must have as much free space as possible for all its members to grow in their own strength, to find out themselves and their potentialities. In their freedom they will err, because experience comes through many errors, but each has in itself a divine principle and they will find it out, disengage its presence, significance and law as their experience of themselves deepens and increases.

On first reading Sri Aurobindo, one is swept up in the expansive breath of freedom that blows throughout his writings. There is no moralizing, no preaching. We are prodded towards an understanding, as if by polite suggestion. He seems to touch us by the logic of our innate common sense.

I felt I was ready to commit my life to the work he proposed. I was full of notions about life and unprepared but primed for the challenges Sri Aurobindo's teachings would bring. The biggest blow fell first—my belief that to know the Divine it is necessary to renounce the world:

The old yoga demanded a complete renunciation extending to the giving up of the worldly life itself. This yoga aims instead at a new and transformed life. But it insists as inexorably on a complete throwing away of desire and attachment in the mind, life and body. Its aim is to refound life in the truth of the spirit . . .

My archaic notions about the spiritual life—following in the timeworn footsteps of the saints of various traditions—remained



strong within me. However, ideas such as “the world is illusion” soon began to tremble before the overwhelming persuasion of Sri Aurobindo’s thought:

The Spirit has made itself Matter in order to place itself there as an instrument for the well-being and joy, *yogaksema*, of created beings, for a self-offering of universal physical utility and service.

Another assumption—“the aim of life is liberation”—toppled:

There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free . . . That is a perfect freedom. It is so free that it is not even bound by its liberty. It can play at being bound without incurring a real bondage. Its chain is a self-imposed convention, its limitation in the ego a transitional device that it uses in order to repeat its transcendence and universality in the scheme of the individual Brahman.

I began to realize that all life is divine, to be transformed, not rejected or renounced out of hand. Matter, like everything in cosmos, is of the substance of the Divine. Matter and life can be infused with the Spirit by consecrating ourselves and our actions to Spirit.

No longer able to bolster itself with the old ideas, my western mind began to plummet. I craved a ladder of beliefs, a clear-cut practice by which perfection is attained. How to progress in this *sadhana* (spiritual practice) of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga?

. . . true spirituality will not lay a yoke upon science and philosophy or compel them to square their conclusions with any statement of dogmatic religious or even of assured spiritual truth, as some of the old religions attempted . . . Each part of man’s being has its own dharma which it must follow and will follow in the end, put on it what fetters you please.

Three years after joining the American ashram, though I considered myself Sri Aurobindo’s devotee, I understood little more. Many questions still jostled my thoughts as we rolled down the road on the way to Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India.

As multicolored lights played across my face, I sat with my nose pressed against the window, my heart bubbling with a strange brew of nostalgia, mirth, and sadness. I had long since stopped wondering when we’d get to the main highway between Madras and Pondicherry. We’d been on it all along. Most of the 200-kilometer trip still stretched into the night before us like a school-boy’s chore on a summer day. I thought about Sri Aurobindo’s return to India after 14 years in England. He had last touched Indian soil when he was seven years old.

Sri Aurobindo was born Aurobindo Ghose in Calcutta on August 15, 1872. When he was seven, his father took

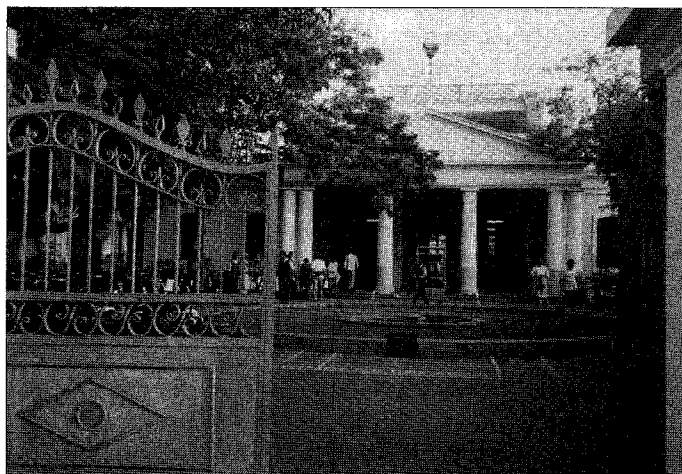
him and his two older brothers to Manchester, England, and deposited them in the care of English friends. The father’s love for his children manifested in the extraordinary desire that his sons grow up completely Anglicized and was reflected in the strict instruction to their English guardians that the boys have no contact with Indians living in England. They should learn nothing at all about the Indian way of life.

Young Aurobindo, whose name means “lotus,” was tutored in Latin and French in the home of his English custodians, a minister and his elderly mother. He published poetry at the age of ten and wrote throughout the rest of his life, culminating in the masterpiece, *Savitri*—which, at more than 23,000 lines, is the longest epic poem ever written in English.

Aurobindo was admitted to St. Paul’s school in London at the age of 12 and while studying there was awarded all significant academic prizes. In 1889 he went with a scholarship to King’s College, Cambridge, where he captured every prize in Greek and Latin. In London he excelled in the exams for the prestigious Indian Civil Service—the highest government level attainable to native Indians in colonized India—but failed to gain admission by not appearing for the riding test. Instead, he joined the service of the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda.

So it was that in 1893, the year Vivekananda carried the torch of Indian spirituality to the West at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Sri Aurobindo returned to India. Suffused in the classical history of ancient, medieval, and modern Europe, having mastered Greek, Latin, English, French, German, and Italian, he bore the seeds of the western philosophical heritage. He arrived alone on February 7, and Mother India greeted her son with the first intimation of the great spiritual destiny to follow. A “great calm” descended upon him which he later recounted:

Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite



Ashram dining hall. (Photo by Wayne Bloomquist)



bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material Space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies.

His education was by no means complete: he had yet to learn a single Indian language. In the following years, after learning Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, Aurobindo immersed himself in the deep waters of India's spiritual legacy, retranslating and reinterpreting the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The French author and Nobel laureate Romain Rolland observed of Sri Aurobindo that he represented "the completest synthesis that has been realized to this day of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe."

Bringing the full force of western analysis to bear upon the most ancient documents of Indian spirituality, Sri Aurobindo founded a new way; one that accepts the reality, even the divinity of the ignorance and darkness which our senses constantly present to us. He proclaims that "life is yoga," and calls us to participate in its deep and integral transformation:

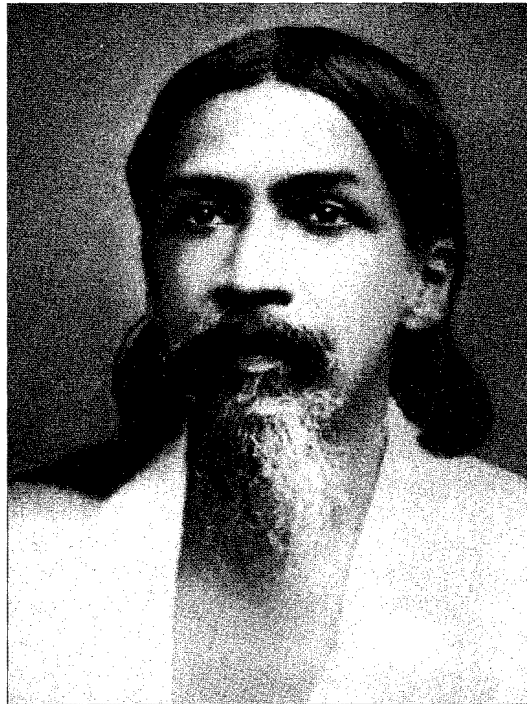
Our aim . . . is to live in the Divine, the Infinite, in God and not in any mere egoism and temporality, but at the same time not apart from Nature, from our fellow-beings, from earth and the mundane existence, any more than the Divine lives aloof from us and the world. He exists also in relation to the world and Nature and all these beings, but with an absolute and inalienable power, freedom and self-knowledge. Our liberation and perfection is to transcend ignorance, bondage and weakness and live in Him in relation to the world and Nature with the divine power, freedom and self-knowledge.

Pondicherry, the next morning. The streets offered a stark contrast to the Madras Highway: lined with tall, stately French colonial houses and teeming with the fluid movement of white-clothed yogis. Everything seemed fired from within by a pure white brilliance that rivaled the unrelenting sunshine.

I found my way to the Ashram dining hall: a large impressive building with high arches and a long, roofed porch. In the small courtyard behind wide iron gates, the stillness was palpable. I stood quietly near a fountain pool together with early disciples of Sri Aurobindo, first-time guests, children, students, and young Ashram inmates, all waiting in an orderly line that filed

past a grey-haired gentleman checking meal tickets with unwavering concentration. Inside the small, high-ceilinged chambers people sat on the floor eating in dignified silence. Where I had expected the loud clatter and din of an institutional cafeteria, I found the peaceful stillness of a library. Could this be the dining hall that serves over 50,000 meals on some days? The order and organization of the Ashram bubbled quietly behind the bright presence of radiating joy.

In Pondicherry, one feels the world filtered through the profound silence of a deep inner peace. All outer activities—the rickshaws, the girls in colorful saris selling fruit and flowers, the movement of the people—seem as substantial as the rustling of dry leaves that blow upon the dusty streets. The Ashram, with its departments scattered among the grand old mansions of the seaside town, and even the life in the streets radiate the fruit of Sri Aurobindo's great force of sadhana, which he turned to more and more exclusively from 1910 onward.



Sri Aurobindo (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Trust)

It may surprise the westerner to learn that the Indian people seem to know and love Sri Aurobindo more as the leader of the early Indian Nationalist movement than as a yogi and saint. Despite his father's ban against all things Indian, while at Cambridge Sri Aurobindo was involved with the Indian Majlis, a student group, where he made speeches advocating Indian freedom. In London, he helped found a secret society called the "Lotus and Dagger," dedicated to the cause of Indian freedom.

His political writing began almost immediately upon arriving in India with a series of articles in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, which were considered seditious by the British. He was asked by the editor to write more temperately. The next 15 years saw a sweeping spectrum of undertakings. Sri Aurobindo worked at a translation of the *Mahabharata*, published poetry and other literary pieces, lectured and eventually became vice principal at the Baroda College. During this time he met with members and attended sessions of the Indian National Congress as well as persistently organizing revolutionary propaganda and action in Bengal.

In 1906, less than a year after the partition of Bengal, he joined the *Bande Mataram* journal as assistant editor. The following year he was arrested on sedition charges for articles that appeared there. His acquittal seemed to spur on the tenor of his political involvement: leading the Nationalist Party in Bengal,



organizing, and traveling with the wider Indian independence movement. As exhaustively as he had conquered western cultural experience, he fathomed and wrestled with the immediacy of the Indian experience.

In 1908, as winds of future political turbulence increasingly blew through Calcutta forcing a new direction of sentiment across the entire subcontinent, Sri Aurobindo met a Maharashtran yogi named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Under Lele, his only human guide in yoga, he established complete silence of mind. Within three days Sri Aurobindo attained the experience of the silent Brahman (superconsciousness).

A stranger in Pondicherry, I called uninvited upon renowned authors, scholars, artists, and pandits—men and women whose unembellished humility cloaked great accomplishment—and I was welcomed like a lost family member. Where Western culture had taught me to expect a distanced courtesy, I found evidence of transformation in the bedrock of an immovable equality and joy. Distilling the essence of those days, my burning questions found answers.

Sri Aurobindo tells us there is a cooperation of two aspects to divine evolution: an effort of ascent towards God on our part, and the descent of the Godhead into our individual nature. For our part, it is helpful to keep three keys in mind: aspiration, rejection, and surrender.

Aspiration is hunger for the Divine. We ascend upward by our one-pointed aspiration. Aspiration is the effort of gathering the soul, mind, life, and body and constantly urging them to transform themselves into the divine reality.

Rejection: We reject all downward impulses within us, such as lust, anger, greed, guilt. Whatever reactions, conditions, reflexes or habits divert us from sadhana are not repressed, but rejected outright from our minds and our beings. It is a work that continues through most of our life.

Lastly, we should *surrender* everything to the Divine, realizing as it says in the *Isha Upanishad* that everything belongs to the Divine, “All this is for habitation by the Lord.” We must leave everything, including our hopes and difficulties, in his Divine care, with the faith that he knows better than we what is most beneficial for our spiritual welfare.

Surrender can best be seen in Sri Aurobindo’s own example: his triumph of achieving the silence did not at first alter the course of his political activity. Between January and May of 1908, he gave more than 12 political speeches throughout India. Sri Aurobindo tells that in early 1908, he had received an inner call to “put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into a closer union with Him.” But the political work held a strong attraction; he felt that if he did not remain with it, it would fail. It was the Divine who finally broke the bond.

On May 1, 1908, a telegram arrived for him in the office of the *Bande Mataram*; a bomb blast had killed two Europeans, and

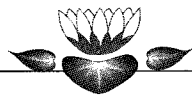
according to the police, Sri Aurobindo was believed to be the secret leader of the group of young revolutionaries responsible for the outrage. He was arrested by the British Government on May 2, and three days later taken to the Alipore Jail:

I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter in my life, and that there stretched before me a year’s imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in a cage. And when I would reenter the world of activity it would not be the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose. Rather it would be a new being, a new character, intellect, life, mind, embarking upon a new course of action that would come out of the ashram at Alipore . . . For long I had made great efforts for a direct vision (*sakshat darshan*) of the Lord of my Heart; had entertained the immense hope of knowing the Preserver of the World, the Supreme Person (*Purushottam*) as friend and master. But due to the pull of a thousand worldly desires, the attachment towards numerous activities and the deep darkness of ignorance, I did not succeed in that effort. At long last the most merciful all-good Lord (Shiv Hari) destroyed all these enemies at one stroke and helped me in my path, pointed to the yogashram, Himself staying as guru and companion in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline. The British prison was that ashram.

In solitary confinement, Sri Aurobindo spent his months immersed in reading the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita*, meditating, and practicing yoga. In what is known as the “Uttarpara Speech” following his acquittal, Sri Aurobindo described his transformation:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.

During his trial, the prisoners were kept in a cage hung above the courtroom. Sri Aurobindo remained there all day, absorbed in meditation, hardly attending to the proceedings. Ironically, the presiding judge was a classmate of Sri Aurobindo at Cambridge,



one whom Sri Aurobindo had even surpassed in the examination for the Indian Civil Service. His life seemed to hang upon the finding of this court. It is possible that no one in India or England was more qualified to defend him than himself. Yet his surrender to the Divine was so complete that he remained unconcerned, aloof, and silent. As to concerns about the defense and the need to assist his lawyer, he later wrote:

... all that was put from me and I had the message from within: "This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside those papers. It is not you who will instruct him. I will instruct him." . . . From that time I did not of myself speak a word to my Counsel about the case or give a single instruction, and if ever I was asked a question, I always found that my answer did not help the case. I had left it to him and he took it entirely into his hands with what results you know.

By our own effort, we cannot make ourselves more than we are. In our present condition we must rely upon the Divine through a surrender which is total. The descent has been called the self-revelation of the Spirit, and comes by an act of the Supreme. Essentially it is the summoning of our entire being towards the Eternal by the Eternal. It can be the steady pull of progress through years of patient work, or it can produce a miracle of instant transformation.

In addition to an open willingness to receive, what is required is our constant and absolute agreement that the Divine may do whatever it wills with us. Because ultimately it is the Divine alone which can divinize us:

For the powers of our mind, life and body are bound to their own limitations and however high they may rise or however widely expand, they cannot rise beyond them. But still, mental man can open to what is beyond him and call down a supramental Light, Truth and Power to work in him and do what the mind cannot do. If mind cannot by effort become what is beyond mind, supermind can descend and transform mind into its own substance.

On May 6, 1909, a year and a day after being taken to the Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo—as he had been assured from within—was acquitted and released. By July, however, the British were attempting to deport him. He led the Nationalist party that September at the Bengal Provincial Conference and continued giving speeches and publishing in the *Karmayogin*, a weekly review, through the end of the year. Finally, in February, 1910, Sri Aurobindo left Calcutta for French India to escape repeated attempts at prosecution by the British. After a stay in Chandernagore, he arrived in Pondicherry April 4, the day a warrant was issued charging him with sedition for an earlier published article. He would spend the rest of his life in Pondicherry.

(Part 2 of this article will appear in the next Collaboration.)

For a complete list of sources for the quotations in this article, write to Vishnu Eschner, Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, 2621 W. Highway 12, Lodi, CA 95242.

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Meditations on the human journey, Part 2

by C.V. Devan Nair

This talk was given at the Savitri Solar Dome, Crestone, Colorado, on August 15, 1995. Part I was published in the Spring 1996 Collaboration.

An evolutionary imperative is at work, and it is a radical evolution of consciousness in our age from mind to supermind. Recall Sri Aurobindo's words: "Man is a transitional animal; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood." Mental humanity may even now be undergoing, perhaps consciously in a few, something more than a quantum leap into a radically different superconsciousness. Sri Aurobindo preferred the Latin word *saltus* (i.e., a break in continuity) to describe the process. He wrote: "Mark that each of the great radical steps forward already taken by Nature has been infinitely greater in its change, incalculably vaster in its consequences than its puny predecessor."

The giant leap from mind to supermind will be incalculably greater than all its puny predecessors. That *saltus* will take up in its movement a spiritual revolution of which Sri Aurobindo wrote thus:

The changes we see in the world today are intellectual, moral, physical in their ideal and intention: the spiritual revolution waits for its hour and throws up meanwhile its waves here and there. Until it comes, the sense of the others cannot be understood and till then all interpretations of present happening and forecast of man's future are vain things. For its nature, power, event are that which will determine the next cycle of our humanity.

Our little gathering here, on this most felicitous of days, is just one of those waves thrown up here and there. Other small scattered groups around the world also constitute similar small waves. In truth, the precursors of all revolutions have invariably seemed a woeful minority. But what of that! Since when have forerunners ever begun as a majority at any stage of the evolutionary journey of life? We may be scorned as oddballs by the rest of the howling tribes. So be it. Regular squares stay put. But



balls can roll. Indeed, we might add another beatitude to Christ's great list: Blessed are the oddballs for they shall be the first to roll into the Kingdom.

We might also recall Sri Aurobindo, who wrote:

If Krishna be alone on one side and the armed and organized world with its hosts and its shrapnel and its maxims on the other, yet prefer the divine solitude. Care not if the world passes over thy body and its shrapnel tear thee to pieces and its cavalry trample thy limbs into shapeless mire by wayside; for the mind was always a simulacrum and the carcass. The spirit liberated from its casings ranges and triumphs.

Nonetheless, Mother also announced: *Salvation is physical*. A divine life in a divine body must necessarily involve a physical transformation. But that comes, as Sri Aurobindo and Mother well knew, only as the culmination of the inner spiritual journey, not at the beginning, nor even at midpoint. Even in our external world, one cannot hope to obtain a Ph.D. without first having gone through the primary, secondary, pre-university, and university stages. And we tend to forget that Mother began her yoga of the body, her descent into the cellular level, only after practicing yoga for nearly 60 years, during which time she had systematically gone up and down the ladder of the worlds. It was after ascending to the supramental level that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother began their descent through the physical subconscious down to the cellular and mineral levels. They were pilgrims of the Light first, before they became pilgrims of the Night, as Sri Aurobindo made clear in his sonnet, "The Pilgrim of the Night":

I made an assignation with the Night;
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 traveled through a vastness dim and blind
To the grey shore where her ignorant waters I walk
By the chill wave through the dull slime
And still that weary journeying knows no end;
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,
There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,
And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
A pathway towards Immortality.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother hewed for us, through trackless virgin jungle, a pathway to superhumanity. But one can be attacked by a grizzly bear even on a jogging track, as happened recently to a woman in Montana. Seekers need to be very clear in their minds that Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is not an invitation to a picnic, and certainly not to an American-style extravaganza. There are serious pitfalls and dangers on the spiritual path, for the good reason that it is infinity we hope to



"... in the hours of solitude the being is immediately enveloped by a marvellously powerful atmosphere, limpid, calm, divine..."—*The Mother, Prayers and Meditations*. (Oil painting by Louise Carroll)

explore and experience. And infinity contains heights as well as abysses, gods and angels as well as the devils of the deep. The light some seekers imagine they see at the end of the tunnel may be, as Robert Lowell once joked grimly, only the light of the oncoming train.

I am no guru (appalling thought), just one seeker among many. But like other fellow-seekers, I have come to appreciate the need for constant vigilance in the light of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, so that one may not lose one's way and be stuck for an unconscionable time in what Sri Aurobindo called "the valley of the false glimmer." Talking about how the vital mimics the spiritual, Mother once observed: "The vital is a sort of super-theater giving performances—very alluring, dazzling, deceptive performances—and it's only when you know the True Thing that, immediately, instinctively, without reasoning, you discern and say, "No, I don't want that.""

There are several things in this country that merit admiration and emulation. Nonetheless, one must also observe that no-



where else is this vital super-theater more rampant than in America—a mindless craze for vital extravaganzas of all kinds. Your cinemas, theaters, newspapers, radios and television cable channels make billions of dollars providing them, not merely to cater to domestic vital appetites. You also export them to lands overseas, and have thus contributed to a worldwide deterioration of taste in art, poetry, literature, music, cinema, and theater. In January this year, on a visit to Pondicherry, I was taken aback to see a beautiful Indian lady on TV singing in Tamil the glories, not of Krishna or Shiva, but of Lux toilet soap. Next it might be Kentucky Fried Chicken, if that hasn't already begun. In modern Indian films they already leap, cavort, and vigorously shake their hips and bottoms a la Michael Jackson.

More things are in the offing, like what is called the information superhighway. Press some computer buttons and you can tune into the Internet's cyberspace, where you can encounter everything from vicious political and racist propaganda, religious fundamentalism and its screaming bigotries, terrorism and its targets, crackpot cults, pornography, and all the rest of the unholy tribes in the endless catalog of modern economic barbarism. We originally emerged from primitive forests, only to find ourselves today in an electronic jungle. Cyberspace, in fact, is the topmost floor of the modern counterpart of the biblical Tower of Babel. You know what happened to that tower.

It bears endless repetition that for those on the spiritual path, the true push-buttons of the human journey are within, not without. It is precisely all this vital super-theater that estranges us from the many-splendored thing we seek. One remembers two famous lines by Francis Thompson:

Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many-splendored thing.

Sri Aurobindo gives us a purview of the vast inner panoramas of which our individual selves are manifestations. He says:

Even the movements of this little surface nature cannot be understood nor its true law discovered until we know all that is below or behind and supplies it—and know too all that is around it and above.

For below this conscient nature is the vast Inconscient out of which we come. The Inconscient is greater, deeper, more original, more potent to shape and govern what we are and do than our little derivative and conscient nature. Inconscient to us, to our surface view, but not inconscient in itself or to itself, it is a sovereign guide, worker, determinant, creator. Not to know it is not to know our nether origins and the origin of the most part of what we are and do. And the Inconscient is not all.

For behind our little frontal ego and nature is a whole subliminal kingdom of inner consciousness with many planes and provinces. There are in that kingdom many powers, move-

ments, personalities which are part of ourselves and help to form our little surface personality and its powers and movements. This inner self, these inner persons we do not know, but they know us and observe and dictate our speech, our thoughts, feelings, doings even more directly than the Inconscient below us.

Around us too is a circumconscient Universal of which we are a portion. This circumconscience is pouring its forces, suggestions, stimuli, compulsions into us at every moment of our existence.

Around us is a universal Mind of which our mind is a formation and our thoughts, feelings, will, impulses are continually little more than a personally modified reception and transcription of its thought-waves, its force-currents, its foam of emotion and sensation, its billows of impulse.

Around us is a permanent universal Life of which our petty flow of life-formation that begins and ceases is only a small dynamic wave.

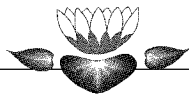
Savitri and *The Life Divine* make clear that there are not merely worlds below and around us, but also the spiritual and supramental worlds above. Then there is the supreme unmanifest Transcendent beyond all worlds, which is the one source and continent of all these other worlds, and before which all human mind and speech recoil. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were the travelers of the worlds, and their Integral Yoga is a yoga of ascent and descent. With them it was never a question of seeking a personal salvation in the supreme Infinite, and leaving the world rotting below. Their aim was radically different, that of a life divine on earth in a gnostic consciousness, which they knew to be the goal of the long evolutionary process on our planet.

Whatever level above the mind we can ascend to is proportionate to the descent we can safely make into the regions below our surface mind. To descend even deeper we need to ascend even higher above. Those who rashly attempt a precipitate descent without the necessary preparation risk becoming dangerously unhinged and cast into stark raving madness. Several such lapses are recorded in the history of the spiritual journey. We would do well to heed Sri Aurobindo's precautionary words in an essay titled "The Way":

First be sure of the call and of thy soul's answer. For if the call is not true, not the touch of God's powers or the voice of his messengers, but the lure of thy ego, the end of thy endeavor will be a poor spiritual fiasco or else a deep disaster.

And if not the soul's fervor, but only the mind's assent or interest replies to the divine summons or only the lower life's desire clutches at some side attraction of the fruits of Yoga-power or Yoga-pleasure or only a transient emotion leaps like an unsteady flame moved by the intensity of the Voice or its sweetness or grandeur, then too there can be little surety for thee in the difficult path of Yoga.

The outer instruments of mortal man have no force to



carry him through the severe ardors of this spiritual journey and Titanic inner battle or to meet its terrible or obstinate inner ordeals or nerve him to face and overcome its subtle and formidable dangers. Only his spirit's august and steadfast will and the quenchless fire of his soul's invincible ardor are sufficient for this difficult transformation and this high improbable endeavor.

Imagine not the way is easy; the way is long, arduous, dangerous, difficult. At every step is an ambush, at every turn a pitfall. A thousand seen or unseen enemies will start up against thee, terrible in subtlety against thy ignorance, formidable in power against thy weakness. And when with pain thou hast destroyed them, other thousands will surge up to take their place. Hell will vomit its hordes to oppose and enring and wound and menace; Heaven will meet thee with its pitiless tests and its cold luminous denials.

Thou shalt find thyself alone in thy anguish, the demons furious in thy path, the Gods unwilling above thee. Ancient and powerful, cruel, unvanquished and close and innumerable are the dark and dreadful Powers that profit by the reign of Night and Ignorance and would have no change and are hostile.

Aloof, slow to arrive, far-off and few and brief in their visits are the Bright Ones who are willing or permitted to succour. Each step forward is a battle. There are precipitous descents, there are unending ascensions and ever higher peaks upon peaks to conquer. Each plateau climbed is but a stage on the way and reveals endless heights beyond it. Each victory thou thinkest the last triumphant struggle proves to be but the prelude to a hundred fierce and perilous battles . . .

But thou sayst God's hands will be with me and the Divine Mother near with her gracious smile of succour? And thou knowst not then that God's Grace is more difficult to have or to keep than the nectar of the Immortals or Kuvera's priceless treasures? Ask of his chosen and they will tell thee how often the Eternal has covered his face from them, how often he has withdrawn from them behind his mysterious veil and they have found themselves alone in the grip of Hell, solitary in the horror of the darkness, naked and defenseless

in the anguish of the battle. And if his presence is felt behind the veil, yet it is like the winter sun behind clouds and saves not from the rain and snow and the calamitous storm and the harsh wind and the bitter cold and the atmosphere of a sorrowful grey and the dun weary dullness. Doubtless the help is there even when it seems to be withdrawn, but still is there the appearance of total night with no sun to come and no star of hope to please in the darkness.

Beautiful is the face of the Divine Mother, but she too can be hard and terrible. Nay, then, is immortality a plaything to be given lightly to a child, or the divine life a prize without effort or the crown for a weakling? Strive rightly and thou shalt have; trust and thy trust shall in the end be justified; but the dread Law of the Way is there and none can abrogate it.

Our safest course would be to tread what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother called the sunlit path which involves the primary discovery of the truth of our own beings, the psychic being or soul. During a personal darshan some three years before Mother left her physical body, I took the opportunity to ask her blessing to enable me to achieve the highest supramental consciousness. I also asked how I could collaborate in her work. Her response: "In the individual, it is the psychic that represents the Divine. Find it and unite with it." Then, in

her infinite compassion, she handed me a card with a mantra inscribed on it, and a blessing packet, saying: "This flower is of the Divine Love." And, as I knelt before her, She laid her hands of power on my benighted head and blessed me.

There are revealing references in *Savitri* to the true person in each one of us—the psychic being or soul. I quote one of them:

Ourself and a high stranger whom we feel,
It is and acts unseen as if it were not;
It follows the line of sempiternal birth,
Yet seems to perish with its mortal frame.
Assured of the Apocalypse to be,
It reckons not the moments and the hours;
Great, patient, calm it sees the centuries pass,
Awaiting the slow miracle of our change



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Trust)



In the sure deliberate process of world-force
And the long march of all-revealing Time.

Always we bear in us a magic key
Concealed in life's hermetic envelope.
A burning witness in the sanctuary
Regards through Time and the blind walls of Form;
A timeless light is in his hidden eyes;
He sees the secret things no words can speak
And knows the goal of the unconscious world
And the heart of the mystery of the journeying years.

With the discovery of the psychic being, and the mental and vital psychization that follow, we can safely begin our spiritual journey, for the psychic can unerringly sift the wheat from the chaff, distinguish the genuine from the spurious, the beneficent from the baneful, true spiritual experience from vital-theater. We cannot deal today with the other ascending and descending grades of the journey. We might merely state this. Following the psychic transformation of our being comes the spiritual transformation. Exceeding, yet inexplicably including both, comes the ascent to the supramental, followed by the descent into what Sri Aurobindo called "the bottomless pit" where he had walked. He tells us in "A God's Labour":

On a desperate stair my feet have trod
Armoured with boundless peace,
Bringing the fires of the splendour of God
Into the human abyss.

And he concludes the poem with two verses:

A little more and the new life's doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
For in a raiment of gold and blue
There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
The living truth of you.

The superhuman labors of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and particularly the descent of the supramental force into the earth's subtle physical atmosphere on February 29, 1956, announced by the Mother, certainly make our own labors less onerous, but by no means render them unnecessary. Nor do they annul the ordeals of the spiritual seeker. But we can confidently overcome the ordeals if we consciously carry within us God's deathless light.

Neither Sri Aurobindo nor the Mother give any specific method or path to arrive at the goal of their yoga, for the good

reason that each person has his or her own window on Deity. All they required was the discovery by each seeker of the hidden truth of his or her own being—the soul or psychic being. *By any path chosen*, said Sri Aurobindo. *That's of no importance whatever*, added the Mother. But a silent mind and purified vital are necessary preparations. Said Sri Aurobindo:

Cease inwardly from thought and word, be motionless within you, look upward into the light and outward into the vast cosmic consciousness that is around you. Be more and more one with the brightness and the vastness. Then will Truth dawn on you from above and flow in you from all around you.

It was the psychic influence, in the first place, that awakened the spiritual call in us. We feel its influence, for instance, in that sudden leap of joy within when we hear, see, or read something ablaze with a radiant revelatory beauty and power. But mostly, it is a game of hide and seek. We don't want the psychic hidden behind the scenes. We want it out in front to lead our mental, vital, and physical lives. Only then can the tremendous adventure of consciousness begin. Two magnificent sentences in Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*, which exercised a powerful influence in my own journey into the Great Unknown, read as follows:

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is Man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.

What was this tremendous being we call Sri Aurobindo like? Nobody knows. He merely told a disciple, "My life has not been on the surface for men to see." Those who had the exceptional privilege of having had his darshan can only speak in superlatives. We know that the Mother prostrated herself before him. We know that his very name was like a mantra for her. She told us that the powerful silence that emanated from him blocked a cyclone from entering his room, even though his windows were wide open. On another occasion she said, "I saw him supramental on his bed."

To conclude, let me take you back to the celebration by the inmates of the Ashram of August 15 in the year 1924, as recorded by a hard-headed revolutionary disciple of Sri Aurobindo, the late A.B. Purani:

Who can describe this day? Nothing can be added by the colors of imagination, poetic similes, and loaded epithets. It is enough to say, "It was the 15th of August." No other day



can come up to it in the depth and intensity of spiritual action, the ascending movement of the flood of emotions, and the way in which each individual here was bathing in the atmosphere.

From early morning the Ashram is humming with various activities: decoration, flowers, garlands, food, bath, etc. All are eager to go up to the Master for his Darshan. As the time passes there is a tide in the flood of rising emotion. It is "Darshan"—we see him every day, but today it is "Darshan"! Today each sees him individually, one after another. In the midst of these multiple activities the consciousness gets concentrated. Today is "Darshan"—not of a human being but of some Supreme Divinity. Today is the rare chance of seeing the Divine. There he sits—in the royal chair in the verandah—royal and majestic. In the very posture there is divine self-confidence. In the heart of the Supreme Master, the great Yogin—a sea of emotions is heaving—is it a flood that mounts from or a flood that is coming down on humanity? Those alone who have experienced it can know something of its divinity. Those who have bathed in it once can never come out of that ocean. He sits there—with pink and white lotus garlands. It is the small flower-token of the offerings by the disciples. Hearts throb, prayers, requests, emotions pour forth—and a flood of blessings pours down carrying all of them away in its speed. Lack of faith, doubts get assurance. All human needs the Divine fulfills and, after fulfilling, his grace overflows. Love and grace flow on undiminished. The look!—the enrapturing and captivating eyes! Who can ever forget?—pouring love and grace and ineffable divinity. If some transcendent Divinity is not here where else can he be?

But all this is before Darshan. As one actually stands in front all curiosity, all pride, all thoughts, all questions, all resolutions are swept away in some terrific divine Niagara. Thou embodiment of love Supreme! what transparency! In the heart of the Supreme Master also, an ocean of emotion is heaving. The heart melts and falls at his feet without knowing, it surrenders itself! Where is here a place for speech! There is only one speech—the language of the body and its flexion that of the prostration of the body in the act of surrender, throbbing of the heart and that of the flow of tears from the eyes! What a peace pregnant with divinity! What a beauty of this experience!

Knowledge is laid on the shelf—and it is all a flood of love. Today the soul has received the certitude of the Divine's victory as it had never done before.

We also have the Mother's declaration: "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; It is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."

C.V. Devan Nair lives in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Sri Aurobindo on oneness and multiplicity

This material is from Sri Aurobindo's The Upanishads: Texts, Translations and Commentaries, pp. 22–23 (verses) and pp. 64–69 (commentary). In Sanskrit, Vidya means oneness; Avidya means multiplicity.

The complete path

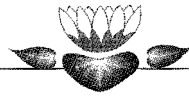
Brahman embraces in His manifestation both Vidya and Avidya and if they are both present in the manifestation, it is because they are both necessary to its existence and its accomplishment. Avidya subsists because Vidya supports and embraces it; Vidya depends upon Avidya for the preparation and the advance of the soul towards the great Unity. Neither could exist without the other; for if either were abolished, they would both pass away into something which would be neither the one nor the other, something inconceivable and ineffable beyond all manifestation.

In the worst Ignorance there is some point of the knowledge which constitutes that form of Ignorance and some support of Unity which prevents it in its most extreme division, limitation, obscurity from ceasing to exist by dissolving into nothingness. The destiny of the Ignorance is not that it should be dissolved out of existence, but that its elements should be enlightened, united, that which they strive to express delivered, fulfilled and in the fulfilment transmuted and transfigured.

In the uttermost unity of which knowledge is capable the contents of the Multiplicity are inherent and implicit and can any moment be released into activity. The office of Vidya is not to destroy Avidya as a thing that ought never to have been manifested but to draw it continually towards itself, supporting it the while and helping it to deliver itself progressively from that character of Ignorance, of the oblivion of its essential Oneness, which gives it its name.

Avidya fulfilled by turning more and more to Vidya enables the individual and the universal to become what the Lord is in Himself, conscious of His manifestation, conscious of His non-manifestation, free in birth, free in non-birth.

Man represents the point at which the multiplicity in the universe becomes consciously capable of this turning and fulfilment. His own natural fulfilment comes by following the complete path of Avidya surrendering itself to Vidya, the Multiplicity to the Unity, the Ego to the One in all and beyond all, and of Vidya accepting Avidya into itself, the Unity fulfilling the Multiplicity, the One manifesting Himself unveiled in the individual and in the universe.



Mortality and immortality

Mortality

By Avidya fulfilled man passes beyond death, by Vidya accepting Avidya into itself he enjoys immortality.

By death is meant the state of mortality which is a subjection to the process of constant birth and dying as a limited ego bound to the dualities of joy and sorrow, good and evil, truth and error, love and hatred, pleasure and suffering.

This state comes by limitation and self-division from the One who is all and in all and beyond-all and by attachment of the idea of self to a single formation in Time and Space of body, life and mind, by which the Self excludes from its view all that it verily is with the exception of a mass of experiences flowing out from and in upon a particular centre and limited by the capacities of a particular mental, vital, and bodily frame. This mass of experiences it organises around the ego-centre in the mind and linking them together in Time by a double action of memory, passive in state, active in work, says continually, "This is I."

The result is that the soul attributes to itself certain portion only of the play of Prakriti or Chit-Shakti and consequently a certain limited capacity of force of consciousness which has to bear all the impact of what the soul does not regard as itself but as a rush of alien forces; against them it defends its separate formation of individuality from dissolution into Nature or mastery by Nature. It seeks to assert in the individual form and by its means its innate character of *Ish* or Lord and so to possess and enjoy its world.

But by the very definition of the ego its capacity is limited. It accepts as itself a form made of the movement of Nature which cannot endure in the general flux of things. It has to form it by the process of the movement and this is birth, it dissolves it by the process of the movement and this is death.

It can master by the understand-

From the *Isha Upanishad*

Verse 6

But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.

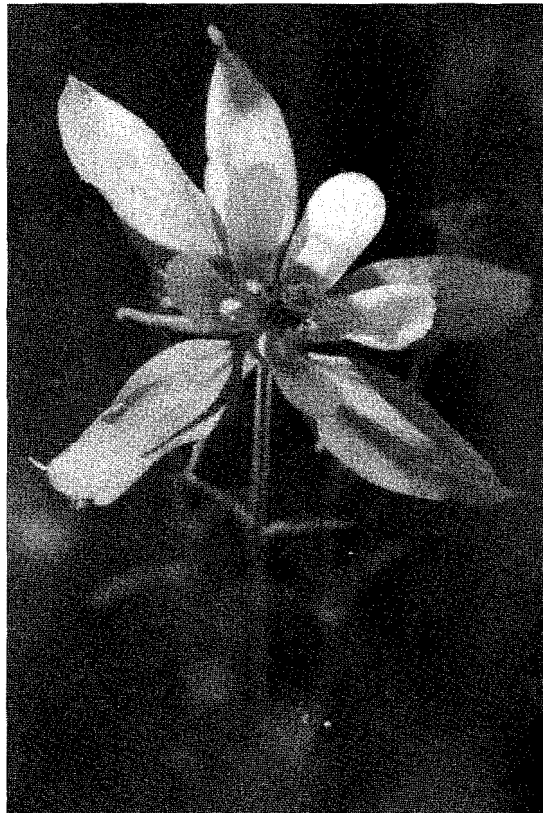
Verse 7

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

Verse 11

He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

—Translation by Sri Aurobindo



Columbine. (Photo by Nancy Dawson)

ing only so much of its experiences as assimilate with its own viewpoint and in a way which must always be imperfect and subject to error because it is not the view of all or the viewpoint of the All. Its knowledge is partly error and all the rest it ignores.

It can only accept and harmonise itself with a certain number of its experiences, precisely because these are the only ones it can understand sufficiently to assimilate. This is its joy; the rest is sorrow or indifference.

It is only capable of harmonising with the force in its body, nerves and mind a certain number of impacts of alien forces. In these it takes pleasure. The rest it receives with insensibility or pain.

Death therefore is the constant denial by the All of the ego's false self-limitation in the individual frame of mind, life and body.

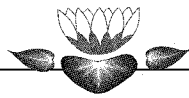
Error is the constant denial by the All of the ego's false sufficiency in a limited knowledge.

Suffering of mind and body is the constant denial by the All of the ego's attempt to confine the universal Ananda to a false and self-regarding formation of limited and exclusive enjoyments.

It is only by accepting the oneness of the All that the individual can escape from this constant and necessary denial and attain beyond. Then All-being, All-force, All-consciousness, All-truth, All-delight take possession of the individual soul. It changes mortality for immortality.

Mortality and Avidya

But the way of attaining to immortality is not by the self-dissolution of the individual formation into the flux of Prakriti, neither is it by prematurely dissolving it into the All-soul which Prakriti expresses. Man moves towards something which fulfils the universe by transcending it. He has to prepare his individual soul for the transcendence and for the fulfilment.



If Avidya is the cause of mortality, it is also the path out of mortality. The limitation has been created precisely in order that the individual may affirm himself against the flux of Prakriti in order eventually to transcend, possess and transform it.

The first necessity is therefore for man continually to enlarge himself in being, knowledge, joy, power in the limits of the ego so that he may arrive at the conception of something which progressively manifests itself in him in these terms and becomes more and more powerful to deal with the oppositions of Prakriti and to change, individually, more and more the terms of ignorance, suffering and weakness into the terms of knowledge, joy and power and even death into a means of wider life.

This self-enlargement has then to awaken to the perception of something exceeding itself, exceeding the personal manifestation. Man has so to enlarge his conception of self. If as to see all in himself and himself in all (Verse 6). He has to see that this "I" which contains all and is contained in all, is the One, is universal and not his personal ego. To That he has to subject his ego, That he has to reproduce in his nature and become, That is what he has to possess and enjoy with an equal soul in all its forms and movements.

He has to see that this universal One is something entirely transcendent, the sole Being, and that the universe and all its forms, actions, egos are only becomings of that Being (Verse 7). World is a becoming which seeks always to express in motion of Time and Space, by progression in mind, life and body what is beyond all becoming, beyond Time and Space, beyond mind, life and body.

Thus Avidya becomes one with Vidya. By Avidya man passes beyond that death, suffering, ignorance, weakness which were the first terms he had to deal with, the first assertions of the One in the birth affirming Himself amid the limitations and divisions of the Multiplicity. By Vidya he enjoys even in the birth the Immortality.

Immortality

Immortality does not mean survival of the self or the ego after dissolution of the body. The Self always survives the dissolution of the body, because it always pre-existed before the birth of the body. The self is unborn and undying. The survival of the ego is only the first condition by which the individual soul is able to continue and link together its experiences in Avidya so as to pursue with an increasing self-possession and mastery that process of self-enlargement which culminates in Vidya.

By immortality is meant the consciousness which is beyond birth and death, beyond the chain of cause and effect, beyond all bondage and limitation, free, blissful, self-existent in consciousness, the consciousness of the Lord, of the supreme Purusha, of Sachchidananda.

Immortality and birth

On this realisation man can base his free activity in the universe.

But having so far attained, what further utility has the soul for birth or for works? None for itself, everything for God and the universe.

Immortality beyond the universe is not the object of manifestation in the universe, for that the Self always possessed. Man exists in order that through him the Self may enjoy Immortality in the birth as well as in the non-becoming.

Nor is individual salvation the end; for that would only be the sublime of the ego, not its self-realisation through the Lord in all.

Having realised his own immortality, the individual has yet to fulfil God's work in the universe. He has to help the life, the mind and the body in all beings to express progressively Immortality and not mortality.

This he may do by the becoming in the material body which we ordinarily call birth, or from some status in another world or even, it is possible, from beyond world. But birth in the body is the most close, divine and effective form of help which the liberated can give to those who are themselves still bound to the progression of birth in the lowest world of the Ignorance.

The Mother on the supramental being

The following passage is from the Mother's Notes on the Way, pp. 238-9.

1 July 1970

I had an experience which was for me interesting, it was for the first time. It was yesterday or the day before, I do not remember. X was there just in front of me, and I saw her psychic being, dominating over her by so much (*gesture indicating about twenty centimetres*), taller. It was the first time. Her physical being was small and her psychic being was so much bigger. And it was an unsexed being, neither man nor woman. Then I said to myself (possibly it is always so, I do not know, but here I noticed it very clearly), I said to myself, "But it is the psychic being, it is that which will materialise itself and become the supramental being!"

I saw it, it was so. There were particularities, but these were not well-marked, and it was clearly a being that was neither man nor woman, having the combined characteristics of both. And it was bigger than the person and in every way overtopped her by about so much (*gesture surpassing the physical body by about 20 centimetres*); she was there and it was like this (*same gesture*). And it had this colour . . . this colour . . . which if it became quite material would be the colour of Auroville [orange]. It was fainter, as though behind a veil, it was not absolutely precise, but it was that colour. There was hair on the head, but . . . it was somewhat different. I shall see better perhaps another time. But it interested me very much, because it was as though that being



were telling me, "But you are busy looking to see what kind of being the supramental will be—there it is! There, it is that." And it was there. It was the psychic being of the person.

So, one understands. One understands: the psychic being materialises itself . . . and that gives continuity to evolution. This creation gives altogether the feeling that there is nothing arbitrary, there is a kind of divine logic behind and it is not like our human logic, it is very much superior to ours—but there is one, and that was fully satisfied when I saw this.

It is really interesting. I was very interested. It was there, calm and quiet, and it said to me, "You were looking, well, there it is, yes, it is that

And then I understood why the mind and the vital were sent out of this body, leaving the psychic being—naturally it was that which had been always governing all the movements, so it was nothing new, but there are no difficulties any more: all the complications that were coming from the vital and the mental, adding their impressions and tendencies, all gone. And I understood: "Ah! it is that, it is this psychic being which has to become the supramental being."

But I never sought to know what its appearance was like. And when I saw X, I understood. And I see it, I am seeing it still, I have kept the memory. It was as though the hair on the head was red (but it was not like that). And its expression! An expression so fine, and sweetly ironical . . . oh! extraordinary, extraordinary.

And you understand, I had my eyes open, it was almost a material vision.

So one understands. All of a sudden all the questions have vanished, it has become very clear, very simple. (*Silence*)

And it is precisely the psychic that survives. So, if it materialises itself, it means the abolition of death. But "abolition" . . . nothing is abolished except what is not in accordance with the Truth, which goes away . . . whatever is not capable of transforming itself in the image of the psychic and becoming an integral part of the psychic.

It is truly interesting.

CENTER LISTINGS

California

Auroville International USA, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816. A nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation founded to support the Auroville project in India. Auroville is the first attempt anywhere to be a universal town where people of all countries can live together in progressive harmony, above creeds and nationalities. Contact Megan Thomas, (916) 452-4013.

California Institute of Integral Studies, 9 Peter Yorke Way, San Francisco CA 94109. An accredited graduate school offering M.A. and Ph.D. programs in philosophy, religion, psychology, counseling; also offering lectures, library, book sales, educational facilities. For information, call (415) 753-6100.

Cultural Integration Fellowship, 360 Cumberland St., San Francisco, CA 94114 and 2650 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94118. Draws inspiration from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as other great prophets of modern India. Offering lectures, residence facility, musical events, book sales. Contact Bina Chaudhuri, (415) 626-2442.

Sri Aurobindo Association, 1790 Highland Place, Berkeley, CA 94709. Devoted to the realization of the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Facilitates visitors to the Ashram and Auroville; publishes *Collaboration*. Contact Wayne and Surama Bloomquist, (510) 841-5841; fax: (510) 848-8531; e-mail: SAACal@aol.com.

Sri Aurobindo Center (formerly East Bay Sri Aurobindo Center), 2288 Fulton St., Suite 309, Berkeley CA 94704. Devoted to the realization of the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Study groups; meditation room; Darshan and related events; lectures; library. Study group, Sunday, 9:30–10:30 a.m.; meditation, 10:45–11:15 a.m.; meditation, reading, and discussion, Thursday, 6:30–8:00 p.m. Contact the information and message line, (510) 433-7309.

East-West Cultural Center, 12329 Marshall St., Culver City, CA 90230. *Ideal of Human Unity* study group, beginning Sanskrit, *Synthesis of Yoga* study group, *Savitri* study group, karma yoga, inquiry into collective yoga; meditation held after each study group. Classes in Indian music, vocal, tabla, and harmonium, chanting. Inquiry into the everyday aspects of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, special presentations, public addresses, movies, potluck supper, performing arts. Special programs held on first Saturday of each month. Phone: (310) 390-9083; e-mail: ewcc@earthlink.net

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, 2621 W. Highway 12, Lodi CA 95242. Collective residential facilities provided for concentrated sadhana in an ashram atmosphere. Community is self-supporting through sales of books, incense, and Ayurvedic products. Karma yoga work-exchange programs offered, visitors welcome. Offering Darshan gatherings, daily meditation, chanting of Vedic hymns and Indian devotional music, weekly study group, library. Contact Dakshina, (209) 339-1342, ext. 5; e-mail: SASP@aol.com.

Colorado

Sri Aurobindo Circle of Boulder meets monthly for meditation and reading on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Contact Lynda Lester, (303) 543-9964.

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



Florida

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

Georgia

Aur-ientation Integral Healing Center, 1924 Cliff Valley Way, Suite 201, Atlanta, GA 30329. Hosts spontaneous Mother and Sri Aurobindo study groups. Offers one-on-one and telephone counseling based on Integral Psychology and Integral Yoga. Offers clairvoyant and cellular healing sessions. Contact Ariel Browne, Ph.D., DD., (404) 728-9807.

Massachusetts

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

New Hampshire

Merriam Hill Education Center (MHC), 148 Merriam Hill Road, Greenville, NH 03048-9729. A nonprofit organization established for the study of wisdom and community, providing opportunities for adults to increase their sense of interconnectedness with others and the environment. Located on 54 acres in the Monadnock region of New Hampshire, MHC offers comfortable accommodations in a renovated farmhouse and barn surrounded by woods. For information, call (603) 878-1818.

New York

Auroville Information Office, P.O. Box 676, Woodstock, NY 12498. East Coast branch of AVI-USA located at "Pondicherry," a gift shop specializing in Auroville handicrafts. Sponsors talks and fundraising events. Contact Julian Lines, (914) 679-2926; e-mail: jhl@aol.com.

Matagiri, 1218 Wittenberg Rd., Mt. Tremper, NY 12457. Maintains a library of the complete works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, with audiotapes and videotapes, photographs, and other materials. Offering Darshan observances, book shop, special programs. Weekly evening meditation. For information, call (914) 679-8322.

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

South Carolina

Sri Aurobindo Center Southeast, Inc., P.O. Box 8375, Greenville, SC 29604. Founded to provide an opportunity to learn

about and experience Sri Aurobindo and Mother's grace and power. Offering meditation, Darshan gatherings, study group, residence facilities, book sales, newsletter. Contact R.P. Rama, (864) 232-9944; fax: (864) 232-3627.

Washington

Lotus Center, 2020 Roosevelt Ave., Enumclaw WA 98022. *Synthesis of Yoga* study group (Enumclaw) Sunday, 7-8:30 p.m. *Synthesis of Yoga* study group (Seattle), Tuesday, 7-8:30 p.m. Purpose is to further the development of yoga in all members and nourish the spiritual aspiration of visitors. Offering Darshan meetings, meditation and library room, lectures, library, book sales, workshops, retreats, musical and cultural events. Contact Ron Jorgenson, (206) 825-3413.

Wisconsin

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

Canada

Auroville Liaison Office, P.O. Box 8010, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V8W 3R7. Publishes the electronic newsletter *Attempt* to facilitate the building of Auroville. Contact Auro and Fidelite Arindam, (604) 383-4699; fax: (604) 480-1781; e-mail: avliaison@auroville.org.

Online discussion groups

Auroconf is an electronic-mail group devoted to news and discussion of matters related to Auroville, the Ashram, and the Integral Yoga. **Savitri** and **Synthesis** are devoted to reading and studying Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, respectively. To join, send e-mail to auroconf-request@compatible.com, savitri-request@compatible.com, or synthesis-request@compatible.com.

Web site

- <http://www.auroville-india.org/toc.htm> (Auroville, India)
- <http://www.sirius.com/~aceebro>
(Aurolink; information about Auroville)
- <http://www.auroville.org/~auro/home.htm>
(Auroville Liaison Office)
- <http://www.webcom.com/haridas/>
(Cultural Integration Fellowship)
- <http://www.earthlink.net/~ewcc> (East-West Cultural Center)
- <http://www.webcom.com/~miraura/> (Miraura)
- <http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~pravir/dbdesc.html>
(Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch)



APROPOS

HEAVEN PHOTOGRAPHED BY HUBBLE TELESCOPE.
Special news bulletin from NASA: "We found where God lives," says scientist!—Supermarket tabloid *Weekly World News*, April 30, 1996

The galaxies exist in you, not printed as mere images within your skull, but in your every cell, your every atom.—George Leonard

... why *Homo sapiens* should carry the spark of rationality that provides the key to the universe, is a deep enigma. We, who are children of the universe—animated stardust—can nevertheless reflect on the nature of that same universe, even to the extent of glimpsing the rules on which it runs. How we have become linked into this cosmic dimension is a mystery. Yet the linkage cannot be denied.

What does it mean? What is Man that we might be party to such privilege? I cannot believe that our existence in this universe is a mere quirk of fate, an accident of history, an incidental blip in the great cosmic drama. Our involvement is too intimate. The physical species *Homo* may count for nothing, but the existence of mind in some organism on some planet in the universe is surely a fact of fundamental significance. Through conscious beings the universe has generated self-awareness. This can be no trivial detail, no minor byproduct of mindless, purposeless forces. We are truly meant to be here.—Paul Davies

Be in touch with excellence. Don't get lost in your own moods; they wear out too easily.—Theodore Weiss

It is certain that no culture can flourish without narratives of transcendent origin and power.—Neil Postman

Truth is not loved because it is *better* for us. We hunger and thirst for it.—Saul Bellow

The central teaching of mysticism is this: *Reality is One*. The practice of mysticism consists in finding ways to experience this unity directly. The One has variously been called the Good, God, the Cosmos, the Mind, the Void, or (perhaps most neutrally) the Absolute. No door in the labyrinthine castle of science opens directly onto the Absolute. But if one understands the maze well enough, it is possible to jump out of the system and experience the Absolute for oneself . . . But, ultimately, mystical knowledge is attained all at once or not at all. There is no gradual path.—Rudy Rucker

Keep away from people who belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.—Mark Twain

Discipline is the refining fire by which talent becomes ability.—Roy L. Smith

Be regular and orderly in your life, so that you may be violent and original in your work.—Gustave Flaubert

How may a mystic communicate his vision? We are faced with the same inadequacy of language when we try to tell you of the superlative qualities of the Citroën D.S.19.—Advertisement in the *Sunday Times*, April 13, 1958

Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.—*The Luck of the Bodkins*, Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, 1881–1975

The next greatest rapture to the love of God is the love of God in men; there, too, one has the joy of multiplicity.

For monogamy may be the best for the body, but the soul that loves God in men dwells here always as the boundless and ecstatic polygamist; yet all the time—that is the secret—it is in love with only one being.—Sri Aurobindo

SRI AUROBINDO ASSOCIATION

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