

Collaboration

Fall 2004/Spring 2005

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 29, no. 2



The Banyan Tree: the center of Auroville, at the Matrimandir

**Current affairs • AV almanac • talks by Debashish Bannerji, Aster Patel, Ron Jorgensen
Reviews of books authored by Alan Lithman, Shyam Kumari, Rod Hemsell
The Mother on the manifestation of the supramental
Sri Aurobindo on the spiritual society**



About the cover

(Photo by Manoj Pavitrana) *The Banyan*, the geographical centre of Auroville, is a beloved and dignified growing presence. For a perspective of its size, see the man standing under the tree to the left of center.

The authors and poets

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Table of contents

Collaboration, vol. 29, no. 2, Fall 2004/Spring 2005

From the office of *Collaboration*..... 3

Current affairs

Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center	Julian Lines	4
Twins Reunited!	Bhavana Dee	4
The University of Tomorrow	Larry Seidlitz	5
Passings		
John Starr	Hadassah Haskale	5

AV almanac

Advances and setbacks on the Matrimandir	Gilles Guigan	6
--	---------------	---

Chronicles

Impressions of growing up in Mother's care	Aster Patel	6
The ashram of the world	Ronald Jorgensen	11

Essay

Living laboratories of the life divine	Debashish Bannerji	17
--	--------------------	----

Source material

Sri Aurobindo on the spiritual society.	24
The Mother on the manifestation of the supramental.....	25

Book reviews

<i>An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium</i>	Bhavana Dee	27
<i>Musings on the Mother's Prayers and Meditations</i>	Larry Seidlitz	28
<i>Essays for the New Millennium</i>	Bhavana Dee	30

The poetry room

Bride of the Fire	Sri Aurobindo	32
At Her feet	Shyam Kumari	32
The depth of me is the depth of you	Abram Saphire	33
Moonlit contemplation	Noel Parent	33
Nisus	Joseph Kent	34
In the dark evening.....	Larry Seidlitz	34
What is sought	Abram Saphire	35
A tryst	Shyam Kumari	35

Apropos..... 36



From the office of Collaboration

This issue marks a transition in *Collaboration's* history in that it has been for the first time edited and printed in Pondicherry, India. Larry Seidlitz, who helped edit two previous issues, recently moved there and has now assumed the role of managing editor. He receives welcome assistance from the Sri Aurobindo Association board.

Lynda Lester, who devoted her time and remarkable talents to keeping *Collaboration* a first-rate journal for the last nine years, has decided to relinquish her editorship, having earned herself some time to pursue other interests. We would like to express our appreciation to Lynda, and we believe we can speak for our readership as well, for her truly excellent work and dedicated service. She has been a wonderful colleague and mentor to Larry in his previous editorial work for the journal, and he feels it will be a challenge to maintain the high standard she has set.

After some recent irregularity in our publication schedule, we hope to get *Collaboration* back on a three issue per year format, with next year's issues planned for April, August, and December. Despite the long gap between issues lately, subscribers should continue to receive three issues for their subscription. We apologize to our readers for the irregularity in publication, and for any confusion this may have caused regarding their subscriptions.

In this issue, we are featuring three of the outstanding presentations from AUM 2003. Each is unique, and as a group they speak to the multifaceted nature of the Integral Yoga, and especially of its collective aspects. In the first, by Aster Patel, we are given a special and fascinating glimpse into collective yoga as practiced in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at the time when Sri Aurobindo and Mother were still in their bodies from the unique perspective of a child growing up in that atmosphere. Here we are shown the potent and radiant love of the Mother as a mother, the august splendor of Sri Aurobindo,

The artists and photographers

Hélène Gagnon (heleneg7@hotmail.com) is an artist from Montreal, Canada. She presently is on an extended visit to Pondicherry.

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<http://www.bigfoto.com> and <http://sxc.hu> provided stock photography used in this issue.

Collaboration (ISSN 0164-1522) is published by the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA), a California nonprofit religious corporation, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA; e-mail: saa@collaboration.org; phone: 209-339-3710, ext. 6; fax: 209-339-3715.

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Staff for this issue: Larry Seidlitz, editor and layout; Vishnu Eschner, Navaja Llope, proofreaders.

Subscriptions: A one-year subscription (three issues) to *Collaboration* is \$20 (\$32 for airmail outside the USA). A patron subscription is \$40 or more for three issues.

Submissions: *Collaboration* welcomes writing, photos, and artwork relevant to the Integral Yoga and spirituality. Submit material by email to: editor@collaboration.org; by fax at 209-339-3715; or by post to *Collaboration*, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA. *Collaboration* cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Letters to the editor may be published unless you indicate otherwise. Letters and articles may be edited for style and space considerations.

About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: Theresa Boschert, coordinator; Vishnubhai Eschner, secretary; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; David Hutchinson, Lynda Lester, Bhuvana Nandakumar, Chandresh Patel, board members.

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



the intense concentration and devotion of the first disciples. We are led into that magic world of the Divine incarnate, the source of that peace and ecstasy that still vibrates throughout the ashram and its walls and courtyards and gardens, within its residents and visitors, and within the wider collective, uniting us all in its universal love and captivating delight.

In the featured presentation by Ron Jorganson, we are shown how to look at the world and the challenges it presents us as an ashram. Ron is not concerned here with how to carve out a quiet little place where one can focus on sadhana and the divine and not be distracted by all the chaos and misery. Ron shows us how we can utilize the problems of the world and turn them to our advantage as a help in sadhana. He specifically discusses some major world problems such as addiction, ecological crises, macroeconomic problems, epidemics, terrorism, stress, and hopelessness about the future, and shows how their enormity and intractability are in effect forcing us to go beyond the mind and to search for solutions spiritual and supramental, solutions that are to be found in the body and not in the mind.

The last, by Debashish Bannerji, is the most philosophical in tone and substance. He begins by introducing Nietzsche's concept of the superman, showing its similarities and differences with that of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's. From this comparison, he expands on the agency of change in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, on the force of the Divine Mother, the *Para Prakriti*. In elaborating on the nature of the change being effected, on the emergence of the superman, he discusses the concept of the world-yoga, the transformation occurring in the earth-nature as a whole under the influence of the supramental Mother's Force.

In addition to our featured articles, you will find current affairs, the Auroville almanac, source material from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the spiritual society, reviews of three wonderful books on the yoga, plenty of poetry, apropos quotes, and many photos.



Hibiscus: Power. (photo by Nilauro Markus)

Current affairs

Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center

by Julian Lines

Ten years ago, the Foundation for World Education (FWE) created a retirement fund for Matagiri founders Sam and Eric and took over responsibility of the land, approximately 40 acres outside of Woodstock, New York.

In an act of unprecedented generosity, the FWE has donated the land to the nonprofit organization, Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, Inc. The current trustees are Julian and Wendy Lines, Karen Ecke, Aditya Ahluwalia, Danielle Hagen and Timothy Jacob. Advisors to Matagiri include Narad, Bhuvana Nandakumar and Bernie and Betty Roseman.

Sam and Eric are the only full time residents, though Julian and Wendy live nearby where Wendy teaches hatha yoga. Both of them work at their shop, Pondicherry in Woodstock, which carries books and Auroville handicrafts.

Matagiri observes the Darshan days and hosts numerous speakers. A "family gathering" of Aurovilians has been proposed for the Fall. Future plans include a new landscaped entrance and raising funds for more living facilities. A proposed memorial orchard would serve as a place for the ashes of devotees living in North America. Information and events are listed at the Matagiri website: www.matagiri.org.

Twins Reunited!

by Bhavana Dee

Born in 1968, two children of Mother and Sri Aurobindo who have grown up on opposite sides of planet, have met and will be getting together. Auroville and the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) were both founded in 1968, based on the integral vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mother—Auroville near Pondicherry in India, and CIIS in San Francisco in the USA.

Collaboration between the two organizations has always been floating around in the air, but it took the visit to Auroville of CIIS President Joe Subbiondo in December 2003, and his enthusiastic reception by Aurovilians, to bring it to the ground. Struck by the presence of "the spirit of CIIS" even on the other side of the world, President Subbiondo said, "The two share the same founding mission and integral philosophy, and as a result both communities have similar values and aspirations. In Auroville you can't help but be keenly aware that the Institute is part of a much larger international vision."

He and the Aurovilians lost no time—at spontaneous meetings called by some of the Center for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) team during his short visit, preliminary plans were worked out. Ideas for CIIS and Auroville to combine their strengths: CIIS's academic organization and inquiry into the vision and Auroville's living experience and example. Meeting with enthusiastic response among the CIIS staff and professors, the idea has already taken shape in the form of three CIIS trips to Auroville.

1. Alumni and Friends Travel Tour, 19–25 January, will be an opportunity for up to 20 CIIS alumni and friends to "return to the source"—a week in Pondicherry and Auroville, and a week visiting the ancient temples of South India. [Anyone interested in joining this tour, contact Richard Buggs, rbuggs@ciis.edu.]

2. Auroville: Spirituality, Community and Multiculturalism in South India, 5–19 January, taught by Jorge Ferrer and Mariana Caplan, professors in the School of Consciousness and Transformation.



[for CIIS students only]

3. Indian Psychology: An Experiential Course on India's Contribution to Psychology, 2-14 January, taught by Brant Cortright, a professor in the School of Professional Psychology. [for CIIS students only]

To make the network even more rich, the collaboration includes CIIS also working together with Ananda Reddy's Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR) in Pondicherry to offer on-line in-depth courses in Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision.

On both sides of the planet, there is a rare enthusiasm and delight about this reunion. People see beyond the possibilities of improving and expanding their own programmes, and sense its potential to be a direct action for the supramental manifestation which is at the base of our life work.

The University of Tomorrow by Larry Seidnitz

On 24 June 2004, Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow, an online university specializing in the thought and vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, opened its virtual doors to the world. A project of the Pondicherry-based Sri Aurobindo Center for Advanced Research directed by Ananda Reddy, the University offers several programmes of study at various levels of difficulty. The one-semester Orientation Programme is designed for 15 hours of study per week, and provides a solid overview of the various areas of Sri Aurobindo's teachings. The Science of Living Programme can be taken full-time (about 30 hours of study per week) for one semester or half-time for two semesters, and consists of four courses selected from a range of options that concentrate on various practical aspects of sadhana and spiritual living. The master's equivalent Academic Programme in Sri Aurobindo's Thought requires two years of full time study or four years of half-time study, and is offered in nine different concentrations. The Ph.D. equivalent Advanced Research Programme in Sri Aurobindo is a three and one-half year full-time research programme

culminating in a Ph.D. level thesis.

The University follows an integral educational approach based on the free progress system, which is guided by the learner's interests and approach to the subjects, and is designed to facilitate the development of the various facets of the being, not only the intellect. The University is seeking the authority to grant master's and doctoral degrees in the future, and is working to offer its courses through collaborations with other educational institutions. It has garnered the support of a number of facilitators (its preferred name for professors) from India and abroad, and has enrolled a number of learners (i.e., students) for its first semester which began August 15. The University website—www.the-university-of-tomorrow.net—also provides downloadable talks by Ananda Reddy on Sri Aurobindo's works, a substantial overview of the teachings, and a wealth of information about the philosophy, methods, policies, and facilities of the virtual University.

Passings

John Starr

7 January 1945 – 9 April 2004

by Hadassah Haskale

John, his wife, Kathy, and I would meet on Saturdays once a month to open *Savitri* at random, each in turn. We would then meditate together for twenty minutes, after which each of us would create something—Kathy would draw in deep concentration; John, the analytic mind among us, would write, in a page or two, messages he gleaned from the passages set side by side; and I would follow the muse where it led. Before parting, we would share and discuss. This process, which occurred over the course of two years beginning near the end of 2001, created a special bond among us. I would often feel the atmosphere of Pondicherry lingering even after these two had gone home, though neither he nor she had ever physically been to the Ashram.

That is how I came to know John Starr in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Our first meeting had been several years previous, when

just before another extended stay in 'The Land of Enchantment,' I was put in touch with him via email. A conference was soon to take place in Crestone and he possibly could provide a ride. Due to a fluke, that did not pan out, but I did meet John, a lean, youthful-looking man with a spiritual aura and big brown eyes.

I find myself resisting placing John "in the past." The imprint of his presence remains strongly in me: John, who wanted the "*Savitri* meditation circle" to continue and grow; John, who when he was pencil-thin after an operation or by the radiation that followed it, I forget which, insisted on giving me a ride to the train station out of town; John's kind, gentle presence. I am still struck by the depth of gratitude and love that seemed to pervade his being in those last months of his life, even though the last six months of our acquaintance was via email following my return to my Jerusalem home. In a sense, he bequeathed his gratitude to me in those printed messages. Actually, it was so much easier for him to write than to speak, for it was his throat that was first attacked by cancer. He met this opponent with a spiritual growth that in the end triumphed greatly, as was witnessed by others who were close to him as well as by myself.

I would like to share an excerpt from the last message I received from John



John Starr. (Photo courtesy Kathy Starr)



before his passing on Good Friday.

This weekend a very auspicious thing has happened in the way of a healer coming to Santa Fe . . . I am fortunate indeed, both to have the opportunities and the support of someone like Kathy. She has been an example to everyone and I feel I know what true love is now. I hope all works out for you in your life and that you can feel as grateful as do I.

Love and Light,
John

How better to honor John Starr's memory than to form *Savitri* meditation circles the world and to practice gratitude?

AV almanac

Advances and setbacks on the Matrimandir

by Gilles Guigan

Management. Four new Matrimandir executives were appointed in October 2003. Since then, all important decisions are taken collectively by consensus at a weekly meeting attended by the Matrimandir coordinators, at least 15 of whom regularly participate together with several long time associates. Small and obvious matters are decided upon at daily morning meetings of the coordinators. Matrimandir executives meet weekly with the Secretary of the AV Foundation to apprise him of the progress of the work. Roger Anger's role as architect of Matrimandir is fully accepted by all and there is a real harmony, discipline and goodwill.

Financial position. The minimum target for donations in 2005 is four and a half crores Rupees [approximately \$1,000,000]. Monthly expenditure has already risen beyond Rupees 20 lakhs/month [approximately \$44,500/month], a significant

achievement; but with increase in the speed of work, expenditure is already running well ahead of income. If regular donors maintain their present level of commitment, they will provide about half of the amount required. Matrimandir well-wishers need now to join hands to find the other half.

Goodwill between the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Matrimandir. For the first time ever the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust donated Rupees 11 lakhs [approximately \$24,500] to Matrimandir. The Matrimandir team gave to the Ashram 2,400 golden tiles with a marble support from Matrimandir. These have been distributed to every Ashramite, student and teacher as a memento from Matrimandir. The Matrimandir team gave also to the Ashram the very first golden disk that was made with gold/glass tiles. This prototype is now displayed at the Ashram Dining Room.

Access Group and Access Policy. An Access Group of concerned Aurovillians assembled spontaneously to receive the visitors and to deal with all questions pertaining to access to Matrimandir. Several months back, it was decided to focus on the completion of Matrimandir rather than on receiving hordes of visitors, while also making it easier for all sincere devotees to concentrate in the Chamber.

Tentative time schedule for completion of the Matrimandir and surrounding area. Matrimandir's foundation stone was laid on 21 February 1971; the completion phase for all structures has now started. A tentative target for completion of work on the Matrimandir is 2006, but experience has repeatedly shown how futile it can be to state any completion date, even for specific areas of work.

Major setback. The Matrimandir team is still trying to assess the full implications of a major setback. A little more than a year ago it was realised that the waterproofing skin was not sticking anymore to the masonry of the sphere. The German manufacturer of the waterproofing material was called and gave its verdict: the primer which they had told us to apply on the masonry had decomposed because it was inappropriate to this particular use. They

acknowledged their mistake and agreed that their 15-year guarantee would apply. At first, it was thought that this waterproofing work was required only in the lower hemisphere, but a more serious inspection September 2004 revealed that it needed to be entirely redone in the upper hemisphere as well. The problem is still more serious: the scaffolding will need to be re-erected right up to the top, all the golden disks removed, the faulty waterproofing material removed, the sphere sandblasted, and only then can fresh coats of waterproofing material be reapplied, all the disks reinstalled, and the scaffolding finally removed. An enormous work, but it was still expected that the *inside* of Matrimandir could be completed towards the end of 2005. But in October 2004 it was realised that the inner skin should be installed only after completing the water proofing work above it. The scaffolding has already been strengthened, and disk teams are assessing how long it will take to complete the work described above.

Chronicles

Impressions of growing up in Mother's care

by Aster Patel

This chronicle was given originally as a talk at the Sri Aurobindo Study Group in Santa Clara, California. Similar talks were given at AUM 2003 in Los Angeles and the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco.

May I first say it gives me an immense joy to be with you, an immense joy. The joy is in a sense redoubled because I didn't know you all were here. To see all of you here gives me great joy, because many of you



Aster Patel presenting at AUM 2003. (Photo by Nilauru Markus)

have studied at the Ashram and grown up there, others will be going there very shortly, and others are connected in different ways. It is something of a grace, it is like a gift.

I will try to share my impressions as a child and as a growing person as we came to the Ashram. I won't try to present these as an adult looking at a time of experience or growth, because the adult adds his own interpretations. So I will present them simply. What was it like for a child to arrive there at that time? What kind of an atmosphere was there? How did Mother deal with us? It will be best if I can in some way create an atmosphere, or somehow if Mother can make us feel what it was like to be with her at that time.

Well, very briefly, my father was on a quest. He was a philosopher but he was looking for a Master who could show the path to spiritual realization. He was not content to talk about God, as he said—he wanted to know him. So he traveled around the country looking for him. He and Tara-di's father, Surendra Nath Jauhar, were very good friends and together, they made their first visit to Pondicherry towards the end of 1938. My father knew that here was the Master that he was looking for. He came with my mother and the moment she met the Mother, she felt that here was an old contact, and she had to come

and live here. Later, as many of you know, she was part of a small group of ladies around the Mother, who were known as the Mother's group, and who accompanied her whenever she left the Ashram, and wherever she went. My younger brother and I were small children, and our parents used take us to the Ashram for long visits.

During one of the visits of my parents, in February 1943, the Mother said to my mother, "You come here by April Darshan with the children, wind up your affairs in Delhi." She said that Indra Sen, my father, could continue at the University of Delhi for some time more. And my father on hearing all this asked, "What do you want to do?" My mother said, "Since Mother has said this I must do it." He said, "I will help you." It wasn't easy! The move was planned, but it was difficult to come out of a large family and at a time when both my father and mother were very involved in their intellectual work—my mother as much in her own right as my father in his, which offered a certain kind of fulfillment, but it was not what they were looking for.

So one fine day, in April, she took the longest train ride in the country at that time, from Delhi to Madras. You know, in those days the south seemed a long way away from the north, not like it is now in India when you travel very easily and you don't feel the difference! It was truly another part of the country, with not much of a contact as it is now.

So she arrived there with two little children! Mother sent somebody to receive us at the station. His name was Vishnubhai. He was a constant companion of Purani-ji, A. B. Purani. He looked after him, stayed in the same rooms. So Mother had

sent him. The Mother was very happy that my mother had taken the step, sold her house in Delhi, wound up things, wound up her work. She had a lot of work in the fields of education and culture. So with two little children she arrived there.

I am telling you some of these things to give you a feel of what that time was like. It is not to talk about things personal, though one has to make a reference—but how things happened, why people came, what prompted them, and how they came. And how Mother would take charge of their lives, and what was the path on which she put them—how she took the *beings* in her charge, soul and body.

She said to my mother, "I have two houses I've chosen for you. Which one do you like for the children?" One was very close to the Ashram with a courtyard. My mother said, "This is good, the children can play there, it has an open courtyard." In fact, because there was a courtyard, other children who came to the Ashram also used to play there until the playground activities were started.

There were about 300 very serious disciples! It was a very serious atmosphere, highly concentrated. There was the Presence of Sri Aurobindo, which even as children—we were just six, seven, eight—we could feel the Presence in the Ashram. We didn't see him except for the four days of the Darshans, but the Presence was felt by us. We couldn't talk about it, describe it, but we were aware of that Presence. There was the Mother, and these 300 people who had their whole consciousness and being concentrated on one point—to follow the path of yoga—and though the supramental descent hadn't taken place, to reach to the supermind and make it descend as an operative power in the earth consciousness in an evolutionary sense. The Ashram was the seed in that sense, and is more than a traditional ashram around a guru.

In this context—the evolutionary dimension of these Avatars—there was something very important, and everybody was aware of it, and that was the one-pointed concentration. And the disciples were very outstanding beings. You must



The Mother leading the children. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

remember: Nolina-da, Amrita-ji, Pavitra-da, Purani-ji, Dyuman, Rishabchand-ji, Nirod-da, Dilip Kumar Roy, and a host of others were there. Even before they had come and joined Sri Aurobindo in his work, they were personalities of great work and accomplishment. The total concentration of the group was like a very *solid* atmosphere for the children. You felt it. There was no dispersal. And yet, I must say, we did not find it heavy, not at all. I can't explain it, but as I look back, it wasn't heavy, we were completely at ease in it. I think the other children came immediately afterwards, there were no other children at that time.

For a while one heard the senior people say, "Oh, but what do we do with two or three children in our midst? Our life is organized, oriented differently. What are children going to do in this place?" But the moment the children came, the Mother turned her full attention on them. Not that she took it away from the senior disciples, but she made them central to her attention. She gave all the time that was needed to organize their life. You had the feeling that the moment you came in and joined the Ashram and were accepted by her, she took you soul and mind and body. Then it is her work of molding you, creating you. And that consciousness is active. In fact, I would say—in some ways, it spread and reaches much wider even today, if you

connect with it. That is a part to remember that I would particularly like to share with you, who live away from Pondicherry in the physical sense, and especially after 1973, which for us was a very great moment of transition. But things had to be discovered after that.

These great beings, the disciples, lived in almost every room of what we know as the main Ashram building. There was no room in which there was not one great presence. I used to be fascinated by it because each one had a different kind of presence. You were conscious of it as a child. You couldn't voice it, but it didn't feel the same, let's put it that way—Purani-ji, Nolini-da, Amrita-ji Pavitra-da. You know, I still remember our round of all these rooms in the Ashram. To me, when I walk into the Ashram even today these presences are still living. Even those with whom we did not have a direct contact, you had the feeling that these great beings were as though pouring their beings into us as empty jars. The feeling of their being poured into us. For me it was very strong. In fact, just two months back, I spoke to Nirod-da about it. I said, "You know Nirod-da, this is what you people used to do us as children!" And he said very quietly, "That was Mother's work," meaning it was their work for the Mother to give this to us as children. They would be sitting in meditation in the courtyard, with their total concentration. There were no external activities at the Ashram at that time. So they walked around, going to the Mother, or whatever other form of communication there was. It was not heavy on the children. We were very happy, very joyous.

Then Mother started to orga-

nize some things for the children. There was no school such as the one in which you have studied and from which you have passed out; it didn't exist. This was early 1943. The Mother said, "I must do something for the children." There was a disciple, Sisirkumar Mitra, who was a historian from Shantiniketan and who had worked with Tagore. Mother said, "You'll spend the mornings with him in his rooms." So my brother and I spent the mornings with him. I can't remember what he actually taught us except that we were supposed to learn English from him. But quite frankly, his way of teaching English was through the medium of Bengali, which he loved. It was through Rabindra Sangeet that we learned English actually, almost in spite of this. But he took us out on the terrace and sat with us on a stone bench under a Champak tree, and what he gave us was love, his own devotion, and his care. It is not the subject that you learn at that age, but the communication from within.

Another experience that we had was that my parents used to go to Purani-ji each evening. They would sit there, ask questions, and hear from him about yoga because he was a senior person. Of course, we went wherever our parents went, there was nothing else to do. We would go there and we would play around on the floor. But we still remember playing



Aster teaching a class in the Ashram in the early 1950s. (Photo courtesy Aster Patel)

around the feet of Purani-ji, and Vishnu-ji making tea for us, and Purani-ji now and again speaking to us. But the feel of that personality, it is that which counts, the consciousness of the being. It is still strong with us, though we don't remember what we might have heard. But the person is strong with us.

Dilip Kumar Roy also was there at that time. You must have heard of him—not just the great musician, but the great bhakta. His love and devotion for Sri Aurobindo was Krishna-bhakti, and it was something that flowed out from him, whether he was walking around or even more so in his music. Once a week, he had a musical evening in his apartment to which he invited a small number of people, about 15 people of the Ashram. My parents were invited, so we went along. We sat close to him, and the ecstasy of that outpouring of his music, even as a child we registered that vibration. After a while we would lie down on the floor and go to sleep, and our parents would pick us up and take us home.

Nishta, the daughter of President Woodrow Wilson, was also at the Ashram. She offered to give us some practice in conversational English. That was the main language of communication in the Ashram, since people came from different parts of the country and elsewhere. So one afternoon a week, we were with her in her apartment. She told us stories from American history—of the early pioneering days, how America was built, what was the spirit, the initiative, the enterprise, the generosity. She was a beautifully serene presence, tremendously concentrated . . . I never met people with that kind of absolute concentration. Nothing in their personality moved in any direction except one. She was very serene, and absolutely directed to the goal. So we used to sit with her for a couple of hours and frolic around. If she had something to do in the apartment, she would get up and walk around. You know where you have the "Sri Smriti" at the moment? That was her apartment at the time. The central room is where she used to receive us.

We had no books, or anything else. We saw Mother three times, four times a

day. She looked at you, she was with you. It was like she had our entire being in her consciousness—not just the inner being, the soul, but the entire external personality, which was so young at the time. It needed to be shaped, to be given a form. It was like she was molding us in the external, and helping the inner to arrive at an expression and contact with the outer. A little later, just two or three years later, every time we went to her she had two things she would say to us, and she would say them repeatedly, every two months, more or less. She wouldn't explain it, she just uttered those words. She said, "Find your psychic being." I had no idea what a



*The Mother giving blessings to a child.
(Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)*

psychic being was! It was like a penetration of the consciousness through those words, because she just uttered those words and left it at that. "Find your psychic being." But in saying this to us, it must have been an action of her consciousness in our being, to give us a touch of it or to bring it forward. And the second thing she would say was, "Be conscious." Imagine you start that at the age of twelve, and every two months she would say, "Be conscious," conscious of all your movements within.

A few more children came. Suddenly it was like a mushroom crop! Within a few

months, by twos and threes they would come. Since my mother was in the field of education, the girls were sent to her by Mother. They came home to study with her, and this went on for a few months.

Then one fine day Mother says, "Oh, now I have a few children so I will start a school." This was 2 December 1943. In fact, this year is very special, it is the sixtieth anniversary. I know there will be a lot of celebrations at the Ashram. There were about twelve children, three teachers, one classroom, and no books. That meant nothing. We were very joyous to have classes together and form ourselves in a group.

So she started to organize our classes. There was Sisir-da, my mother, and another disciple whom you wouldn't have known—a very difficult person. But he had some experience of teaching and there he was. The Mother organized our subjects, our classes, and what we were to do. My mother asked her a question. She said, "Mother, it is your school, so this cannot be like teaching outside. How are we supposed to teach? What do you want us to do? I have done teaching outside, but surely this is not what you expect us to do here."

Mother said, "No, I'll tell you." So she guided the teachers, and the students, but more the teachers in the beginning. Almost each day they wrote a report of the work they had done and sent it to her. She wrote back answers, and they used to meet her two or three times a day in any case. And she talked to us, asked us what we had done. It was not so much the subject that we studied that she was interested in, but how did the teacher handle the student. She used to say to the teachers, "If you are not in absolute control of yourself, you can have no control whatsoever over the children, and you shouldn't even expect it. Look at yourself to set right the balance. If you find a child hard to deal with, who is not obedient or whatever, there is something in you which needs to be set right." We as children were quite aware of what she was telling the teachers because we were a small family. But that didn't matter, because the teachers also had come for



growth, for the sadhana. They were not self-conscious about it. They had not put themselves up on a kind of teacher-pedestal, not at all.

So that is how our classes went—one year at a time—because we were just one group, the first group. So as you finished one year, there was another course of studies. And as new disciples came, they were able to take up another subject. We grew organically, but our main growth was what Mother was doing and how she was handling the consciousness of a growing child—setting right the wayward movements, putting in front the right ones—and not through words, but by the action of her consciousness upon the child.

I must say that the fact that the Mother was there in the most physical sense, and we met her so often, certainly created something very special for us. But if we are in touch with that consciousness, then the same thing continues to operate, though in a different way. The way is different, the action is not different. That is something that my group in the Ashram learned slowly to see after 1973 when Mother left her body. It was a big transition for us.

Suddenly one day when I was just 16, Mother says to me, “I want you to teach.” We were with Mother as we were with our natural mother, and I said, “But Mother, I’m studying.” She said, “You can do both!” Mother never took “no” for an answer. She would go on, softly, but she never took “no” for an answer. She said, “You can do both.” I still persisted, I said, “But Mother, I don’t know how to teach.” She said, “It is good to be with the children, it is a very good training, and I’ll tell you how to do it.”

So here we were! We had one classroom upstairs, one classroom downstairs where we had five-year old children. And I was supposed to start teaching. They were happy because they never had a young teacher like that! All others were much older. At that age, if you have a very young teacher it is much more enjoyable, because they are more easy.

Mother said, “You bring them to me everyday at nine-thirty in the morning.” This was the “blessings time” in the medi-



Darshan. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

tation room. You know where that big photograph of the Mother is now? She used to sit there. I used to go up to her, and behind me were ten or twelve little kids. So she would look at each child, and then she would look at me and say something about the child to me, so I would understand how the child was growing. That was very interesting. She saw the child and what I would not have understood, she would tell me: This child is like this, that one is like that, handle this child like this. Of course, every day I wrote what we had done, and she would write back. Imagine how much she had to correct, how much time she gave. I am talking of details, details of the external world we are used to, but also details of the inner world. That was Mother: the inner and the outer.

One day I asked, what do I do with the children? She said, “Give them freedom.” Though I had grown up so free myself, I said, “Mother, you give freedom to children at this young age?” She said something which I’ve taken all my life to understand, and I’m continuing to make an effort still! She said, “A child is never too young to be given freedom, but create the right

atmosphere. If you don’t create the right atmosphere, then giving freedom doesn’t make sense.” I suppose I can only say now that what she meant was that if you have the atmosphere in which the soul is encouraged to grow, then the freedom helps in its growth. Without freedom, it wouldn’t grow; but if you didn’t have the atmosphere, then freedom would be counter-productive. So it is the *atmosphere* on which she laid the utmost emphasis.

Here I would like to share with you what it was like for us children to have the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We had the Darshan four times a year. What was it like for a child to have that Darshan, to be in their physical presence?

The Mother whom we met every day was always full of love and care. At the same time, she could be very firm, very strong, when a movement was wrong. Her gaze was always very penetrating, full of love, but a love that penetrated into the consciousness and acted. You felt it was going deep, deep, deep within you, and where it touched you something lost awareness at that point. That was the experience of everyone, children and adults.

On Darshan days, there was a long room at the end of which there was a couch and two seats. The Mother looked very different seated by the side of Sri Aurobindo. It was another Being. As children, we could not relate to her in the same way as when we met her every day, it was not the same. By the side of Sri Aurobindo, she was another Being altogether. She seemed too far for us to relate to. More than that we can’t say.

We were supposed to go up in a file, and Nirodbaran would be standing outside the enclosure, to the right of the seat of the Mother, to see that we did not stay too long. The file had to be moving, though not because of the time it took. It was not easy to stand before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for too long. The Presence of Sri Aurobindo as he sat, that was something to be seen. One can feel it within . . . he sat in such absolute majesty. Not a physical movement, there never was a flexion of a muscle on his face, totally immobile. And the eyes carried a look of a



very vast impersonality. It was not a look of recognition, focusing on people who came in front, whom he knew. The Mother did, she recognized them, gave a look of recognition, she smiled at them sometimes. Sri Aurobindo's was a vast impersonality. If you looked into the eyes, even as a child, you were going right inside and moving on, and then you were "lost." But standing in front, you had the feeling, as a child, which are silly words, but that is all that a child is capable of, you had the feeling that this was *It*. And you didn't know what the "It" meant. Maybe it was another word for the "Absolute," I don't know. But there was nothing beyond. But always that impersonality, whoever came and went.

As children we went with our parents. I am sharing this because this means a lot to me. After a while, I wanted to stand alone before Sri Aurobindo. So I told my parents, "forgive me, I am young, but I want to go alone." So I followed the line and all the rest. Once, by chance, I was just behind Dilip-da, Sri Dilip Kumar Roy. You know his relationship with Sri Aurobindo? You all have heard about it. It was one of such absolute love and bhakti. Already by the time he was in the line he was almost in a state of ecstasy—his flowing orange robes and his body swaying with that inner movement and inner emotion. I just happened to be behind him. As a younger person you can afford to peep a little to right and the left and look because nobody really bothers with that. And I noticed that Sri Aurobindo's response was different. There was always the impersonal look, but there was, the only time at least that I've seen—when the senior disciples went to see him in his rooms, I know nothing of that—but here there was a look of recognition. Because there was a personal relationship. So you had the vast impersonal, but also a look of recognition in front. You clearly saw the two. And even on the face, a slight flicker of a smile. Physically, a movement of the muscles. As a little girl, I was absolutely entranced with what took place between them and the way Sri Aurobindo looked.

After that I had my own little way of going up for Darshans! I used to wait in

the courtyard until Dilip-da entered the Ashram. And when he joined the line, I'd slip in behind him. Everyone knew the children, there was no problem. I was always quiet. So as we entered the room from the far side, if you peek a little to the right, a little to the left, you can see Sri Aurobindo so many more times. Then when Dilip-da was in front, he took a little longer than most people . . . what went between them I don't know, but it meant a lot to me to just experience that standing behind. So that's how, for most of the Darshans, I made my way upstairs behind Dilip-da. And with those flowing robes, nobody knew there was a little girl behind looking left and right. Even Nirod-da didn't notice it too much, because one didn't stay too long.

For days before the Darshan, that solid Presence that you almost feel you walked into, which we used to feel in his rooms upstairs, it would kind of *spread*, not only in the entire courtyard of the Ashram, but into the neighboring streets. You know where you have the school? That whole second row of streets. And our house was what is now the Puja House, just by the side of the school. That was where we lived at the time. So just when you entered the street, it was like you *walked into* something solid. That feeling even as a child is so clear. That consciousness can be something so concrete and so tangible. It was like you walked into something. It started a few days before the Darshan—very solid, very concrete.

This was our education. The teachers were there, they gave us a lot of love, we were very informal with them. Slowly other activities started in art, theatre, other subjects, and the physical education, which is a very big organization. How Mother worked with the youngsters, with the older women, how she organized all that—that is a whole subject by itself, a whole area of work. The teachers that we related to and the subjects that we studied were secondary. The key things that she kept telling us were "find your psychic being," "be conscious." That was education. We loved the subjects, but that was not *it*. It was the consciousness that she worked on, with all our limitations and our imperfections.



Ronald Jorgensen. (Photo by Nilauro Markus)

The ashram of the world

By Ronald Jorgensen

This chronicle was given originally as a talk at AUM 2003 in Los Angeles.

When I was living in the Ashram, I read something compelling in one of the booklets put out by the Sri Aurobindo Society from a series with extracts of things Mother and Sri Aurobindo said on different subjects. Someone had asked Mother about living outside the Ashram, and she gave what I thought was a provocative answer. She said life outside the Ashram is more difficult, but the realization is more complete. That struck me deeply. I did not know I was going to be outside the Ashram at the time. I was taken out by illness, and then when I came back to the United States in order to stay in the body and get well, I found out I was supposed to be here to share with those in the West what I had learned in the Ashram. So, I am still doing that; but it took on a greater meaning when, after being here for some time, I remembered that comment of the Mother.

A very close friend of mine in Auroville who is gone now, Ruud Lohman, once said in an article he wrote for *Sri Aurobindo's Action*, "Where is the boundary of Auroville? Is it on a map, or right through the center of the human heart?"



Krishna's play in the vital. (Thanjore style painting on glass by Jocelyn Shoepack and Janaka Studio)

Something else that walks around this subject—the ashram of the world—is the definition of ashram. I do not know how many people are familiar with it, but it is something which has stayed with me ever since I heard it a long time ago. An ashram is the house of the guru where you go to learn to live on their heights of consciousness by the practical consequences of everyday events.

There was a calendar—you might wonder how all these connect, I am soon going to make that clear—featuring a picture of Sri Aurobindo, and below it was a quotation: “All he knows, all he loves, all are his, all are he.” I have only seen it once.

So, with that kind of a guru, that kind of a leader of this Yoga, where is the boundary of the Ashram? If it is the guru's house, if the line might go right through the human heart, if we think of Auroville as an ashram, and certainly if we think the re-

alization needed is to be very complete, might be more complete outside the physical boundaries of what we now call the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, then the world is a very relevant ashram.

Usually when we think of resources, of things that an ashram will help us with in our spiritual process, we think of positive things. We think of all of the things that are the truths of the spirit, of contact with those with us who are great examples of it, the *satsang* [good company] we can have, all

of those wonderful things. But we know—those of us who have lived in the Ashram, and those of us who may be living in this much more complete ashram outside—we know, many times, that things seeming to be the darkest, seeming to be the biggest obstacles, are the most helpful. Take, for example, the person in the group about which everybody says, “What is that person doing in this group?” Only later do we find out that the group would have learned very little without that person. Through these surprises, we realize that sometimes the greatest resources present the darkest face or the most ambiguous interface.

I want to talk about those types of resources. The world that we are now noticing, particularly in the West—I am living only in the West, I don't know how it is when you are standing in the East—particularly in this political administration that we are living under (and I say “under” pur-

posely) gives one lots of material if one is willing to look at the dark countenance, lots of material.

The first resource—it may surprise you, but I am noticing it everywhere, so maybe I should start with it—is that of addiction. Now we have a familiar understanding of what addiction refers to. We see people who are addicted to alcohol, to smoking, and to other kinds of drugs. I come from the Seattle area—everybody knows Seattle is supposed to be a big place for coffee addiction, and I think it is true. That is one addiction I am free of, but there also are addictions to things like foods and activities—it goes on and on.

When I say I see addictions everywhere I look, my sense of addiction may not be technically correct, but to me it is anything that skews your life, takes you off the center you are working on, takes a surprising amount of time and energy away from what you feel is important for you to be doing, catches you blind-sided many times, that you feel surprisingly controlled by at times. You wish you did not invest that much time and energy in it, or you wish you were not participating in it at all. Yet you do, something in you continues to nourish it. To me that is an addiction.

It can even be an addiction to working too much, so that the work overbalances all the other resources of your being and you no longer can participate fully in an integral process of transformation—it shrinks to a very specialized process of transformation. It can be any one of a number of things.

There is one I should mention that has really become quite prominent in this country, and is not talked about in polite circles, but I think we can talk about it here, because I feel things can be very open here. This one has drawn reportage; there were a couple of big pieces on it in *The New York Times*—the addiction of internet sex and pornography. It is so big that apparently even companies like AT&T and Disney have decided they could earn more and produce better corporate reports by getting into this field. It is reported to be the biggest single moneymaker on the internet. Now that is huge.



There are things that people, all of us, feel we are somehow addicted to, even things like how we design our day, whether we put things into our day which are not necessary. For example, sometimes people even get addicted to taking a rest when they do not need it. I know that is a very wide definition of addiction, but I feel it is one of the biggest ways the forces of adversity, the hostile forces, whatever you want to call them, through those openings have a way of retarding the process of the transformation, of blunting things, of even appearing to stop or trying to stop this great realization.

It is something each one of us can look at in our lives. We can look at where we are not flexible; where we find things that are stuck, where we can truly open. We can begin to see practically that what we really want to experience is a full integrality so that nothing may pull us off center. It is a vast center, but it is a center that moves, that is not stuck. So that is the first resource in the world, which I think is truly a great one.

One of the things that comes out of that is purity. I will never forget the first time I understood the idea of purity from the yogic point of view. Purity is a vastitude. That is really surprising. It was surprising to me when I first heard it because we do not think of purity that way. We usually think of purity as something protected off in a corner, away from all the dirt and mud of the world. But thinking of purity as a vastitude directs itself to the dissolution of addictions.

Think of any addictions in yourself, preferably, or in your friends. Usually an addiction pulls you into a smaller and smaller frame of reference. You become quite selfish, quite small in context, quite unaware—even ignorant in the root sense of “ignore”—of larger issues and larger concerns. The addiction drags you out of harmony with the things you know you have to take care of in your life—not just your responsibilities, but your sacred responsibilities. And speaking practically, people who have addictions see, as the development deepens, the fraying and then unwinding of their jobs and their

families. But when you become more pure and you let the forces of the *Shakti* enter into you and begin to drive these addictions out, what happens is that you become vaster, you no longer have that small context, the whole sense changes. So this sense of purity as a vastitude is really helpful, at least it is helpful to me.

Another big resource, a grand one in the ashram of the world is ecology, the life of the planet—especially in the conditions of our political administration right now. I am not an ecologist at all, but I am interested in it because I am a human being living on this planet. I was struck by several pieces in the media, and several anecdotal bits



Water hyacinth: “Krishna’s play in the vital.”

of information, which indicate that our so-called leaders and their advisers really have given up. I mean they literally have given up on the hope of having an ecological survival of this world. They are just riding on the last wave; they are not even trying. It is not even a question of any effort; it is just the attitude of, “What can we extract before it is all gone, how much can we enjoy ourselves, how much can we use, how much profit can be made until it ends?”

Relating to that is the economic resource, in which there is a similar attitude being taken by those in political power. In a recent *New York Times* editorial, when

the tax cut was being worked on, the paper said it looks like the administration, these are my words, is just going to ride out the party with the national debt, increase the national debt massively and just ride out the party of this economy until it is driven into the ground. Just party the night away until it is all ruined, it is destroyed. This is not a radical publication, *The New York Times*. So with these two things, the ecology and the economy, which are very closely related, one can see it could be easy to become discouraged when you look at this kind of attitude in those in power and who will make decisions in these two areas.

I’ll give you an interesting “econo” example because it surprisingly connects to the landscape of spiritual-religious inquiry. I have an engineer friend with an interest in the question of wastewater use. He is struck by the observation that people dominating this field right now have an attitude you cannot do anything with waste water, you just have to get rid of it. He is referring to human sewage and gray water, other water like that. But in his understanding, there is a technologically very feasible way to deal with it, to turn it into something quite useful. Human waste, changed, can become a rejuvenating force in agricultural and other recycling processes; even gray water can be processed and become a resource, a potent resource.

My friend said the attitude of these people is a reaction against what they observe to be a kind of holism of the world. They see things in terms of good and evil, which comes out of a certain religious orientation, a fundamentalist religious orientation that sees that something is evil, something is poisonous, something is toxic. It cannot be changed—it has to be thrown out, or isolated, to have something put around it to protect you from it. They have to deal with life that way. Of course, what happens is the wastewater problem just gets worse because we do not do anything with it; we just try and put a covering over it. He said they have this idea everything has to remain what it is, when in fact, in biological life, in looking at things ecologically, everything is changing all the time. Wastewater is just a different form of



something that has great resources.

The question is how do you do that, how do you manage that, how do you move it into its useful form? I think this is an example of what we are facing in the ecological and the economic situation today. We need to teach ourselves, and we need to participate in the teaching of those that are supposed to represent us, how this can be a different scenario for the future. This is something that a person can do right now.

Now, in that effort, I discovered something. One of the things that comes out of this kind of confrontation with this resource in the ashram of the world is flexibility on our own part. To explain what I mean by that I will go way back to something in the 1960's. At that time there was a report put out by a group called the Club of Rome. Some people may remember them—an elite of leading scientists, statespersons (“statesmen” in the old, gender-biased world), economists and business figures, educators and, I believe, artists. The group said something truly interesting. Remember, this was at least forty years ago. They said that if you take any *one* of the world problematiques—in ecology, economics, politics, education, population—any one of the major problematiques (I think they had these five delineated) and you solve it, you create a worse situation because it negatively affects the others in a way you cannot predict. You cannot get out of this predicament, they said. It was really interesting.

My conclusion was then, and it is even more so now, that in this problematique of our ecological and economic situation there is no mental solution. Unless, we might say, there was some revolution; yet even in a revolution's aftermath there usually emerges another system with similar problems. So the only solution is—and I think this is the reason these things come up in the ashram of the world, the reason we are confronted with them, the reason they have blossomed and gotten bigger—



is that we need to understand it is time to move out of the mental culture. The genuine responses, the solutions do not come from the mind. They have not come even since the 1960s, but it is much more emphatically true now.

So the whole question of the supramental manifestation, which we know began in 1956, becomes more and more cogent, particularly with regard to the supramentalization of the physical. I will give four examples from seemingly unrelated sources. I don't know how many of you are familiar with this, but once when Mother talked about getting out of the mind, she said, “it seems like we never understand anything until we understand it in the body.” Then Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist, said, “There is a certain dimension in our physical consciousness where everything can be understood.” He meant *everything*, not just things that are physical, everything. There was a person, I do not remember his name now, a psychologist whose book I reviewed decades ago, who said that physically it is possible to express every subtlety of thought and emotion, all the other parts of our being, through the physical being. *Everything* can be expressed physically. That is a strong and startling statement. And the last of these four examples is that I remember reading that Albert Einstein, when he was working on his theory of relativity, acknowledged that about a dozen years before he began to do the calculations mentally, he felt the discovery in his physical

body, but he could not put it into words, into mathematical calculations.

So these four examples suggest something inordinately profound. Not only do we need to get out of our mind as our sole resource for dealing with the problems in the ashram of the world, but we need to see that the body, not just the emotions and the spirit, not just the soul and the heart, but also the physical body itself—as Mother says, and as Satprem writes in

The Mind of the Cells—can be the habitude, the house where everything comes together and we move towards what is coming from the future.

There is a little example of this in my own world that I find interesting. When I teach yoga classes in the early morning with students, and they come to learn postures, there are things that come in from Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's perspective, even though I am just teaching postures and breathing and meditation. There is something called the Cat Series and the Salute to the Sun that you do when you warm up. I have been doing this since 1964 when I first learned yoga. That is a long time, and I have been teaching it almost everyday and I practice it. So whenever I start a yoga practice session myself or a class I always begin with the Cat Series. You are on your hands and knees and you bring your head and tail up like this [gesture] and breathe in, and then you bring the head and tail down while the back comes up and you breathe out. That stretches the spine. Then you go sideways, and then you begin rotating it all the way around. It is a wonderful series; it begins to look like you are some dragon harmoniously twisting a 360 in the sky when you do it right . . . and the breathing goes with it.

What I have noticed is that even to this day, since 1964 to this day, when I pay attention, I am still increasing that stretch. It has not come to an end, to a limit. Some how I have noticed new muscles, new de-



degrees of stretch, new experiences of opening up. I do not know for sure if it is physical or not, but I can tell you what I have experienced, what it is experientially. It has made me wonder: Is there going to be any end to this, will it ever end?

I can give you examples in Tai Chi also. One has the same sort of experience—that certain moves, certain routings, certain senses of flow in the movements from one position of the body to another seem to have infinitely progressive careers. They do not seem to have any status of photograph-still perfection. It keeps moving. It keeps going. It does not have an end.

Another interesting example of this infinite progression is from a study of language in which linguists followed conversations that ordinary people hold on the street—not professors, not poets, not philosophers—just ordinary people talking about ordinary things. They found in analyzing these exchanges and looking at the structure of what was being said, the syntax, that every time people had a conversation, new structures were created—every time. Now that is astounding. It means we have a virtually infinite language. I do not know about other languages because this was done only in English. I suspect it is true of all languages.

There is still another example of this in a study done in a book called *Chaos: Making a New Science* that talked about how we think chaos is sometimes the overriding factor in things, though we are longing for order. In this study it was found there is no such thing as real chaos. There is a pattern in everything, even in what are considered to be the strongest examples of chaos. So that, for example, in long term patterns of data of weather predictions and reports—considered among the most chaotic of phenomena—sublimely beautiful grand patterns became visible among the minutiae of the numbers!

Another thing I remember in *Chaos* is that in following the outline of a peninsula or river, following ins and outs of that irregular curve between the land and the water, there seemed to be no limit of those degrees, of those changes of the length

and the variability of this line. It seemed to have an infinite quality. I wish I could put it more clearly but that is as well as I can describe it. But I was struck by the fact investigators found there seemed to be no limit.

I am bringing up these examples—my own teaching of the Yoga, conversations on the street, weather data, and delineations on a map—because it seems to me that even though we think that in “this hard limited human day” we do not have infinity or that we do not have eternity, we really do. But if there is an integral reality, if everything is really one, then it is not surprising that the infinity and eternity of the spirit expresses itself in this podium that I am speaking from right here, and in this hand, and in everything. It also means that in the most obstinate political, economic, and ecological realities . . . that infinity and eternity are hiding there, too. So nobody is stuck. Nothing is stuck. We just have to be open to what we think is stuck, and see where the infinite and eternity are moving. That is another resource of the ashram of the world.

Further resources are the disease epidemics now becoming more newsworthy. There has been widespread talk about SARS lately, and SARS is pretty dramatic in itself. A student in one of my classes was wearing a T-shirt about the Bubonic Plague that described the progress of the Plague as it moved from country to country. In its most accelerated movement it crossed into a fresh nation in about one year. Pretty fast. But SARS is much faster. I know there are other factors now involved that quicken the transmission of disease, but still SARS is many times faster than the Bubonic Plague was. As I remember, that medieval catastrophe consumed about one third of the population of Europe—one out of three persons died from the Bubonic Plague. So I can see why people are petrified and why there is a lot of panic. It is very understandable.

And now we see Mad Cow Disease is with us, so Americans’ isolationist luxury is yielding to feeling more a part of the world. We notice our newspapers have carried a lot of scientific alerts—concern and questioning—about its dangers. And

of course there are other rampant disease alerts on the horizon given by epidemiologists and spokespersons from the National Center for Disease Control. So this is just the beginning.

A person could very well say, “Well, what security is there in life? What protection is there? What kind of a life do I have to look forward to? This is getting to be a pretty tough go.” One could do that, but again, if you look at this as the ashram, and you look at all of these things as having infinite resources in them, and not just surface threats, then what is it that we are being presented with? What is it that we can use this for? It is certainly true that from the ordinary point of view, you are in danger, or can be.

But from another point of view, a truer point of view, a core point of view, it is just a question of your learning to respond to the pressures that exist around us in yet another form so that you become more clear about what your purpose really is. If you are here to do a work, and if the work is being coordinated by a massive consciousness, which we call the Divine, and by the executive power of that consciousness, which we call the Mother, these diseases are part of that. They are not another force that comes in threatening to upset





that. They are part of that same whole reality. Nothing surprising, nothing overwhelming, just part of it, and obviously they have a purpose in that whole reality.

I will give you an example of just how strong that kind of response can be. This comes from a person in our group here. I don't know if he is in the audience right now, but we had an interesting conversation when I first arrived. We both spent some time in Hawaii, and he lived there for a while. We were talking about Pele, the goddess of the volcanoes and the fire, and I told him I had an unforgettable communion with Pele while I was there. Then he said, "That is not just your experience. There is something real about that, which people there experience, who get into a far deeper level than just what you run into on the tourist basis."

He gave one example of this I can tell you about, because I was there for this kind of phenomenon. I think he said he saw it, I am not certain, but anyway he is very familiar with the story. There was a volcano that had erupted and volcanic lava was threatening villages. It was a very big eruption. This volcanic lava was about ten feet high and was coming through a village, and it was going to destroy all the houses in the village. One person there, a devotee of Pele, refused to move. He refused to leave his house. The government and all exhorted him; you can imagine what kind of fuss this caused. There was this wall of lava coming through, and our person was burning offerings of some sort of leaf. I do not remember the name, but it is a certain plant they offer to Pele to show their devotion toward her and their confidence in her. He kept doing this on all sides of the house, and he absolutely refused to move. When the lava came to his house—ten feet high—it parted and went around. It is still a story people talk about.

Now that is a little dramatic, but it shows what I am trying to illustrate. You have nothing to worry about, none of us has. We only have to be in that core and work from there. All these other things show how they are a part of the play of the whole reality, which has everything in it. So that is the resource of diseases and ep-

idemics, which I think is really dense with substance, occupying a lot of people's consciousness right now.

Then there is the situation for which I coined a word. You know the word *eschatology*, right? *Eschatos* means end, it means things of the end, and *logy* comes from the Greek word, *logos*, to study, to understand, to know. So the word I coined, *eschapathy*, means the disease of things of the end. I think right now in our situation, at least in this country, there is such a concern about how everything is running down, about how we are coming to the end, about how there is nothing really that is promising in the future. People talk about whether they want to have children, whether they want to raise children in this world. Do they want to have anything that invests in the future at all because it may be a waste of energy? These are the kinds of concerns we all hear sometimes from people. So, to me this is one of the major resources of the ashram of the world, this problem of seeing a shadow over everything and precluding an end we cannot escape.

This situation reminds me of a very interesting incident concerning a man who was part of John F. Kennedy's administration during the 1960s. I am not sure if he was in the actual administration, but he was part of Kennedy's group. He was aware of Sri Aurobindo's work, the supramental manifestation, and the Mother's work. So he approached the Mother with a question, saying, "This consciousness you speak of, this new consciousness, I would think that just as if a deer in the forest has seen someone or seen something that made a big impact on it, you would see a difference in the deer afterwards—is somebody who has had contact with this consciousness changed in any way we could notice? Is there anything that would indicate to us somebody has been in touch with this supramental consciousness?"

The Mother liked the question a lot, and she said about this very interesting question, "There are two, so to speak, symptoms," using symptoms in a very positive way, "of contact with this consciousness. The first one is, nothing sur-

prises you." Then she added, "Now I want to make a distinction. There are people you see that you may admire, very realized people, and they look like nothing surprises them. They go into situations that are shocking, that are upsetting, and you see there does not seem to be any reaction from them. Yet," she said, "if you watch closely you see on a very subtle level a recoil. But they quickly recover from it and re-establish their balance again." She said, "I'm not talking about that. In this there is no recoil. Nothing shocks you, nothing surprises you, there is nothing you have to be above, or to be able to adjust to. You just are not surprised."

She added, "The second thing is," and this is what relates to that concern about the end of things, "nothing causes any doubt about the eventual transformation and victory of the supramental. There is no doubt. You cannot be dissuaded. You cannot suffer anything that causes you to tremble or be unsure of it. You just know that it is going to happen. It is decreed. It is going to happen." So she said those are the two characteristics you would find in a person who had been in touch with this consciousness.

She also said, in another context, which I love so much, "If a person ever had for one moment, just one touch, one sense, one vision, one hearing, one way of apprehending or becoming aware of the way



Debashish Bannerji, Director of the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles. (Photo by Nilaura Markus)



Grace flows and is all things for all people (people who are seemingly at odds with each other) to each person's fullest spiritual benefit in every way that is needed by each, if a person could see this action for just one moment, you would never be in doubt or have a loss of faith again. You would never be upset about anything. You would be fine. You would just be fine." So this concern about things running down, about a sort of entropy of the psychic life of the world, is baloney. It really is baloney. And we can use it; we can use this concern as a way of cutting our teeth on material that can be turned from compost into blossoms.

I also was going to talk about terrorism, and hedonism, and stress, but I am not going to talk about all of those in the two minutes remaining. What I will just say of this terrorism that has come up—you can see the similarities between that and the other things I have talked about, and how they can be dealt with creatively, and how to see what is behind them—the whole terrorism thing is a return back to a dinosaur view of the world as being good and evil, as being them and us, as being material and spiritual. Of course, we know better than that. We can experience it, we can read about it, we know people who are beyond that. Terrorism is another example of this, a way to find out that we are all living on the same planet, including the so-called terrorists. We are living on this planet together, and something is out of whack within the whole. But it can be repaired, and needs to be repaired. We cannot just point guns at them, we cannot just get on our "shock and awe" horse.

I guess I should end with stress, because that seems to be—when you get down to it—what so many people deal with in their lives everyday. A report just came out that said that twenty percent of our population is now in the state of what is called extreme stress. That is a pretty heavy description of the thing—extreme stress. That is where it affects your everyday life in a very pervasive way. That is the supreme example of this being a resource of the ashram of the world; because here we are, we arrive from this great reality, as

Wordsworth said in his poetry, "trailing clouds of glory do we come," and we forget. We get in here, get into what we think is a "hard limited human day," to take that phrase from Savitri again, and we forget. We think, "Oh, am I going to get through this, with all this happening?"

But one of the key reasons for coming here is to express that peace, that beauty, that tranquility, that sense of poise that we came with in the first place, and show that it can be done here. That is the divine adventure, the divine game. To begin here, to transform here what was up there, to make what was above become down here below—ignorance into knowledge, death into delight. You know the series, including falsehood into truth; we have been through those things before in our studies. Stress is a great example of that, and it gives us a gracious opportunity to make real in our lives everyday, in our heartbeats, and in our eating and our sleeping, and all the things we go through where we feel stress could be, to let that become a path, an opening to a Presence of what is Divine in our physiology.

Author's Note: Many of the quotations in this talk, particularly those of the Mother, were drawn from memory. Properly, quotation marks should not be used as the words may be approximate, but the sense appears to flow more easily with them. Forgiveness is hoped from those with better memories or documentary evidence.

Essay

Living laboratories of the life divine

by Debashish Bannerji

This essay was given originally as a talk at AUM 2003 in Los Angeles.

Today I will speak on the subject "Living Laboratories of the Divine Life." By 'living laboratories,' I am referring, of course, to Sri Aurobindo's



Frederick Nietzsche.

justly famous phrase taken from *The Life Divine*. But before turning our attention to that phrase, I would like to back up a little in time and consider the idea of the superman as it makes its beginning in the utterance of Frederick Nietzsche.

In many ways, Nietzsche, as a philosopher, can be said to inaugurate the modern age. Modern philosophy, where it has been fruitful, has been largely an engagement with Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche is a controversial figure, a very complex figure. Complex, because he received intuitions from above and uttered them in a new kind of way that challenged the metaphysical tradition. He also introduced ideas—new ideas—that were half-baked. Often they were not well-formed, and sometimes they were inconsistent. So to denigrate him or to adulate him is, in either case, a dangerous thing.

Nietzsche introduced the idea of the superman in his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. I will read out a passage from this work. In recent translations of this work, the German term *Übermensch* has been rendered as "overman" instead of "superman." Some of us are familiar with a similar kind of replacement that has been attempted by Georges von Vreckem, who has translated the Mother's "surhomme" as "overman" rather than "superman." I do not wish to enter into technical controver-



sies or debates over these terms, but bring to your notice that there is a degree of fluidity about these things that lend themselves to varieties of interpretation.

I read you Walter Kaufman's translation of Nietzsche's passage:

"I teach you the Overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"

"All beings so far have created something beyond themselves. And do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the Overman. A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from the worm to man and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.

"Whoever is the wisest among you is also a mere conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I bid you to become ghosts or plants?"

"Behold, I teach you the Overman. The Overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the Overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of other-worldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoning themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go . . .

"Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the Overman: he is this sea; in him, your great contempt can go under.

"What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your

reason and your virtue . . .

"Man is a rope, tied between beast and Overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

"What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.

If we look at Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's texts, we see one critical element that is missed by Nietzsche. They are not talking about the human will attaining to the superman. They are talking about the human being as the site where the superman is formed by agents other than the human.

"I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.

"I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore.

"I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may someday become the Overman's . . .

"I love him who does not hold back one drop of spirit for himself but wants to be entirely the spirit of his virtue: thus he strides over the bridge as spirit."

It is a very interesting passage, a profound passage, a passage that I wanted to read out because many who have read Sri Aurobindo have never read Nietzsche, and have acquired certain preconceptions of what the Nietzschean superman is all about. I would encourage them to divest themselves of these ideas. Nietzsche inaugurates the future destiny of the human race in the modern age; at a crisis point in western civilization, he holds out the goal of the

self-exceeding of man in the superman. We don't need to assume that Nietzsche himself knew with clarity what he meant by the term "superman," but it is best to receive the complexity of his thought and see its vastness and its greatness. We should look at it side by side with the superman as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and at how their superman relates, if at all, to Nietzsche's idea.

I read first from the Mother a familiar passage. It is from a talk to the children of the Ashram:

"There is an ascending evolution in Nature which goes from stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from animal to man. Because man is for the moment the last rung on the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there is nothing on earth superior to

him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly Nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result. She endeavors to bring out a being that will be to man what man is to the animal, a being that will remain a man in its external form and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mind and its slavery to ignorance.

"Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to man. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish himself in this consciousness, which he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realize it."

There is much in this that bears resemblance with Nietzsche's description of the



superman. Both texts are explicit about the transitional character of the human species. The Mother's statement actually contains within it Sri Aurobindo's famous assertion "Man is a transitional being" and for Nietzsche, "Man is a rope tied between beast and overman" and again, "Man is a bridge and not an end . . ." Secondly, both texts emphasize an earthly destiny. And finally, note the not so noble appraisal of the human being. Man is no longer the "measure of all things" extolled in the European Renaissance, the source of western civilization hubris. While the human being in the Mother's formulation may not be the contemptible worm of Nietzsche, it isn't too far from that either. The Mother quickly disabuses humanity of its exalted notion of itself.

I now read Sri Aurobindo's passage from *The Life Divine* where he likens us to "living laboratories:"

"The animal is a living laboratory in which nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman, the God. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God. For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by nature of that which slept or worked in her involved it is also the overt realization of that which he secretly is."

Let us ponder these three texts. In all

three, there is the notion of the self-exceeding of man. The human being has to exceed himself, because from the viewpoint of the imperfection of nature, humanity is as faulted as the animal, the worm is to the human being. It is to set our sights on that kind of goal that Nietzsche is calling us through the voice of Zarathustra. But Nietzsche's call is going out to the will of man. It is not a simple call to the ego—it is not a call to titanism as has been popularly supposed. It is a call to sacrifice, to vastness. It is a call to the formation of the gods within us. The overman, according to Nietzsche, is like the gods of the Greek classical heritage. It is Nietzsche's allergy towards the Christian tradition that makes him deny God. But it is in the becoming of God or of the gods in human guise, that his message lies. But it ends there. What apart from the human will is there to lead us to this goal? If we are hardly more evolved than the worm or the animal in most of our nature, what hope do we have, except for willing something that is faulted into existence in our drive upwards?

If we look at Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's texts, we see one critical element that is missed by Nietzsche. They are not talking about the human will attaining to the superman. They are talking about the human being as the site where the superman is formed by agents other than the human. In both cases they use the term *nature* to indicate this

extra-human agency. What is it that they mean by *nature*? Evidently, if there is something that ties these uses of the word to some common ground, we have to think of nature as the evolutionary force in a conscious form, the evolutionary will.

Sri Aurobindo's texts need to be read in a cross-cultural context. They have contexts that are

equally Eastern and Western. *Nature*, in Sri Aurobindo's usage, carries in its background the entire metaphysical Romantic tradition, the European tradition of nature as a cosmic presence and power. With the metaphysical "death of God" and the birth of the modern age at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century in Europe, German Romanticism found nature as a replacement for God—nature as a power with an intelligence instinct in it, as a cosmic container, a Mother-Force. It is in this sense that the English Romantic poets also extol nature. Sri Aurobindo draws partly on this tradition in his usage.

But for Sri Aurobindo, nature is equally and perhaps even more so all that that term means in the Indian tradition when it is translated as *prakriti*. Sri Aurobindo has written extensively about this term, the various things it means and has meant. The term comes to us from Sankhya as that *mukhya*, that Chief of the manifest world that is the primary force manifesting things. It is that which drives us, drives everything—matter, life, and mind. It gives us the sense of agency through the creation of an ego, *ahamkara*, but actually is the complete authority through the operation of its three *gunas*—*sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*—of all that happens in us.

But *prakriti*, from an even earlier tradition, lost and then revived in the Gita, has two faces to it. It returns to us in another guise through the Tantra in two colors, dark and golden, which occupy two hemispheres and two different modalities, *para* and *apara*. *Apara prakriti* is of the lower hemisphere, of *avidya*, ignorance, wearing the dark guise of unconscious nature, the automatisms of Sankhya. It contains the laws that are coded into matter, life, and mind that run everything, within which we are given the illusion of consciousness. *Para prakriti* is the unveiled force, Nature-Force of the Supreme Divine. It is the calling forth into becoming of Being, of the One Being, the only Being there is.

This dichotomy, this two-fold nature, is contained and encapsulated in that simple word *nature* that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother use in their texts. Because, in-



The Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles. (Photo by Nilauro Markus)



deed, the way to the superman, as far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned, is in these two hands of nature, both of these aspects of nature. The lower nature, ignorant, is still instinct with the force of divinity. It has moved matter into the domain of life. It has moved life into the domain of mind. It will move mind into the domain of supermind.

But the question is when? Nature has eternity in her hands, as the Mother has said. Nature doesn't care for our time schemes. Nature experiments, plays with forms, possibilities, and ideas, and creates this plethora of manifest realities that we find so delightful in this world. We build our botanical gardens and our zoos so that we can travel through these parks and delight in these multitudinous and wonderful creations of nature. Nature has thrown up our human diversity too, our diversity of types, our diversity of thinking, our diversity of cultures. It is all the doing of nature, and she is here to play in infinite more games, because She is the creative spirit. Progress takes place at her own slow pace through all this.

But the human being, as Aswapathy expresses to the Supreme Mother in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, is a hapless unfinished experiment of nature. It is a product of nature's half-finished march toward super-humanity, caught between the worm and the God. From life to life, we suffer the pains and discords of a half-baked consciousness that yearns to exceed itself, that is replete with complex problems it can never solve because of a fundamental incapacity. It feels trapped and imprisoned and cries out for *moksha*, liberation, ultimate escape out of this prison-house of the round of suffering and insoluble complexity, finding no other goal.

This is where Sri Aurobindo intervenes to indicate that nature has another poise—the poise of nature in the Knowledge, in the *vidya*. This higher nature is the golden Mahakali behind the black Kali, the body of light, of knowledge, of gnosis, the gnostic Mother. And it is this gnostic Mother, when she descends, who becomes active as the unveiled power controlling the lower nature, who can change everything within the *avidya*, who can

So, I ask you: this kind of condensation of force (which gives you quite a special vibration of consciousness), who is there that is really conscious of it?

change the conditions of the *avidya*. For then, it will be no longer a play of trial and error, a slow and painful growth through eternity of the ascending powers of consciousness, but of the future bringing the present into itself, a precipitation of the goal that begins working within the present transforming it to its own conditions. This is the one reason why Sri Aurobindo chose to spend all his time and all of his superhuman yogic power to focus on the bringing down of the supermind. He could very easily have sat in his room in Pondicherry and accomplished what he has said some yogis have done in the Himalayas—brought about revolutions in the world. Not only could, he did—a number of them—but he wasn't satisfied with that, because it could not solve mankind's problems.

The problems of humanity cannot be solved by a change of the external conditions, or even a temporary change in the inner consciousness of individuals or peoples that causes them to do exalted things beyond their habitual or normal capacity. For an hour God resides in a nation or in a time. We experience an hour of God. Human beings are empowered temporarily to do deeds they never could have done; but then, as in the first canto of *Savitri*, "The Symbol Dawn," inevitably the power recedes and we are left to "the common light of earthly day." We are back to business as usual, the sordid poverty of human life.

There is only one way that this can change. It is not through our unaided effort, but through the bringing down of a force, which in spite of us, can change conditions here. But the "in spite of us" has to be understood in its right dimensions. This change of conditions is not an external or a temporary change, it is first

and foremost a radical change of consciousness—and this cannot occur without our conscious cooperation. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in the statement I have quoted from *The Life Divine*, as always, with every aspect of the question included, "Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the Superman, the God."

Let us make no mistakes about the priorities of this process. It is the *para-prakriti*, the supreme or higher nature, who is the scientist of this laboratory. It is we who serve her purpose through our adherence. We are the conscious cooperators. Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's primary yogic work has been to change the agency of this process from the lower to the higher nature, or rather, to establish the higher within the lower. And what is called the supermental descent and manifestation is exactly the collapse of the division between the *vidya* and the *avidya*. It is the implosion of the power, the knowledge, the *vijnana-shakti* into earth, and that entry has initiated a new age.

A new age does not start by astrological factors. It is not because it is written in the calendar that a new age suddenly begins. A new age is an act of consciousness. It is a powerful act of consciousness, willed by the human cooperators and assented to by the Divine. And this is the new age that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have inaugurated. It is a new age, first and foremost, of world yoga. It is a new age of yoga and of world-yoga—yoga, the accelerated process towards conscious evolution. *Prakriti*, nature, has always been doing yoga. This is why in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo can say, "All life is yoga." But the yoga of nature is



a slow, semi-conscious process. The yoga of human beings who wake up from within by the pointing finger of light that comes as a beacon showing the way is a conscious yoga. It is a conscious yoga that accelerates and quickens the process. It condenses into a lifetime or a few years what would otherwise have taken many lifetimes. It brings the future into the present. This is exactly what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done on a cosmic or terrestrial level. They have initiated the earth into a new yoga. The ear of the earth has been privy to the mantra of a new yoga and has accepted it. That yoga has begun.

We heard in a talk yesterday about the conditions of the earth and about the earth as the ashram, the ashram of the world. Ron Jorgensen spoke of the entire world as the home of the Lord, and of the circumstances that come to us in the world as being provided by the Lord for our yoga. Indeed, it is the ashram of the world that all humanity can be said to inhabit today, and in a profounder sense than of providing materials for the growth of consciousness in those who have chosen to take up yoga. It is the ashram of the world because the world itself has been moved into a world-yoga. This is the meaning of the new age.

I would like to draw your attention at this point to an ancient story, a story from the *Puranas*, a story that tells about an occult event that happened in eternal time, an eternal event. It is a story about a great churning of the cosmic ocean so that the pot of *amrita*, the ambrosia of immortality that is at the bottom of the ocean, will be brought to the surface, will be churned up from the bottom. The gods and the demons together undertake this churning. The great world mountain, Mount Meru—which also is in each of us as the Meru-danda, the spine—the world axis, Axis Mundi, the pillar of the world, that is used as the churning rod. The great serpent Ananta—who is the base of the evolutionary fountain of avatarhood, of Vishnu—the coiled infinite potential of Time, with Eternity on one side and Perpetuity on the other, eternally changing, never changing, is used as the churning rope. And Vishnu himself, as the Tortoise avatar, is the base

on which the churning rod, Meru, is stationed.

The first thing that happens with the churning is the rise of the poisons of the ocean. The poisons of the ocean are so dense, so acrid, so corrosive, that even the demons can not continue. Both the gods and the demons are completely stalled. The sky turns black with poison. What we today call pollution is as nothing compared to that condition. Man cannot even envisage that condition of poisonous darkness. Neither the gods nor the demons can cope with it. It is at this point that the great Lord Shiva himself comes to the rescue by drinking the poison and holding it, by his yoga-power, in his throat, which is therefore stained blue. This is why Shiva has as one of his names, Nilakanta, the blue-throated.

A number of mystics had experiences around 5 December 1950, at the time when Sri Aurobindo left his body, and several of them saw a vision of the great Shiva drinking the cup of poison. Indeed, the departure of Sri Aurobindo can be understood in this light. The myth of the churning of the ocean is an image of the world yoga initiated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo has prepared the

process, he has initiated it and he has sacrificed himself so that our unprepared nature may be able to bear the intense difficulties of the beginning. It is the first stage of this world yoga that he has made possible by drinking the acrid poison that rose up from the depths. He has held the supramental light in his body and he has broken the backbone of earthly karma, which would have otherwise made it impossible for us to move into this new age. This is why the Mother has addressed Sri Aurobindo's "material envelope" and said "... Before Thee who has willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."

All that we see and experience today are the physical repercussions of occult events of this kind. The pollution that we see is inevitable. It is the result of our collective consciousness. It is the poison-fruit of our world karma facing us as we take our first steps in the new age. It is necessary. It will pass. It has already been dealt with by the Lord himself.

But this world yoga, though much quicker than the processes of nature, is still a process of collective preparation





which is impersonal and relatively slow, because it is a process of bringing consciousness to the unconsciousness. It is awakening it, but awakening it over time, slowly. People receive ideas. In a talk yesterday we heard a whole spate of names of people who appear to be doing the work of the Mother without knowing that they are her instruments. Indeed, they are, and yet the purpose has not yet become conscious in them, the fullness of divine intent has not dawned on them. They are serving the world yoga.

The work of the supramental consciousness occurs not merely at the universal level of the world yoga, but also at the individual level and at several other levels. It is conducting many experiments simultaneously and in an interrelated fashion too complex for the human mind to comprehend. As Sri Aurobindo says in the book *The Mother*, the Mother's steps are very complex, "one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence." This is why surrender is demanded of us. It is only through surrender that we can progressively become more enlightened instru-

ments of her workings and in the process find ourselves more and more a part of her. By this means, we are to rise to a consciousness one with her consciousness, a state from which our present condition will seem indeed very embarrassing. In this progression of the world yoga, we have to be open to the vast, complex, global and minute working of her supramental *shakti*, that reality which is here among us. The living laboratory is not just the individual, nor is it merely the work to ameliorate world conditions, it is these and a variety of other experiments that are going on at the same time.

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were in Pondicherry, the Mother has said that there was a question whether they would do the yoga with just a handful of disciples, to intensely try to accelerate the process of the descent of the supermind, bring it down and then radiate it. She said the other option was to go slower, but to gather around them representative specimens of humanity that would be able to bring a much wider possibility of the manifestation of supramental consciousness on earth. She says the decision was not made mentally. The Lord made the deci-

mens. We are cultures on petri dishes that are being experimented on. We have been chosen because we are representative of something, something which goes far beyond our own understanding. We are here to serve a purpose that will be revealed to us not today, but only when the work is done.

Today or tomorrow, all the earth, every individual, will receive this blessing, because this is the condition of the world yoga. The world yoga progresses through smaller collectives. Not only as the entire body of the earth, but more quickly, much more consciously, through the intention of people who awake to the reality of what the supramental force is bringing. The growth of the Ashram was around Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's ascension, it was around their attempt to reach the supermind and bring it down for humanity. For that growth, the roots had to extend far into the possibilities of terrestrial manifestation. Diverse specimens of humanity gathered around Mother and Sri Aurobindo at the Ashram—a tremendous diversity. And yet, each individual had personalities that were moulded into their highest possibilities by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—their highest possibilities of manifesting the yoga force.

The Mother did not stop with this process. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been physically present at the center of the Ashram community as a laboratory of the supramental experiment. But in 1968, she spawned another community with an even wider, more global, planetary basis that would not have them physically at its center. That community would have to open to them internally. Its members would have to be the conscious collaborators in the inner sense, no longer guided externally in the material details of their existence, no longer capable of dragging them down, of pulling at the hem of their robes and soiling them. They also would have to receive the problems of humanity, and they would have to open to the Divine from within and receive the grace of the transformation through collaboration with the *para-prakriti*, with the supreme Mother Force. This is Auroville. Auroville today is

That community would have to open to them internally. Its members would have to be the conscious collaborators in the inner sense...



sion. It happened by itself—and it is the second course that was followed. This was how the Sri Aurobindo Ashram developed.

We who have been touched by the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taken maybe a few faltering steps in the direction of the light that they have shown, the goal they have shown, have inevitably felt at some point how privileged we are, how fortunate we are. What a grace we have received. Let us not be fooled that it is due to any credit of ours that we have been chosen for this grace. It is a process which has selected us.

The phrase "living laboratories" is very relevant here. We are "cultures" both in the sense of particular social expressions and in the sense of biological speci-



continuing in this work. It also is a sphere of churning, a cradle and crucible of the superman.

And yet, this is not all. In a conversation of December 1938, Sri Aurobindo said that a few hundred people in the Ashram will not be sufficient to make the supramental effective for mankind. Thousands of people doing the yoga sadhana in many walks of life across the world would be needed for that. Individually and collectively, across America, across Europe, across Asia, across the world, we are all invited to be participants in the purpose of the supramental manifestation.

The supermind is interested in us. We are not here merely to make conscious efforts, to make titanic efforts, to fling ourselves from this orbit to the higher orbit. We can be heartened by the fact, but we should also be extremely attentive to the fact, that the supermind is interested in us. It is a Force that is seeking us out. It is an agency, an active power. In seeking us out, it is seeking us not merely as individuals, because its purpose is a divine life on earth. A divine life on earth is not manifested by one person.

A divine life is a context, a divine life is an opening up of a world of phenomena that make for a rich collective existence in all its forms. If we cannot provide it with the conditions for this, its work is to that extent hampered or thwarted of the cooperation that it seeks. We need to be conscious of this, because it is only to the extent that we are conscious of this that we can be its collaborators. We need to gravitate together; unite our wills, form collective individualities. We need to form integral collective flames of aspiration that will be able to invoke that higher consciousness and call down that light, that power to work among us, to form itself in us, to radiate through us in our acts, in our bodies. That, indeed, is what it seeks.

The power of the supramental *shakti* here on earth seeks unity, integration, and perfection. It seeks these in an integral way. We are first called in consciousness to these experiences of integrality. This is the pressure. Can we be integral within? Can we integrate ourselves: integrate our

mind, life and body around the psychic being? Can we feel whole, feel one? This is the pressure. The help is coming for this. But again, it is not merely at the individual level. Can we experience the unity of collective consciousness?

In a previous talk we were very fortunate in receiving a message which I have heard for the first time—a very refreshing message—that the signs of the supramental manifestation are not to be sought primarily in the breakdown of the Berlin Wall or the fall of Soviet communism, but within us, in the change in the modality of consciousness. Are we aware of this? Let us become aware of it. We live in God. Are we aware of it? It is the consciousness that has to turn within and see what is being done by the supramental *shakti* inside, not outside. This means an awareness of the process of integration of the being and also its results. We must recognize the fact that unity manifests in and through us when we least expect it. We experience it but we are not aware of it.

There is a form of experience that the supermind is calling us to have and feel. Individually, great yogis have experienced the Divine, the Oneness, the One Being. And yet, when they have come out of it, they have seen that every individual has remained in the ignorance. Why? Even when they had the experience of oneness, it was only they who had it. When the Mother experienced the descent of the supermental force into the earth at the Ashram playground, it was such a powerful experience that she felt when she would open her eyes she would see everybody flat on the ground. But nobody, except for a handful, even knew what had happened. The ignorance encases us so densely that we are unaware of what is going on within. But the experience, the new spiritual experience to which we are called by the supermind, first in symbolic form, in collectives, and finally as a world phenomenon, is that of collective oneness.

Collective oneness seems at the outset to be a trivial phrase, one of those catch-alls of the new age. But it is not that. Collective oneness is arriving at a poise of

consciousness above the mind, not individually, but collectively, where a number of people can experience at once that they are the One Being. They look at each other and they know themselves simultaneously as one and yet irreducibly different—a difference because this One Being is not a finite being, it is infinite. The infinite One wonders at its own infinity. It is one and yet infinite. Its own potentialities come to it from its own infinity, and it wonders. This is the content of the experience of collective oneness that the supermind is calling us towards.

The possibility of being is not the only aspect of the supramental invitation. It is also the possibility of becoming, an integral perfection in becoming. For this we must not merely aspire collectively for the supermind to manifest through us, move us as a collective, but we must offer it an integral field, a field of knowledge, a field of work, a field of love and emotion, a field of physical labor and activity. We offer it an integral field collectively with the consciousness that this is why we are doing this work—not to create an edifice that others will marvel at as some kind of institutional radiation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—but to allow the supermind the conditions that it seeks for our cooperation. In the works of knowledge, in education; in the works of will, in business, in politics; in the works of culture, in the emotional life, in the refinement of the senses; in works of the body, of labor, of service, of *dasya*; let us give all our parts of being fully and collectively, because that is what the supramental force is interested in.

I call upon all of us to meditate on this invitation, because we are called upon to be conscious collaborators, but even more importantly, we are called upon to be living laboratories. We are the living laboratories of the divine life, individually and collectively. To be conscious of this, to hold these possibilities in our being, to be always receptive, this is the call. To have a will for the divine life is good, to surrender the will is better, but to be receptive to the messages of the Scientist who is using us as the site of Her experiment, as a living laboratory, is perhaps the best.



Source material

Sri Aurobindo on the spiritual society

A society founded upon spirituality will differ in two essential points from the normal human society which begins from and ends with the lower nature. The normal human society starts from the gregarious instinct modified by a diversity and possible antagonism of interests, from an association and clash of egos, from a meeting, combination, conflict of ideas, tendencies and principles; it tries first to patch up an accommodation of converging interests and a treaty of peace between discords, founded on a series of implied contracts, natural or necessary adjustments which become customs of the aggregate life, and to these contracts as they develop it gives the name of social law. By establishing, as against the interests which lead to conflict, the interests which call for association and mutual assistance, it creates or stimulates sympathies and habits of helpfulness that give a psychological support and sanction to its mechanism of law, custom and contract. It justifies the mass of social institutions and habitual ways of being which it thus creates by the greater satisfaction and efficiency of the physical, the vital and the mental life of man, in a word, by the growth and advantages of civilisation. A good many losses have indeed to be written off as against these gains, but those are to be accepted as the price we must pay for civilisation. The normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being. For the life, the mind, the body are the three terms of existence with which it has some competence to deal. It develops a system of mental growth and efficiency, an intellectual, aesthetic and moral culture. It evolves the vital side of human life and creates an ever-growing system of economic efficiency and vital enjoyment, and this system becomes more and more rich, cumbrous and complex as civilisation develops. Depressing by its mental and vital

overgrowth the natural vigour of the physical and animal man, it tries to set the balance right by systems of physical culture, a cumbrous science of habits and remedies intended to cure the ills it has created and as much amelioration as it can manage of the artificial forms of living that are necessary to its social system. In the end, however, experience shows that society tends to die by its own development, a sure sign that there is some radical defect in its system, a certain proof that its idea of man and its method of development do not correspond to all the reality of the human being and to the aim of life which that reality imposes.

There is then a radical defect somewhere in the process of human civilisation; but where is its seat and by what issue shall we come out of the perpetual cycle of failure? Our civilised development of life ends in an exhaustion of vitality and a refusal of Nature to lend her support any further to a continued advance upon these lines; our civilised mentality, after disturbing the balance of the human system to its own greater profit, finally discovers that it has exhausted and destroyed that which fed it and loses its power of healthy action and productiveness. It is found that civili-

sation has created many more problems than it can solve, has multiplied excessive needs and desires the satisfaction of which it has not sufficient vital force to sustain, has developed a jungle of claims and artificial instincts in the midst of which life loses its way and has no longer any sight of its aim. The more advanced minds begin to declare civilisation a failure and society begins to feel that they are right. But the remedy proposed is either a halt or even a retrogression, which means in the end more confusion, stagnation and decay, or a reversion to "Nature" which is impossible or can only come about by a cataclysm and disintegration of society; or even a cure is aimed at by carrying artificial remedies to their acme, by more and more Science, more and more mechanical devices, a more scientific organisation of life, which means that the engine shall replace life, the arbitrary logical reason substitute itself for complex Nature and man be saved by machinery. As well say that to carry a disease to its height is the best way to its cure.

It may be suggested on the contrary and with some chance of knocking at the right door that the radical defect of all our systems is their deficient development of just that which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a widespread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment,



Ganesha: A temporary street-corner display for his commemoration, in Vaithikuppam, near Pondicherry. (Photo by Larry Seidnitz)



weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline. Modern society has discovered a new principle of survival, progress, but the aim of that progress it has never discovered,—unless the aim is always more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater and still greater complexity of the social economy, a more and more cumbrously opulent life. But these things must lead in the end where the old led, for they are only the same thing on a larger scale; they lead in a circle, that is to say, nowhere: they do not escape from the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, they do not really find the secret of self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality, but only seem for a moment to find it by the illusion of a series of experiments each of which ends in disappointment. That so far has been the nature of modern progress. Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul. It is not indeed certain that a subjective age will lead us there, but it gives us the possibility, can turn in that direction, if used rightly, the more inward movement. . .

The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, nor as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to

spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, sub-souls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma. [Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, pp. 209-213]



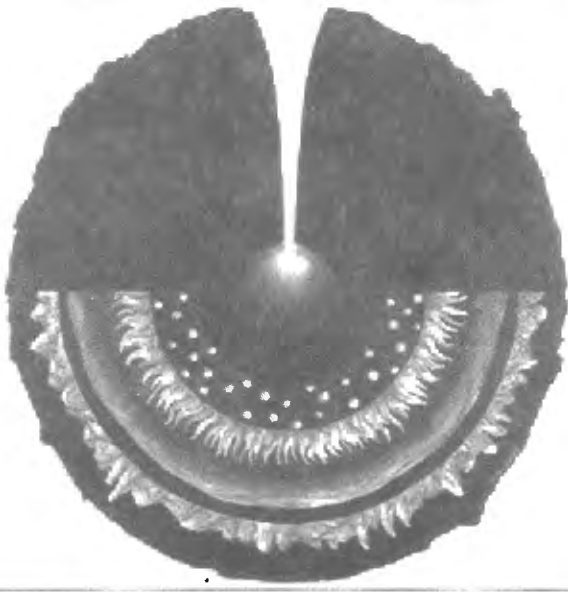
Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

The Mother on the manifestation of the supramental

Yes, and all spiritual books which speak of the experiences of another world are always full of paradoxes. They say, "It is like this, it is like that," in an attempt to give you a suppleness which will allow you to understand—but even so you do not understand.

The truth is that these experiences can be communicated only in silence.

And yet, it has been said (and it is a true fact) that these worlds, like the supramental world, are going to express themselves physically. Then what is going to happen? Will they find new words? New



Five elements. (Artwork by Hélène Gagnon)

words must be found for them . . . It is difficult, for if new words are found, they have to be explained!

After all, the ancient initiatory systems were good in a way, in the sense that they revealed the Knowledge only to those who had reached a stage where they could receive it directly without the help of words. And I'm afraid it may come to the same thing now—perhaps even one who has this supramental knowledge will never be able to make himself understood by people, unless they themselves become capable of entering into this knowledge. And so the logical result is that people will say, as I have heard it said: "Oh! it is just as in ordinary life." Precisely because all that is not of the ordinary life completely escapes our perception, it cannot be transmitted by words.

Take a place like this, which is surcharged with certain forces, certain vibrations; these vibrations do not show themselves in visible and tangible things—they can produce changes, but as these changes occur according to a method (as all physical things do), you pass almost logically from one state to another and this logic prevents you from perceiving that there is something here which does not belong to normal life. Well, those who have no other perception than that of the ordinary mind, who see

things working out as they habitually do or seem to do in ordinary life, will tell you, "Oh that, that is quite natural." If they have no other perception than the purely physical perception, if they are not capable of feeling the quality of a vibration (some feel it vaguely, but those who are not even capable of feeling that, who have nothing in them corresponding to that or, if they have something, it is not awakened), they will look at the life here and tell you, "It is like the physical life—you have perhaps some ideas of your own,

but there are many who have their own ideas; perhaps you do things in a special way, but there are lots of people who also do things in a special way. After all, it is a life like the one I live." . . . And so, it may very well happen that at a given moment the supramental Force manifests, that it is conscious here, that it acts on Matter, but those who do not consciously participate in its vibration are incapable of perceiving it. People say, "When the supramental force manifests, we shall know it quite well. It will be seen"—not necessarily. They will not feel it any more than those people of little sensitivity who may pass through this place, even live here, without feeling that the atmosphere is different from elsewhere—who among you feels it in such a precise way as to be able to affirm it? . . . You may feel in your heart, in your thought that it is not the same, but it is rather vague, isn't it? But to have the precise perception . . . listen, as I had when I came from Japan: I was on the boat, at sea, not expecting anything (I was of course busy with the inner life, but I was living physically on the boat), when all of a sudden, abruptly, about two nautical miles from Pondicherry, the quality, I may even say the physical quality of the atmosphere, of the air, changed so much

that I knew we were entering the aura of Sri Aurobindo. It was a *physical* experience and I guarantee that whoever has a sufficiently awakened consciousness can feel the same thing.

I had the contrary experience also, the first time that I went out in a car after many many years here. When I reached a little beyond the lake, I felt all of a sudden that the atmosphere was changing; where there had been plentitude, energy, light and force, all that diminished, diminished . . . and then . . . nothing. I was not in a mental or vital consciousness, I was in an absolutely physical consciousness. Well, those who are sensitive in their physical consciousness ought to feel that quite concretely. And I can assure you that the area we call "the Ashram" has a condensation of force which is not at all the same as that of the town, and still less that of the countryside. So, I ask you: this kind of condensation of force (which gives you quite a special vibration of consciousness), who is there that is really conscious of it? . . . Many among you feel it vaguely, I know, even people from the outside feel it vaguely; they get an impression, they speak of it, but the precise consciousness, the scientific consciousness which could give you the exact measure of it, who has that? I'm not alluding to anyone in particular, each one can look into himself. And this, this condensation here is only a far-off reflection of the supramental force. So when this supramental force will be installed here definitively, how long will it take for people to perceive that it is there? . . . I say that the mind cannot judge, it is on facts like these that I base myself—the mind is not an instrument of knowledge, it cannot know. A scientist can tell you the proportion of the different components in any particular atmosphere, he analyses it. But as for this proportion here, who can give it? Who can say: There is such a vibration, such a proportion of this, such a proportion of that, such a proportion of the supramental? . . . I put the question to you so that you may ponder over it. [The Mother, *Conversations on Yoga*, pp. 349-351]



Book Reviews

An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium: A Primer for the Mutation of Consciousness
by Alan Sasha Lithman (aka Savitra)

Reviewed by Bhavana Dee

An *Evolutionary Agenda* is a smart book, a fun book, an inspiring book, and, for *Collaboration* readers, it is really *our* book, because one of “us” has written it. Our beloved Savitra has poured his fire and rhetorical passion into a truly helpful manual to update us in our pursuit of Sri Aurobindo’s vision. Like Georges VanVrekhem, he has helped us with our homework, taking his understanding of Sri Aurobindo into the fray and morass of modern multi-stimuli and letting it light the way. Eschewing both pietism and scholasticism, he has delivered for our use a hard-hitting, fast-track, multi-channelled, 1001-varieties style booster.

This *Agenda* takes Mother and Sri Aurobindo very seriously, literally. What He is said in *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*, what She started in Auroville, is a call for a totally new world, a new global consciousness. Savitra’s *Evolutionary Agenda* is a wake-up call to apply what They envisaged for our lives, today. And he is walking his talk; his language throughout modestly suggests new ideas, while never pretending to authority. In fact, the subtlety of the arguments, which go beyond thinking of being a cradle for the new species to imagining what the new species might be like, include repeated forays into exposing the blind-alleys and dead-ends of the old ways of thinking that we need to leave behind. For example, he writes, “With consciousness as the subject of our inquiry, we are, reader and writer alike, not merely detached observers but intimately, inseparably and subjectively involved in our subject matter.”

Savitra’s language is often almost poetic, a self-confessed style which he feels can often carry the deeper message in its

rhythm. For instance, if I expand what was a bulleted phrase:

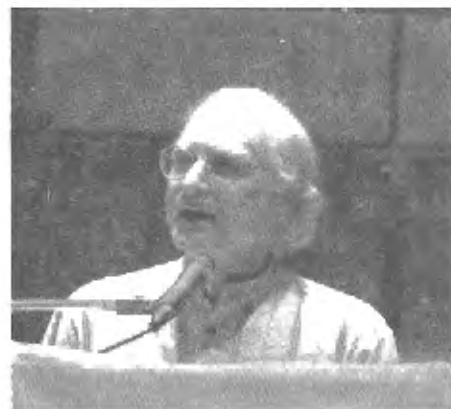
We are at a transitional moment,
when the cresting wave of an
evolutionary cycle
overtakes history’s shallower
process and perspective,
pressing us against our upper
threshold as a species,
sweeping us in the inrushing
evolutionary tide
toward a new principle of Being.

For anyone who has been putting off reading this book, thinking “what can I learn from this guy,” it is heartening to find that even an imperfect instrument (and I include us all in that generalization) can be a tool for the divine work, leading us in the direction we know we are supposed to go.

Those of us already familiar with the central themes of the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s work will find them in new words. This helps us to re-understand the yoga of the cells and make it our own yoga, to recognize the supramental manifestation all around us, to see anew the brilliance of Their injunction to transform the world as we transform ourselves, and the importance of beginning from the near and moving outward. Along the way, there is the delight of recognizing subtly introduced catchphrases from our Auro-experience, Aurobindonian cadences and rhythms, and Satpremian lyric and urgency.

One of the key insights is to recognize and accept that unbearable pain is what pushes us beyond our limits. “We only change when the pain of resisting exceeds the fear and pain of change . . .” Our age, with its overwhelming commercialism and vulgarity, enormous gaps of obscene wealth and grueling poverty, crimes of alienation, terrorism, senseless hatred and wars, provides the stimulus, and “evolutionary activism” asks us to enter yogic discipline not for *siddhis* or escape, but to humbly offer all we are to the new, and in so doing co-create the new consciousness.

The book is rich in areas of intrepid exploration; to mention but one: To give us a sense of where we are headed, he suggests several stages in the mutation of the species. *Homo egoicus* is where humanity



Savitra speaking at AUM 2003. (Photo by Nilaurio Markus)

is now, the paradoxical stage where the evolute becomes aware of the process of evolution but is still enslaved by ages-long conditioning to withdraw and contract from the supposed “other,” and gradually is proceeding to *homo transitionalis* (that’s us). We were introduced to evidence of this stage in the 1960s, and we have witnessed it win mainstream acceptance (ecology, yoga classes, whole systems thinking, body-mind realities, organic farming, renewable energy, conflict resolution)—and also its perversion at the service of power and commercial ends. The job of *homo transitionalis* is to save the world for the next stages by actively pursuing alternatives while living and acting from an inner center aware of the evolutionary task. Although it is becoming clear that it is not by thinking, but only by the force of *being* that *homo transitionalis* will change the world, the emphasis is on outward changes. In contrast, *homo polaris*, centuries later, will be working on changing the root consciousness of human nature, and fine-tuning the new species-level changes. *Homo holisticus* will go deeper, maybe by the twenty-second century, creating the mind of light, working on the transformation of matter, surrendering the last vestiges of egoic control to the supramental power. Only much later does *psyche materialis* appear, the butterfly winging its way out from the pulp of the digested caterpillar, the post-human, supramental being.



Energy II. (Artwork by Hélène Gagnon)

Today, Savitri suggests, those of us who recognize ourselves in this transition are involved in evolutionary action-research. Acknowledging the mind's reactionary protests that it is "still not working," "impossibly utopian," "too dangerous," "too absurd," we are invited to transform ourselves and the world. We are asked to sacrifice ourselves to the project, and in so doing transform the very concept of sacrifice from ego-loss to consensual (and eventually joyful) self-giving. This *Evolutionary Agenda* asks of us conscious effort on many fronts. It means finding and shining on the parts of ourselves that are "pained by the light," the parts that make our meetings rife with discord and hostility. Gradually, painstakingly, we train our minds to recognize others in transition, to recognize our evolutionary "predecessors," and not to fall into old

in Auroville for years, to take a new look and make a new commitment to "working through outer fields to shake self and collective out of its egoic trance." All who share this sense of a new birth are challenged to make a commitment to community and networking, to make personal lifestyle choices that reflect a sense of Oneness, to become aware of the planetary resources and the needs of other people. Savitri suggests two major projects on which evolutionary activists could concentrate—progressive elimination of money as a measure of value, and transformation of media as a tool of communication—but he ends with open-ended conclusions. The child's plaint to the emperor in his new clothes, which has piped up throughout the text, is again sung out, "No clothes. No close, open."

egoic patterns of dominator, us-versus-them modalities. We grow to recognize that the new consciousness honors the body, not only the personal but also the global one. Mother's injunction to Auroville to build an economy without money takes on a new vibrancy, as we see the ubiquity of the false god marketing false values of material wealth, competition and violence, and put ourselves firmly on the side of primary values of equality, mutuality, voluntary simplicity and conscious collaboration with each other and with the new consciousness.

Evolutionary activism, which is what the *Evolutionary Agenda* is all about, challenges us all, even if we have been "doing integral yoga" or living

***Musings on the Mother's Prayers and Meditations*, volumes 1-3, by Shyam Kumari**

Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz

Shyam Kumari is one those extraordinary disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who quietly go about their work and sadhana but leave in their wake a tremendous treasure for all those treading on the path behind. For such souls, the work they produce is not of the ordinary human make—it is inspired by and embodies a light and force from above. For Shyam, one senses this higher, greater impetus in both the volume and the quality of her work.

The quantity of her output is remarkable. She has conducted interviews with hundreds of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's disciples and has published four volumes on *How they came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, and three volumes of *Vignettes* from their lives with the divine Masters. She has translated *Savitri* into Hindi (presently in its third revised edition), has written children's books in both English and Hindi, has written more than 250 poems that have appeared in the Ashram journal, *Mother India*, and elsewhere, and which she plans to publish in book form. She single-handedly writes, edits, publishes, and distributes a quarterly Hindi journal on the yoga called *Golden Swan*, and regularly contributes articles and essays to various other journals. On top of this, she has written the extraordinary three-volume work that is the subject of this review: *Musings on the Mother's Prayers and Meditations*.

But it is not primarily the volume of her contributions, but their deep, wise, and soulful quality that most clearly distinguishes Shyam from the ordinary author. Hers are not simply the works of an intelligent and creative mind, though that contributes, but there is conveyed in them a light, an atmosphere, a depth, a refined emotional sweetness and delight that belies their secret source. Shyam confesses that the night prior to beginning on her *Musings*, she had an extraordinary meeting with the Mother in a dream-vision, in



which the Mother was seen to be dictating something aloud before a large, empty desk. When one reads and touches the subtle, psychic vibrations in these *Musings*, one senses that it is indeed the Mother who has been moved to expand upon her original *Prayers and Meditations*.

The books consist of short, usually two to four page, essays on each of Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*. The essays are arranged as chapters in the chronological order in which Mother had written the prayers. Mother's prayers themselves are quoted in the essays, usually partially and divided in two or three parts, interspersed with Shyam's commentary and reflections. There are 306 such essays in the three volumes. To amplify or illustrate her musings, sometimes Shyam quotes other sources such as Mother's talks, *Savitri*, or her esteemed teacher and friend, the late Nolini Kanta Gupta.

Throughout the volumes, each of Mother's prayers and meditations inspire Shyam's reflections on life, sadhana, and truth. These reflections are intricately woven around the inspiring prayer or meditation, but often expand and elaborate on its implications and relevance in unexpected directions. There is a rich variety of content, ranging from fundamental elements of yogic practice, to commentary on contemporary world events, to interpretation and elucidation of the experiences and realizations of the Mother. I found Mother's prayers themselves taking on a profounder and fuller significance, as if Shyam was able to bring them out from the rare, ethereal atmosphere of the divine consciousness into a realm of experience nearer the human, though still exalted and pure. Many of the prayers are translated into terms of yogic practice, with its challenges and detours, to which most aspirants readily will relate. There is sage advice here from a fellow traveler on the path, one whom evidently has journeyed long and far. There is a wonderful consistency of tone and style that runs throughout, and one finds some of Shyam's particular and insightful perspectives on life and yoga periodically recurring in different essays as if familiar,

sweet melodies and notes.

We may illustrate these points with a few examples. The first is from the prayer of 25 May 1914. The Mother wrote:

"O Divine Master of love and purity, grant that in its least stages, its smallest activities, this instrument which wants to serve Thee worthily may be purified of all egoism, all error, all obscurity, so that nothing in it may impair, deform or stop Thy action. How many little recesses lie yet in shadow, far from the full light of Thy



illumination: for these I ask the supreme happiness of this illumination."

Now read the beginning of Shyam's musings on this prayer, from the chapter titled "detailed surrender."

"The obstacles that stand in the way of an integral sadhana are not only the major but also the minor things of life. It is in the field of day-to-day small insignificant-seeming happenings, that the sadhaks most often sink into the morass of ordinary nature. When we scold the servant, or are ungracious to the postman, when we brush our teeth careless, forgetful of the Divine, or eagerly and greedily eat some choice dish, then we forget to keep the correct attitude, by not seeing

and seeking the Divine in every being, by not making every act an act of worship."

In many of Shyam's musings, we are brought back again and again to the central secret of success in sadhana: simple, sincere surrender and reliance on the Divine Grace. This fundamental principle is illustrated in Shyam's musings on the prayer of 2 June 1914, an essay which she has titled "To call and rely." She writes:

"Why do we seem to crawl? Why do we slide back again and again and why do we bend under the load of our lives? Why is there not a natural, effortless and smooth blossoming of our being and activity? Why the backward look life after life? What demon in us betrays our soul? . . .

Our tragedy is that we forget to keep them in the front of our consciousness, to totally rely on them. When we are in trouble or in the doldrums, when the way gets blocked we forget to call them. A child spontaneously and instantaneously calls for its mother to extricate it from its troubles. In the same way if at each moment we would call the Mother to come and paint our inner being in Sri Aurobindo's sun-colours, to suffuse our consciousness with her white lotus-scent and wrap our outer being with the robe of her sparkling purity, then the results would be truly marvelous because Divine Love has the Power to undo the dark Inconscient's irresistible downward gravitational pull."

Throughout *Musings*, Shyam beautifully inspires and connects the reader with the nature of that sincere surrender and reliance on the Divine. For example, meditating on the prayer of 7 December 1912, she writes:

"A tired head laid on some bosom of love, a tiny face turned upwards trustfully towards some Being of Light, a total refuge in two arms that are a sanctuary against all attacks, a nestling in a Divine Heart warm with the velvety softness of sweet caring—these are the emotions the soul feels when it turns sincerely and exclusively towards the Lord."

Another theme that recurs throughout *Musings* is commentary on the world scene, and especially its falsehood, suffering, and evil. Shyam is explicit in her char-



acterizations of such evil; one senses that her eyes are open to the full horror that manifests here, and that she too has suffered under the hand of the adverse Powers. Although she is unflinching in illuminating the falsehood, she is not bitter or pessimistic. Always, she puts these negative aspects of the world in relation to the Divine; these are the elements that the Mother has come to heal, transform, or eliminate. For example, reflecting on the prayer of 21 November 1914, Shyam writes:

"This present world—full of strifes, cruelties, discordances and wars—is not what the Divine intended, wanted or ordained. The horrendous conditions of humanity that we are witnessing now are an accident and aberration. But the person whose children are shredded by terrorists' bombs, whose home is fiercely burnt and life totally destroyed cannot help but to reproach and question the Lord, 'Why did You allow all this carnage to happen? Why do You allow the guilty to flourish?'"

Basing her reply on Mother's prayer, Shyam reassures us, "The Divine is not indifferent to our pain. The Mother descended on the earth to write a *finis* to this millennial chapter of sorrows and woes." After elaborating on the change that will occur—"Not only the good will be protected, but the bad will be transmuted into good, evil into virtue and woe into weal"—she adds, "Let us then survive, holding to the assurance given by the Mother. Surely all is going to be well, to be divine."

In many essays, Shyam focuses on bringing out the historical implications of the prayers regarding the nature of Mother's inner realization at that point in time. For example, Shyam indicates that in the prayer of 22 December 1914, "the Mother recorded a new greatening achieved by her mind." Then Shyam dissects the three stages of the change recorded there, which might otherwise easily be overlooked: "a mind open to all universal possibilities, 'a silent mind,' and a mind open to 'the resplendent sun of sovereign Truth,'" which Shyam interprets as the supramental. Later in the volume, Shyam indicates that from 2 January 1915 until June 1916, the Mother "worked on the problem

of the purification and transformation of her vital being and a victory was achieved on 5 June 1916," where again there was a progression from an exalted union with the Divine in quiescence, to a dynamic union in the midst of intensest activity.

As another example, commenting on the prayer of 13 July 1917, Shyam writes, "our Mother who had, through her tapasya for self-culture and self-elevation, already identified herself with her Mahasa-



raswati and Mahalakshmi aspects, had now become identified with the imperial Maheshwari . . ." Shyam provides further information about this progression in the same essay when she writes: "Actually, these four Personalities or Powers which Sri Aurobindo mentioned in *The Mother* remained active until February 29, 1956. Afterwards the Mother began acting from her Supramental status, as far as it would be possible to act from that status under the then prevailing world conditions." Shyam apparently bases this interpretation on an anecdote related by Nolini, in which the Mother had advised some ashramites who had wanted to put on a play about the four Powers of the Mother to not put so much importance on them, because she had already gone far beyond them.

As illustrated here in these few examples, there is a tremendous treasure in these volumes that definitely is worthy of study and meditation. There is rich material for a variety of types of readers, and for the different aspects of our nature: physical and practical, emotional and psychic, intellectual, and spiritual. Generally, I

found in reading Shyam's *Musings* that they quickly transported me into a meditative state, as if I was borne into the psychic and spiritual atmosphere in which they were suffused. At various times I found practical advice and wise counsel for situations or difficulties I was facing in my own life and sadhana. Occasionally my interest and curiosity was specially roused, and I found myself considering, analyzing, and sometimes questioning Shyam's interpretations and extrapolations. At all times, I felt myself before a wise and loving mentor, someone both knowledgeable and experienced, someone with "inside information"—both from her many years in the Ashram and personal contact with the Mother and senior disciples, and from her evident inner development and established inner contact with the Divine. *Musings on the Mother's Prayers and Meditations* is an exceptional work from an exceptional author that inspires, informs, and delights.

Essays for the New Millennium Views and Reviews: Sri Aurobindo, Yoga Philosophy, and Savitri, The Mother and Auroville, The Global Crisis, 1992- 2002, by Rod Hemsell

Reviewed by Bhavana Dee

Rod's book and my promise to review it for *Collaboration* were much in the background as I perched with a young friend who had led me up a narrow path beside Willow Creek in the Sierras. Reflecting on the headlong race of those myriad drops to the ocean, immersing myself in the ineffable beauty of the swirling water and towering trunks and falling twigs, into my mind came the cadences of *Savitri*. It seemed to me in almost revelatory brightness that the message of this profound ecological and dynamic spiritual epic, this torrent of words extolling the glory and caprice of Nature, is what Sri Aurobindo is all about, what Auroville is all about, and especially for the occasion, what Rod's book is all about.

On first glance through this homemade book, with its amateurishly inconsis-



tent layout, I complained to Rod, "It is certainly a potpourri – speeches, fragments of essays, project proposals, tirades . . . even a workshop brochure!" He said, "Read it all through and it will make sense." I did, and it did. Essentially he is calling forth the profundity of *Savitri's* mantric message, finding it in philosophy, science, politics, and environmental action, and invoking it into our lives, today.

Rod is a philosopher, so this book will appeal mainly to those of a philosophical turn of mind. He sets Sri Aurobindo in his contemporary philosophical context; and thanks to his practice of using very long quotes, one need not be already conversant with Whitehead, Heidegger, Gebser and Derrida to get a sense of a common human intellectual struggle in the twentieth century. "Philosophy calls us to seek the potential of perfection in ourselves, understand what it means and be regenerated by it," Rod says. He then proceeds to elucidate how Whitehead and Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo have each returned to the roots of their respective philosophical traditions and brought forth a completion and synthesis, with Sri Aurobindo pointing the way for a new leap forward.

Rod's critique of Ken Wilber also benefits from the use of long quotes, so that the difference in source of inspiration and depth of vision becomes very apparent. With appropriate respect to Wilber's skill-

ful and voluminous synthesis, which Rod presents in ample detail, the critique carefully points out Sri Aurobindo's stronger and more radical vision of what Wilber calls "integral non-dualism." That is, Rod highlights Sri Aurobindo's conviction that the highest spiritual evolution of consciousness can bring about a substantial, lasting and integral transformation of the life of humanity on earth. For Sri Aurobindo, such an evolution is possible because the highest divine supermind is the basis of existence, can be realized through a spiritual ascent of consciousness, and can descend through a higher spiritualized mind into life and matter to transform every aspect of existence. Wilber may well develop his ideas, Rod opines, but until now only Sri Aurobindo speaks from outside the higher reaches of Wilber's "four quadrant" spectrum.

Rod's loving and explicit recapitulation of the theoretical background of Auroville takes us into the nitty-gritty of real world transformation. He sets the practical problems facing Auroville in the context of the classical social problems of individual vs. collectivity, freedom vs. law, and refers to the social implications of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. These problems will be solved by an evolving humanity, involving the individual and the collectivity in a psychological and social process of mutual transformation. What is needed to do this in Auroville, as the Mother has stated, is a spiritualised consciousness which is aware of the One, or at least a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, and a great goodwill. Rod also takes us into the practical problems of Auroville's actual economy and its ideal of "no money." He sees Auroville's experience as a microcosm of the global struggle that Mother foresaw very clearly: "What we may call the 'reign of money' is drawing to its close. But the transitional period between the arrangement that has existed in the world till now, and the one to come, in a hundred years for instance that period is going to be very difficult—is very difficult."

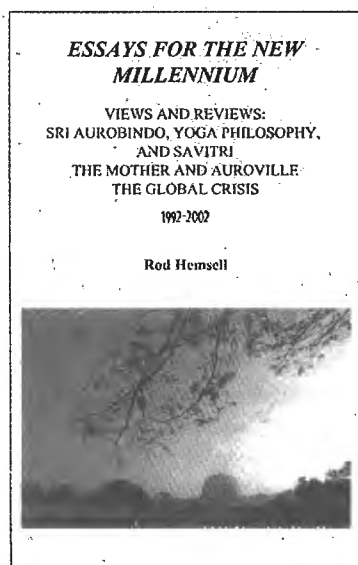
In connection with a proposal for an international water project in Auroville,

three pertinent articles by major ecological thinkers are reviewed: E.O. Wilson, Harvard biologist; Lester Brown, of World Watch Institute; and Vandana Shiva, Indian nuclear physicist and activist. All call for a need to correct a global situation where commercial interests are unremittingly exacerbating the ecological crisis. Interestingly, he sets the observations of these ecologically and economically astute international observers in relation to the standard undergraduate economics textbook used in most major universities in the US, *Economics Today* (2001-02), pointing out how it persistently and misleadingly ignores actual ecological limits and focuses only on market and prices.

Having cited E.O. Wilson's scholarly appraisal of the ecological crisis facing humanity, in another article he points out the three major paradoxes which Wilson, as a committed atheist and empiricist, creates in his attempt to reconcile the stress that the human population is putting on the biosphere, the weakness of the scientific approach to curb the indiscriminate destruction, and his failure to see what is so clear to Sri Aurobindo, the possibility of science discovering and embracing a truth beyond itself.

After dealing with the inconsistencies of this "biological basis of morality," in another essay he turns to the wrongheaded might-makes-right tenets of "The Bush Doctrine." Again making liberal use of quotes, this time from a White House document, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002", we see starkly revealed a national policy gorged on "military might" and "economic might" which places itself and its interests above the community of nations. "Students of the philosophy of human unity and world unity, as formulated by Sri Aurobindo," he points out, "who have perhaps been reassured by the growing influence and integrity of the United Nations, will of course be sensitive to the tone of unilateralism, and the extreme emphasis on the use of force, that resound throughout this document."

Other essays deal with spirituality in healing and in education, but in the end

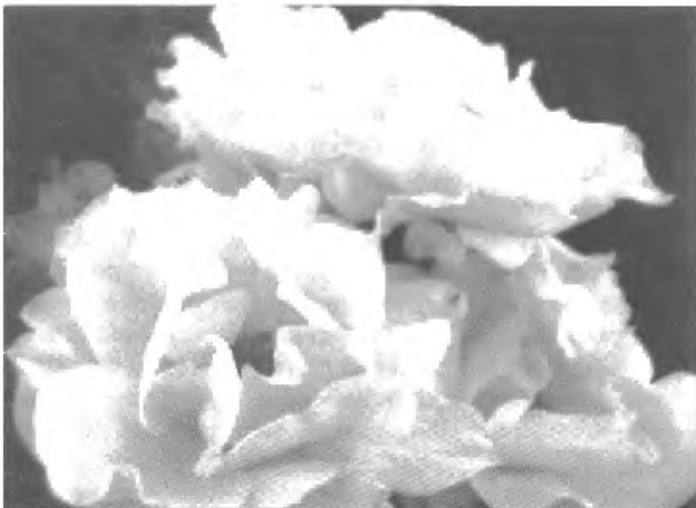




Rod once again takes up his centrally underlying theme: *Savitri*, and the beauty and message which a devoted reading of this mantric epic can bring. In an earlier piece he has presented Sri Aurobindo's explicit intention with *Savitri*: as a seer-poet he seeks to provide a "flame-word which shall lead the earth soul to light," and through mantra and mythos to make that flame-word an effective power for transformation. In the last essay, he clarifies the relation of the epic story with Mother's experiences as detailed in the *Agenda*, and also relates her experiences to the radical existential and deconstructionist philosophies of Nietzsche and Derrida. In the intense quandary of the modern world, faced with ecological and political crises of the direst dimension, we are behooved to hear the answer of Savitri to Death, the detailed answer of spiritual love to all the mental arguments. The last page of the book announces the Savitri Immersion Workshops, which are presented annually at The Baca, Colorado, where continuous reading of Savitri over a week allows the deeper messages to be apprehended.

The Mother's Auroville and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* both attempt to present to the world a radically new way to approach truths that have long been shrouded in religion and tradition, and allow them to reveal their next evolutionary flowering. Rod invites the reader to enjoy with him the sweep of the philosophic mind, the joys of debate and inquiry, the delight of applied thought, and the appreciation of poetry and myth. He presents these aspects of the cultivated mind as part of the ascending spiral of evolution that has been so powerfully evoked by Sri Aurobindo from a stage beyond all that. Rod's sharing of his writings reminds us not only to heed Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's call to aspire for supreme Truth, but also to use their tools and opportunities to place it foremost in our lives.

The book comes with a CD recording of Rod reciting *Savitri*'s "The Yoga of the King," and is available directly from him, rodhemsell@yahoo.com, for \$20. Registration for the annual August Savitri Immersion Workshop is available through the same email address.



The poetry room

Bride of the Fire

Bride of the Fire, clasp me now close,—
Bride of the Fire!
I have shed the bloom of the earthly rose,
I have slain desire.

Beauty of the Light, surround my life,—
Beauty of the Light!
I have sacrificed longing and parted from grief,
I can bear thy delight.

Image of ecstasy, thrill and enlance,—
Image of bliss!
I would see only thy marvellous face,
Feel only thy kiss.

Voice of Infinity, sound in my heart,—
Call of the One!
Stamp there thy radiance, never to part,
O living Sun.

—Sri Aurobindo

At Her feet

Here ceases the cyclic game—
Now gathered in are my senses,
I am a golden cocoon!
The past weighs no more on my soul,
Through the silences I glimpse the goal.
The deeply etched grooves of Karma
Are cancelled by Thy Grace.
Through the luminous cloud-clefts
Thy rainbow-arms' embrace
Wipes off each lingering shade
Of my aeonian pain.
Thy beauty infinite in the finite's face
Makes my own being a secret whole.
Whispers tell me, "Don't hesitate,
Advance and dare the Ultimate.
Wager everything on your faith."

—Shyam Kumari



The depth of me is the depth of you

Free to go wherever I chose,
Contentment was nowhere to be found.
I spent my vital mentality
On an illusory idea of self.
High on this false identity,
Things seemed to serve me.
All the pleasures and pains
Were certainly what I had ordered.
But the dish before me
Was a harsh bitter fruit.
It poisoned me entirely,
And all those around me.
I felt like a fragment
Of a sickening humanity.
Set apart from the rest,
Alienated, like everyone else,
All living the hells and heavens
That vacillate in individuals.
This persisted agonizingly
Until the realization of a truth:
I am not my thoughts, my status,
My possessions or my past.
They are a part of me,
But decisively not my entirety.
Only a fraction of my eternity
Are things already done
And the things I'll do.
The depth of my existence
Rests in the infinite place
From where these things rise up.

—Abram Sapphire

Moonlit contemplation

pearly sapphires dance
quietly above the still mountain,

and the wise one gently
breathes across the
murky waters of an
unknown, placid lake.

true believers,
(the paralyzed seekers)
stare unknowingly at
their confusion and disbelief,

unaware of
the blackened crevasses
concealing the mountain's knowledge,

mysteries too feared,
too good,
to be explored by faithless wanderers.

a moonlight's graceful presence
gazes upon the dark comforting
silence of the mountain's discernment,

haunting lost egos with
precious light to see,
blinding them innocently
with unaccepted vision,

here the creating One,
that eternal observer,
becomes divided into
dusky shades of differences,

and the mountain's secret valley
of shadowy nothingness
reveals where the mountain's
truthful trail begins,

where the fearless
explore onward,
while believers gather
only to wonder.

—Noel Parent



Nisus

Ancient Indians believed the Golden Strait to be a sacred place
of the Gods.

It has also been called the gateway to the Orient.

The San Francisco Bay has existed for many thousands of
years
with its winds and fog and clouds
in Brahman's poised omnipresence.

It was one of those magic days when everything
seemed the delight of existence. Antique orange trolleys
trundled by. Kites dawdled in the autumn sky. A joyous play
of the One and the Many. Is not our planet Earth
the home of the Divine in the cosmos?

I was walking north along the San Francisco waterfront near the
Bay Bridge
toward the Ferry Building. It was a breezy Saturday afternoon
in October. I inhaled the salty sea air, enthralled by the idyllic
atmosphere of one of the world's most scenic walks.

The sunlit piers were all aglow along the Embarcadero
lined with port flags and elegant palms. Mothers strolled baby
carriages.

Cyclists and romping youth on roller skates
passed by under esplanade lamps.

I continued along the Embarcadero esplanade
toward Aquatic Park, entranced by the prevailing spirit of joy
and ethereal beauty of the Bay.

At Pier 39 I paused to view the blue spectacle of bay waterfowl,
aquatic
paradise of pelicans, geese, swans, ducks, and gulls. Ferries
cruised
the harbor routes of Tiburon and Sausalito. All seemed a
welcome respite
from the dreary mood of the workweek.

Children at Aquatic Park were building sandcastles on the
shore.

Sunbathers and lovers reclined on the grassy knoll
gazing toward the glorious estuary and misty hills of Marin.

Continuing on to Fort Mason, I ambled over a Marina hill
overlooking Golden Gate Promenade, musing over the white
sails and sweep
of the estuary when I saw the harbor entrance all ablaze.

I was filled with awe and wonder. Such radiant splendour!
The Sun had entirely obliterated the Golden Strait in such
wondrous light
that it seemed an epiphany of the Gods
kindling thoughts of human evolution. Are we not evolving
toward a heavenly outcropping on earth of the Divine?

Now whenever I look toward the Golden Gate, I recall the
dazzling
radiance of that Sun, symbol of a creative Supermind
that guides the evolutionary nisus toward the gnostic future
to the outflowering of the Divine on this sacred Earth.

—Joseph Kent

In the dark evening

In the dark evening, my heart glows.
The soft breeze carries your perfume
Enchanting me with your loveliness.
Subtle is your spell, difficult to hold;
It drifts in the cool quiet air,
Floats on waves of sounds from afar,
Or falls silently as snowflakes.
Only in the heart of peace you dwell;
Calmly with warm, deep love you speak.

In your patient, delicate manner,
Through my stumbling awkward attempts,
You peel away all that distorts
The simple truth of your being.
How many lifetimes have you stood
At my shoulder, out of sight,
Watching, beckoning me to turn
To see the sweetness of your smile
And feel its exquisiteness.

Now that I have seen your beauty
And felt your touch upon my life,
My soul bows down before your feet
Praying with profound adoration.
May the dead weight of the ages pass
So that the glory of the new
Be born awake to your Presence.
Docile to your creative power,
And full of your pure, sacred bliss.

—Larry Seidlitz



What is sought

My teachers, my students, my fellow seekers,
Some light shines through the clouds now, so
I'll write and maybe I'll reflect that light.

What we seek is not what we think;
Neither is it what we feel. Deeper,
More primary, it is what we are.

Even those who don't know they seek this,
Even they with their elaborate schemes
Involving such "concrete things"
Are looking to make more of what they are,
Or make what they are "more".

We may skip through these illusions
Of minute fragments which feel so real.
We may jump right into the great illusion,
Dissolve ourselves in a world of uniform soup.

In doing so are we any less deluded?
Maybe we've taken a step too far . . .
But maybe this step will let us get back
To our usual delusion with an insight -
What I am at my core is you at yours, and further
I share this core with all sentient beings. Further yet,
The substance of my surroundings, of this universe,
Is as sacred as my soul.

Only thinking makes this not so.

So, what is sought is everywhere I look.
If only more often I had eyes to see.

— Abram Saphire



New growth on Copper-pod trees: "Service." (Photo by Navaja Llope)

A tryst

Quietly I tried to slide down
The hidden paths of Thy Peace,
But like a hundred courtesans
Thoughts enchanted and enringed me.
Avidly I listened to their fascinating tales
At first so important; gradually they grew stale.
Satiated I tried to plunge
Into the plumbless depths of my soul,
But the dance of the nimble nymphs of life
Kept hidden the inner doors.
I have a tryst with my true self;
In an expectant hush my bride is waiting.
She has lighted an eternal lamp —
Peerless the reflections of her beauty.
Tears fall from the luminous pools of her eyes,
As at my hapless wanderings she sighs,
Yet her love abides.
Again I try to find the way,
But get entangled in the overgrowths of life.
O my Dawn! Arise and flood the faltering darkness
With the rivers of your radiance.
On your million rays bear me away
From the mirage of mind and life.

—Shyam Kumari



Apropos

What we call fate does not come to us from outside: it goes forth from within us.—Rainer Marie Rilke

The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of the Divine.—St. John of the Cross

It is our lack of faith that creates our limitations.—The Mother

Philosophy is really homesickness.—Novalis

I, you, he, she, we—in the garden of mystic lovers, these are not true distinctions.—Rumi

Forget safety. Live where you fear to live. Destroy your reputation. Be notorious.—Rumi

Just as the rains pierce through the bad roofing of a house, even so the passions pierce through an ill-disciplined mind.—The Dammapada

Try to be happy—immediately you will be closer to the Light.—The Mother

Learn to smile always and in all circumstances; to smile at your sorrows as well as your joys, your sufferings as well as your hopes, for in a smile there is a sovereign power of self-mastery.—The Mother

It is the fact that people who are cheerful and ready to go step by step, even by slow steps, if need be, do actually march faster and more surely than those who are impatient and in haste.—Sri Aurobindo

Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.—Margaret Mead, anthropologist

The value of our actions lies not so much in their apparent nature and outward result as in their help towards the growth of the Divine within us.—Sri Aurobindo

Since I can never see your face / And never shake you by the hand, / I send my soul through time and space / To greet you. You will understand.—James Elroy Flecker, from a poem “to a poet a thousand years hence.”

It is not because a thing is difficult that one should give it up, on the contrary, the more a thing is difficult the more determined should one be to succeed in it.—The Mother

My mind not only wanders, it sometimes leaves completely.—From the Internet

Sometimes I think I understand everything, then I regain consciousness.—From the Internet

Whether you believe you can do a thing, or that you cannot do a thing, you are right.—Henry Ford

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.—Philo

There are two allied powers in man: Knowledge and Wisdom. Knowledge is so much of the truth, seen in a distorted medium, as the mind arrives at by groping; Wisdom what the eye of divine vision sees in the spirit.—Sri Aurobindo

Suffer yourself to be tempted within so that you may exhaust in the struggle your downward propensities.—Sri Aurobindo

What is the use of only knowing? I say to thee, act and be, for therefore God sent thee into this human body.—Sri Aurobindo

Consecration is a process by which one trains the consciousness to give itself to the Divine.—Sri Aurobindo

Work is a means of self-dedication to the Divine, but it must be done with the necessary inner consciousness in which the outer vital and physical also share.—Sri Aurobindo

Let us progress ourselves, it is the best way of making others progress.—The Mother

The more we concentrate on the goal, the more it blossoms forth and becomes precise.—The Mother

A time has come when we have to go back to our heritage and recognize that even material things have a consciousness, have a life.—M.P. Pandit

Progress: to be ready, at every minute, to give up all one is and all one has in order to advance on the way.—The Mother

No joy is comparable to the feeling of the eternal Presence in one's heart.—The Mother

I don't think that one can ever smile too much. Someone who knows how to smile in all circumstances is very close to true equality of soul.—The Mother

If you can always smile at life, life will always smile at you.—The Mother

Happiness is as contagious as gloom—and nothing can be more useful than to pass on to people the contagion of a true and deep happiness.—The Mother

How many of you believe in telekinesis? Raise my hand. —From the Internet

To do easily what is difficult for others is the mark of talent. To do what is impossible for talent is the mark of genius.—Henri-Frédéric Amiel

To err is human, to admit it, a blunder.—Anon.

Choose anything, but follow it to the source.—Stephen Mitchell