

# Collaboration

Summer 2000

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 26, no. 2



Whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of everything, the capacity of concentrating the attention. If you are able to gather together the rays of attention and consciousness on one point and can maintain this concentration with a persistent will, *nothing* can resist it—whatever it may be, from the most material physical development to the highest spiritual one. But this discipline must be followed in a constant and, it may be said, imperturbable way; not that you should always be concentrated on the same thing—that's not what I mean, I mean learning to concentrate.

And materially, for studies, sports, all physical or mental development, it is absolutely indispensable. And the value of an individual is proportionate to the value of his attention.

And from the spiritual point of view it is still more important. There is *no* spiritual obstacle which can resist a penetrating power of concentration. For instance, the discovery of the psychic being, union with the inner Divine, opening to the higher spheres, *all* can be obtained by an intense and obstinate power of concentration—but one must learn how to do it.

There is nothing in the human or even in the superhuman field, to which the power of concentration is not the key.

You can be the best athlete, you can be the best student, you can be an artistic, literary or scientific genius, you can be the greatest saint with that faculty. And everyone has in himself a tiny little beginning of it—it is given to everybody, but people do not cultivate it.—*The Mother, from The Sunlit Path: Passages from Conversations and Writings of the Mother, p. 65*

Georges Van Vrekhem on Sri Aurobindo's 'yoga of the king' • The call of yoga • Integral Yoga 2000  
An interview with Amal Kiran • Preparing for the supramental • Napping with the Divine



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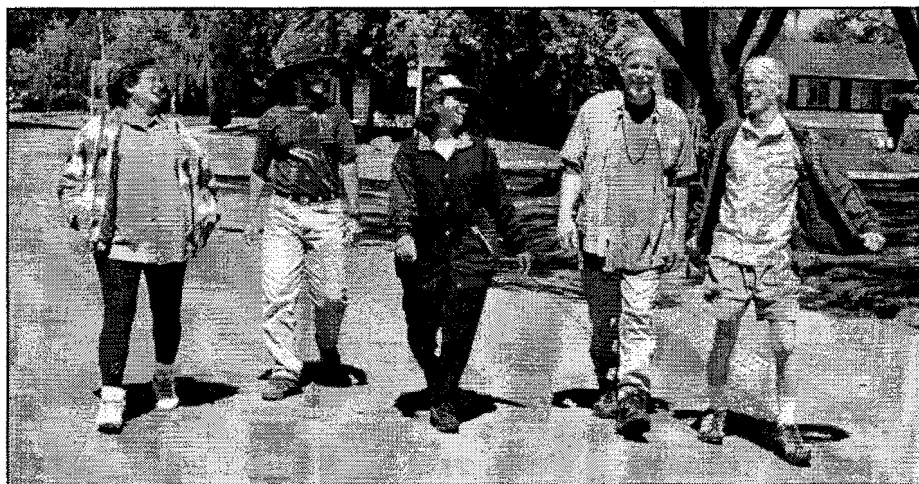
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**About SAA:** The primary purpose of the Sri Aurobindo Association is to distribute information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville and to support various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: David Hutchinson, president; Vishnubhai Eschner, secretary; Marta Belén, treasurer; Lynda Lester, vice president, *Collaboration*; Chandresh Patel, vice president, Money-Power Project; Kalpana Patel, vice president, AUM 2001; and Bhuvana Nandakumar, vice president, *Collaboration* archives and nonprofit organization.

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The Sri Aurobindo Association meets for a "yoga intensive" to try to figure out how to do yoga as an organization. See SAA story on p. 8. (Photo by Lynda Lester)





On the cover: Orange-red hibiscus, given by Mother the spiritual significance "Manifold power of the new creation." (Oil painting on folding panel by Boots Brunnell)

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# Fundamentals

## The call of yoga

### **Mother on the urge to transformation**

The following selections are taken from *Growing Within: The Psychology of Inner Development* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1992) and *The Sunlit Path: Passages from Conversations and Writings of the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1984).

### **The awakening of consciousness**

One suddenly feels that everything one does, everything one sees, has no meaning, no purpose, but that *there is* something which has a meaning; that essentially one is here on earth for something, that all this—all these movements, all this agitation, all is wastage of force and energy—all that must have a purpose, an aim, and that this uneasiness one feels within oneself, this lack of satisfaction, this need, this *thirst* for something must lead us somewhere else.

And one day, you ask yourself, “But then, why is one born? Why does one die? Why does one suffer? Why does one act?”

You no longer live like a little machine, hardly half-conscious. You want to feel truly, to act truly, to know truly. Then, in ordinary life one searches for books, for people who know a little more than oneself, one begins to seek somebody who can solve these questions, lift the veil of ignorance. (*Growing Within*, p. 27)

### **The sublimest of adventures**

There is a moment when life such as it is, the human consciousness such as it is, seems something absolutely impossible to bear, it creates a kind of disgust, repugnance; one says, “No, it is not that, it is not that; it can’t be that, it can’t continue.” Well, when one comes to this, there is only to throw in one’s *all*—all one’s ef-



“The world is preparing for a big change. Will you help?” (Photo of the Mother courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

fort, all one’s strength, all one’s life, all one’s being—into this chance, if you like, or this exceptional opportunity that is given to cross over to the other side. What a relief to set foot on the new path, that which will lead you elsewhere! This is worth the trouble of casting behind much luggage, of getting rid of many things in order to be able to take that leap. That’s how I see the problem.

In fact it is the sublimest of adventures, and if one has in him in the slightest the true spirit of adventure, it is worth risking all for all. (*Sunlit Path*, pp. 1–2)

### **The resolution to do yoga**

You see, one may have a very good will, a life oriented towards a divine realisation, in any case a more or less superficial consecration to a divine work, *and not do yoga*.

To do Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is to want to transform oneself integrally, it is to have a single aim in life, such that nothing else exists any longer, that alone exists. And so one feels it clearly in oneself whether one wants it or not; but if one

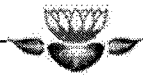
doesn’t, one can still have a life of goodwill, a life of service, of understanding; one can labour for the Work to be accomplished more easily—all that—one can do many things. But between this and doing yoga there is a great difference.

And to do yoga you must want it consciously, you must know what it is, to begin with. You must know what it is, you must take a resolution about it; but once you have taken the resolution, you must no longer flinch. That is why you must take it in full knowledge of the thing. You must know what you are deciding upon when you say, “I want to do yoga”; and that is why I don’t think I have ever pressed you from this point of view . . .

But the day you make a choice—when you have done it in all sincerity and have felt within yourself a radical decision—the thing is different. There is the light and the path to be followed, quite straight, and you must not deviate from it. It fools no one, you know; yoga is not a joke. You must know what you are doing when you choose it. But when you choose it, you must hold on to it. You have no longer the right to vacillate. You must go straight ahead. There! . . .

To do the yoga, this yoga of transformation which, of all things, is the most arduous—it is only if one feels that one has come here for that (I mean here upon earth) and that one has to do nothing else but that, and that it is the only reason of one’s existence—even if one has to toil hard, suffer, struggle, it is of no importance—“This is what I want, and nothing else”—then it is different. Otherwise I shall say, “Be happy and be good, and that’s all that is asked of you. Be good, in the sense of being understanding, knowing that the conditions in which you have lived are exceptional, and try to live a higher, more noble, more true life than the ordinary one, so as to allow a little of this consciousness, this light and its goodness to express itself in the world. It would be very good.” There we are.

But once you have set foot on the path of yoga, you must have a resolution of steel and walk straight on to the goal, whatever the cost. (*Sunlit Path*, p. 19)



## New letters on yoga

### From our readers

**W**ith much pleasure I read your "Earth hour" in *Collaboration*. I like the healthy sense of humor in it.—August Timmermans, [augusti@bu.ac.th](mailto:augusti@bu.ac.th)

"Sri Aurobindo: Inside, outside, upside down" was marvelous. I have read it many times, getting more and more joy. You are right in many things. Reciting *Savitri* is a yoga in itself. One sometimes experiences a spontaneous overflowing of something mysterious that brings tears to the eyes.—Kuldip Kumar Suri, [kuldipsuri@indiatimes.com](mailto:kuldipsuri@indiatimes.com)

I received the Spring *Collaboration* issue and was so excited to see two of my drawings published in it. It is such an honor, because it is as if I had done true work for the Mother. Devan Nair was very pleased to see the drawings too. He said, "Of course, you are doing the work of the Mother always."

Thanks a million,

Jai Ma!—Catherine Blackburn, [c.blackburn@sympatico.ca](mailto:c.blackburn@sympatico.ca)

I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed *Collaboration*. Thank you so much for sending it. You did a beautiful work. It was good to see the photo of the Sri Aurobindo Association—it is hard to live in a faceless world.—Alicia Torres, [altorres@cantv.net](mailto:altorres@cantv.net)

The Spring issue of *Collaboration* was first class by any reckoning. Every article was extremely well chosen. Congratulations to all those responsible.—Devan Nair, [miraaur@nas.net](mailto:miraaur@nas.net)

Belated note to say I received the Spring 2000 *Collaboration*. It is a magnificent issue. It seems that a special effort was made. The "eight questions" is very needed, and we've all got to plunge

in on that. Particularly enjoyed the selection from G. Van Vrekhem's soon-to-be-available work on Mother; Lynda Lester's journal piece on "Damn it, I'll do the sadhana ANYWAY"; reprint of Dave Hutchinson's talk at the Cultural Integration Fellowship on Sri Aurobindo's birthday; the selection from the 1962 *Agenda*—and much more that doesn't come to mind right now.—Rick Lipschutz, [rlipschutz@pedcard.ucsf.edu](mailto:rlipschutz@pedcard.ucsf.edu)

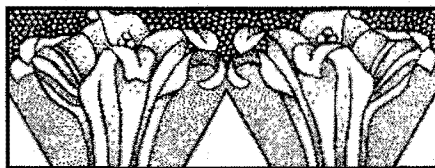
Your dedicated work is very much appreciated.—Larry Jacobs, Newport Beach, California

We think *Collaboration* is going from strength to strength. Thank you for the excellent production.—Robert and Martha Orton, Charlottesville, Virginia

This is to acknowledge the receipt of *Collaboration*, and to thank you for forwarding the letter and the magazine. It would be a great pleasure for those of us involved with the quarterly magazine *The Oriya Aurovilian* to read the contents of your magazine, and perhaps reprint selected pieces with due references.

I saw your magazine after a gap of nearly eight years, and find much refreshing change. Thank you for the good work.—Hrushikesh Acharya, [hacharya@netscape.net](mailto:hacharya@netscape.net)

*Note: With the advent of e-mail, the Web, and Auroconf collective discussions on yoga, along with home computers, scanners, printers, and a two-person editorial team, it is easier to produce Collaboration than it was eight years ago. The current editors would like to once more acknowledge the wonderful work Gordon Korstange did as editor of Collaboration from 1981–1995, and the pioneering efforts of Eric Hughes, who founded Collaboration and edited it from 1974–1982.*



## Current affairs

### 'Pow-wow' meeting held in San Francisco

#### *Focuses on collaboration among Integral Yoga groups*

by Dave Hutchinson

**T**he Sri Aurobindo Association sponsored an informal "pow-wow" over the weekend of March 4–5 in the San Francisco Bay Area to look at cooperation among the various Integral Yoga organizations and centers in North America. The meeting was held at the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) on Saturday, 4 March, then moved to the home of Chandresh Patel on Sunday, 5 March.

Attending the meeting were Parag Bhatt, Preeti Bhatt, Wayne Bloomquist, Bina Chaudhuri, Vishnu Eschner, Ed Giordano, Jim Hurley, Dave Hutchinson, Lynda Lester, Julian Lines, June Maher, Bhuvana Nandakumar, Chandresh Patel, Kalpana Patel, and Kundan Singh.

By any measure the meeting was a success. An air of harmony reigned, questions and topics arose in a fluid progression, decisions were made on specific actions, and overall, Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and their supernal consciousness were the focus.

Some of those attending hold positions in more than one organization, so that the Sri Aurobindo Association, Auroville International USA, Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, Foundation for World Education, Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, and the Center for Cellular Evolution all had representatives. In addition, there were representatives for the Integral Yoga Web site and the aurobindo.org mailing lists. The group was aware that although this was a good start, it was not inclusive of the many centers in North America.

Partly out of a recognition that many



centers did not have someone at the meeting, and partly out of the feeling that a federation or council of centers would be premature at this time (although a proposal for such was submitted by the East-West Cultural Center, which was unable to attend), we did not attempt to form any such council. Because travel to such a single meeting will always be financially

up, and we all agreed that working with youth has many virtues. In that direction, we considered bringing over students from Auroville and the Ashram, arranging tours for teachers, and sponsoring work-study programs. No specific projects were selected, but we plan to continue focusing on youth and education as a unifying direction.

part of the anniversary celebration.

The Bay Area has become a vibrant center for the Integral Yoga in recent years, with a flourishing study center in Fremont, close ties to the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham Ashram in Lodi, and several smaller groups working on specific projects. Despite the Bay Area being one geographic region, many study groups and individuals are unaware of activities going on in other groups or centers there. So we also decided to convene an informal regional conference later in the year, similar to the "pow-wow," in order to look at local concerns and promote local activities.

The question of the All-USA Meeting (AUM) 2001 arose, and after some discussion, volunteers decided to hold AUM 2001 in the Bay Area so that it could benefit from the fiftieth anniversary celebration of CIF, and vice versa. A team has been created and is actively working toward AUM 2001.

Much of the work of communication and organization in recent years has taken place on the Internet, and we discussed the Internet at length and how it could be used for a greater harmony, flexibility, and coordination among centers and individuals. Current center Web sites were discussed, their purposes and content, and how current resources could be assisted as well as extended.

The first step we decided was to create a "webmasters" forum where those who are already working on Web sites related to the yoga can discuss what they are doing, the content available on the various sites, technical questions, plans for the future, and so forth. This will hopefully allow for a better use of time and resources, create opportunities for collaboration, and help pool our combined technical expertise. This forum has been started.

As part of this movement, the Sri Aurobindo Association has moved its Web site (<http://www.collaboration.org>) to a better provider so that more functions can become available to the community. These functions include hosting (on request) Web sites of various Integral Yoga



*Wow! A pow-wow! Front: Ed Giordano, Bhuvana Nandakumar, Kundan Singh, Chandresh Patel. Back: Vishnu Eschner, Julian Lines, Wayne Bloomquist, Bina Chaudhuri, Lynda Lester, David Hutchinson, Kalpana Patel, Parag Bhatt.*

difficult, we decided to create a mailing list to continue discussion of topics related to coordination among centers.

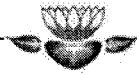
Rather than create an umbrella organization of centers, specific items were selected for action. The general thought was that collaboration is more successful when our diverse centers have a work to do together. The PeaceTrees project of Auroville was brought up as a good example of a project that created unity across boundaries.

When considering possible projects, Kireet Joshi's recent message urging Auroville to work with youth was brought

Everyone expressed a heartfelt gratitude for the work that Bina Chaudhuri, along with her husband Haridas, has done over that past decades in founding both the CIF and the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. The CIF was, in fact, the first center for the Integral Yoga in the United States, and it is holding an extended celebration of its fiftieth anniversary in 2001.

Those present decided that one immediate way to strengthen ties to CIF and work with the yoga would be to organize a lecture series on Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Auroville, and related topics as





centers and groups in North America; offering commercial transactions; delivering music or video over the Web; and providing an open events calendar where any center or individual can post notices of upcoming events. At the same time it was recognized that the primary interest for many events is local, and in the development of any of these resources, the interests of local groups and their Web sites will be the first consideration.

Continuing the discussion of communication, we decided to begin work on a "white and yellow pages" for the various centers in North America so that all centers and individuals can be informed of each other's activities in a more timely and efficient fashion.

Looking to the immediate future, we made specific plans for visitors who are touring North America this spring and summer (Georges Van Vrekhem, Mangesh Nadkarni, Alan Herbert, Annemarie Bakker, Tapas Bhatt). With representatives from around the country, this planning was quick and efficient.

Finally, we did a realistic assessment of the amount of work that the various organizations and individuals are already doing, and decided that for proper implementation of the plans sketched above, and to move into the twenty-first century, an office might be opened to engage in the various activities of organization, coordination, media outreach, and visitor planning.

We considered honest estimates of the cost of running such an office, and we will follow up with a more detailed look at the details of such an endeavor. If this office becomes reality, it will serve all the organizations and centers in North America.

To summarize, these are the plans for the future:

1. Create a mailing list to continue discussion related to collaboration among centers.
2. Organize a lecture series on the Integral Yoga in the spring/summer of 2001 to be a part of the fiftieth anniversary celebration of CIF.
3. Convene a regional "pow-wow" to look at local Bay Area concerns and possibilities.
4. Begin planning for AUM 2001 to be held in the Bay Area in concert with the fiftieth anniversary celebration of CIF.
5. Create a forum for Integral Yoga webmasters to work together.
6. Extend the functions and services offered to other centers by the Sri Aurobindo Association Web site.
7. Create a "white and yellow pages" for centers in North America.
8. Explore the possibility of establishing a national office for coordination and communication.

For more information, please contact David Hutchinson, [dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu)

*David Hutchinson (<http://www.webcom.com/dhutch>) is president of the Sri Aurobindo Association, co-administrator of the "aurobindo.org" Integral Yoga mailing lists, and co-editor of Collaboration. He lives in Sacramento, California.*

## News

### 'Compatible' lists move to 'aurobindo.org'

The Integral Yoga e-mail discussion lists, which were hosted from 1994–2000 by Larry Tepper at [compatible.com](http://compatible.com), have moved to another address: [aurobindo.org](http://aurobindo.org). The online community thanks Larry for his years of service in establishing and maintaining the lists. Thanks go also to the new system administrators, David Hutchinson and Parag Bhatt, who set up and tested the new system and moved hundreds of subscribers to the new service provider with only minor casualties. The Integral Yoga lists include:

- **Auroconf**, a general discussion list on Integral Yoga
- **Auroinfo**, a list for announcements and information
- **Psych**, a forum for discussion on Integral Psychology
- **Savitri**, a discussion group that studies Sri Aurobindo's master epic poem
- **Synthesis**, a group that studies *The Synthesis of Yoga*
- **MPP**, a forum for those interested in the Money-Power Project, which examines money in light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother
- **Doucemere**, which automatically sends a daily selection from *Prayers and Meditations* of the Mother
- **Quotes**, which sends short quotes daily from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

To subscribe to any of these lists, send e-mail to **[list-request@aurobindo.org](mailto:list-request@aurobindo.org)**, where **list** is the name of the e-mail list. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type **subscribe list** where **list** is the name of the e-mail list. For example, to subscribe to Auroconf, send e-mail to **[Auroconf-request@aurobindo.org](mailto:Auroconf-request@aurobindo.org)**. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type **subscribe Auroconf**.

The lists maintained by Dave and Parag also include forums for various working groups who communicate via e-mail—for instance, the Sri Aurobindo Association, the AUM 2001 committee, the Integral Yoga webmasters, Integral Yoga centers, participants in Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham collective retreats, and others.

### Webmasters: Subscribe here

The Sri Aurobindo Association has created an e-mail forum ([webmasters@aurobindo.org](mailto:webmasters@aurobindo.org)) for use by individuals responsible for Web sites related to the Integral Yoga. The purpose of the list is to exchange technical information related to Web sites: what can be done with them, the various programs used to create a site, the different scripting languages on the Web, commercial possibilities, image manipulation, and so forth. Currently there are two dozen participants on the list with different skills and knowledge in Web development. If you are interested in joining this list, please send e-mail to Dave Hutchinson ([dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu)).



## Money, power, yoga

In September 1998, a group of interested individuals launched the Money-Power Project. The idea was to collectively understand the force that is money-power: divine in origin, essential for Mother's work in daily life, yet currently in the hands of the asuric forces. Two e-mail forums were created—one to understand the dynamics and working of money, the other to understand the nature and aspect of the influence of this force in our personal yoga.

A great deal of enthusiasm and discussion was engendered, and the project raised a pool of real money. The project has not collected the original vision of \$1 million, but we are increasingly working towards larger sums for Mother's work. Although even the immediate needs of numerous pending projects are not within our reach, a start has been made. As her money-power warriors, we still have to keep the ultimate goal in mind.

In mid-1999, discussion on the money-power e-mail forums waned and other projects came up—for instance, a fund-raising effort for land for Auroville and the launching of the American pavilion in Auroville's International Zone.

Recently, however, the e-mail discussions have been rekindled. Those who would like to join the effort are reinvented to work in practical terms with the money-power. To subscribe to the e-mail forum, send a message to **MPP-request@aubindo.org**. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type **subscribe MPP**.—*Chandresh Patel*

## Auroville goes interactive

The wonderful "Auroville Interactive" CD is waiting to bring higher vibrations to computers worldwide. A new batch is hot off the press. The CD runs on Windows (or Macintosh with an emulator) and contains film clips, panoramas, audio clips, articles from *Auroville Today*, maps of Auroville with overlays, and lots more. And it is all searchable! The cost is \$39 plus \$3 shipping. Send a check payable to AVI-USA to P.O. Box 676, Woodstock, NY 12498. For more information on Auroville books and products, send e-mail to the Auroville Information Office at [avinfo@aol.com](mailto:avinfo@aol.com).—*Julian Lines*

## CIF turns fifty; lectures planned

The Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) in San Francisco turns fifty in 2001. Founded in 1951 by Haridas Chaudhuri and directed since his death in 1975 by his wife Bina Chaudhuri, the center has been active for half a century in presenting Sri Aurobindo's vision to humanity. In honor of the anniversary, a lecture series next year lasting from late spring to fall is being planned.

## Work ongoing in Orissa

Many thanks to those of you who contributed towards the relief fund gathered to help victims of the Orissa cyclone. Funds were collected by a number of organizations and sent from the U.S. through Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham. Work is ongoing and help is still needed.

A detailed report, update, and photo gallery of the project is available on the Web at <http://collaboration.org/centers/orissa/ichhapur.html>.—*Dakshina Vanzetti*

## MyIntegralYoga.URL

- The Sri Aurobindo Ashram has put up a Web site at <http://www.sriaurobindoashram.org>. The site contains information on Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and the Ashram.
- *Golden Chain*, the alumni magazine of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, has established a Web site at <http://www.goldenchain.org>. Somdutt Atrie, the editor ([goldenchain@mailroom.com](mailto:goldenchain@mailroom.com)) hopes the site will serve as a networking tool for former students of the Centre.
- Bernard Sage of Marseilles, France, manages a large Integral Yoga Web site at <http://intyoga.freesevers.com>. The site includes text by Mother, Sri Aurobindo, and Satprem as well as extensive photo montages that are updated on darshan days.
- Matagiri's Web site, with lovely lotus graphics and a photo of the Matagiri center, is at <http://www.matagiri.org>. The Spring 2000 *Matagiri Newsletter* is online at <http://www.matagiri.org/spring2000.htm>.

## Center to center

## SAA facilitates Integral Yoga activities

### Manages, assists emerging projects

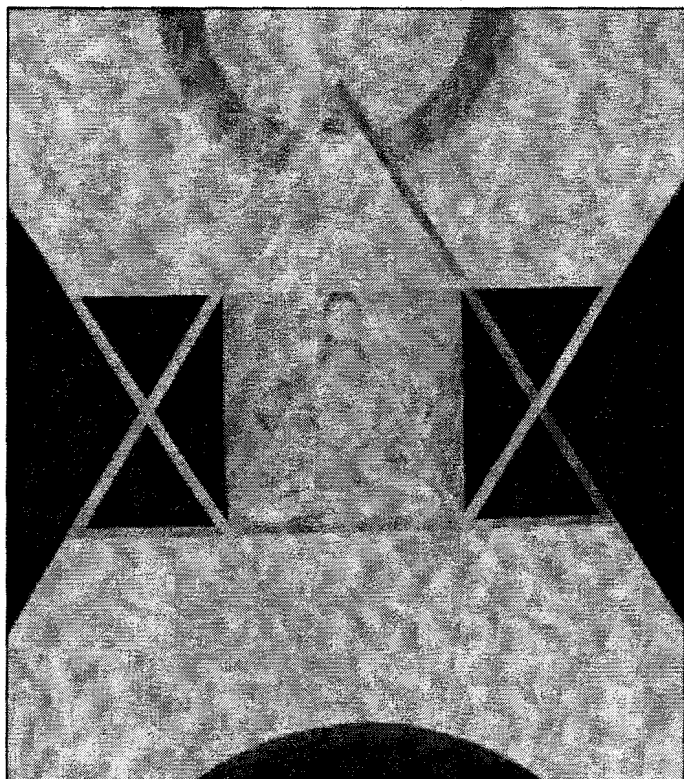
by the Sri Aurobindo Association

*"Center to center" is the place in Collaboration for profiles from centers, organizations, and groups related to the Integral Yoga. If your group has news and photos to share, please send them to the address in the sidebar at the end of this article.*

*The Sri Aurobindo Association, which publishes Collaboration, has been growing and developing over the past few years. The following report is offered in response to questions that have been received about its mission and work.*

The Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA) is a California nonprofit religious corporation whose primary purpose is to distribute information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville. It publishes *Collaboration* and channels contributions to various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. SAA also supports gatherings such as the annual All-USA Meeting (AUM) and other meetings.





*Ascent and descent. (Painting by Shiva Vangara)*

SAA is not an authority or an umbrella organization and does not have membership or dues; rather, it helps to facilitate different expressions of yoga in the Integral Yoga community and encourages collaboration among the various groups.

The SAA board of directors has developed a consensus style of working and aspire to make their work an expression of individual and collective sadhana. Besides the office work involved, each board member champions at least one specific project which they hope will be of benefit to the community.

The current officers of the Sri Aurobindo Association are:

- *President: David Hutchinson.* Dave is a registered nurse living in Sacramento, California. He works at the University of California Davis Medical Center as a computer systems administrator.
- *Secretary: Vishnubhai Eschner.* Vishnu lives in Lodi, California, where he is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham Ashram and vice president of Auromere Imports.
- *Treasurer: Marta Belén.* Marta lives in Sacramento, California, where she coaches young musicians in stage performance and is an accompanist for numerous musical ensembles.
- *Vice president, Collaboration: Lynda Lester.* Lynda is a technical writer/editor in Boulder, Colorado, where she works at the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

- *Vice president, Money-Power Project: Chandresh Patel.* Chandresh lives in Sunnyvale, California, where he manages Caesium, Inc., a software firm.
- *Vice president, AUM 2001: Kalpana Patel.* Kalpana lives in Sunnyvale, California, where she is an accountant. She chairs the AUM 2001 team.
- *Vice president, Collaboration archives and nonprofit management: Bhuvana Nandakumar.* Bhuvana lives in Cleveland, Ohio, where she is pursuing a graduate degree in management of nonprofit organizations.

### Keeping busy

SAA manages and assists numerous emerging projects. Some SAA activities past and present have been to:

- Host a "pow-wow" in San Francisco to examine how the various Integral Yoga groups can better work together and share resources (see "'Pow-wow' meeting held in San Francisco," p. 5).
- Hold an SAA board member "yoga intensive" in May 2000 to discover the collective soul of SAA, learn how to consciously surrender (as an organization) to the Divine, and develop ways to work individually and collectively for the higher consciousness.
- Publish *Collaboration*, which features many expressions of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, provides inspiration and a sense of community for sadhaks, and offers a showcase for writers, artists, and photographers. SAA gives complementary copies of *Collaboration* to centers to distribute to interested newcomers, and participates in a mutual journal exchange with many Integral Yoga publications around the world.
- Host the SAA Web site (<http://www.collaboration.org>) and invite centers to submit informational content (e.g., the Orissa cyclone relief effort, Sri Aurobindo Saranam, and Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham).
- Provide physical space on the SAA Web server and administrative hosting for other Integral Yoga Web sites (e.g., the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch and Golden Chain).
- Administer and manage the Integral Yoga e-mail lists on the aurobindo.org server, including public discussion lists with hundreds of members and small ad-hoc lists for various work projects.
- Channel donations as requested to many areas of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's work, including Sri Aurobindo Ashram projects, Auroville, the Money-Power Project, various centers, and the Integral Yoga Web site (<http://www.miraura.org>).
- Organize and provide leadership for the 1998 and 2001 All USA Meeting (AUM); provide temporary loans and consulting assistance for AUM in other years.
- Sponsor travel for speakers from the Ashram, Auroville, and the Integral Yoga community and seek ways to facilitate their travel between centers in the U.S.



- Sponsor the Money-Power Project as an ongoing activity.
- Work with emerging centers such as Sri Aurobindo Saranam.
- Sponsor a delegate to the World Parliament of Religions in South Africa in 1999.
- Consolidate the many disparate databases in the Integral Yoga community.
- Meet together as a board three to four times a year to coordinate work projects.

The Sri Aurobindo Association encourages anyone with a thoughtful idea to help in transformation and progress as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to contact them. SAA

will do all it can to support people with the goodwill, stamina, and initiative to champion the realization of their ideas. Please address correspondence to SAA at the *Collaboration* post office box listed below.

#### Yoo-hoo—you too!

What are you doing? Others would like to hear about it! Send news and photos of your organization, center, or group to *Collaboration*, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, California 95816 USA; e-mail: [saa@collaboration.org](mailto:saa@collaboration.org); phone: 209-339-3710, ext. 6; fax: 916-451-9039.

## Chronicles

### The view from nine decades: Part 1

#### An interview with Amal Kiran

by Anie Nunnally

*This is the first of a two-part series. The next installment will be Anie's interview with Udar Pinto, another esteemed Ashram nonagenarian.*

It is difficult to imagine what it would be like to stand in the presence of Sri Aurobindo, to encounter the Infinite in a physical form, and to even correspond with him directly. There are only a few remaining in the Ashram who have received the supreme grace of personal darshan with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and I was recently honored with the privilege of interviewing two such people.

On a visit to the Ashram in December 1999, I interviewed two long-time members: K.D. Sethna (named "Amal Kiran" by Sri Aurobindo, meaning "a clear ray") and Udar Pinto—ninety-five and ninety-three years young, respectively—who graciously shared with me

the illuminating experiences of their darshans and early days in the Ashram with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Both gentlemen had broken their hips in 1999 and are confined to wheel chairs, but neither showed signs of broken spirits, nor were they lacking in a healthy sense of humor. (Amal referred to himself as being "legi-capped" rather than "handicapped"; he had been stricken with polio in his early childhood. However, at this stage in life he says of himself, "I have a fire in my heart which age cannot quench . . .")

Years of sadhana and dedication to higher pursuits have been kind to the minds and bodies of these two extraordinary beings. Their radiant, wrinkle-free skin; sparkling, intelligent eyes; and mental clarity are often not found in men of a much younger age.

Amal-da, as he is affectionately called in the Ashram, is a writer of poetry of exceptional merit (his collected poems have been published under the title *The Secret Splendour*) as well as a critic of poetry and author of numerous books on scientific thought and history. He was a correspondent with Sri Aurobindo on *Savitri* while Sri Aurobindo was writing this monumental tome. He was also founder and, for half a century, editor of *Mother India: A Monthly Review of Culture*. Even now he remains in contact with legions of the scholarly and those in liter-

ary circles from all around the world.

Udar Pinto came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as a businessman living in Pondicherry. He founded the Harpagon Atelier, makers of furniture and stainless steel products, and was a personal secretary to the Mother, seeing her on a daily basis and taking care of correspondence and numerous business matters on her behalf. He continues to recuperate at home and receives frequent visitors daily. At 5 p.m. each day, he may be found in his sitting room reading aloud from *Savitri* to a group of rapt listeners who gather there for the reading and meditation that follows.

#### Amal tells his story

Amal now calls home the Ashram Nursing Home on Goubert Boulevard, where he has resided since May 1999 after his hip was broken. He does not want to return to his house, as he is well taken care of at the nursing facility and is free from all the responsibilities of "house-keeping," as he says. He is given daily physical therapy sessions and receives many visitors.

The monsoon rains were teeming on many days that I saw him, but there was always sunshine when I entered his room because of his warm, welcoming, sunny disposition. This was true also of his lovely assistant Minna Paladino. When I



arrived, he was often sitting in the sun room overlooking the Bay of Bengal, pondering the tireless waves and surf that pound the concrete walls along the boulevard. He seemed quite peaceful and contented.

### In the beginning

**A**mal was born Kekushru (Kekoo) D. Sethna on 25 November 1904 in Bombay. The family were members of the Parsi community in Bombay, descendants of the Zoroastrian Persians who fled their homeland to India in the seventh and eighth centuries to escape Muslim persecution. His father was a prominent doctor in Bombay, and the family adhered to the traditional Zoroastrian faith.

Young Kekoo passed through a phase of religious fervor in his childhood and prayed daily from the Zoroastrian book of prayers, called *Avesta* in the ancient Persian language of Avestan. Afflicted with polio at the age of around two years, he was taken by his father to London for surgery to correct the paralysis. The surgery was somewhat successful but a slight limp remained. This, however, obviously did not stand in the way of his many lifetime achievements.

I asked him what were some of his childhood ambitions. He said that at one point in his youth, he wanted to be just like Sherlock Holmes because he "admired his mysterious and probing mind, quick intelligence, and high brow." He used to ask the barber to cut his hair so that he would look just like Sherlock Holmes!

Soon young Kekoo was writing verse and novelettes and binding the books himself. As he grew into his teen years, he began to doubt the existence of God and to probe scientific literature. He began reading Joseph McCabe, an exponent of the German Heckel's science of materialism. His father was incensed about this and told Kekoo that Heckel was an atheist and that he did not want the "wrath of the Almighty brought down upon his house." The young boy replied, "The wrath will come if the Almighty



*Amal Kiran, long-time editor of Mother India and a personal correspondent with Sri Aurobindo, and his assistant Minna Paladino. (Photo by Anie Nunnally)*

comes!" His father said, "I will call upon all the learned of the community to come and reason with you." The son replied, "I look forward to talking to them." (The great thinker was being "hatched.")

Amal said he never would have dreamt that after his father's death (which came not long after this period), he himself would eventually take up the spiritual life at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. (He went on to become a brilliant student of literature and philosophy at St. Xavier's College in Bombay, and was studying for his master's degree when he arrived at the Ashram in 1927. He gave up all formal education after joining the Ashram).

His interest in the science of materialism, with its theories and debates regarding free will vs. predestination, continued for a time, but would soon change. A new way of thinking was on the horizon.

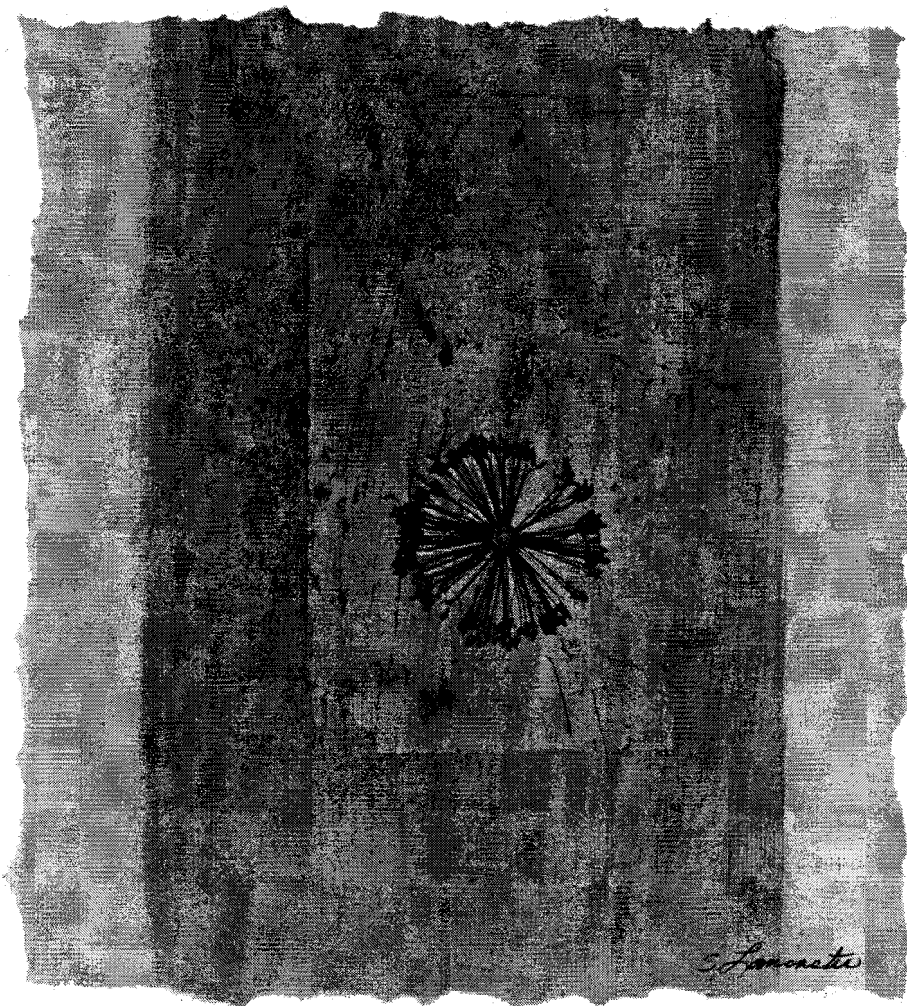
His girlfriend at the time spoke to him of a Bengali yogi and devotee of Sri Krishna who visited Bombay periodical-

ly. His name was Pagal ("mad for Krishna") Harnath. They went to see him. Amal put a question: "I believe that the universe is ruled by fixed laws. Where, then, does God come in?" The yogi replied, "If there are laws, there must be a lawgiver!" Amal thought he was being verbally tricked, but sensed something in the guru's tone that led him to believe it was an answer beyond the intellect.

This was the first time his intellectual interrogation had been squelched. A sense of something deeper was expressing itself, something of an intuitive knowledge, so he could not bring himself to engage in mental questioning. This event led him to begin reading Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna.

During this period he went to another yogi, Yogi Devji, who taught him some breathing exercises. The yogi went about the room touching people on the top of the head and Amal felt a powerful electrical current down his spine. The yogi had people render themselves immobile and





Sunburst. (Multimedia art by Shirley Lancaster)

draw the whole of their being upward from the feet through the top of the head where, he said, there would be "spiritual presences in the room ready to help them." Amal tried to do this, and suddenly found himself in an out-of-body experience in quite a conscious way. He knew he wasn't dreaming. He was watching himself do this extraordinary thing; then he asked a self-conscious question: "How is this possible?" With this question, there was a sudden rush back into the body.

With this, Amal learned—not by any argument, but through actual experience—that we are more than just a body. This finally was the proof for him that he

wasn't a mere physical form and that no materialist thinking could convince him otherwise. From this point onwards, his entire outlook on reality changed.

### How he came to Sri Aurobindo

One day Amal went to the Crawford Market in Bombay to buy a pair of shoes. Upon his return home, he noticed the newspaper in which the shoes were wrapped. He opened up the paper, and there before him was an article entitled, "A Visit with Aurobindo Ghose." He avidly read the article and said, "This is the kind of yoga I'd like to do—under a master yogi like Sri Aurobindo, who can read

in six different languages and appear in more than one place at a time!" He did not think it odd that a yogi could appear in more than one place at a time, but a yogi who could master so many languages, including Greek and Latin, was a remarkable phenomenon to him. He wrote to the Ashram and received a reply from A.B. Purani saying that he and his girlfriend could come there and "try it out."

Before leaving, he satisfied his grandfather, now the family patriarch, and married his Parsi girlfriend. This was a good decision, as traditionally, newly married couples in India receive sizeable sums of money from family and friends—so now he had sufficient funds to travel to Pondicherry. This was 1927 and he was twenty-three years old.

After some time in Pondicherry, he sent a telegram to his grandfather that read, "Enjoying picturesque Pondicherry!" After they had been there for nine months, his grandfather wrote back, "Where is the baby?" The reply was that they had had a new inner birth and that was the "baby"! He and his wife Lalita, who had accepted Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, eventually lived separately. She stayed on in the Ashram for almost ten years before returning to Bombay.

Amal ("a clear ray") was given his name by Sri Aurobindo in 1930. His poetic genius was recognized and nurtured under the guidance and inspiration of Sri Aurobindo, and he ultimately entered into correspondence with Sri Aurobindo on *Savitri*.

After Lalita left, Sri Aurobindo warned Amal against any serious affairs with women. However, there was a young Parsi woman named Sehra in Bombay who had loved him years before and had never married. When he returned to Bombay on a visit, they were reunited and married. He told her he would give her ten years of married life and then would return to Pondicherry. *Mother India* was launched in 1949, and he continued to edit the magazine from Bombay. He and Sehra eventually returned to the



Ashram on 12 February 1954; Sehra passed away on 24 April 1980.

Following are some of the questions I put to Amal, and his answers.

### Questions and answers

**Anie:** Would you describe your first darshan with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? What experiences did you have with them?

**Amal:** The first darshan with the Mother, I had the impression of a radiance all around her. When I first saw Sri Aurobindo, I had the sense of something leonine, as well as a mountainous calm. He leaned forward and blessed me with both hands about my head. The Mother kept smiling all the time, as if to set me at ease in the presence of Sri Aurobindo.

My turn to go to them was following an American couple, whom I overheard discussing whom to bow to first. They solved the problem by bowing between them. This way they touched the feet of neither, but had the rare experience of being blessed by both of them at the same time.

I looked at Sri Aurobindo and saw him gently moving his head forward and backward with an expression on his face as if he saw my inmost being. I liked the shape of his nose and the way he seemed to look deep within me, but afterwards I felt a little disappointed with myself for having examined his look and been concentrated on his outer appearance. When I met the Mother later on, I asked her, "Mother, has Sri Aurobindo said anything about me?" She said "Yes, he told me that this young man has a good face." So it seemed to be "tit for tat."

I was a bit disappointed, but I told myself that to have a good face in Sri Aurobindo's eyes could not but mean a great deal—at least it meant that I could face the difficulties of the yogic life. Sri Aurobindo had a soft, very soft voice, I am told, but I never heard him speak.

**Anie:** Can you describe the atmosphere of the Ashram when Mother and Sri Aurobindo were in their physical bodies, and the difference since that time?

**Amal:** The general atmosphere of

the Ashram did not change radically. When both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had left their bodies, I could still feel their presence—perhaps because their subtle physical was said to have extended a number of miles beyond their bodies. I remember being told that their subtle physical bodies extended out to the Lake

strongest attributes and contributions of Americans to the work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo?

**Amal:** Mother felt that external help for the growth of the Ashram would come imminently from America, but she said there would be a sort of tantalizing connection. I remember her saying that

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*"Sometimes the sense of opening was so intense that I felt almost breathless . . ."*

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Estates, several miles away. So it may be said that they hold us close to them even at a great distance.

**Anie:** In what way did your sadhana change after they left their bodies? How has the sadhana changed for you at this stage in life, and what new forms has it taken?

**Amal:** The sadhana has not fundamentally changed since my first experience, which was the opening of the heart center about six months or so after I settled in Pondicherry. I had been persistently after this opening of the heart. Several times I made the Mother touch me with her hand in the middle of my chest, asking her to break me open there, and at last there was an opening. At that time, I realized just how shut human beings are in their heart region. With that opening came the sense not only of a great wideness, but also of a lovely atmosphere full of flowers and fragrances accompanying this happy warmth. Sometimes the sense of the opening was so intense that I felt almost breathless and prayed that this heavenly feeling would never go away.

**Anie:** What changes do you see taking place in the Ashram in the future, and will it be different in any way from what it is now?

**Amal:** So long as there exists a nucleus of sadhaks in the Ashram really doing the yoga, the Ashram will remain as it always has.

**Anie:** What do you see as being the

Ganesh, the lord of wealth, would always help her, but often in a wayward way. There were times when the Ashram was almost desperately in need of money. The Mother had to sell her own saris to obtain the needed relief. There were some American followers who bought the saris and then offered them back to the Mother. A great deal of money began to pour into the Ashram from America after the Mother's departure.

I always felt a special admiration for those who had never seen Mother or Sri Aurobindo in their physical bodies and yet could dedicate themselves to the Ashram life—especially people from America and other countries. I know of some who had come here as fulfilling a part of their pilgrimage in India, but having stayed on here for some time, dropped their idea of seeking elsewhere and stayed on in the Ashram.

The first Americans to settle here were a couple named Mr. and Mrs. McPheeters. The husband went out to travel to various places, and when he returned he was not quite the same person. During his absence, his wife was made by the Mother a part of the small group that used to meet the Mother in the Prosperity storeroom before the soup ceremony took place. Janet McPheeters would have stayed on if it had not been for her husband, who wished to return to America.

**Anie:** One difficulty occurring in the sadhana is straying from the path, doing



**O** Divine and adorable Mother, with Thy help what is there that is impossible? The hour of realisations is near and Thou has assured us of Thy aid that we may perform integrally the supreme Will.

Thou has accepted us as fit intermediaries between the unthinkable realities and the relativities of the physical world, and Thy constant presence in our midst is a token of Thy active collaboration.

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute.

A new Light shall break upon the earth.

A new world shall be born.

And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled. — *From Prayers and Meditations of the Mother*, 25 September 1914

what one knows not to do, becoming discouraged. Did this happen in your sadhana? How to guard against this happening and what to do if and when it comes?

**Amal:** Straying from the path and doing what one knows not to do are real obstacles in yoga. Becoming discouraged now and again is a common phase, but one can get over this condition by appealing again and again to the Divine for help. In any kind of difficulty, the most powerful help lies in praying to the Divine to carry one safely through the dark periods. The Divine is always ready to pick you up whenever you fall.

A certain passage in the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* has been the chief support of my yoga. It begins, "O Divine and adorable Mother, what is there that cannot be overcome with Thy help?" There is also the passage, "Thou hast promised to lead us all to our supreme destiny."

Not always to go on struggling, but to appeal to the Mother to take up our struggle is one of the major secrets of success. Perhaps it is best summed up in

the formula, "Remember and offer." To practice this most fruitfully, one must stand back inwardly from the invading impressions.

**Anie:** Now that you are in your nineties, what has yoga done for you at this stage in your life?

**Amal:** My paramount aspiration, as stated earlier, was to have the opening in the heart—what Sri Aurobindo called the psychic being. This gave me an intense feeling of joy that was self-existent. I was always afraid it would not last, but last it did, though not always at the same pitch. Ever since this first breakthrough, there has always been a sense of a radiant response to the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

**Anie:** Could you explain what it was like to be Sri Aurobindo's correspondent for *Savitri*?

**Amal:** A friend of mine with some literary accomplishment gave me, on my invitation, his comments on *Savitri*. Mostly they were critical. I submitted them to Sri Aurobindo and he considered them by answering. He found them not sufficiently penetrating because the writer had no spiritual background, but as they were from an accomplished literary consciousness, Sri Aurobindo thought it worthwhile to enter into a discussion with him.

When I sent a copy of Sri Aurobindo's answer to my friend, he was rather apologetic and said that if he had known that Sri Aurobindo would read them, he would have been less "downright" in his tone. It was good that he was "downright," because thereby he gave Sri Aurobindo an opportunity to reply at length. Sri Aurobindo considered his comments as representative of a competent critical mind, and he wanted this kind of mind to realize the newness of such poetry as *Savitri*, which was written from a yogic and spiritual consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's answers to various criticisms by me helped to make clear the level from which Sri Aurobindo wrote his spiritual poetry. Sri Aurobindo said my questions to him were based on some understanding of the kind of poetry he wrote

and the plane from which he did so, whereas my friend's comments were lacking in sympathetic understanding.

*Savitri* struck me as opening up an entirely new world, not only of experiences but of literary expression. It was a great help to me because I was eager to write from what Sri Aurobindo called the overhead planes. Of course I aspired to participate in that consciousness, but more directly my aim was to open myself to the influence and receive the direct utterance of poetry. It was possible to be receptive to it without myself getting stationed on those higher levels.

Sri Aurobindo distinguished these levels as higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, and overmind intuition. He considered these planes as being communicated by us through our poems. The overmind itself was difficult to tap, and examples of the sheer communication could be found mostly in the *Rig Veda*, the *Upanishads*, and part of the *Gita*.

It was interesting to realize that by silencing one's mind and keeping the consciousness looking upward, as it were, it was possible to write the highest spiritual poetry now and again without being stationed on those overhead levels. It is also interesting to note that one or two skillful changes in a poetic statement could mean a leap from the mental level to the overhead one. A striking example can be given by the small change made in one line like:

A cry to clasp in all the one God-hush

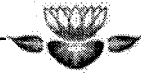
A sheer uplifting of the plane can come by transferring two words from the middle of the line to its end so that the line would read:

A cry to clasp the one God-hush in all

The first version suggests that this cry could be suggested by an effort to catch it, while the other version transmits the plane directly.

**Anie:** For many years you went to the samadhi for long meditations on a daily basis. Would you describe what





you experienced in these meditations?

**Amal:** There was a response from the samadhi towards me and from myself towards the samadhi. The presence of Mother and Sri Aurobindo became more intense during these visits to the samadhi. Afterwards the persistent feeling was that I carried the samadhi within myself, so I do not feel an acute need to be physically face to face with it any longer.

#### Further discussions with Amal

**S**ome days later I returned to the nursing home to visit Amal. It was Christmas Eve morning and he was dressed in a bright red shirt and wearing his ever-present bright and happy smile. On this day, the last interview day, I had no specific questions. We spoke of many things, among them being that of feeling the Mother's presence within.

I told him that after my near-fatal experience from an automobile accident in 1962, the Mother had come to me, miraculously bringing me back from the portals of death. At that time she entered my consciousness and opened my psychic being, and since that time has remained permanently in my heart center. I said I felt Sri Aurobindo as a vast presence looking down on me from high above as the purusha consciousness. Amal said "Yes, Sri Aurobindo is too large to live within our hearts; we live within him!"

Amal told me the Mother said that if someone came to her even once, she did two things: she linked their outer being to their psychic being, and she put out an emanation of herself to go with that person for the rest of their lifetime. That emanation would go out in accordance with the spiritual needs of the sadhak.

We discussed death further and he said that he had spoken to the Mother on a crucial point about going on doing yoga life after life. The Mother said, "That is not a part of our program!" Amal said for him this was a thundering statement.

How then did Sri Aurobindo pass away? His passing was called "the great sacrifice." It was not a death in the ordinary sense. Paradoxically, Amal said,



*Ginkgo leaf. (Multimedia art by Shirley Lancaster)*

with Sri Aurobindo's death, the "power of death" died. Death as a regular, fixed principle of evolution no longer exists.

Of course people still die, but conquering death and decay was the last victory of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the earth—and it is from the subtle physical plane that this work continues until it is completed. Amal said that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have a home, an actual abode, on the subtle physical plane. Many Ashramites have "visited" this plane and have seen them there.

After this discussion, silence fell and we remained in a vast moment of eternity for quite some time. I quietly left with no further words exchanged.

Once more I visited this shining soul before leaving to return to the U.S. The meetings with Amal set in motion a deepening for me of my innermost being and my own personal sadhana. I came away with the feeling of intense joy and gratitude for having been graced to know of his experiences with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, which brought me ever closer to them in this very personal and intimate sharing.

*Anie Nunnally is a music teacher who was accepted by the Mother to live in the Ashram (and part of the time in Auroville) from 1969–1972. She worked for many years with the Foundation for World Education and is an active member of the East-West Cultural Center, the Sri Aurobindo center of Los Angeles.*



# The yoga today

## Integral Yoga 2000

### Sadhaks respond to the "eight questions" of last issue

The last issue of *Collaboration* contained an article called "Eight questions: Where is the yoga headed in the new millennium?" Here are some responses that were received by personal e-mail or posted to Auroconf, the online discussion group for Integral Yoga.

#### General comments

**T**he 8–10 questions in the latest issue of *Collaboration* seem to be the outpourings of the surface mind. When one enters the deep sea of inner consciousness, they will cease forever.

In its basic state, the soul is sexless. Gender exists in the realm of "human" beings. The guru and spiritual discipline clear and accelerate the spiritual path. These truths cannot be imposed by an outside person. Each person will learn them in his own due time with his own pace.—*Name withheld*

What is this—some kind of new test in the yoga?

However self-confident we feel while looking at things from this perspective, this yoga is magical, while full of invisible pitfalls. The basis of the yoga, from what I have seen (as opposed to other paths) is to be ready for the unexpected because you will certainly meet the unexpected here.

Perhaps instead of a new eightfold path we have, instead of four questions or twenty questions—eight questions.—*Jocelyn of Auroville*

We have been writing about Integral Yoga and eight (or more) questions for years now. When the questions were presented at AUM 1999 and discussed on Auroconf in cyberspace over and over, we ended with a feeling of helplessness at

#### The eight questions

1. Do we need traditional gurus anymore?
2. Are the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the last word in the yoga, or are there fresh insights, new findings yet to be discovered?
3. Is the yoga still developing? Is new knowledge available that was not available to sadhaks or the world in 1940 or 1970?
4. Is the traditional yoga of Sri Aurobindo "out of date," now that the supermind is active upon the earth?
5. Can one do the physical transformation before the psychic and spiritual transformations? Is it possible to work on cellular consciousness before working through the stages of Sri Aurobindo's yoga?
6. Is the traditional stricture against sharing experiences still valid?
7. Is celibacy still valid as a requirement for progress in this yoga?
8. Is it enough to be a traditional sadhak, or are there forces emerging in the world (e.g., communication, technology, virtual reality) that change the nature of practice of the yoga itself?

times. Although each one of us has our own method of abiding by a discipline generated of dire necessity, there is no all-pervading consensus.

The integrating force of the Divine Mother evolved by Sri Aurobindo throughout his life and the Mother's life has guided us to the realization that "all life is yoga." With all that knowledge and devotion (known popularly as jnana yoga and bhakti yoga in India), in terms of Sri Aurobindo's action (or karma yoga for today), we can hardly count (m)any full-time followers of Integral Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo was the prophet of possibilities and provided a blazing example of how to live for the Divine, and the Mother followed with a matching illustration by outlining a full-fledged course in transformation from overmind to supermind—but few of us have learnt our lessons well enough.

We have spent the last twenty-seven years toying with *Savitri* (which is truly Sri Aurobindo's will, showing how to live the life of the soul) and Auroville (which the Mother gave us as her will and testament in detail as its charter), mainly talk-

ing about differences in our petty egoistic interpretations whenever we had an extra hour or a dollar to spare in part-time pursuit of our "commitment." Each one of us has been busy with immediate needs for our bodies, minds, and families, or our self-centered centers or circles or businesses—if not totally in all cases, in most of the cases at least partially.—*Naren Bhatt*

It's important to have an open mind about these matters, but it's equally important to examine one's motives behind changing and reinterpreting the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The basic spiritual principles behind Sri Aurobindo's yoga have not changed, and you probably can't go wrong if you follow his writings and teachings to the letter—but once you begin to reinvent certain aspects of his teachings, I would suggest to go slowly and proceed with caution. One must have sincerity and examine one's motives honestly, because any changes must not be done simply for the sake of convenience or to satisfy the human ego.

Sri Aurobindo represented an eternal



truth, and eternal truths are not subject to change. Since yoga is an inner process, many of the outer dynamics may change and be subject to new interpretations and manifestations—but the inner process is still based on the eternal truths and basic principles that Sri Aurobindo laid down.—*Lisa Rachlin*

I loved the list—it's a thought-provoking and necessary correction, in the sense of a "mid-course correction" of the ocean voyage. To me, Lynda, Dave, and Vishnu's list is pretty much of a piece, and looks at the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives and aspects—namely, how has the progressive evolution over the past near-century changed the face of the collective aspect of the Integral Yoga?

The first four questions seem especially interconnected. Regarding them, I think it's clear when we think about it that there was much in both Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's writings, sayings, and (especially) lives that was far and away beyond the limited ability of those around them (and, for that matter, those like us who have followed!) to comprehend—or even to realize our lack of comprehension.

The more I follow this yoga and delve deeper into the lives and works of its originators, the clearer it becomes how far their accomplishments were beyond not only ordinary humanity (even in their early years), but even the more "advanced" spiritual figures. Even a little basic humility should serve to make it clear that no one (at least, no one I've ever met personally, and I've met some very fine folks) has reached even the same planet they were from, let alone mastered and surpassed the levels of consciousness attained by the supramental avatars. (In fact, it's clear that if anyone had, the term *avatar* is poorly served, if applied to one who is surpassed within a single lifetime!)

This doesn't mean I consider any comparison between us and them to be heresy! They were quite clear that their yoga was meaningless if we, in turn, did

not proceed to follow the path they had opened. And hubris aside, it's clear from a close reading that both Sri Aurobindo and Mother looked to a future in which many new discoveries would be made, and our knowledge—both inner and outer—would be surpassed many times over.

I liked how Dave put it [see the sidebar "More questions" on p. 19]: "Hence the question arises, 'Is spiritual life itself different now that the supermind is active

upon the earth?'" In reading Satprem I get the sense that he's saying 'yes,' but I don't get a sense of what the difference is, other than a negative one: 'All the old is out of date.' Washing away that which is prematurely hardened is all to the good, but I at least am always looking for positive experience and knowledge. So the question arises."

For me, the key phrase in this discussion has to be "washing away that which



*Sundial. (Beach installation by Shirley Lancaster)*





is prematurely hardened." When a new universe, with all it portends, suddenly swims into view, the human mind is forced to make some necessarily superficial generalizations concerning its form and processes in order to begin to assimilate that which is far beyond its ken. After a time, though, these initial generalizations and assumptions begin to wear thin as the new gains in intimacy and brings us into its orbit.

So what is our natural tendency? Of course, to say, "Well, that *old* universe we discovered a few years ago is now being surpassed by this *new* universe we're now in the process of discovering, because we're now far beyond that old one!"—rather than simply recognizing that what is being surpassed is simply our old, initial understandings. That new universe is still far beyond us, but we have now begun to come into line with it, and so it is we who have changed, not That.

What I'm trying to say is that when we take a deeper look at the "old yoga" (writings, stories, etc.), all the "new" that we are now discovering is already there—we just didn't see it at first due to our own limitations.—*Will Moss*

The eight questions are not so easy to answer, I find. There are mostly more than one answer possible, since the questions address a complexity of aspects and it really depends from which angle one is looking.—*August Timmermans*

## Answers to specific questions

### 1. Do we need traditional gurus anymore?

**N**o brainer—of course! . . . lest nature would have done away with them, as she will hopefully do with the mosquito one day!—*John Chirostarr*

The answer should be "yes," since aspirants come from diverse backgrounds and are at diverse points or stages in their individual evolution. For those who are more evolved and prepared, Sri Auro-

bindo and the Mother provide all the support and guidance, and much more, that is needed from a guru. But there may be many others who need the guidance and direct helping hand of a physical person as a guru on their path. Besides, there are many diverse paths worldwide, in humanity's journey to the Supreme. The traditional paths have not closed shop.—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

My personal experience with advanced beings incarnated in human form is that they act by the simple fact of their presence. It is not what they speak, although they can speak the truth for every possible moment; and it is not what they design, project, explore, or counsel—it is what they radiate, directly from their attunement to your psychic.

A true guru, if incarnated, is able to develop in you, in a matter of minutes, a fiery passion for the Divine—passion not for the guru (that is a passing phase) but for the Divine.

In practice, a guru acts as an alchemical shield: you send confusion and receive clarity, you send rudeness and receive elegance, you send fear and receive courage, you send shadows and receive your eternal identity, you send anger and receive divine fury.

My impression is that being in matter, a guru can, in a massive way, use his (or her) body, and the intelligence of the body, as a "printer": liberating a complete spectrum of "divine commands" into the core of matter.

I regard a guru as a force field—as an advanced post of the Divine, a fire-giver and a revealer of the Divine in everything.

But above all, the guru is the wisest of all possible lovers: he can turn passion into the fuel of cosmic freedom. His embodied presence speaks, in a silent language, to the tamasic external conscience, that the victory is a fact. An incarnated guru is whirl of fire and a stampede of laughter, a detector of neurosis and a wheel of impersonal tenderness.

If I cannot produce the spontaneous emergence of such fire, such laughter,

such discrimination, and such love, then I might need an external guru . . . to light my Fire.—*Andre Pinho*

The same question could be asked about the need for a role model by parents toward their children. While one form of thinking might suggest that pure equality is an optimal relationship, the reality of love is that one must be what one must be. And although a "guru" might always be a difficult job—with the risks of idolatry, and embarrassment as one is discovered to being "only human"—I feel the courageous thing to do is to accept the challenge of working on ourselves as we also support others.—*Tom Cowan*

If the gurus stay in devotional connection with Sri Aurobindo, we need as many as possible ;-). . . . So far as they have the supramental light, they aren't traditional.—*Denis Shershunov*

Sri Aurobindo and Mother never were "traditional" gurus.—*Will Moss*

If by "we" you mean the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—and if by "gurus" you mean Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, then of course! What is traditional? There is the fact that, throughout time, they have always been our gurus. Otherwise, whatever is popularly considered "traditional" has no real relevance for us. If you want to prescribe what is needed for aspiring humanity in general, I think that may be impossible.—*David Walker*

I have never felt that I needed a "traditional" guru. Always the internal master has made me feel his presence since I was a child. I know that such a position is unconventional, and I have sought the real presence of known or unknown "masters" and have read many books about them. But nobody has been able to replace for me the reality of the inner guru, and many of the living masters I have met have made no impression on me (except for two or three Tibetan masters, such as Kalu Rinpoche, or the Dalai Lama or Pope John Paul II. But it was an



## More questions

*After a number of people exhibited a certain discomfiture at the "eight questions," intimating that the authors were trying to 1) elicit a certain set of "right" answers, 2) challenge people's yogic attainment, or 3) advocate a new "yoga lite" and consign Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga to history, Dave Hutchinson posted the following thoughts to Auroconf to clarify the spirit of inquiry behind the questions. —LL*

**W**hat exactly is the traditional yoga of Sri Aurobindo? Is there such a thing? And if so, can anyone give a clear and practical description of it? (Or, as often happens here on Auroconf, will we get ten different descriptions? What of that? Does that mean that *nobody* understands the yoga? That there is no such thing as the Integral Yoga, but rather a multitude of individuals practicing widely divergent methods? Or that we're all struggling with the bare essentials?)

What was the understanding of the yoga, the shared knowledge, that sadhaks had in 1940? And what about in 1970, thirty years later? Does anyone out there understand, in an mentally explicable way, cellular transformation, the subtle physical, the way the supermind is working on the earth? Is this known well enough, or are we still in a collective state of ignorance, and it's too early even to talk about such things? Maybe we should revisit this topic in a hundred years?

What is the true, spiritual role of a guru? I mean in practice, in the working out of it. Can anyone out there describe how the guru works, the effect of being on being, in some kind of detail? Not in broad general terms of guidance or teaching or leadership (we're all familiar with this, from texts) but in actual fact, of what an embodied guru such as the Mother does. And what is the exact difference (if any) between what she did in the physical and what she does today?

What is physical transformation? Does anyone have a glimmer of a hint of a possibility of a clue as to how it really works, what it really is?

Can anyone explain in practical detail, in actual experience, the yogic effect of conversing about spiritual topics? How that touches or opens the inner being? The influences that pass from person to person? Starting from that point, perhaps we can move on to consideration of media such as telephones, postal mail, and e-mail interchanges, and how they differ from face-to-face satsang. The recent Auroconf discussion on music, and how widely that one part of culture can touch or open the being, should give us pause in too quickly deciding what can or can't be done with this area of technology.

People have asked what is meant in the questions by the reference to "traditional yoga" or "traditional sadhana." One sense in which I, at least, intend the meaning of "traditional" in relation to thinking about this yoga has to do with some of the statements of Mother, and the consequent commentary on them by Satprem in the *Agenda* and other books. I don't have any quotes at hand, but the general impression is that the direction the yoga took at some point in the Mother's physical embodiment was radically different. Perhaps this had to do with the transformation of the physical, or other advanced work the Mother was doing.

I think Satprem has been trying to comment or explain this direction of the yoga for many years, but in reading Satprem I've never gotten a clear idea of what this direction is. He seems to be saying that there is (perhaps an indefinable) "something" that is different from the "traditional" understanding of the yoga, and that that "something" doesn't necessarily follow the guidelines and stages that one gets from the other texts (*Synthesis*, *Life Divine*, *Letters*, Mother's talks).

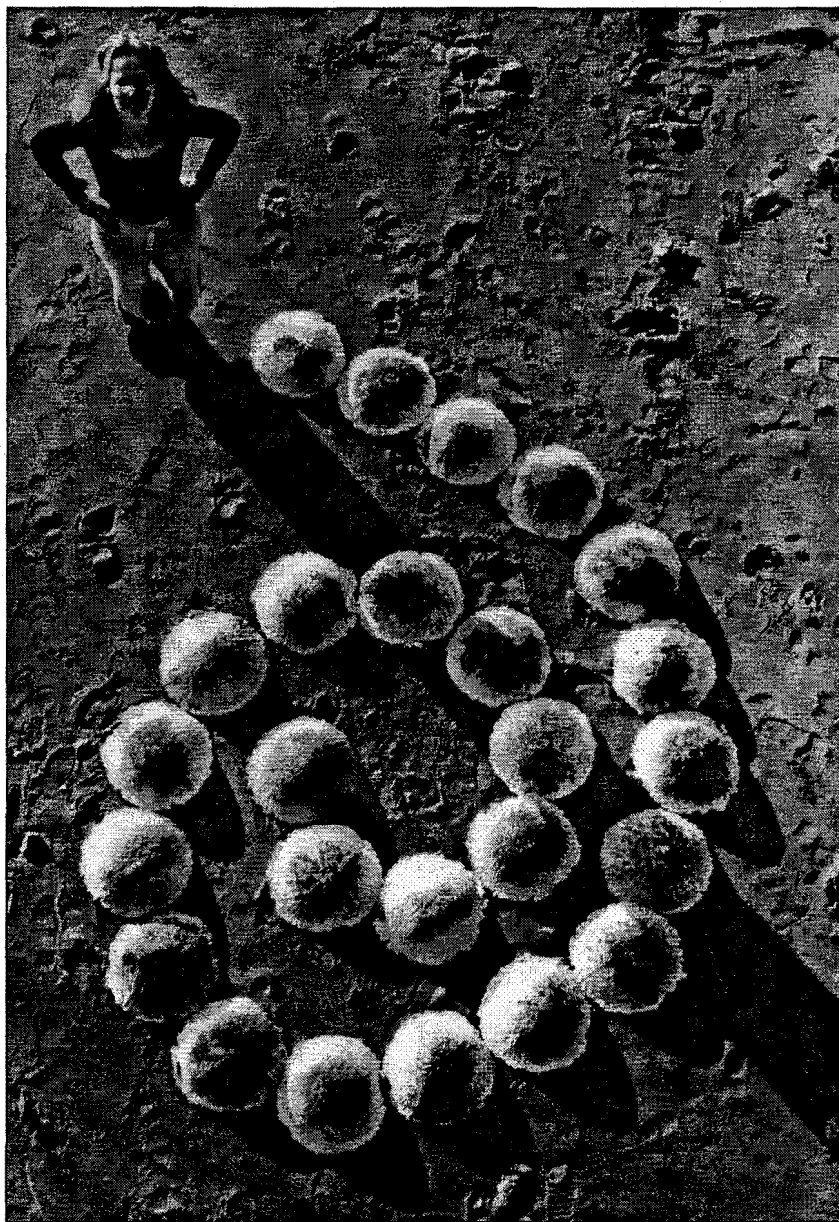
Hence the question arises: "Is spiritual life itself different now that the supermind is active upon the earth?" In reading Satprem, I get the sense that he's saying "yes," but I don't get a sense of what the difference is, other than a negative one: "All the old is out of date." Washing away that which is prematurely-hardened is all to the good, but I at least am always looking for positive experience and knowledge. So the question arises.

This is kind of a hard one to answer for someone like me, who didn't experience the spiritual life until . . . oh, say 1976. There's no pre-supramental to compare it to. Maybe we have to ask older sadhaks who were conscious in the 1950s, and can compare current times to the pre-supramental era.

At any rate, these were the kinds of considerations we were hoping to spur with the eight questions: real, practical, current questions about the yoga, how it works, what it is, where it's going, where it has been, how it works itself out in the individual, what boundaries it might or might not have, what errors we might be making of interpreting the texts, what fresh experiences individuals are having that we can learn from, what is known about its farther reaches in the supermind and transformation, what real experiences people are having in today's world.

I might add that the three of us [Vishnu Eschner, Lynda Lester, and Dave, who proposed the "eight questions"] are probably the most boringly conservative sadhaks you can imagine; and yes, all of the questions were real. No jokes. Lots of delight in coming up with them, but they were all honestly intended. We asked these questions not out of mere intellectual curiosity, nor out of a vapid attempt to raise vital hackles, but because they matter to each of us, and in living the yoga they arise year after year, decade after decade.

—Dave Hutchinson



*Spiral. (Beach installation by Shirley Lancaster)*

impression coming from their presence, not from their sayings or works—in fact I often disagree with their sayings, because they are not my path). For others, I had rather the impression of big vampire spiders, as Mother saw them in European churches or places of Indian cults, and I remained far from them if possible—or had to install a rather strong defense in the subtle planes.

But many people who are not sensi-

tive or psychic from birth or training may need the physical presence of a real guru (or priest or rabbi or lama or imam) in order to begin to walk on the path. I know many of them (and they often want me to follow behind their guru; it is a painful situation each time). I have never tried to convert them, because in every religion, sect, or path I have always felt people who were sincere. The method and the official aim is not important—

equally the official guru, priest, rabbi, or lama.

Of course, there is always a danger of slipping off the path (to fall from yoga, as Sri Aurobindo said). But what is without that possibility? Sincerity and vigilance are more important than the fact of being the follower of a traditional guru (or of a nontraditional one, besides). Everybody knows too that an important teaching can come by any person, event, animal, landscape, film, book, or privileged moment.

On the other hand, it is true that traditional methods (asana, japa, mantras, prayers, etc.) have a certain effect, I would say an automatic effect, on matter and spirit. In that sense they can be of use, at least in the beginning or for daily training. But just for a time, till we can reach the total opening of the inner being. Afterwards, we are beyond the material or spiritual effects (because we master them). In the periods of the “dark night of the soul,” they are of first importance; at other moments, they have no more importance. That is the same for the guru (traditional or not, dead or alive).—*Bernard Sage*

I consider Sri Aurobindo and the Mother far from being traditional. They emphasize to continuously go deeper, find the inner guidance, open up, unite with the Divine within and above. From there the yoga will proceed naturally. We can speak of the force or the Mother’s force, which could be understood as something impersonal—and yet ask each individual sadhak and they will confirm the absolute personal guidance they experience in their yoga and life. At least for me, when looking back on my life I can only see with amazement how much guidance and protection there has been.

Looking at the aim of the Integral Yoga—the supramentalization of the being and the earth atmosphere—we know that this is in continuous progress, not at all something established. Obviously leading figures will be needed at certain stages to indicate the progress and to be of guidance and help. Once we are con-





scious of the psychic and the Mother's force, it seems that we can do without a guru—but a guru might be necessary for a certain stage and to a certain extent in the yoga. In my life it has been the psychic that has led me, and led me finally to the complete truth I was looking for and which I found in the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Like many others, I have lived so far without the physical presence of a guru, although I experience a living connection.—*August Timmermans*

I may be wrong, and I apologize to anyone I may offend with this remark, but some of the Auroconf discussion on this issue has been a bit "Me Tarzan, me very tough, me go it alone, everyone go it alone." That may be OK for some, but many of us are still in need of love and company on the way. Some of us have family responsibilities and are unable to uproot and live in India, or even live in a particularly yogic environment, and the presence of others on the path is an essential requirement for ongoing mental health.

I do not compare my guru with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and I feel that this is what some object to—that a lesser person should try and set themselves up as the successor to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I agree wholeheartedly that this should not be so, and I am now exclusively committed to the path of Integral Yoga—but I still maintain my links with my former yoga community and feel an unending gratitude towards my guru.—*Diane Johnson*

Perhaps this is not a "yes" or "no" question. I feel that for some individuals a traditional guru is quite necessary, and for other individuals it is not so. It depends largely on individual needs, personality, and makeup. The basic question is how to make spiritual progress. I do not think gurus are for everyone, but I would certainly not be in such a hurry to completely dispose of the genuine guru without fully understanding the value of one.—*Lisa Rachlin*

## 2. Are the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the last word in the yoga, or are there fresh insights, new findings yet to be discovered?

**U**ndoubtedly—but personally I feel a need to digest their works before I look beyond.—*John Chirostarr*

New findings will come when we have become conscious of the supramental and can talk about its workings. As long as one is practicing the yoga, the writings are a necessity to understand one's development.—*August Timmermans*

There is more to be discovered, but it will all fit into the pattern Sri Aurobindo

laid down in his major writings. That pattern came directly from his supramental consciousness and was translated into English as well as a supremely brilliant mind could do so. He made it clear that a supramental or even overmental consciousness would always be fresh and new because it manifests the infinite—and there can be nothing fresher or newer than that.—*Hugh Higgins*

Sri Aurobindo's avatarhood is to bring in a new consciousness, the supramental, to work here on earth. There is no accurate estimate of how long (in terrestrial time) it would take for this new consciousness to manifest visibly and fully in humankind. It could take several hundred years; it could be more. But there may be still higher tiers to climb to after that

### Biology: New knowledge for the yoga?

*The following is an example of a new theory in biology (developed in the 1980s) that holistic thinkers are applying to consciousness. If this theory of "formative causation" proves true, it will shed light on what Mother called the "supramental contagion"—and we can expect to increasingly feel the supramental influence as more individuals cross the threshold to become transitional beings: born human, but opening themselves to the supermind and preparing the way for the emergence of the true supramental species.—LL*

**A**s another example of formative causation, [Rupert Sheldrake] cites the difficulty in crystallizing certain organic compounds that have never been crystallized before. Scientists may work for years until they obtain one crystal. But once this has been achieved, other experimenters across the world usually find it much less difficult to produce their own crystals. The more crystals that are produced, the easier it becomes to crystallize the compound.

The conventional explanation has been that microscopic "seed" crystals are carried from one laboratory to another on the beards or clothing of visiting scientists or by atmospheric currents. But when subsequent crystallizations occur inside sealed containers, as happened with glycerine, this explanation seems to fail. Sheldrake's hypothesis, by contrast, interprets such phenomena as the building up of a particular morphogenetic field.

Applying Sheldrake's theory to the development of higher states of consciousness, we might predict that the more individuals begin to raise their own levels of consciousness, the stronger the morphogenetic field for higher states would become, and the easier it would be for others to move in that direction. Society would gather momentum toward enlightenment. Since the rate of growth would now be dependent on the achievements of those who had gone before, we would enter a phase of superexponential growth. Ultimately this could lead to a chain reaction, in which everyone suddenly started making the transition to a higher level of consciousness.—*Peter Russell, The Global Brain (J.P. Tarcher, 1983), p. 193*



stage has been realized. I presume there would be another manifestation of a new avatar to take the evolution further.—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

The Divine is ever full and eternal, an infinite source of shakti—therefore I don't see how the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could ever be the very last word on yoga. The Divine will probably continue to manifest fresh insights and new findings.

You mention in your question that during their lifetimes the yoga grew, changed, and developed new terminology, new forces, and new expression. But did it change or develop really, or could it have been more of a question of revelation? Perhaps it didn't change and grow as much as we think. Perhaps it just became more and more revealed (and that, in fact, effected the change).

Expressions and outer manifestations are subject to change, that is their nature; but eternal truths remain eternal truths, unchanged and unperturbed by outer conditioning. The supramental is an eternal truth, and its manifestation will surely bring about changes as it becomes realized in the terrestrial atmosphere. I would say don't become too hooked on these changes.—*Lisa Rachlin*

I feel that the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother encourage us to encompass "fresh insights (and) new findings yet to be discovered."—*Tom Cowan*

The word of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is not law (intractable, eventually to be transcended, repealed, or amended), but truth revealing and manifesting itself. As what they are saying becomes what is lived, fresh insights and new discoveries overtake us at every breath.—*David Walker*

If their writings were the "last word," the yoga (and the supramental avatarhood) would be shown to be a colossal failure. As it happens, what we see is a growing momentum in the evolution of consciousness worldwide, exactly as was

envisioned and planned and made possible by their lives and work.—*Will Moss*

### 3. Is the yoga still developing? Is new knowledge available that was not available to sadhaks or the world in 1940 or 1970?

Not much. Who has assimilated what was written before those years? I do not find that anyone, myself included, is a very good student of either Sri Aurobindo or of Blavatsky or Leadbeater or Steiner or Marc Edmund Jones or Sri Sathya Sai Baba. In the last hundred years, more esoteric teachings have been given to the world, in more accessible form, than in the previous hundred thousand years, yet nobody studies them. "New knowledge" is mostly just a rehash of what has been written, or a different slant on it.—*Hugh Higgins*

All recorded works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (and the senior sadhaks who lived with them) have yet to be brought to light. Even then, humanity will take many years to accept, understand, and assimilate these teachings (and the explanations that follow).—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

New knowledge in the yoga? Maybe a much higher diversity of experiences, and maybe a greater confidence among sadhaks about the fact that the yoga is developing.—*August Timmermans*

Living simultaneously in the old world, the new world, and a transitional zone, to my various personalities, the very possibility of "knowledge" seems untenable. Not "knowledge," but new ways of knowing, new ways of being—yes.—*David Walker*

Yes. It will be different tomorrow than it is today. To me the yoga is a road map of distinctions to the Divine. As I gain insight into my own subtle characteristics, especially in the last five years,

I've found that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have presented me with a perspective that, although not making my life easy, has nonetheless facilitated my understanding of everything else. My experiences, as do others, add to the yoga.—*Tom Cowan*

Here we come to the crux of it. When we speak of "the yoga," what is it exactly we are referring to? Is it not a collective movement, seen globally as humankind (or even "the earth") moving forward on an evolutionary curve that began accelerating in the early part of the twentieth century, and which continues to accelerate at ever higher rates?

Just as an individual's sadhana begins slowly, haltingly, with first this movement and then that, and after a certain point a breakthrough comes and the pace quickens, and each new revelation or descent brings a further quickening and calls into play new faculties, powers, and parts of the being—so too is the world movement.

If new revelations and new descents followed one upon another during Sri Aurobindo's life, and then during Mother's sadhana in the body, naturally these will be followed by further and new and unexpected departures. This is the progressive revelation of the Divine, and it is eternally creative and unending.—*Will Moss*

### 4. Is the traditional yoga of Sri Aurobindo "out of date" now that the supermind is active upon the earth?

Sri Aurobindo's yoga is not yet "out of date," even if you choose to call it "traditional yoga." The supermind is yet to be manifested, though its activities are helping and guiding events upon earth. Where are those who would claim to have surpassed the conditions of Sri Aurobindo's yoga and profess to be ready for the supermind? Much much more remain to be done. Salute to the "forerunners."—*Hrushikesh Acharya*





## Physical fitness: New knowledge for the yoga?

*Interest in physical fitness activities has exploded since earlier decades of the yoga (and even since the 1970s). Today in America, a manifold variety of training regimens, workout classes and videos, health clubs, exercise equipment, and fitness magazines abound. These new physical disciplines, along with developing knowledge in the fields of nutrition and sports medicine, might be used to advantage by those working to consciously develop in their bodies the qualities of suppleness, balance, endurance, and harmony as preparation for the supramental manifestation, as conceived by the Mother in this excerpt from the Agenda. —LL*

**T**he transition between the two [the human and the supramental being] appears really possible only through the entry—the conscious and willed entry—of a supramentalized consciousness into a body that we could call an “improved physical body,” in other words, the human physical body as it is now, but improved: the improvement produced, for instance, by a TRUE physical training, not in its present exaggerated form but in its true sense. It’s something I have seen fairly clearly: in an evolution (physical training is developing very fast nowadays, it’s not even a half a century since it started); in evolution, that physical training will bring an improvement, that is, a suppleness, a balance, an endurance, and a harmony; these are the four qualities—suppleness (plasticity), balance between various parts of the being, endurance, and harmony of the body—that will make it a more supple instrument for the supramentalized consciousness.

So the transition: a conscious and willed utilization by a supramentalized consciousness of a body prepared in that way. This body must be brought to the peak of its development and of the utilization of the cells in order to be... yes, consciously impregnated with the supreme forces (which is being done here [in Mother] at the moment), and this to the utmost of its capacities. And if the consciousness that inhabits that body, that animates that body, has the required qualities in sufficient amount, it should normally be able to utilize that body to the utmost of its capacity of transformation, with the result that the waste caused by the death of decomposing cells should be reduced to a minimum—to what extent?... That’s precisely what still belongs to the unknown.

That would correspond to what Sri Aurobindo called the prolongation of life at will, for an indefinite length of time.

What I meant by an “improved physical body” is that sort of mastery over the body that’s being gained nowadays through physical training. I have seen lately magazines showing how it had start-

ed: the results in the beginning and today’s results; and from the standpoint of the harmony of forms (I am not talking about excesses—there are excesses everywhere—I am talking about what can be done in the best possible conditions), from the standpoint of the harmony of forms, of strength and a certain sense of beauty, of the development of certain capacities of endurance and skill, of precision in the execution combined with strength, it’s quite remarkable if you think of how recent physical training is. And it’s spreading very quickly nowadays, which means that the proportion of the human population that is interested in it and practices it is snowball-

ing. So when I saw all those photos (for me, it’s especially through pictures that I see), it occurred to me that through those qualities, the cells, the cellular aggregates acquire a plasticity, a receptivity, a force that make the substance more supple for the permeation of the supramental forces.

Let’s take the sense of form, for example (I am giving one example among many others). Evolution is openly moving towards diminishing the difference between the female and the male forms: the ideal that’s being created makes female forms more masculine and gives male forms a certain grace and suppleness, with the result that they increasingly resembled what I had seen all the way up, beyond the worlds of the creation, on the “threshold,” if I can call it that, of the world of form. At the beginning of the century, I had seen, before even knowing of Sri Aurobindo’s existence and without having ever heard the



word “supramental” or the idea of it or anything, I had seen there, all the way up, on the threshold of the Formless, at the extreme limit, an ideal form that resembled the human form, which was an idealized human form: neither man nor woman. A luminous form, a form of golden light. When I read what Sri Aurobindo wrote, I said, “But what I saw was the supramental form!” Without having the faintest idea that it might exist. Well, the ideal of form we are now moving towards resembles what I saw. That’s why I said: since there is an evolutionary concentration on this point, on the physical, bodily form, it must mean that Nature is preparing something for that Descent and that embodiment—it seems logical to me. That’s what I meant by an improved physical form. —From Mother’s Agenda, vol. 6, 1965 (Institute for Evolutionary Research, 1980), pp. 72, 75–76.

*Inset: A new ideal of feminine beauty. (From an ad for Avia athletic shoes)*



Not in the least. The supermind is active, and it stimulates a lot of feeble or immature yogas in people who are slowly evolving. This is not wrong, but it is incomplete and premature. It is good, of its sort, but the serious student has to go to Sri Aurobindo (and some of the other writers I've mentioned on Auroconf) to get the "real stuff." Popular teachings are a sort of imitation of the yoga, kids playing at being mommy and daddy, and they have their place. I don't despise them, but there are much higher levels on the spiral of the supermind that few are climbing. Sri Aurobindo's works are hundreds or thousands of years ahead of humanity.—*Hugh Higgins*

Even during their lifetimes, both Mother and Sri Aurobindo guided individuals to their individual swadharms, not following any hard and fast rules or guidelines. Even the Ashram restrictions on politics, meat, and sex were limited to Ashramites—Mother set no such limits in Auroville, for example. So the "general consensus" is simply a generalization, of which there are as many exceptions as not, and "new approaches" in fact represent nothing new at all. As long as the heart and core is the realization of the Divine (the "one thing needful") and the generalization of that realization in the outer nature, all that follows from that in fact is "the yoga."—*Will Moss*

There is still a difference between the supermind working on the earth atmosphere and on those people who are consciously and actively aspiring to become part of it through the practice of the Integral Yoga. There is the earth evolution, of which one can say that it is accelerated, and there is the yoga development, which takes a much more intense course.—*August Timmermans*

Dates are "out of date." I submit that the yoga of Sri Aurobindo is only traditional in the sense that it rediscovers the eternal spirituality of life on earth. The present activity of the supermind is evi-

dence that Sri Aurobindo is continuing his yoga for the earth.—*David Walker*

I don't think so. Once again, Sri Aurobindo represented an eternal truth in his life, teachings, and yoga, and eternal truths don't become outdated. Sri Aurobindo was plastic enough in his thinking, I believe, to accommodate fresh interpretations and insights into his yoga. I think one can find this in reading his books.

Of course in our modern time, one might be attracted to flashier practices, especially through the guidance of a fickle mind, or one might find this "out of date" theory a good way to rationalize laziness, but the painstaking work of a true sadhak is still required and not out of date, in my view.—*Lisa Rachlin*

This one is a joke, I think.—*John Chirostarr*

*Note: In the 1980s, many sadhaks influenced by Satprem claimed that due to the Mother's work in matter, Sri Aurobindo's classical, step-by-step "triple transformation" had been surpassed and would no longer be necessary: supramentalization might be attained by those who had simply "a need, a need for Something Else." In asking this question, one thing I was curious to see was if this was still a common view.—LL*

##### **5. Can one do the physical transformation before the psychic and spiritual transformations? Is it possible to work on cellular consciousness before working through the stages of Sri Aurobindo's yoga?**

With opening, offering, and consecration, yoga is done simultaneously in all parts of the being. It is more effective with our conscious participation—and conscious participation is only complete with the psychic and spiritual transformations.—*David Walker*

I presume the answer to both is "no." The spiritual should precede the physical.—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

On the contrary to many answers, I must give a positive response. Yes, it is possible to work on cellular consciousness before working through the yoga stages. And I know it, because I have done it that way since I was a child, not knowing anything of yoga or Sri Aurobindo. In fact, it was a constant fact that I was speaking to my cells and hearing their responses. I have always had the impression that my consciousness was simply the result of a complex organization of my cells (and also of my atoms).

If you can look at yourself as to the peripheral consciousness of the organism you are, and at the same time as the knot-point of many planes and flows or currents (as Buddhism says), if you can feel that your brain is only a kind of machine that is transforming external thoughts, and if you have one day the experience of conducting your body as you would drive a truck (as I did), you will understand that the cellular consciousness (and the atomic consciousness) is not a fake.

But, but . . . to work on the cells and work with their consciousness does not automatically lead to a physical transformation—in fact it is, rather, a matter of seeking a kind of harmony with them.

In order to do a physical transformation, there are two ways: from the body to the spirit or from the spirit to the body. In my opinion, Sri Aurobindo well saw how dangerous was the first way, and that is the reason why he always said that the second way was the only one sure and practicable.

Because matter is the first existing thing, it is also the most reluctant to any transformation. And when it transforms itself, it is on a huge and quick scale (an example could be the volcano, or the impact of the meteorite that killed the dinosaurs). The physical transformation must be controlled, and it must be by the controlled vital and mental, which are more plastic for they have come afterwards.





## The Internet: Knowledge networking for the yoga?

**T**he hallmark of the current "Information Age" is the Internet, which networks human minds together at the speed of thought. This would seem to indicate the definitive maturation in humanity of the mental principle, following earlier ages of physical and vital orientation.

But once evolution hits the mind, it accelerates; mind proper is but the foyer to higher levels of mind (illuminated mind, intuition, overmind) and supermind itself. Sri Aurobindo's yoga of perfection starts from the premise that "man is a mental being," and uses the mind and the will to move the nature toward the Divine. Could we use the Internet, a mental tool par excellence, to progress in yoga?

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother made use of the technologies of their day—radio, newspapers, telegrams, cars, tape recorders. They published journals, books, and bulletins and maintained two-way dialogs with disciples via scribbled marginal notes. Today would they have computers, publish on the Web, and use e-mail?

The Internet makes things move faster. Could it help our consciousness evolve faster as well—perhaps as a means to compare notes on yoga with fellow sadhaks around the world, establish "consciousness collaboratories," and advance the collective awareness? Most people, after all, are not interested in sadhana, and those who are, are distrib-

uted around the earth. The Net is a way for those rare souls to communicate and synergize soul force.

And (incidentally) might the emerging sense of one-world globalization—intensified by orders of magnitude since the widespread propagation of the Net—be an early precursor to unity consciousness?

The following reviews are excerpts from Web pages at Amazon online booksellers (<http://www.amazon.com>). —LL

### **CyberGrace: The Search for God in Cyberspace** by Jennifer Cobb.

Quote from the book: "Teilhard de Chardin, in his often poetic style, wrote, 'A glow ripples outward from the first spark of conscious reflection. The point of ignition grows larger. The fire spreads in ever-widening circles till finally the whole planet is covered with incandescence. Only one interpretation, only one name can be found worthy of this grand phenomenon. Much more coherent and just as extensive as any preceding layer, it is really a new layer, the "thinking layer," which, since its germination at the end of the Tertiary period, has spread over and above the world of plants and animals. In other words, outside and above the biosphere there is a noosphere.'

"The noosphere represents a stage of evolution characterized by a complex membrane of thought, fueled by human consciousness. This distinctly nontraditional evolutionary idea may strike us as odd until we consider

the phenomenon of cyberspace, that electronically supported layer of human consciousness that now encircles the globe."

CyberGrace offers paradoxical evidence that our machines may be conduits to a deeper spirituality. With daily headlines announcing dizzying advances in science and information technology, many people wonder about their—and their children's—ability to lead lives imbued by a sense of the sacred. In the new world, where the search for spirituality may seem scattered and unfocused, Cobb brilliantly uses the most popular and prevalent phenomenon of our times—the computer—to find a world filled with meaning and love.

**Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Religion in the Information Age** by Erik Davis. The gap between the technological mentality and the mystical outlook may not be as great as it seems. Erik Davis looks at modern information technology—and much previous technology—to reveal how much of it has roots in spiritual attitudes. Furthermore, he explores how those who embrace each new technological advance often do so with designs and expectations stemming from religious sensibilities. In doing so, Davis both compares and contrasts the scientific attitude that we can know reality technologically and the gnostic idea of developing ultimate understanding.

The control of the vital and mental can be made in different ways. Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's way is to find at first the psychic being in ourselves, because it is the real origin of all, and to bring it to the front—and at the same time to connect ourselves with the universal spirit that is present in the universe on all planes (also the subconscious ones). This is a method of security.

We know that Sri Aurobindo sought his whole life the "formula" for that pur-

pose. And he added the simultaneous (and hard to make work) surrender to the Divine as a counterforce in the beginning of the sadhana, and as the main (or only) force in the end. Because only the Divine in us, when he pervades everything in our being, can make the physical transformation without our disintegrating.

Because here is an important difference of Sri Aurobindo's yoga from the other paths: he seeks always to remain on this earth, not to escape of it via samadhi

or implosion. And another difference is that the transformation has to be collective, according the principle that is called in modern times "holographic" (a part for the whole).

Coming back to the question: yes, it is possible to do the physical transformation before the psychic and the spiritual, but it is not to be wished, for our safety and for the good continuation of that yoga.—Bernard Sage





## Physics: New knowledge for the yoga?

*The following are examples of a new outlook in physics that was not apparent in earlier decades of the yoga. Paradigm shifts such as this may profoundly change humanity's view of reality—and, for integral yogis, lead to a vastly increased shradda (faith) and a more precise power of working practically in the consciousness. Findings in this area may also provide the missing link between science and the Mother's work in supramentalizing matter. —LL.*

**F**laws in the materialistic paradigm of science have appeared in recent years. These flaws have grown to a gaping rent, torn across the whole fabric of the materialistic conception of reality. Strained by the conflicts between Einstein and Bohr over the ultimate meaning of quantum mechanics (developing in the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox), subjected to further stress in Bell's theorem, and finally ripped through in recent tests by Aspect in France, the whole cloth of the materialistic picture of reality must now be rejected. —*From The Physics of Consciousness: Quantum Minds and the Meaning of Life by Evan Harris Walker (Perseus Books: 2000), p. 5*

The inflationary theory, together with the Big Bang theory, lets us trace everything back to the very beginning. That beginning is called the Planck era. And what do we find there? We find that the universe began as a primitive, pure, intense—a very intense—quantum state that existed in an infinitesimal point of space and time—a moment when all matter potentiality, all space, and all time existed as one thing, one quantum state. But what is it that we have learned that such quantum states in fact are? What have we found, as we have searched point by point to understand the nature of reality? We have found, above all else, that quantum states and mind are one in the same thing. We have found that in their essential nature, quantum fluctuations are the stuff of consciousness and will. And now, here, we find that this mind stuff was the beginning point of the universe—the stuff that out of a formless void created everything that was creat-

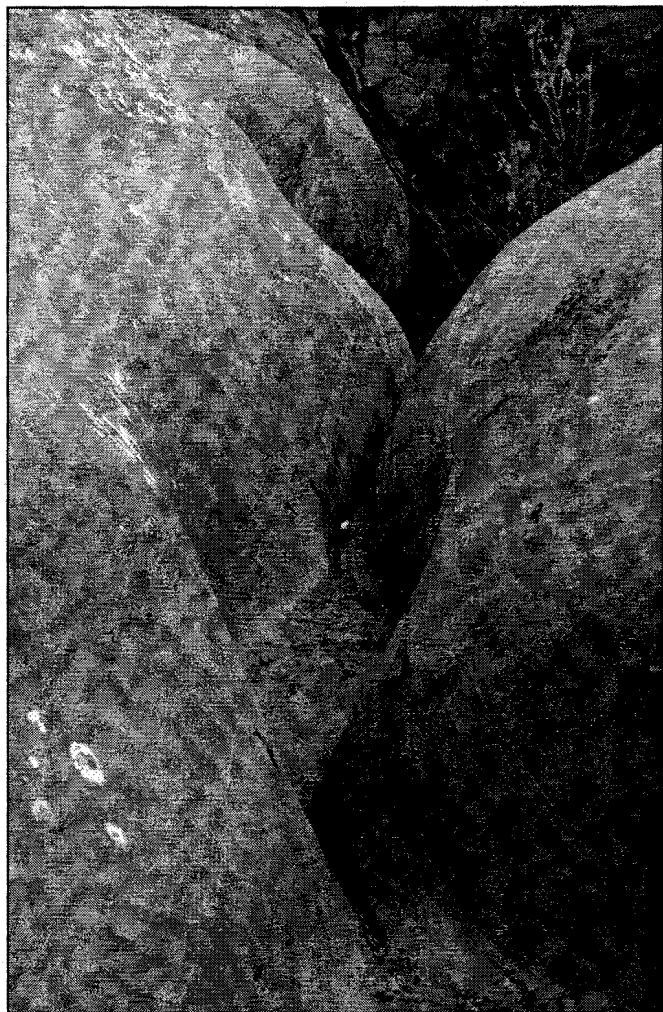
ed. We find that in the beginning, there was this quantum potentiality. We discover that in the beginning, there was the Quantum Mind, a first cause, itself time-independent and nonlocal, that created space-time and matter/energy. —*From The Physics of Consciousness, p. 326*

What, then, truly are the bounds of mind? Can the quantum mind alter matter? Can the entangled quantum states of consciousness see into other minds and beyond the limits of space and time? Can these things happen despite the fact that they seem so far removed from what we commonly understand to be the nature of the world? ... To understand what actually goes on, we must first understand how this minuscule world of quantum wonder might affect the world we experience. Then we must understand how the consciousness and will that we have already shown to have a quantum mechanical nature can affect matter by manipulating the indeterminacy that underlies every physical event. —*From The Physics of Consciousness, p. 268*

Classical physics states that physical reality is local—a point in space cannot influence another point beyond a relatively short distance. However, in 1997, experiments were conducted in which light particles (photons) originated under certain conditions and traveled in opposite directions to detectors located about seven miles apart. The amazing results indicated that the photons "interacted" or "communicated" with one another instantly, or "in no time." Since a distance of seven miles is quite vast in quantum physics, this led physicists to an extraordinary conclusion—even if experiments could somehow be conducted in which the distance between the detectors was halfway across the known universe, the results would indicate that interaction or communication between the photons would be instantaneous. What was revealed in these little-known experiments in 1997 was that physical reality is nonlocal—a discovery that Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos view as "the most momentous in the history of science."

In *The Non-Local Universe*, Nadeau and Kafatos offer a revolutionary look at the breathtaking implications of nonlocality. They argue that since every particle in the universe has been "entangled" with other particles like the two photons in the 1997 experiments, physical reality on the most basic level is an undivided wholeness. In addition to demonstrating that physical processes are vastly interdependent and interactive, they also show that more complex systems in both physics and biology display emergent properties and/or behaviors that cannot be explained in terms of the sum of the parts. One of the most startling implications of nonlocality in human terms, claim the authors, is that there is no longer any basis for believing in the stark division between mind and world that has preoccupied much of western thought since the seventeenth century. And they also make a convincing case that human consciousness can now be viewed as emergent from, and seamlessly connected with, the entire cosmos.

In pursuing this groundbreaking argument, the authors provide a fascinating history of developments that led to the discovery of nonlocality and the sometimes heated debates among the great scientists responsible for these discoveries. They also argue that advances in scientific knowledge have further eroded the boundaries between physics and biology, and that recent studies on the evolution of the human brain suggest that the logical foundations of mathematics and ordinary language are much more similar than we previously imagined. What this new knowledge reveals, the authors conclude, is that the connection between mind and nature is far more intimate than we previously dared to imagine. What they offer is a revolutionary look at the implications of nonlocality, implications that reach deep into that most intimate aspect of humanity—consciousness. —*From the book jacket of The Non-Local Universe: The New Physics and Matters of the Mind by Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos (Oxford University Press: 1999)*



*The smoothness of stone. (Photo by Marta Belén)*

I surely believe Bernard, but I take it as exceptional. We must not forget that many among us have been in a spiritual development before this life and can relate to yoga, and to psychic and spiritual experience, easily. I agree with David in this—that if you want to be a conscious participant in the physical transformation, the psychic and spiritual realizations are a basis. Also, the higher consciousness brings changes to the physical when it enters down to the physical level. Maybe people are confusing this with the supramental?—*August Timmermans*

#### **6. Is the traditional stricture against sharing experiences still valid?**

**I** find it to be less and less valid for me, but there are still experiences I do not want to share. Didn't the Mother say it might not be good to share the latest or most powerful experiences, but that one could share the earlier ones? But as people in general talk more and more about spirituality, these strictures seem to dissolve naturally.—*Hugh Higgins*

These so-called “experiences” are of many kinds and occur at various planes of our consciousness. Some can even be mere strong mental imaginations. Oftentimes, the need to share can be borne out of the compulsions of one's ego, but it can also be a genuine feeling to share with close friends on the path. The “traditional stricture” against sharing is only a safeguard for the sadhak. Limited sharing with the chosen, when it helps other friends, has always been practiced.—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

Sharing is love. But on the e-mail conferences, we are only starting to touch the surface of each other (except for those who have an “outside the conference” relationship). I usually maintain a consciousness that I'm speaking to about 100 people, only some of whom I know, so I only share personal matters if I think the transparency to it has an application of service to others.—*Tom Cowan*

It depends on the conscious space in which utterance and audience happens. In the world of ignorance, there is always a sacrifice. It is risky business. But sharing experience is the very nature of language and exchange in the life divine. Unfortunately, the life divine still comes and goes. I think that since we are on a common journey—and are interdependent—appropriate sharing is a significant form of mutual aid.—*David Walker*

If sincerity is the basis of sharing, it can only be helpful to share with each other. The outcome on this forum over the past weeks has helped me enormously to understand and respect individuals better.—*August Timmermans*

#### **7. Is celibacy still valid as a requirement for progress in this yoga?**

**C**elibacy is considered a great help to gather one's energies to focus on the yogic activities in hand so as to make the progress faster. Thus, this was (and is) a condition for the inmate sadhaks at Ashram. But there are many examples of married persons who have accepted Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and try to tread on their path. One should start from where one is stationed in life at present, and proceed on. Indulgence in sex and all related activities and perversions are hindrances one is called upon to relinquish. Nature's purpose in sex is limited only to procreate, and not to indulge in it.—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

Nothing has changed in this regard. It works for some. And doesn't work for others.—*Tom Cowan*

As we all know, sexual activity in the vital can continue ferociously even with celibacy. The psychic transformation of the vital and the total consecration of the being cannot be complete until the sexual impulse falls away—the descent of the supramental into the vital and physical is probably blocked. But above the vital, progress can still be made.—*David Walker*



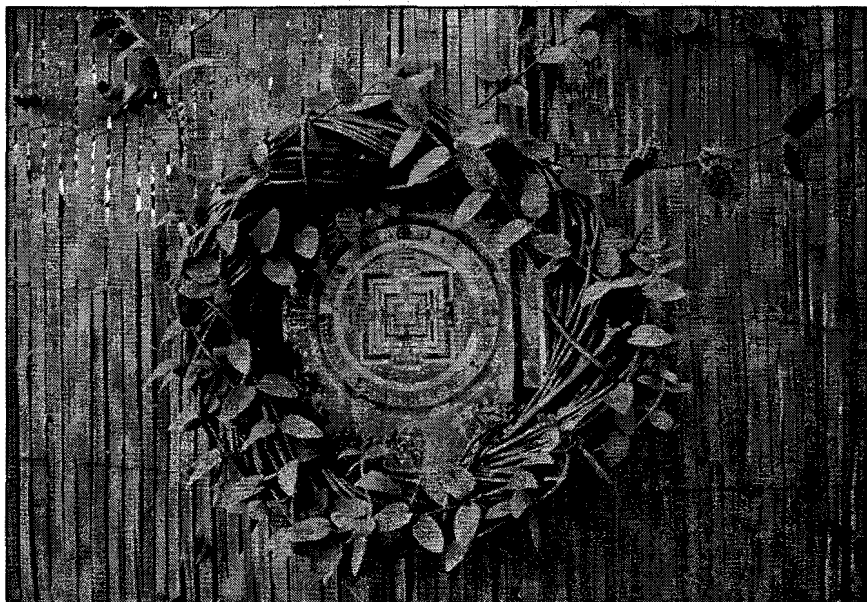
When one is able to take up celibacy, the advancement in the yoga goes fast.—*August Timmermans*

Definitely yes. It is an idea from a not-very-high religious consciousness that “sex can be allowed for a while.” I know that when you get some power, you think you can allow to yourself little sexual activity, but it seems to be uncontrollable. Maybe certain period of celibacy is needed (let’s say twelve years)? Anyhow, I think it completely depends on your aspiration.—*Denis Shershunov*

Yes. But I wish there were more material available on precisely how sexual consciousness and energy is to be transformed. Perhaps Sri Aurobindo’s view is that one ought not to work on it directly, but let it be transformed as one works on one’s consciousness as a whole, according to his detailed instructions.—*Hugh Higgins*

I believe so. Once again, this yoga is an inner process which Sri Aurobindo well understood and knew the ins and outs of—so I wouldn’t be in such a big hurry to discount his conclusions. Rather, be sincere and examine your own motives before deciding it is no longer valid. This is not a yoga for the weak or faint-hearted. Be sincere and don’t make excuses for yourselves, saying that Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is out of date in order to feed your sexual appetite. The transmutation of sexual energy into *ojas*, spiritual force and soul force, has long been understood among yogic adepts. Sri Aurobindo built his yoga on the strong foundation of classical yoga, and he built, and he built. We should continue to build without knocking out the foundation stone.—*Lisa Rachlin*

*Note: Although I have always taken Sri Aurobindo’s advice on this matter at face value (since committing to celibacy in 1976), I have talked with numerous sadhaks who feel that this ideal is not just difficult to attain but is impractical, unnecessary or—indeed—“out of date.” In one early discussion on Auroconf,*



Yantra. (Photo by Marta Belén)

*the majority (not all) of the participants argued that for Western seekers in the 90s, bramacharya was no longer “realistic.” In asking this question, I was curious to see what the consensus was today, and if any new insights on the matter might be emerging, one way or another.—LL*

**8. Is it enough to be a traditional sadhak, or are there forces emerging in the world (e.g., communication, technology, virtual reality) that change the nature of practice of the yoga itself?**

**T**hese things are superficial, no matter how convenient. They do not change the nature of the practice of yoga. What is a “traditional sadhak”? I have no idea. I feel often that no one has ever done this yoga except Sri Aurobindo. As the Hebrew prophet said, “There is no one righteous, no, not one.”—*Hugh Higgins*

“Communication, technology, virtual reality” are nothing but tools to do a job with—like flying an airplane as opposed to taking a boat across oceans.—*Tom Cowan*

Yoga based on eternal principles, not on emerging forces. Don’t get too caught up in technology, virtual reality, etc., which are manifestations of consciousness, but, like castles in the sand, don’t really stand on their own. We can look at all of these things as signs of the time, maybe even signs of the supramental manifestation that Sri Aurobindo wrote about, but they are still merely signposts. On their own they are subjective—that is, subject to change. Look to the eternal consciousness that Sri Aurobindo did speak about. This is what effects all of these emerging forces in the world. They are not forces on their own, merely indicators. Follow what they are pointing to. Don’t become too engrossed with them. They are useful and they can also be destructive if misused. They are dual in nature.

It is not really a matter of being a “traditional” sadhak. I don’t think Sri Aurobindo cared a hoot about tradition! Was he traditional? No!! He was a revolutionary. I think it’s really a matter of sincerity.—*Lisa Rachlin*

Computers, TV, etc. must be conquered with right attitude. Again, what is it—“traditional sadhak”?—*Denis Shershunov*





I am not sure what is meant here, and again I do not consider the IY as a traditional yoga. The development of the yoga itself makes it possible to be in the world and function in the world, in contrast with traditional yoga where the sadhak depends on the guru and the protective environment of the ashram. I think the psychic development makes this possible, together with the inner guidance and protection that one receives in this yoga.

The e-mail forums we have do contribute seriously to feeling connected with the collective in the Ashram, Auroville, and worldwide, although still, the yoga development of the sadhak himself remains individual. The forums can greatly contribute to communicate about the Integral Yoga.—*August Timmermans*

I think the development of sadhaks can take place in conjunction with others—that although development is often limited to the individual, it is not necessarily so. That's one reason why the question about these new means of communication rises in my mind: they expand the possibilities so much in terms of connecting with other sadhaks. I well remember the "dark ages" in the 1980s when, for me, years would go by before having five minutes of interaction on the level of these recent postings about the yoga. It may be just "communication," but . . . I hold the door open for other possibilities.—*Dave Hutchinson*

Whom do you call a "traditional sadhak"? The main focus of the sadhak is to follow the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and allow their influences and blessings to work out in his or her life. Wherever needed and appropriate, we should feel free to utilize any means that modern technology has provided. (For example, this interchange of ideas on Auroconf should be accepted as a helpful activity on the path. Internet and e-mail were unknown in Sri Aurobindo's time.) For Aurobindonians, helpful means should be welcome, and those that hinder and distract should be discarded.

The aim must be clear at all times.—*Hrushikesh Acharya*

My notion is that in Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the sadhak is nontraditional. Else, how can we expect the unexpected or colonize a new creation?—*David Walker*

*Note: Now that I look at it, the question is perhaps vague or two-pointed. By "traditional sadhak," I was thinking "a person who is not involved in the external world, who lives in a traditional ashram." The problem with that understanding is that it doesn't really fit those who are in the Pondicherry Ashram; hence, a confusing question.—DH*

*Hrushikesh Acharya lives in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India; Naren Bhatt in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; John Chirostarr in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Tom Cowan in Westhampton Beach, New York; Hugh Higgins in Boulder, Colorado; Jocelyn in Auroville, India; Diane Johnson in the Blue Mountains near Sydney, Australia; Will Moss in Watertown, Massachusetts; Andre Pinho in Tomar, Portugal; Lisa Rachlin in Boulder, Colorado; Bernard Sage in Marseilles, France; Denis Shershunov in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic; August Timmermans in Bangkok, Thailand; David Walker in Santa Cruz, California.*

## Earth hour

**"This human hour, this earthly hour is the most beautiful of all the hours."**

—*The Mother*

## Napping with the Divine

by *Lynda Lester*

*This column focuses on the day-to-day practice of Integral Yoga: what it looks and feels like, its stumblings and gropings, its progress and aspiration. The following selection is taken from a journal of experiences in consciousness.*

**7 November 1997**

*Note: My friends Mary, Tim, and Fred and I were scheduled to fly to San*

*Francisco to hear a concert by pianist Scott Kirby, but our plane was cancelled. We stood in customer service lines for four hours and battled numerous impossibilities before Fred gave up and Mary and Tim and I booked a late flight to San Francisco via Orange County.*

As we waited in line with people around us swearing and yelling angrily into cell phones, people getting sick with despair and resignation, and Fred's worry index going off the charts, I gave everything to the Divine.

I felt karma-free, free as a bird. I'd been cut loose from the moorings of mundane care and daily responsibility; I was on a cosmic pilgrimage. Therefore, anything that happened I was taking as divine opportunity to advance faster in sadhana.

I'd had only three hours of sleep the night before and was in desperate need of a nap if I could get it. So after a harrowing, seemingly endless buffeting in customer service, I found a semideserted gate across the concourse.

I'd been to Chicago O'Hare and learned there the airport protocol for exhausted people: pull up some floor and crash. So I staked out a spot between a pillar and a plate glass window, pulled my feather pillow out of my canvas bag, lay down, and pulled my hat over my eyes.

The floor was mine; relative privacy was mine; two hours were mine to sleep. I rested and thought: how wonderful, what grace.

No cares: my cares were left at the office.

No hassles, no people: I was left alone to sleep on the floor in peace.

No problems: our plane was rescheduled, and we would be in San Francisco tonight, and we would hear Scott tomorrow . . . and this was a mission devoted to God, a worry-free zone, a zone where only the Divine resided.

And as I lay there on the cold carpet in the airport, my entire body aching with the pain of sleeplessness and middle age, I looked closely to see what was the truth of this moment.



What it was, was the Divine holding me in his arms.

I was cradled in the arms of the Divine Mother, like a baby being rocked to sleep.

“Mr. Mushroom, Mr. Be A. Mushroom; Ms. Mental, Ms. Arlene Mental; Mr. Bread, Mr. Short Bread, please report to a white courtesy phone.” The voices I heard over the PA were becoming surrealistically comic as I drifted into a cozy, half-awake state.

Underneath me was the concourse, rumbling with the feet of hundreds of passersby; but what I felt most was waves of divine bliss beating up from the floor—like subatomic radiation, like reverse gravity, like convection: wave after wave of delight carrying me in a little Wynken-Blynken-and-Nod boat on a sea galaxy of God. It was impossibly beautiful, impossibly full of peace and sweetness; it infused my aching cells.

And as I lay there crashed out on the floor like some despair-ridden homeless person, transcendence seduced and enveloped me, introduced me to infinity and immortality, brought me face to face with the timeless Eternal.

And that is how, cradled on the breast of the Divine, I found shanti and ananda on the floor of Denver International Airport.

This, I thought, has got to be the most wonderful experience I will have all weekend.

Nothing could be sweeter than this.

I was wrong.

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## Essay

### Sri Aurobindo and Aswapati in Savitri

*The ‘yoga of the king’ is Sri Aurobindo’s own yoga*

by Georges Van Vrekhem

This essay will be included in a collective book by well-known writers on Savitri under the editorship of R.Y. Deshpande, the present editor of Mother India and successor to K.D. Sethna. (Georges notes, “I am not a well-known writer on Savitri, but I have been asked to participate anyway.”)

Who are the protagonists, the principal characters in Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*? This is, apparently, one of the simplest questions that may be asked about the epic: the chief protagonist is Savitri, after whom the epic is named and who dominates its second half; then there is Satyavan, her counterpart and husband, who represents the soul

of humanity; and thirdly there is Aswapati, the king who is Savitri’s father and who is the main character in the first half of the epic.

The authorities, experts, and exegetes who have written on *Savitri* are unanimously of the same opinion. The following is a small selection from the learned assessment of some of them concerning the first, second, and third book, i.e., almost half of the epic’s text.

In *The Book of the Divine Mother*, M.P. Pandit writes: “In the first part, [Sri Aurobindo] speaks of Aswapati’s Yoga,<sup>1</sup> the Yoga of the King . . . Aswapati in the epic is the representative of the aspiring humanity who prepares and lays the path to the Divine Glory . . . Aswapati stands face to face with the Creatrix of the universe, the supreme Divine Mother, and prays to her fervently to manifest her glories on Earth . . . The Divine Grace takes birth as Savitri, daughter of King Aswapati, and with the birth of this Flame, things get moving . . . Aswapati has arrived at the overmental levels of existence and he embodies the consciousness of the One, which includes the many . . . After describing the overwhelming experience of Aswapati with the absolute stillness at the gates of the transcendent, the poet observes that that is not the Ultimate.”<sup>2</sup>

In *Savitri: An Approach and a Study*, A.B. Purani writes: “Aswapati acquired this secret knowledge [see book I, canto 4] that had come down by tradition and attained to the freedom of the spirit by cutting the cord of the mind which ties it to the earth . . . The entire second Book is, in fact, Aswapati’s travel over worlds heaped upon worlds in a complex cosmogony mounting from the plinth of the plane of Matter right up to levels of Higher Mind and the plane of the Cosmic Being leading to worlds of greater knowledge. Aswapati represents the aspiring human soul down the millenniums of evolution in his search for the truth of himself, of the world and of God. He acquires by his *tapasya* immense knowledge of the possibilities of the human consciousness, its deeper depths and its higher and the highest heights. In his heart burns the flame of aspiration to create here on earth an image of the perfection which his soul feels is possible for man and earth to attain. The third Book describes Aswapati’s entry into and experience of Supracosmic planes of consciousness and his meeting face to face with the Supreme Creatrix, the power of the omnipotent Divine.”<sup>3</sup>

And in Rohit Mehta’s *The Dialogue with Death*, we read: “In the epic of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo deals exhaustively with the Yoga of Aswapati, which indeed is the Yoga of Ascent. And Aswapati’s Yoga is a series of negations [?]. It is only when all is negated that the Voice of the Divine is heard promising the descent of one of its most brilliant rays for dispelling the darkness of the earth. And so the Birth of Savitri cannot be understood unless one understands the Yoga of Aswapati in which the latter ascends higher and higher by a never-ending process of negations . . . Instead of showing Aswapati performing austerities and offering oblations in various sacrifices, [Sri Aurobindo] has introduced the journey of the King in quest of a divine blessing so



Integral human. (Digital collage by Margaret Phanes)

that he may have a child for which he was longing. And so Aswapati's long journey is for obtaining the blessing of a child."<sup>4</sup>

One could quote many more assertions to the same end; in their unanimity they should be utterly convincing for the student of Sri Aurobindo's cosmic poem. But then: why does Sri Aurobindo write the name "Aswapati" for the very first time on page 341?<sup>5</sup> Forgetting to mention the name of a character whose actions are described in no less than 326 successive pages of his poem would indeed be a gross, not to say a staggering oversight by a poet as painstaking as Sri Aurobindo, of whose poetic labor Nirodbaran, his amanuensis, writes: "Revision after revision, addition of lines, even punctuations changed so many times!"<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the books reporting and depicting Aswapati's [?] actions seem to be of great importance, for again we read in Nirodbaran: "Undoubtedly the first three Books were of a much higher level of inspiration and nearer perfection than the rest, for with ample leisure, and working by himself he could devote more time and care to that end, which unfortunately could not be said about the rest of the Books."<sup>7</sup> Written towards the end of Sri Aurobindo's earthly life, they must at least reflect the highlights of his knowledge and yogic experience.

This matter certainly deserves closer examination.

Who was the Aswapati of the *Mahabharata*, of the legend on which Sri Aurobindo based *Savitri*? R.Y. Deshpande, in his *Vyasa's 'Savitri'* and *The Ancient Tale of Savitri*, gives us a close rendering of the original Sanskrit. In the latter work we read: "Long ago in Madra ruled a noble king. An ardent follower of the dharma, he was of a devout nature and was firmly established in truth. He was respectful to the seers and sages and was kind to the citizens of his country. His name was Aswapati. Performer of Yajnas, presiding over charities, skilful in work, one who had conquered the senses, he was loved by the people of his kingdom and himself loved them; Aswapati's single concern was always the welfare of everybody and towards that end he spared no effort.

"But he was issueless. With the passing of time, and with the advancing of age, this caused him great affliction. Therefore, with the intention of getting a child, he undertook very hard and arduous tapasya, extending over eighteen years. Every day he offered a hundred-thousand oblations to the Goddess Savitri. He observed rules of the strictest continence, and held all the senses fully under control, and took just a little food, and that too only in the sixth part of the day.

"At last, pleased with his devotion and worship, Goddess Savitri herself appeared out of the sacrificial flames in front of him and blessed him. She granted him a boon of fulfilling an appropriate wish of his. She even told him that she, understanding the purpose of his great austerities, had already spoken to Brahma about his desire to have a son. She further informed him that he would soon get a daughter, beautiful and effulgent, and he should not have any hesitation or reservation in accepting this boon. It had been bestowed by the great Father-Creator himself and he should be happy about it.

"In proper time the King, who ever abided by the Law, established his seed in the womb of his eldest queen, the companion of his dharma, Malawi; a few months later a daughter was born to her."<sup>8</sup>

Let us now compare the *Mahabharata's* description of Aswapati with that of the hero of the first three books in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

One in front of the immemorial quest,  
Protagonist of the mysterious play  
In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms . . .  
A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,  
Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power.  
His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres  
Into our province of ephemeral sight,  
A colonist from immortality . . .  
His birth held up a symbol and a sign;  
His human self like a translucent cloak  
Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world.  
Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time  
And paying here God's debt to earth and man  
A greater sonship was his divine right. (p. 23)



The "protagonist" described here, "in front of the immemorial quest," is undoubtedly an avatar: "His human self like a translucent cloak / Covered the All-Wise . . . A greater sonship was his divine right." This is hardly what could be said of the *Mahabharata*'s Aswapati, however great a king and yogi he may have been. Neither could Aswapati be characterized as "a thinker and toiler in the ideal's air"—a characterization which Sri Aurobindo has held on as a leitmotiv throughout the report of his protagonist's actions:

The toiling thinker widened and grew still,  
Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart . . . (p. 33)

A single thinker in an aimless world  
Awaiting some tremendous dawn of God,  
He saw the purpose in the works of Time. (p. 137)

His privilege regained of shadowless sight  
The Thinker entered the immortals' air  
And drank again his pure and mighty source. (p. 263)

He carved from his own self his figure of her [the Divine Mother]:  
She shaped her body to a mind's embrace.  
Into thought's narrow limits she has come;  
Her greatness she has suffered to be pressed  
Into the little cabin of the Idea,  
The closed room of a lonely thinker's grasp. (p. 275)

Always the Ideal beckoned from afar.  
Awakened by the touch of the Unseen,  
Deserting the boundary of things achieved,  
Aspired the strong discoverer, tireless Thought,  
Revealing at each step a luminous world. (p. 277)

This witness hush is the Thinker's secret base:  
Hidden in silent depths the word is formed . . . (p. 283)

**T**he mind is of course the typical attribute of the human being, leader in the upward effort of the evolution upon earth. Throughout Sri Aurobindo's oeuvre one finds man defined as "the mental being," constitutionally sandwiched between the animal and the god, and in a way partaking of both. As such the traditional avatar, son of man for born into humanhood, can be seen as the missioned "thinker" toiling with the highest property specific to man in order to break through the ceiling imposed on the human species, in an effort to enter and reveal the higher, spiritual worlds.

Still, the context makes it clear that the words "thinker" and "thought" have here a much wider significance. Mind reaches from its presence in matter across all levels of existence up to the overmind. The thinking and toiling done here by this frontrunner, this pioneer of humanity, takes place on levels above the rational,

discursive mind Sri Aurobindo has spoken of time and again, and which he has extensively described in *The Life Divine* (pp. 940 ff). The names he gave to those levels are: higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, and overmind. It may be recalled that all of these levels, which are worlds peopled with beings, are spiritual, and that all of them reflect in an ascending degree of purity the supramental truth-consciousness. That this is so in the overmind, the worlds of the gods, is common knowledge, but it is seldom recalled that the higher, illumined, and intuitive mind also partake of this divinity.

For Thought transcends the circles of mortal mind,  
It is greater than its earthly instrument:  
The godhead crammed into mind's narrow space  
Escapes on every side into some vast  
That is a passage to infinity. (p. 260)

The conclusion of all that is, of course, that the protagonist of the first three books of *Savitri* is not the Aswapati of the *Mahabharata*, but Sri Aurobindo himself. In other words, these three books—together with his later sonnets and shorter poems—are his spiritual autobiography. His are the variety of detailed yogic, cosmic, and divine experiences and visions; the superhuman effort to carry humanity beyond itself and found the kingdom of God upon the earth; the unprecedented wealth of spiritual and occult experiences.

One soul's ambition lifted up the race . . .  
He drew the energies that transmute an age. (p. 44)

"All this is his own experience," said the Mother to Mona Sarkar. "These are experiences lived by him, realities, supracosmic truths. He experienced all these as one experiences joy or sorrow, physically. He walked in the darkness of inconscience, even in the neighbourhood of death, endured the sufferings of perdition, and emerged from the mud, the world-misery to breathe the sovereign plenitude and enter the supreme Ananda. He crossed all these realms, went through the consequences, suffered and endured physically what one cannot imagine. Nobody till today has suffered like him. He accepted suffering to transform suffering into the joy of union with the Supreme. It is something unique and incomparable in the history of the world. It is something that has never happened before. He is the first to have traced the path in the Unknown, so that we may be able to walk with certitude towards the Supermind. He has made the work easy for us. *Savitri* is his whole Yoga of transformation, and this Yoga appears now for the first time in the earth-consciousness."<sup>9</sup>

The young disciple to whom this was said noted down everything from memory, but the gist is unmistakable. (It was in the same conversation that the Mother gave away that Sri Aurobindo also described in detail many of her own experiences without her having spoken about them, and ascribed them to Savitri.)

Sri Aurobindo himself wrote in a letter to K.D. Sethna: "I





have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if, for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience." (p. 794) He wrote also: "*Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences." (p. 794) It would be possible to cull from his letters half a dozen more quotations to the same effect.

In 1936, the three first books of *Savitri* were still "a small passage about Aswapati and the other worlds." (p. 731) In 1946, that small passage had developed into the stupendous grandeur of the bases of Sri Aurobindo's yoga;<sup>10</sup> the expounding of the new knowledge gained by him which would support his work of bringing down the supramental upon earth and lay the basis of its

material transformation; the report of his exploration of the worlds, their connections with our earth, and the work he performed in them; his quest for the supreme goal: the presence of the Divine Mother and her promise to incarnate among mankind in order to assure the foundation of the divine life upon earth.

"The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds was just a small passage," writes Nirodbaran. "Here now we find the fully lengthened and developed Book running into 15 Cantos. The third Book, The Book of the Divine Mother, was also written probably for the first time, for he wrote to Amal in 1946: '... There is also a third sufficiently long Book, The Book of the Divine Mother.'"<sup>11</sup> And we may repeat here part of an already used quotation: "Undoubtedly the first three Books were of a much higher level of inspiration and nearer perfection than the rest."

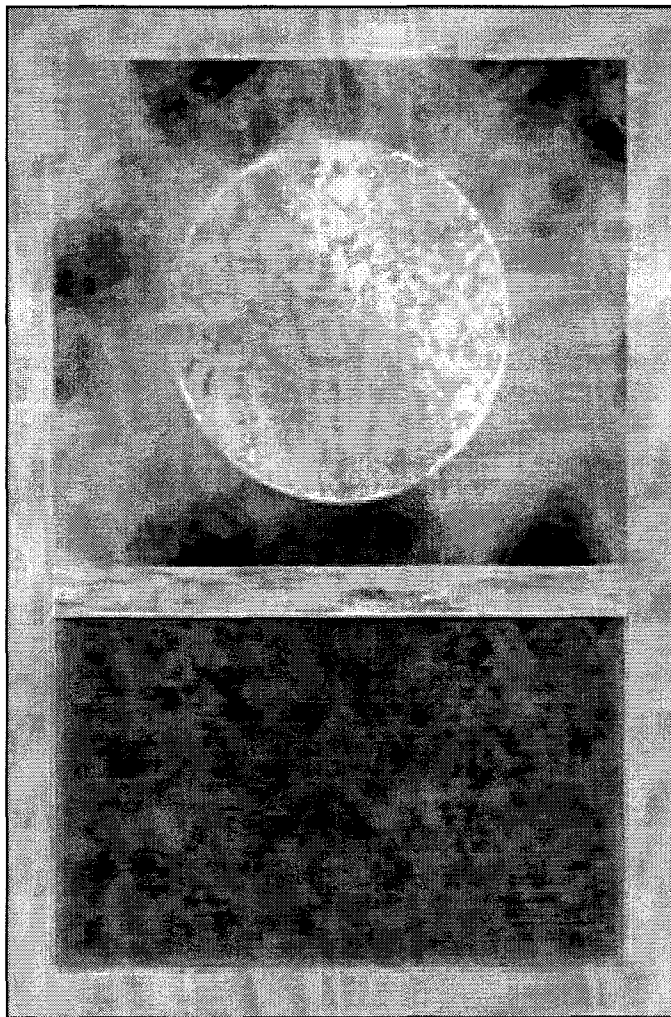
Is the present writer the first to draw attention to the role and presence of Sri Aurobindo in the first half of *Savitri*? Not at all. For most of the authors who have written about *Savitri*, the poem occupies an important place in their life; they have studied it thoroughly; they treat Sri Aurobindo's mantric poetry with reverence, even with love. The many insightful and enlightening pages K.D. Sethna has devoted to *Savitri*, for instance, are widely appreciated.

From the writings of the other *Savitri* admirers, a passage from Mangesh Nadkarni's *Savitri: A Brief Introduction* must suffice. It says:

"Sri Aurobindo's Aswapati is not the sorrow-stricken King of the *Mahabharata* story, who performs austerities for the sake of having a child. Sri Aurobindo's Aswapati is a seer-king, a representative and a leader of enlightened humanity... His quest is for that creative principle which has the power to put an end to all human frustrations, discontents and ills; this is something which has so far evaded all thinkers, reformers, revolutionaries, even avatars. Aswapati has acquired all that human knowledge and wisdom have to offer both in the East as well as in the West; and he is painfully aware of the fact that nothing, neither science and technology, nor religion and art, have so far been able to free man from the clutches of death, ignorance and suffering. Down the ages, man has always aspired for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality...

"It may be noted here that this was also Sri Aurobindo's own quest as a yogi. In a very real sense these 22 Cantos devoted to Aswapati's yoga also describe Sri Aurobindo's own tapasya. Like Sri Aurobindo, Aswapati too seeks to win for mankind the secret of transforming the very structure of human consciousness so that life on earth can blossom into fulfilment."<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, however profound their insight, all authors keep referring, as in the above passage, to Aswapati in a text and context where Sri Aurobindo never mentions the legendary king and sage, and where he is without any doubt writing down his own revolutionary, superhuman experiences. (And when he mentions for the first time the name "Aswapati," on page 341, it is only because he is reaching the end of those personal, all-important experiences and intends to take up again the thread of the



*Evolving landscape. (Digital art by Margaret Phanes)*



legend which he has left on page 21, at the end of book 1, canto 2, the beginning of the epic.)

I indeed deem the discernment between Sri Aurobindo and Aswapati in the first three books of *Savitri* of the utmost importance, for the following reasons:

1. The constant repetition of the name "Aswapati" in the first three books of *Savitri* has grown into a sort of tradition from the earliest commentaries onwards—a tradition that persists fifty years after Sri Aurobindo's passing. Such traditions tend to become regarded as established fact. In this case, this would be disastrous, especially among the reading public who usually do not dare or do not have the means to call a seemingly authoritative opinion into question.

2. In the publications on *Savitri*, the systematic repetition of the name "Aswapati"—where one should read "Sri Aurobindo," or "the protagonist," or "the one in front," or "the thinker and toiler," or whatever name or epithet suitable for the purpose—automatically, not to say subconsciously, pulls the reader back to bygone times in ancient India. In the first half of *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, takes us ahead with him in his avataric enterprise to establish the foundations of the future. Aswapati belongs to the world of the legend and the past, Sri Auro-

bindo to the world of the symbol and the future. No Aurobindonian will show a lack of respect towards the world of the rishis, of the *Mahabharata* and of Veda Vyasa, but, however great, they belong to the "lower hemisphere," just like all the rest of the bygone history of humanity. In the first three books of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo, "in the front of the immemorial quest," has laid for the first time and for all time to come the bases of the "upper hemisphere" of a divine consciousness and life upon earth. The repetition of Aswapati's name and the associations in accordance with it may act as a kind of film dimming our perception of Sri Aurobindo's world-transforming action.

3. As shown previously, it is beyond doubt that the first three books of *Savitri* are a record of Sri Aurobindo's experiences—in other words, that they are autobiographical. This, by itself, makes them of incomparable value—a value which would be diminished and distorted by ascribing them to the legendary Aswapati. The following statement of Sri Aurobindo's in a letter to a disciple is well known: "Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all about my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see." By now, a great many facts about his life have been gathered and the writing of a responsible, well-founded biography has become possible. The immense value of the first three books of *Savitri*, however, is that they present us with an extensive account and narrative of what "has not been on the surface for men to see." Who Sri Aurobindo was and what he did for the world cannot be known without this account, and this goes far beyond anything Aswapati was or could stand for.<sup>13</sup>

These three points of importance to any reader of *Savitri* deserve some concrete illustration. Be it nevertheless stated that the following illustrations, as well as this short essay as a whole, are nothing more than pointers towards the fundamental thesis. A few examples must suffice; for the rest one can only refer the reader to Sri Aurobindo's grand epic itself.

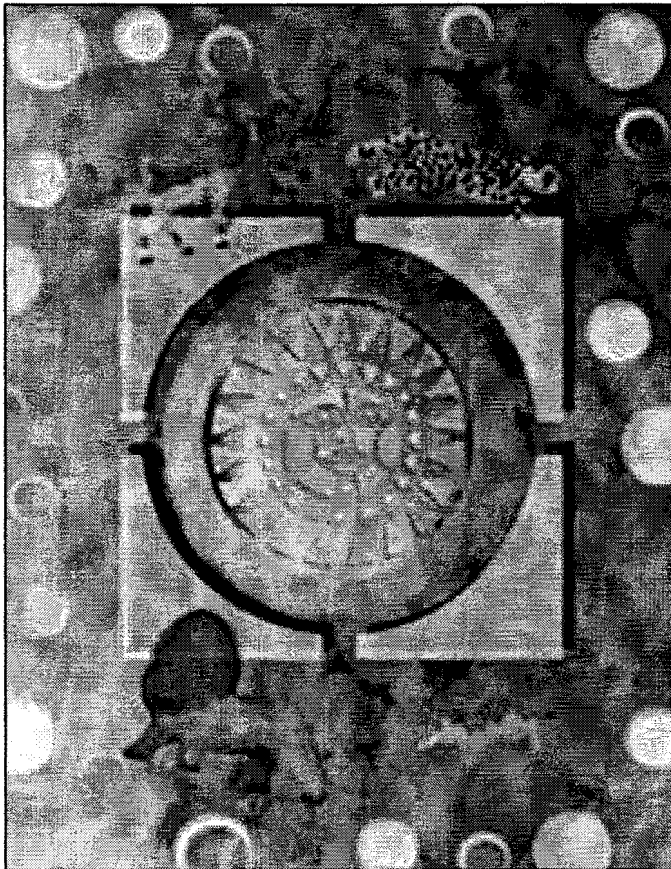
### Sri Aurobindo's occult biography

**S**ri Aurobindo has told us about many of his spiritual experiences. They are strewn, mostly under the cloak of impersonality, everywhere in his letters as in all his other works. In the three books under consideration we read for example:

A fit companion of the timeless Kings,  
Equalled with the godheads of the living Suns,  
He mixed in the radiant pastimes of the Unborn . . . (p. 236)

In the still self he lived and it in him;  
Its mute immemorable listening depths,  
Its vastness and its stillness were his own;  
One being with it he grew wide, powerful, free. (p. 284)

Himself was to himself his only scene.  
Above the Witness and his universe  
He stood in a realm of boundless silences



*Integral world. (Digital collage by Margaret Phanes)*



Awaiting the Voice that spoke and built the worlds.  
A light was round him wide and absolute,  
A diamond purity of eternal sight . . . (p. 297)

He had reached the top of all that can be known:  
His sight surpassed creation's head and base;  
Ablaze the triple heavens revealed their suns,  
The obscure Abyss exposed its monstrous rule . . .  
In the kingdom of the Spirit's power and light,  
As if one who arrived out of infinity's womb  
He came new-born, infant and limitless  
And grew in the wisdom of the timeless Child;  
He was a vast that soon became a Sun . . .  
He linked creation to the Eternal's sphere,  
His finite parts approached their absolutes,  
His actions framed the movements of the Gods,  
His will took up the reins of cosmic Force. (pp. 300, 301, 302)

As the Mother said: "*Savitri* alone is sufficient to make you climb to the highest peaks. If truly one knows how to meditate on *Savitri*, one will receive all the help one needs. For him who wishes to follow this path, it is a concrete help as though the Lord himself [she always called Sri Aurobindo "Lord"] were taking you by the hand and leading you to the destined goal. And then, every question, however personal it may be, has its answer there, every difficulty finds its solution therein; indeed there is everything that is necessary for doing the Yoga"<sup>14</sup>—in the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo.<sup>15</sup>

### Sri Aurobindo the warrior

In the writings about Sri Aurobindo by his followers, he is seldom considered to be or represented as a warrior, a dauntless combatant. One mostly reads about him as the ever helpful, infinitely patient, knowledgeable, humorous, compassionate master or guru—which he of course also was to a degree out of the ordinary. Yet leaving out his warrior side lessens and therefore deforms his total image. He was after all the avatar of the supramental, which is none other than the last avatar in the Hindu tradition: Kalki, expected to come on a white winged horse brandishing the sword of the spiritual power (and whom nobody perceived when he *did* come). If it is true that because of his effort the supramental has descended into the earth's atmosphere, and if because of this descent the earthly evolution is entering the "upper hemisphere" of the truth-consciousness, then Sri Aurobindo cannot but have been Kalki.<sup>16</sup> It is then unthinkable that he could have accomplished his mission without the severest and continuous battles against the hostile forces in possession of the world. One reads about this in the deeply moving poem "A God's Labour," as one reads about it in the first cantos of *Savitri*:

Here must the traveller of the upward Way—  
For daring Hell's kingdoms winds the heavenly route—  
Pause or pass slowly through that perilous space,

A prayer upon his lips and the great Name. (p. 210)

He met with his bare spirit naked Hell. (p. 219)

A warrior in the dateless duel's strife,  
He entered into dumb despairing Night  
Challenging the darkness with his luminous soul. (p. 227)

[He] fought shadowy combats in mute eyeless depths,  
Assaults of Hell endured and Titan strokes  
And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal. (p. 230)

Invincibly he ascended without pause . . . (p. 306)

The Divine Mother addresses him as "Son of Strength" and "strong forerunner." Sometimes one gets a glimpse of his battles in his correspondence with Nirodbaran. But if he had never written his autobiographical poems and these cantos in *Savitri*, who would have guessed the superhuman difficulties and perils he was involved in—while sitting there for hours in that big chair almost without moving, staring with open eyes in front of him, as described by the Mother and by the same Nirodbaran? Much of what he had gone through, and hidden from her, the Mother would later suffer in her turn; these experiences of hers are there for all to read in some private conversations held after her withdrawal. For:

The Great who came to save this suffering world  
And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law,  
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain: . . .  
Heaven's riches they bring, their sufferings count the price . . .  
The Son of God born as the Son of man  
Has drunk the bitter cup, owned Godhead's debt . . .  
The Eternal suffers in human form . . . (p. 445)

### Sri Aurobindo and science

**H**aving all the knowledge of the universe at his disposal, according to his own saying, Sri Aurobindo knew what he wanted to know, also about modern science. This is one of the many barely touched-upon subjects concerning Sri Aurobindo and the Mother awaiting to be studied in depth. (One really has the impression that this kind of study has hardly been taken up and that whole dimensions of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother remain to be discovered—which, in a very real sense, is the discovery of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother themselves.) For instance, when writing the *Arya*, i.e., years before the formulation of the theory of quantum mechanics, Sri Aurobindo predicted that the deeper science would penetrate into matter, the more matter would seem to evaporate till none would be left.<sup>17</sup> In *Savitri*, an explanation of the origin and evolution of the cosmos in addition to so much more, we find numerous revealing examples of this kind of knowledge. To quote a few:





A gas belched out from some invisible Fire,  
Of its dense rings were formed these million stars . . . (p. 101)

Sri Aurobindo gives here the spiritual explanation of the origin of the cosmos, in science called the “singularity” named the Big Bang. The invisible—but very real—Fire is none other than Agni.

The following quotation belongs to what Sri Aurobindo once called “the science of the future”:

At first was only an etheric Space:  
Its huge vibrations circled round and round  
Housing some unconceived initiative:  
Upheld by a supreme original Breath  
Expansion and contraction’s mystic act  
Created touch and friction in the void,  
Into abstract emptiness brought clash and clasp:  
Parent of an expanding universe  
In a matrix of disintegrating force,  
By spending it conserved an endless sum.  
On the heart of Space it kindled a viewless Fire  
That, scattering worlds as one might scatter seeds,  
Whirled out the luminous order of the stars.  
An ocean of electric Energy  
Formlessly formed its strange wave-particles  
Constructing by their dance this solid scheme,  
Its mightiness in the atom shut to rest;  
Masses were forged or feigned and visible shapes;  
Light flung the photon’s swift revealing spark  
And showed, in the minuteness of its flash  
Imaged, this cosmos of apparent things.  
Thus has been made this real impossible world,  
An obvious miracle or convincing show. (p. 155)

One of the unsolved problems is the question whether mathematics exists as such somewhere in an ideal, Platonic space or world, or whether it is a product of the human mind. In the following lines Sri Aurobindo provides the answer from his spiritual experience:

The Unseen grew visible to student eyes,  
Explained was the immense Inconscient’s scheme,  
Audacious lines were traced upon the Void;  
The Infinite was reduced to square and cube.  
Arranging symbol and significance,  
Tracing the curve of a transcendent Power,  
They framed the cabbala of the cosmic Law,  
The balancing line discovered of Life’s technique  
And structured her magic and her mystery.  
Imposing schemes of knowledge on the Vast  
They clamped to syllogisms of finite thought  
The free logic of an infinite Consciousness,  
Grammared the hidden rhythms of Nature’s dance,

Critiqued the plot of the drama of the worlds,  
Made figure and number a key to all that is:  
The psycho-analysis of cosmic Self  
Was traced, its secrets hunted down, and read  
The unknown pathology of the Unique. (p. 269)

“They” are the world-creators, here called by Sri Aurobindo “a subtle archangel race,” and called by the Mother in her *Entretiens* “demiurges” or “intermediary creators” who shape and concretize the manifestation on the levels between “the Unique” and the inconscient foundation.

A last example is the role of the “void” in the manifestation of the cosmos. On page 100 of *Savitri* we read:

A Mystery’s process is the universe.  
At first was laid a strange anomalous base,  
A void, a cipher of some secret Whole,  
Where zero held infinity in its sum  
And All and Nothing were a single term,  
An eternal negative, a matrix Nought . . .

The role of the “void” is repeated in several places of the poem, such as:

For long before earth’s solid vest was forged  
By the technique of the atomic Void,  
A lucent envelope of self-disguise  
Was woven round the secret spirit in things. (p. 106)

Out of the Void’s unseeing energies  
Inventing the scene of a concrete universe . . . (p. 121)

When earth was built in the unconscious Void  
And nothing was save a material scene . . . (p. 129)

Understanding these passages may be helped by the reflection that the One, the All, the Unique, the Absolute is absolute Existence which is absolute density. The cosmic manifestation was (and is) therefore only possible by way of creating space for it within the absolute divine density; it is this initial space of creation that Sri Aurobindo calls the “void,” so essential in the creative process that he writes the word with a capital letter. The Absolute in its pure density cannot be approached by an “impure” being (like man): its density would annihilate him.

We find this density reflected in the power—the fire and light—contained in each and every atom. If the means would be found to liberate the entire pure power of one single atom, the whole universe would explode with it. We owe it to the limitation of the scientific process that the atomic power can be liberated only within limits. To a high degree atomic physics has become occultism, as predicted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, though without the scientists realizing it.



(Composite: Vishnu Eschner)



## The reprogramming of earth's foundations

In *Beyond the Human Species: The Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, I have already drawn attention to the fundamental importance of the end of canto 8 in book 2 as to the transformation of matter in our material world which is *now* taking place.

Into the abysmal secrecy he came  
Where darkness peers from her mattress, grey and nude,  
And stood on the last locked subconscious's floor  
Where Being slept unconscious of its thoughts  
And built the world not knowing what it built.  
There waiting its hour the future lay unknown,  
There is the record of the vanished stars.  
There in the slumber of the cosmic Will  
He saw the secret key of Nature's change . . .

He saw in Night the Eternal's shadowy veil,  
Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,  
In destruction felt creation's hasty pace,  
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain  
And hell as a short cut to heaven's gates.  
Then in Illusion's occult factory  
And in the Inconscient's magic printing-house  
Torn were the formats of the primal Night  
And shattered the stereotypes of Ignorance.  
Alive, breathing a deep spiritual breath,  
Nature expunged her stiff mechanical code  
And the articles of the bound soul's contract,  
Falsehood gave back to Truth her tortured shape.  
Annulled were the tables of the law of Pain,  
And in their place grew luminous characters . . .

He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass  
The diamond script of the Imperishable,  
Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things  
A paean-song of the free Infinite  
And the Name, foundation of eternity,  
And traced on the awake exultant cells  
In the ideographs of the Ineffable  
The lyric of the love that waits through Time  
And the mystic volume of the Book of Bliss  
And the message of the superconscient Fire.  
Then life beat pure in the corporeal frame;  
The infernal Gleam died and could slay no more.  
Hell split across its huge abrupt façade  
As if a magic building were undone,  
Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream . . .

Healed were all things that Time's torn heart had made  
And sorrow could live no more in Nature's breast:  
Division ceased to be, for God was there.  
The soul lit the conscient body with its ray,  
Matter and Spirit mingled and were one. (pp. 231–32)

This was *done* by Sri Aurobindo and happened in him. For remember what he wrote to K.D. Sethna: "I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced . . ." It is this that is being worked out *now*.

I wonder, scanning those few illustrations—and the wealth of facts and events in *Savitri* not even touched upon here—if it is possible to interpret all that as experienced, discovered, and effected not by Sri Aurobindo, the avatar, but by a legendary Aswapati. If one reads the first half of *Savitri* without Sri Aurobindo himself in mind (and in the heart), one not only misses its true significance: one also erects a screen between the spiritual vibration conducive to his yoga and one's own receptivity.

All beings existing at present are participating in the ongoing process of terrestrial change, whether they want it or not. Being part of evolution, one cannot escape evolving, especially at a moment like this when the evolutionary process is accelerated to a dizzying pace in which time hardly matters anymore. But those who are turned towards Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and tuned to their presence, can by whetting their understanding sharpen their spiritual sight and adapt their inner eye to the worldwide transformation, unique not only in history but in the existence of our Mother the Earth.<sup>18</sup>

## End notes

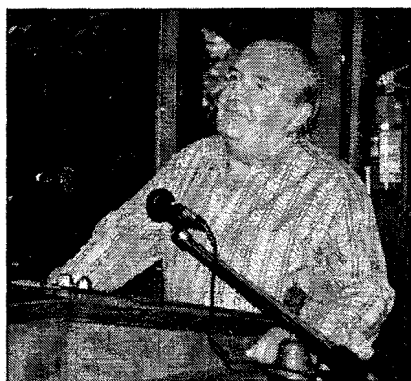
1. In this essay I am using the spelling "Aswapati" throughout for uniformity's sake, even where the quoted authors spell the name differently.
2. M.P. Pandit, *The Book of the Divine Mother*, pp. 17, 40, 42, 46, and 78.
3. A.B. Purani, *Savitri: An Approach and A Study*, pp. 163 and 165.
4. Rohit Mehta, *The Dialogue with Death*, pp. 33 and 34.
5. It is true that Sri Aurobindo mentions the name "Aswapati" a few times in his correspondence with K.D. Sethna, but the letters in which this happens date from the second half of the 1930s—a time when Sri Aurobindo's correspondent had no other means of placing the protagonist of the first books, and a tactful Sri Aurobindo (as we shall see further on) did not want to write otherwise.
6. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 265.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
8. R.Y. Deshpande, *The Ancient Tale of Savitri*, pp. 2 and 3.
9. Mona Sarkar, *Sweet Mother I*, pp. 26 ff.
10. The title "The Yoga of the King" of book 1, cantos 3 and 4, is generally understood to mean "the yoga of King Aswapati." Yet it might be a translation of the term *raja yoga*, and it surely is a (condensed) telling of the first phases of Sri Aurobindo's own integral, royal yoga.





11. Nirodbaran, op. cit., p. 179.
12. Mangesh Nadkarni, *Savitri: A Brief Introduction*, pp. 22–23.
13. Autobiographical, and therefore of immense value too, are the sonnets and shorter poems Sri Aurobindo wrote after his retirement. It is, besides, remarkable that many of these poems contain or prefigure experiences rendered in a broader scope in *Savitri*.
14. Mona Sarkar, op. cit., p. 22.
15. In the same conversation the Mother said: “It was his way of speaking, so full of divine humility and modesty. He never asserted himself.” (p. 23) The books here under consideration contain two striking examples of this delicacy, tact and humility, the hallmarks of the truly great. Book 1 canto 3 (“The Yoga of the King 1”) should start with the lines: “One in front of the immemorial quest / Protagonist of the mysterious play . . .” In order to soften these strongly accented personal lines, Sri Aurobindo has them preceded with “A world’s desire compelled her [Savitri’s] mortal birth”—a verse that puts the whole grandiose narration of his personal accomplishments against the background of the world’s evolution and the role not of his own but of the Mother’s action on it. Another example is the beginning of canto 5 in book 1. Again before starting to relate his experiences, Sri Aurobindo begins this canto with the line: “This knowledge first he had of time-born men.” A very personal statement indeed—but it refers to the previous canto “The Secret Knowledge,” and thus softens its impact. Be it said in passing that this secret knowledge must no doubt be important for all seekers of truth, Aurobindonian or not. Yet, strangely, up to now I have nowhere read a thorough commentary on this canto. Even its importance is rarely referred to.
16. For the argument’s sake we leave out the Mother’s role in all this and the fact that the Kalki avatar proved to be a complete, double-poled avatar—something the ancient Hindu tradition could not foresee.
17. A book published by Paul Davies and John Gribbin in 1991 has the title *The Matter Myth*.
18. This short essay is based on a talk the author held on 10 January 1999 in Savitri Bhavan, Auroville.

Georges Van Vrekhem (shown here speaking at AUM '98) is an author, translator, and Aurovilian who lived for eight years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He is the author of *Beyond the Human Species* and an upcoming book called *The Mother: The Story of Her Life, to be published in India this fall* by Harper-Collins. (Photo by Lynda Lester)



## Source material

### Preparing for the supramental

#### *Mother on levels of humanity*

*This selection is from Mother’s Agenda, vol. 6, 27 November 1965, pp. 305–10 and 311–13. Mother is talking to Satprem, whose questions and comments are in italics.*

**D**id you feel anything special on the darshan day [24 November]? No?

Sri Aurobindo was there from morning to evening.

THERE, you know.

For, oh, for more than an hour, he made me live the concrete and living vision, as it were, of the condition of humanity and the various layers of humanity in relation to the new or supramental creation. And it was marvelously clear and concrete and living.

There was the whole humanity that isn’t quite animal anymore, that has benefited from mental development and created a certain harmony in its life—a vital, artistic, literary harmony—and the vast majority of which live satisfied with life. They have caught a sort of harmony and live in it a life as it exists in a civilized milieu, that is to say, somewhat cultured, with refinement in taste, refinement in habits. And this whole life has a sort of harmony in which they find themselves at ease, and unless something catastrophic happens to them, they live happy and content, satisfied with life. Those may be attracted (because they have taste, they are intellectually developed), they may be attracted to the new forces, the new things, the future life; for instance, they may mentally, intellectually become disciples of Sri Aurobindo. But they don’t at all feel the need to change materially, and if they were to be forced to, it would be first of all premature and unjust, and it would quite simply create a great disorder and would upset their lives quite unnecessarily. It was very clear.

Then there were the few—the rare individuals—who are ready to make the necessary effort to prepare themselves for the transformation and to attract the new forces, try to adapt Matter, seek the means of expression and so forth. Those are ready for Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. They are very few. There are even those who have the sense of sacrifice and are ready to have a hard and difficult life, as long as it leads them or helps them towards this future transformation. But they should not, they should in no way try to influence others and make them share their own effort: that would be quite unjust—not only unjust, but extremely clumsy because it would alter the universal—or at least terrestrial—rhythm and movement, and instead of helping, it would cause conflicts and result in chaos.

But it was so living, so real, that my whole attitude (how can I explain ? . . . A passive attitude, which isn’t the result of an active will), the whole position taken in the work has changed. And this has brought a peace—an absolutely decisive peace and

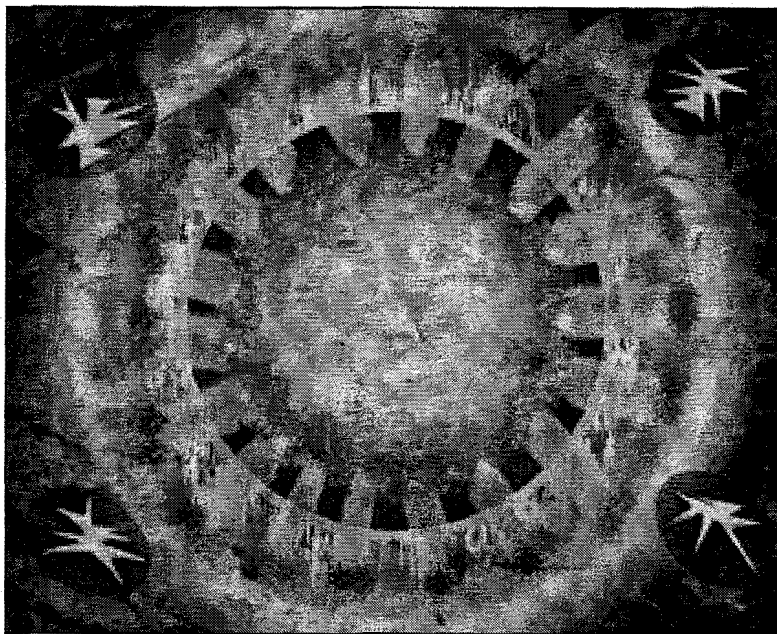


tranquillity and trust. A decisive change. And even, all that in the previous position seemed to be obstinacy, clumsiness, unconsciousness, all sorts of deplorable things, all that has disappeared. It was like a vision of a great universal Rhythm in which each thing takes its own place and . . . everything is just fine. And the effort of transformation limited to a small number becomes something FAR MORE precious and FAR MORE powerful for the realization. It's as if a choice had been made of those who will be the pioneers of the new creation. And all those ideas of "spreading" [the ideal], of "preparing" or churning Matter—childishness. It's human agitation.

The vision had such majestic and calm and smiling beauty, oh! . . . It was full, really full of divine Love. And not a divine Love that "forgives"—that's not at all the point, not at all!—each thing in its own place, realizing its inner rhythm as perfectly as it can. That's all.

That was a very beautiful gift. Of course, all those things are known somewhere, intellectually, vaguely, in their principle—all that is known, but it's quite useless. In everyday practice, you live according to something else, a truer understanding. And there, you seemed to be touching things—you saw them, touched them—in their higher ordinance.

It came after a vision of plants and the spontaneous beauty of plants (which is something so wonderful!), then of the animal with such a harmonious life (when men don't interfere), and all that was quite in its own place. Then true humanity seen as such, that is to say, the summit of what a balanced mind can produce in beauty, in harmony, in charm, in elegance in life, in taste for life—taste to live in beauty—while eliminating, naturally, all that is ugly and low and vulgar. That was a lovely humanity. Humanity at its highest, but lovely. And perfectly satisfied as such, because it lives harmoniously. And it may also be like a promise of what almost the totality of humanity will become under the influence of the new creation: as I saw it, it was what the supramental consciousness can do with humanity.



*Kali. (Digital art by Margaret Phanes)*

There was even a comparison with what humanity has done with animal kind (something extremely mixed, of course, but there have been improvements, betterments, more complete utilizations). Animality under the mental influence has become something else, which naturally has been mixed because the mind is incomplete; similarly there are examples of a harmonious humanity among the well-balanced people, and it appeared to be what humanity could become under the supramental influence. Only, it's very far ahead; we shouldn't expect it to come about immediately—it's very far ahead.

There is clearly, even now, a transitional period, which may last a rather long time and is rather painful. But the sometimes painful effort (often painful) is made up for by a clear vision of the goal to be reached, of the goal that WILL be reached—an assurance, you know, a certitude. But it [the supramental influence] would be something that had the power to eliminate all the errors, all the distortions and ugliness of mental life, and then a very happy humanity, quite satisfied with being human, feeling no need whatsoever to be anything but human, but with a human beauty, a human harmony.

It was very charming, it was as though I were living in it. Contradictions had disappeared. As though I lived in that perfection. And it was almost like the ideal conceived by the supramental consciousness of a humanity that had become as perfect as it can be. It was very good.

And it brings a great sense of rest. Tension, friction, all that disappears—impatience, too. All that had completely disappeared.

*In other words, you're concentrating the work instead of diffusing it everywhere?*

No, it may be materially diffused because the individuals aren't necessarily gathered together. But there aren't many of them.

That idea of an urgent need to "prepare" humanity for the new creation, that impatience has disappeared.

*The realization must first take place in a few.*

Exactly. Take for instance a book like yours (but I've known this from the beginning), a book of that sort [*The Adventure of Consciousness*] will have fulfilled its full purpose if it touches just a dozen people. It doesn't need to sell by the thousands. If it touches a dozen peo-



ple, it will have fulfilled its purpose to the full. That's how it is.

I saw that, I have seen that so concretely. Besides those who are capable of preparing for the supramental transformation and the realization, whose number is necessarily very limited, there should be increasingly developed, in the midst of the ordinary human mass, a higher humanity that had towards the future or promised supramental being the same attitude as animality, for instance, has towards man. What is needed, besides those who work for the transformation and are ready for it, is a higher or intermediate humanity that would have found in itself or in life this harmony with life—this HUMAN harmony—and that would have the same sense of worship, of devotion, of faithful dedication to “something” that seems to it so superior that it doesn't even attempt to realize it, but which it worships and whose influence and protection it feels the need of—and the need to live in that influence and to have the joy of being under that protection. . . . It was so clear. But not that anguish and agony of wanting something that eludes you because—because it isn't yet your destiny to have it, and because the amount of necessary transformation is premature for your existence, and so it creates a disorder and a suffering.

But I clearly see that when the work is done as I am “made” to do it, it becomes that way very spontaneously. For instance, one of the very concrete things, which shows the problem clearly: humanity has the sex impulse quite naturally, spontaneously and, I may say, legitimately. This impulse will naturally and spontaneously disappear along with animality (a lot of other things will disappear, such as for instance the need to eat, perhaps also the need to sleep the way we do), but the most conscious impulse in a higher humanity, and which has remained as a source of . . . bliss is a big word, but of joy, of delight, is certainly the sexual activity, which will have absolutely no more reason to exist in the functions of nature when the need to create in that way no longer exists. Therefore the capacity to

come into contact with the joy in life will go up one rung or will orient itself differently. But what the spiritual aspirants of old had attempted on principle—sexual negation—is an absurd thing, because it must exist only in those who have gone beyond that stage and no longer have any animality in them. And it must fall off naturally, effortlessly, without struggle, just like that. Making it a focus of conflict, struggle and effort is ridiculous. To be sure, my experience with the Ashram has absolutely proved that to me, because I have seen all the stages and that all the ideas and prohibitions are absolutely useless, that it's only when the consciousness stops being human that it falls off quite naturally. There is a transition there that may be somewhat difficult because transitional beings are always in a precarious balance, but inside oneself there is a sort of flame or need thanks to which the transition isn't painful—it's not a painful effort, it's something that can be done with a smile. But to want to impose that on those who aren't ready for that transition is absurd. I have been much reproached for encouraging certain people to marry; there are lots of these children to whom I say, “Get married, get married!” I am told, “What! You encourage them?”—it's common sense.

It's common sense. They are human, but let them not pretend they aren't.

It's only when the impulse spontaneously becomes impossible for you, when you feel it as something painful and contrary to your deeper need, then it becomes easy; at that time, well, outwardly you cut the links, then it's over.

This is one of the most convincing examples. It's the same thing with food—it will be the same thing. And there will probably be a transition in which our food will be less and less purely material. That's what they are after nowadays: all their vitamins and tablets are an instinctive research for a less down-to-earth food, which certainly will serve as a transition.

There are lots of things like that. Since the 24th [the darshan day] I have been living in this new consciousness and

have seen the picture of a lot of things. There are even experiences I had gone through which I've understood now. Like for instance when I fasted for ten days (completely, without even a drop of water), without a thought for food (I didn't have time to eat), and it wasn't a struggle: it was a decision. And at that time there was a faculty in me which developed little by little, and when for example I breathed in flowers, it was nourishing. I saw it: you get nourished in a subtler way.

Only, the body isn't ready. The body isn't ready and it deteriorates, which means that it eats itself up. So that shows that the time hadn't come and it was just an experiment—an experiment which teaches you something, which teaches you that there mustn't be a blunt refusal to come in contact with the corresponding matter, there mustn't be isolation (you can't isolate yourself, that's impossible), but a communion on a higher or deeper level. (*silence*)

\* \* \*

But it was so soothing, so sweet, so marvelous, that vision—each thing expressing its own kind, quite naturally.

And then, the Flame . . . When the Flame lights up, everything becomes different. But this Flame is something totally different; it's totally different from religious feeling, religious aspiration, religious worship (all that is very fine, it's the summit of what man can do and it's very fine, it's excellent for humanity), but this Flame, the Flame of transformation, is something else. Oh, I remember now that Sri Aurobindo reminded me of something I had written in Japan (which is printed in *Prayers and Meditations*), and I had never understood what I had written. I always tried to understand and asked myself, “What the devil did I mean? I have no idea.” It had come like that and I had written it directly. It was about a “child” and it read, “Do not come too near him because you will get burnt.” (I don't remember the words at all.) And I always wondered, “What's this child I am referring to? . . . And why should one take care not to come too near him??” And suddenly,





only yesterday or the day before, I understood; suddenly he showed me, he told me, "It's this: the 'child' is the beginning of the new creation, it is still in its infancy," so don't touch it if you don't want to be burnt—because it burns. (*silence*)

And it's quite clear that with the breadth and totality of the vision something comes which is a compassion that understands—not that pity of the superior for the inferior: the true divine Compassion, which is the total understanding that everyone is what he must be.

There remain only distortions. There was also the explanation of distortions. It was a decisive vision that puts everything in its place. A true revelation.

All those things have been told a thousand times, they have been written I don't know how many times, they have been thought and expressed—all that is very fine, up there. But this is seen on the [material] plane itself, felt, lived, breathed, absorbed; it's something else altogether. It's an understanding that has nothing to do with intellectual understanding.

(*after a long silence*) Sri Aurobindo continues to tell me things. . . . It's truly very interesting.

There is a sort of instinct which wants everything to be in agreement with the experience one has. But that is a tendency to uniformity, the Supreme's uniform oneness, which is the non-manifest Supreme, eternally unchanging, in opposition to the innumerable multiplicity of all the expressions of that Oneness; and instinctively there is always a recoil (*gesture*) towards the Nonmanifest, instead of (*Mother opens her two hands*) an acceptance of the manifestation in its totality. It's very interesting.

And it's the first effect of the return to the Origin.

The first effect of the return to the origin is simplification, identity, the One—the identical One. And then there is the movement of the manifestation (*gesture of expansion*): the multiple Immensity. It's instinctive.

## *The poetry room*

### On the edge

Peering out from black oblivion's cold cave,  
Onto plains of peace and warm tranquility,  
Paths of steep ascent and high endeavor,  
Purple peaks of enchanting bliss and beauty;  
Hesitant, refusing to emerge and cast off  
Old desire, familiar pain and habit,  
Roles and goals now drained of true significance,  
Ties and trappings that entangle and distract;  
Stumbling on indecision's dangerous ledges,  
Tripped and bloodied by the Falsehood's sharp stone,  
Nursed and nurtured by the Spirit's soft rain,  
Slipping back and forth while wasting life's chance;  
Praying for the gift of a single purpose—  
Simple surrender soaring up in God's light. —Larry Seidlitz

### When we first met

He was calm, gazing at me  
From his picture, and I  
Casting glances at him.  
His wisdom in my hands,  
As I read, I was struck,  
Saw it was He, the One  
Whom I had been seeking  
In all my books and dreams.  
He was clear, a mirror  
Revealing myself, my soul;  
Truth, simple and profound,  
One within, One without,  
Smiling at me from the shelf  
With love, from eternity.

—Larry Seidlitz

### Reality

Maya, maya,  
Illusion, veils . . .  
Worlds manifested in minute details.  
Trees that wither,  
Rivers that dry;  
Mountain and man, they crumble, but why?  
Where is reality?  
In what domain?  
Who can explain?  
To find in this universe  
The Eternal Light,  
To overcome evolution's blinded sight,  
To awaken the unconscious to its rightful bliss  
Is to taste with joy  
The Divine's kiss.

—Rose Kupperman

### Mountain maya

Everything that appears  
melts away like a dream,  
a phantasm, or a cloud  
  
Even your massive stillness  
and silent depths of stone  
dissolve in the wind  
  
And the emptiness of time  
like a rivulet of snow  
melting into eternity  
  
Or a moment of silence  
in the sunset's  
golden flow

—Rod Hemsell



## Gnostic knots

### A short guide to comparative religions

Taoism: Stuff happens.  
 Confucianism: Confucius say, "Stuff happens."  
 Calvinism: Stuff happens because you don't work hard enough.  
 Buddhism: If stuff happens, it really isn't stuff.  
 Seventh Day Adventist: No stuff on Saturdays.  
 Zen: What is the sound of stuff happening?  
 Hedonism: There's nothing like a good stuff happening!  
 Hinduism: This stuff happened before.  
 Mormon: This stuff is going to happen again.  
 Islam: If stuff happens, it is the will of Allah.  
 Moonies: Only happy stuff really happens.  
 Stoicism: This stuff is good for me.  
 Catholicism: Stuff happens because you are BAAAAD.  
 Hare Krishna: Stuff happens rama rama.  
 Judaism: Why does this stuff always happen to US?  
 Zoroastrianism: Stuff happens half the time.  
 Christian Science: Stuff is in your mind.  
 Atheism: Stuff it!  
 Existentialism: What is stuff anyway?  
 Rastafarianism: Let's smoke this stuff.

—Submitted by Marta Belén



Transitional being sighted in Brazil! (Photo by Leona Dunlap)

### You know you are Indian when/if:

- There is a sale on any item, you buy 100 of them.
- You drink tea in a saucepan.
- You call an older person you've never met before "uncle."
- You make telephone calls only after 6 p.m.
- You eat onions with everything.
- You say you hate Indian films (/songs) but secretly watch (/hear) them with your parents.
- You order Indian food in your own language to impress the people you're with, but the waiters don't understand you.
- You're walking out of customs with your trolley at the airport and see all twenty-five members of your family who have come to pick you up.
- (If you are male): Your mother does everything for you.
- (If you are female): Your parents would freak out if you wore a crop-top baring your midriff—but wearing a sari with all your "spare tires" exposed is perfectly acceptable.
- You are always taking off and putting on your shoes when you visit your family friends.
- For your American friends, oil is used purely for cooking and not as a grooming aid.
- You have annoying nicknames like Guddu, Papoo, Pinky, Guddia, Tinku.
- If you aren't married and you turn twenty-five, your parents start wringing their hands and proclaim that it's too late.

—Submitted by Julian Lines

**Pope Goestheveez!** was the shortest reigning pope in the history of the Church, reigning for two hours and six minutes on 1 April 1866. The white smoke had hardly faded into the blue of the Vatican skies before it dawned on the assembled multitudes in St. Peter's Square that his name had hilarious possibilities.

The crowds fell about, helpless with laughter, singing:

Half a pound of tuppenny rice  
 Half a pound of treacle  
 That's the way the chimney smokes  
 Pope Goestheveez!

The square was finally cleared by armed carabinieri with tears of laughter streaming down their faces.

The event set a record for hilarious civic functions, smashing the previous record set when Baron Hans Neizant Bompzidaize was elected Landburgher of Koln in 1653.—*From The Armchair Anarchist's Almanac by Mike Harding; submitted by Chandresh Patel*



## Apropos

Rain—violent torrents of it, rain like fetid water from a God-sized pot of pasta strained through a sky-wide colander, rain as Noah knew it, flaying the shuddering trees, whipping the whitecapped waters, violating the sodden firmament, purging purity and filth alike from the land, rain without mercy, without surcease, incontinent rain, turning to intermittent showers overnight with partial clearing Tuesday.—*David Hirsch*

The kingdom of God will transform the entire planet. All alive will be able to enjoy life to the full, developing their natural abilities by engaging in satisfying work and wholesome recreation. Conditions worldwide will be such that no one will ever even think of kidnapping his neighbor.—*From Awake, a Jehovah's Witness magazine*

There is an almost sensual longing for communion with others who have a larger vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendships between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality almost impossible to describe.—*Teilhard de Chardin*

Very happy to see and read about Mother. I kindly request you to create an e-mail ID for Mother, so that we can send messages to the Mother directly. Kindly let me know if already exists.—*Guest-book entry on the Integral Yoga Web site*

Look, miracles—you think all the miracles were in the Biblical days? Do you know what we're doing now with people? Why do you think there are more people who are reaching a hundred years old than ever before in our history? We're getting these old people out of their rocking chairs, out of bed, eating right, exercising and believing in something. Even if you are ninety-five years old, you can double your strength and double your endurance in six to eight weeks—at ninety-five! This is actually the truth! Now if I

can double your strength and double your endurance, wouldn't that be a miracle to you? If you are a big fat person and you lose eight or fifteen or twenty inches off your waist and you get more energy than you've had since you were a kid—that's a miracle. But the point is, we make our miracles happen.—*Jack LaLanne, eighty-four-year-old physical fitness guru*

Clue for nine-letter word in the 1 July 1999 New York Times crossword puzzle: "Indian poet"

Answer: "Aurobindo"

It might look like I'm doing nothing, but at the cellular level I'm really quite busy.—*From the Internet*

Sha da da da  
Sha da da da da  
Sha da da da  
Sha da da da da . . .  
Yip yip yip yip  
Yip yip yip yip  
Mum mum mum mum  
Mum mum  
Get a job!

—*Karma yoga advice from the Silhouettes, 1958*

The monkeys of Varanasi [Benares] are huge brutes and are sometimes surly. They now took it into their heads not to allow me to pass through their street, so they howled and shrieked and clutched at my feet as I passed. As they pressed closer, I began to run, but the faster I ran, the faster came the monkeys and they began to bite at me. It seemed impossible to escape, but just then I met a stranger who called out to me, "Face the brutes." I turned and faced the monkeys, and they fell back and finally fled.

That is a lesson for all life—face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys, the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them. If we are ever to gain freedom, it must be by conquering nature, never by running away. Cowards never win victories. We have to fight fear and troubles and ignorance if we expect them to flee before us.—*Vivekananda*

Those who survived the San Francisco earthquake said, "Thank God, I'm still alive." But of course, those who died, their lives will never be the same again.—*Senator Barbara Boxer*

With no signs of slowing, the yoga rage is sweeping across America!—*National Enquirer, April 2000*

Two caterpillars were watching a butterfly, when one said to the other, "They'll never get me up in one of those hang gliders."—*Neil McKay*

You can spend a good many hours in front of the TV and no one will think anything is amiss. You can spend a lot of time walking shopping malls and people will think that everything is just fine . . . But if you decide to go for the grand prize, the crown jewel of life, people will become deeply disturbed. If you persist, they may become irate and do what they can to block you . . . To be accepted by the ordinary, you must base your life on and want ordinary things. When you seek the extraordinary, you must be prepared to walk alone, for few will be willing to join you.—*Kat Bakhu, Attunement*

WASHINGTON, DC—Returning from a two-week retreat at the top of Nanda Devi in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh with mentor Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Fed Chair Alan Greenspan announced Monday that all currency flows organically from India's rupee. "Just as water, which ordinarily flows downhill, will leap up to cover a rock, so do the currencies of the seven major industrialized nations adapt their direction and flow to the rupee, the one constant in an ever-changing economy," said Greenspan, clad in a traditional Indian sherwani and sandals. "The meta-fiscal ramifications are simultaneously overwhelming and calming."—*From The Onion, a humor newspaper*

New words are needed to express new ideas, new forms are necessary to manifest new forces.—*The Mother*