

Collaboration

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Shyam Kumari on "How I came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother"
Essays by Martha Orton on "Sacrifice" and Richard Carlson on "Technology"
Rick Lipschutz reviews Wayne Bloomquist's new book, *God shall grow up*
Current affairs • AV almanac • New letters on yoga • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

"The Samadhi," in the Ashram's courtyard, is a place of meditation and spiritual pilgrimage for devotees worldwide. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

The authors and poets

Vigyan Agni (agni@auroville.org.in) is a Matri-mandir worker living in Creativity, Auroville. He also offers Tamil and Sanskrit classes online.

Richard Carlson (rcarlson@olympus.net) is President/CEO of Pacific Weather Inc., and is the main organizer for AUM 2005.

Susmita Chatterjee, who lives in Bangor, Maine, is a poet and gives lectures on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy (susmita_chatterjee@hotmail.com).

Prabuddha Khare (khare_pra@hotmail.com) is a former student of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram school, and a software engineer in San Jose, CA.

Shyam Kumari, an Ashram member for 36 years, is an author, poet, editor, and director of a Sanskrit school (shyamkumari@auromail.net).

Julian Lines (jlines@hvc.rr.com) is a board member of AVI, AVI-USA, and Matagiri. He also runs "Pondicherry," a shop in Woodstock, NY.

Rick Lipschutz (rlipschutz@pedcard.ucsf.edu) is a medical transcriptionist in San Francisco, and a member of the Cultural Integration Fellowship.

Martha Orton (bearfacts@adelphia.net) is a clinical social worker in Charlottesville, VA, and is pursuing studies in Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

Angelo Salerno (salerno_51@hotmail.com) lives at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, CA. He works at Auromere and loves gardening.

Larry Seidlitz (larry_seidlitz@hotmail.com) is a student facilitator for Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow in Pondicherry.

Dakshina Vanzetti (sasp@lodinet.com) directs the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham ashram in Lodi, CA., and is active in the collective work.

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From the office of Collaboration

This issue comes in the wake of the tsunami that devastated Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Tamil Nadu, India, the state surrounding the enclave of Pondicherry. Pondicherry itself was spared the worst, protected by an eight foot high sea wall and the Mother's grace. Although Pondicherry was affected, more serious repercussions were felt north and south of the city. Auroville, six kilometers north, had no casualties, but nine of its communities were damaged. Near Auroville, 24 villages were hit hard and 104 people were killed. Auroville rushed into action in a remarkable way providing emergency and long-term relief and rehabilitation. A report is given in the AV almanac section.

Our feature articles include a chronicle by Shyam Kumari of her remarkable early life and how it led her to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and 36 years of dedicated service in the Ashram. Among her more than 30 published books are a set of four, *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, in which she tells the stories of 112 disciples. In this issue we have her own life story, written firsthand in her wonderful, fireside style.

We also feature two essays. The first by Martha Orton recounts the key principles of the Yoga as described in three crucial chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. It focuses on the essential elements of the triple path of works, knowledge, and devotion, especially on their common thread that weaves them into a true synthesis. We also are shown the nature and place of the psychic, spiritual, and supramental transformations. Based closely on the text, Martha summarizes in a relatively brief space the main elements of the Yoga.

The second essay by Richard Carlson, the main organizer for AUM 2005, is on technology and how and where it is leading us. In this first of a two-part article, Rich covers the nature and development of the close interdependence between humans and their machines, detailing the latest technologies that are hurtling us into the future. The outcome of this thrust is ambiguous, there loom both positive and negative possibilities, and Rich helps us to discern these and consider how we may steer clear of the latter.

In addition, we have source material from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother relevant to Richard's article, an article on yogic basketball by Prabuddha Khare whose formative years were spent in the Ashram school and physical education department, a review by Rick Lipschutz of Wayne Bloomquist's new book, and a fine selection of poems. You will also find current affairs, art, photography, and apropos quotes.

The artists and photographers

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

Kalpna Patel (kalpupatel@hotmail.com) lives in Santa Clara, CA. She is treasurer of SAA and enjoys playing yogic basketball.

www.freephotobank.com provided photography for this issue.

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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.

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Current Affairs

AUM 2005 to be held in Port Townsend, WA

AUM 2005 will be held in Port Townsend, Washington at the Fort Worden Conference Center from June 9-13, 2005. The theme will be "The Promise of the Future," and presenters from the U.S. and India will explore three major aspects, "The Future Body," "The Future of Science and Technology," and "The Future Community." The conference is being organized primarily by Rich and Nishi Carlson in Port Angeles, Washington. Rich and Nishi are heroically spear-heading the effort with the help of the new AUM continuity team and a few other advisors and helpers from around the country. This distributive effort reflects a wonderful openness to new ways of working together, right in tune with the AUM's focus on the future.

Presenters for this year's conference include Alok Pandey, Aster Patel, Matthijs Cornelissen, Debashish Banerji, Lynda Lester, and Ameeta Mehra. Panelists include Rod Hemsell, Dave Hutchinson, Lakshman Sehgal, Michael Miovic, and Guy Burneko. Other featured guests include Karunamayee, classical Indian vocalist; Joseph Subbiondo, president of California Institute of Integral Studies; and Allan Combs, author. Some of the presenters will be touring other centers around the country.

The emphasis of the conference format will be on panel discussions, cafe-style small-group breakout sessions, interactive workshops, collective meditations, centers meetings, and outdoor activities. The intention is to make the presenters available to all who attend in an intimate setting. See the AUM website for more details: www.collaboration.org/aum/2005/index.html.

Auroville International Meeting 2005 held in Auroville

by Julian Lines

Auroville is represented in various countries by individuals and nonprofit organizations known as Auroville International. These Auroville International (AVI) centers are involved in education, fundraising and generally trying to help Auroville fulfill its mission as described in its charter. Some have memberships, others are just individuals familiar with Auroville who give out information. In the U.S., we have a nonprofit corporation. AVIUSA board members Julian Lines and Chandresh Patel are also members of the Auroville International Board.

We arrived in Auroville on 9 January, still in shock over the tsunami, and just as the Integral Psychology Conference was getting under way, so things were humming around the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture and Bharat Nivas (the Pavilion of India) in the International Zone. We met for two days as the AVI Board, then

invited everyone for our opening session with Sraddhalu as our featured speaker, along with recent videos by the new webmaster, Luigi.

Here are some highlights from the meeting:

There is a new team working for AVI in Auroville consisting of Kathy, Tine, and Lella.

AVI has nominated former AVI president and diplomat, Robert Aarsse, and author Alan (Savitra) Lithman to be part of AVI's Network of Advisors.

There is an effort underway to create new AVI centers and add members by creating new brochures.

We would like all centers to recognize one another's members thus creating a worldwide membership. We would like to move towards creating national and international directories.

There is a new effort to have cultural activities in the International Zone. The primary public spaces—Pitanga, Bharat Nivas, Information Center, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture and the Unity Pavilion—need a maintenance budget.

The internal Auroville Russian Pavilion group feel they now are ready to build something with the funds available.

The Shakespeare International Theater in Auroville (SITA) is a proposed international theater with a 300-500 seat capacity. There are already talented Auroville youth working in costume and set design. Project holders want the SITA to be self-financing. The theater will be international in scope, not just the plays of Shakespeare.

Development pressure from Pondicherry is encroaching on Auroville from three sides. Employment opportunities in Auroville have caused an increase in the village population in the Auroville area.

An excellent mini-documentary on the tsunami was shown. This DVD is being duplicated and will be made available to the AVI centers.

AVIUSA plans to make an excellent video production on Auroville by Basil, "Towards a Sustainable Future," widely available in the U.S.

Because of problems with the waterproof covering of the Matrimandir, all 1500 discs have to be removed, and the ferrocement must be sandblasted to remove the bad primer. This unfortunate turn of events has set the work back two years. Also, the inner chamber will be closed for renovation of the cooling system after February. There was an appeal for outreach from the centers to raise the two million dollars needed to complete most of the work over the next two years. A CD is available about the work, and the team is considering fundraising ideas.

At the Town Hall, a presentation was given on the vision and concept of the Master Plan. There has been a blossoming of conferences and collaborations all over the world on Auroville. The Auroville planning team is collaborating on many projects and traveling out a lot. Asia Urbs, linking European and South Asian cities, is just one of many successful links. India itself is very interested in the urban/rural issues Auroville is facing. Other projects of the planning team include: working with the



Pondicherry Heritage Preservation, introducing electric vehicles and charging/swapping stations, pollution control, environmental planning, and international relations. They have set up a certificate program for training electricians, and bought advanced equipment for environmental analysis. There is even a proposal for a nonconventional (biomass) power plant. Much effort is going into data collection and collaboration with the Indian Space Agency to monitor via infrared the change in the bioregion over the years.

There was a report on the Sri Aurobindo Institute for Educational Research (SAIER), which has a biannual research journal, RITAM. They also are involved in a number of projects supported by the Government of India, including a new student dorm, a new primary school, and a new school directed by Meenakshi.

Education is the underlying principle of Auroville. Future School, Auroville's high school, currently serves 45 students, but will grow at the rate of 15 students per year over the next five years. Transition, the elementary school, serves 130 children from 29 countries, ages 6-15. Vadarajan, who has been in Auroville since 1969, reminded us that Mother said education consisted not of preaching, but example. He directs a morning kindergarten and evening classes for Tamil youth. Many other excellent schools were mentioned. It was reported that many student teachers are coming to do their practicums in Auroville.

Currently there are three programs in progress from the California Institute for Integral Studies: Multiculturalism, Indian Psychology and an Alumni tour. The University of California at Santa Cruz also had a program, as did the University of Washington, Naropa Institute for Noetic Science, and Vestopland from Norway. Auroville itself is offering a winter Integral Studies Program taught by Aurovilians and visitors.

Kathy Walkling, a new team leader for AVI, is involved with informal education and networking around the world. She reported that there have been 79 requests for volunteer and internship opportunities from over 19 countries.

Shraddhavan discussed the work of Savitri Bhavan, including the housing of 400 paintings by Huta on Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*, and two training scholarships. Weekly talks are being given at the center by Sraddhalu.

Peter outlined a major progress in the evolution of decision-making. Previously, the Resident's Assembly had no enforceable process for making decisions. Now there is a procedure for taking decisions and amending the process.

Many visitors who come would like to work. Auroville is concerned that too many visitors are just "hanging out" and should be oriented and participate in some way. It was noted that Findhorn has a structured program for receiving visitors, experience week, which is an opportunity for karma yoga.

Outreach is very important for interfacing with journalists. The Auroville Council is taking on the work of transitioning to a new team.

Collective projects of "Centeraction"

During AUM 2004 in Greenville SC, a meeting was held of representatives and associates of various Sri Aurobindo centers, study groups and related organizations, in which several projects were identified to work on collectively. In the aftermath of the conference, an action group was formed (dubbed "Centeraction"), and four projects were taken up as a collaborative work by volunteers: (1) AUM continuity; (2) Speaker's Bureau; (3) Mailing List Project; (4) Miraura Website update. At present, the first two projects are moving forward, whereas the latter two are pending, primarily for additional volunteer assistance. Further details about the projects are given below. If you are interested in helping on any of these projects, contact Dakshina at sasp@lodinet.com.

AUM Continuity Team: This group was formed to help the local organizing team that hosts the AUM from year to year and build on the past experiences to help the AUM's run smoothly and evolve according to the needs of the wider Sri Aurobindo community. The Continuity Team is working on a revised "AUM Manual" that gives helpful organizing information, and can assist in selecting presenters, providing format suggestions, and helping with travel arrangements for presenters by interfacing with the Speaker's Bureau. The purpose of continuity is not to narrow the AUM's down to a single or limited format, but to offer background support and ease the process for the local organizers in their unique efforts.

Speaker's Bureau: The Speaker's Bureau is being formed as part of the effort to coordinate the travel and tours of speakers—not only for the AUM, but whenever a speaker or presenter is visiting the U.S.—between the various regional Sri Aurobindo centers, and also for outreach to other venues where Sri Aurobindo's teachings are not well known. The Speaker's Bureau team is collecting bio-data and topics of expertise on those who can present on a variety of subjects relating to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This information will be made available for use by various centers to create promotional materials for any talks they wish to host or organize. The team also assists speakers coming from India with visa and ticket arrangements, and coordination of VUSA tickets that enable travel around the country at significantly reduced rates. Any centers who wish to host a speaker will be encouraged to help arrange talks at other venues in their area, such as universities, Indian cultural and religious organizations, institutions for psychology studies, and civic groups. If you are a speaker on Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, and would like to be included, please send bio-data, topics, and a photo by email to sasp@lodinet.com.

Mailing List Project: This project started as a relatively simple task of cleaning up discrepancies in the large, merged mailing that was combined from the regional lists of various centers and organizations a couple of years ago. The team decided to take the project to the next level by making it updateable



online via a password system, so that each person on the list can update their information themselves. Also, the team was interested in adding several features whereby people can subscribe to various publications such as *Collaboration*, or register for the AUM, or subscribe to various centers' mailing lists, or list their skills for volunteer-based Sri Aurobindo community projects. It was quickly realized that this project would tie in with the development of the Miraura Web project and the projects basically became merged, with the mailing list aspect becoming a function and aspect of the wider project. This project is now pending the addition of more volunteers.

Miraura website renovation: In addition to adding the on-line mailing list feature, the entire Miraura website (www.miraura.org), which was created over 10 years ago, will be updated. Although much of the reference material will be retained and updated, the project is more than just a face-lift, the whole site is being looked at in terms of how it can better serve the Sri Aurobindo community not only as a reference tool, but as a dynamic way to foster interchange and connections using the best that technology can offer today. It is intended that the site can be easily maintained and updated by those who take up that work in the future, with the process being documented for future reference.

This inspiring and massive project has since been postponed, and requires additional volunteers. If you are interested in helping with this project, specific technical skills that would be helpful on this project include: content management; writing and editing; web/graphic design; and knowledge of computer technologies such as html, css, php, and mysql.

Briefs

Books on disk: Over the course of seven years in the 1970s at Matagiri, passages from the works of Sri Aurobindo and Mother were read out as part of the daily meditation program each morning by Eric Hughes and recorded on reel-to-reel tape. One hundred and six reels (approximately 1.25 hours each) were recorded, covering several volumes of Sri Aurobindo's major works, several volumes from Mother's Collected Works, and several smaller works and compilations.

As a collaborative project between Matagiri and Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, a grant was obtained to transfer the old tape reels to a permanent digital medium (CD's) in order to save these archival recordings from environmental damage and deterioration; and to publish, over time, selections from the recordings for distribution to the public as "books on disk" in audio CD format. Proceeds from the initial release would be used to fund subsequent releases in the series.

The first CD in the project is available: Sri Aurobindo and the Mother On Love (\$16.00 ea.). To order, contact Auromere Books and Imports: 1-800-735-4691, info@auromere.com, or Matagiri: 845-679-5358, Julian@pondi.biz.

The Golden Path, Anie Nunnally's new book based on her interviews with 12 senior disciples, is now available. These distinguished disciples from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville—which include Americans, Europeans, and Indians—relate their personal stories of darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Some of the interviews were previously published in *Collaboration*. The attractive 264-page book, illustrated with interesting photos, is published by the East West Cultural Center, the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles, where Anie is an active member (310-390-9083; ewcc@sriarobindocenter-la.org).

AV almanac

Auroville tsunami relief and rehabilitation program

by the Tsunami Relief Team

[This article was originally published on Auroville's website: www.auroville.org. It has been edited and used with permission.]

Under the umbrella of the Auroville Village Action Group, the Auroville Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Centre began functioning 26 December, the day the tsunami hit the Tamil Nadu coast. In the first months, its main task was to provide immediate need-based emergency relief to the residents of 24 affected villages and communities located in the Auroville area. It has now moved into the longer-term rehabilitation phase. A core group of 25 volunteers has taken up tasks ranging from overall coordination, communication, financial management to organizing volunteers for field work. All activities are being carried out in close collaboration with village residents and government authorities.



A woman sits where her home once stood. (Photo courtesy www.auroville.org)



Phase 1: Emergency relief

Immediately after the tsunami hit on 26 December, a group of concerned Aurovilians, faced with the influx of fleeing village residents, decided to immediately open an emergency relief camp. In total, 2500 affected villagers were given food and shelter during the three days the relief camp was functioning.

On the basis of a needs assessment, it was decided to immediately start distribution of food and non-food items like blankets, clothes and school materials to 24 villages and communities identified as Auroville's main concern. Most distribution activities have been completed, but close monitoring of the situation in the villages continues.

Until 1 March, a group of 50 to 100 volunteers worked in the villages daily to remove the waste and debris laying on village streets and lands. The work is now continued under the Cash-for-Work program project, in which village residents are offered wages in return for cleaning work.

A special team is taking care of the needs of the nine Auroville beach communities and its residents. Depending on needs, individuals and families have been relocated, urgent individual financial needs have been met, cleaning activities have been undertaken, infrastructure and house repairs have taken place, and damaged fences have been resurrected. Pending issues include company losses, house repairs, excess salinity of the water, and potential electrical problems due to corrosion of cables by the sea water intrusion. Depending on the available funds and the urgency of activities, further action on these issues will be taken.

Phase 2: Rehabilitation

To facilitate the much longer-term rehabilitation phase, an overall program coordination infrastructure was put in place. The Rehabilitation Program consists of four distinct, but interlinked projects: Tsunami Restoration Knowledge and Coordination Centre, shelters and infrastructure, ecological restoration, and livelihood. The worldwide Irish charity organization *Concern* has offered to partner with the Auroville Tsunami Rehabilitation Centre for the livelihood and shelter projects. The UK-based organization *Save the Children* has partnered with the Auroville Building Centre for the design of pre-crèche Integrated Child Development Centers for all Tamil Nadu, and has committed itself to building 28 of these centers in Auroville's area of concern. In order to ensure the input of the affected villagers and to guarantee a need-based approach for all the rehabilitation activities, a *Paalam* structure was set up, in which each village or community is represented by one Panchayat member, one woman, one youth and, if possible, one teacher. The *Paalam*s, meaning bridge in Tamil, meet every week and form an indispensable source of reflection and information for all the rehabilitation projects.

Tsunami Rehabilitation Knowledge and Coordination Centre: In order to share information, expertise and ideas among



Children enjoy a meal at an Auroville relief camp. (Photo courtesy www.auroville.org)

the various organizations contributing to tsunami-related efforts in South India and to foster better coordination among NGOs, donor organizations, government agencies, and volunteers, a Knowledge and Coordination Centre has been established. This Centre, organized and implemented by Auroville, will function as an interactive information platform for the collecting and sharing of knowledge, the spreading of best practices and the development of consensus on rehabilitation strategies and implementation. The aim is to create a coordination and information-sharing model that will be useable in any future disaster emergency. The Knowledge Centre exists in two locations, a physical office and a virtual office in the form of a website. The physical office in Auroville is open and there is an ongoing collection of data. The website is under construction and will go online in April.

Shelters and infrastructure: A main issue of rehabilitation is providing new shelters to tsunami-affected villagers. An implementation strategy to facilitate the construction of up to 1000 new shelters and accompanying infrastructure is being formulated and villages have been identified. Infrastructural solutions concerning planning, land development, roads, multi-purpose community facilities, electricity and renewable energy, water, rainwater harvesting, wastewater treatment, and sanitation are part of this project. Auroville has solutions and related training and management models for housing and infrastructural needs, tested and ready for implementation. A group of Auroville architects has created a number of house designs that have been presented to potential future residents, government officials, and other NGOs for feedback. On a designated piece of land, prototypes of the designs will soon be built.

The Tamil Nadu Government has provided temporary shelters to a large section of the people who have lost their houses as a result of the tsunami. In some villages there was no land immediately available, so there is still a need among some sections of the population for temporary shelters. Auroville is willing to provide materials, such as poles and thatch (keet). At the moment we are waiting for permission from the district authorities.



Ecological restoration: In an effort to create awareness in the population about the importance of afforestation, not just for protection from tidal waves, but also to combat salt-water intrusion and the further degradation of natural resources, an ecological restoration pilot project is being set up. The project will be implemented in Auroville beach communities and on selected village plots along the coast. A presentation of the ecological restoration plans will be made to the Paalam members who will introduce them to the coastline residents on March 17th. A team of Auroville botanists will take up responsibility for this project.

Livelihood: Auroville is coordinating its training facilities to host vocational trainings, from tailoring to computer skills, for up to 100 youths from the affected villages. Recruitment and information activities have been taking place and training programs on welding, mechanics, computer software/hardware and electronics have started.

A pilot project in which 1050 village women are being offered livelihood workshops in handicrafts with the intention of establishing self-sustaining women's cooperatives is taking place in seven villages. In cooperation with Upasana, an Auroville fashion design unit, three modules have been developed for producing complimentary gadgets made from left-over cloth. The easily marketable gadget prototypes have been developed by students from the Chennai-based National Institute for Fashion Technology. The pilot project will be comprehensively documented and used as a model for implementation in other parts of India.

Other livelihood programs with the intention of establishing self-sustaining units, such as a paper bag producing workshop and a papier maché workshop, are being initiated.

The Cash for Work Program is daily employing residents of tsunami affected villages to further clean up the village. In order to keep the living surrounding clean, community leaders have showed interest in setting up a solid waste management system in cooperation with the Auroville Eco-service.

Fifty of approximately 170 fishing boat engines have been repaired by an Auroville mechanics team, and 120 more are in the process. A boat repair survey will take place soon and a strategy for the repairing of boats is being formulated.

The Tamil Nadu Government has offered 100 percent compensation for the wooden catamarans and nets, which will benefit a large section of the fishermen population. For the more expensive fibre boats (or FRPs, Rs. 150,000 each), in use by another large section of the fishermen, the Government has offered a 50 percent grant. The remaining 50 percent would be in the form of a loan or NGOs could step in and cofinance the replacement of these boats. As soon as the Government has finished its survey of losses and finalized its refunding policies, we will propose in which way we can contribute to the rehabilitation of these fishermen's livelihoods.

For information on how you can help, contact the Auroville Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Centre, Aurelec, Auroville – 605101, Tamil Nadu, India; Tel: +91-413-2622184; e-mail: tsunami@auroville.org.in; Website: www.auroville.org.

New letters on yoga

Yogic basketball

By Prabuddha Khare

We all know that sports and physical exercises find equal importance in the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Yoga as any other line of education and discipline. Mostly, though, we engage in it with reservation and when we do, we get lost in its outer structure, its appeal for excitement, joy of success, and pride in the appreciation we receive. If we look back and ponder over the opportunities these activities provide to become conscious of all the little movements in us, all these enemies of the Truth, we shall find the true purpose of our engagement and learn to appreciate the large vision of our Masters.

Indeed it could be said that sports is the best medium for bringing out, becoming conscious of, and transcending the subtle and obscure ills in our nature that otherwise we are not even aware of. Moreover, sports by its very nature and appeal provides a joyful and collective ambience for yoga. This ambience forms the core of the sunlit path laid out by the Mother, and contrasts with the traditional paths of yoga that invariably have a touch of suffering and hardship. On this account alone, sports must occupy a premium position when we talk about collective yoga, for no other collective activity is endowed with such a natural and spontaneous scope for individual and collective progress as sports. I must lay stress on progress here since not only do our faults come up to the surface but we are also graced with ample opportunities to overcome, transform and transcend them in a luminous, joyful, and loving surrender to the collective spirit. Transcendence, or being in a transcendental consciousness, may sound like an exaggeration here, but has not the Mother asserted in no uncertain terms in one of the evening classes that a yogi should be capable of perfect divine consciousness at all moments, including while playing basketball? Relaxed, fun-filled, nearer to the consciousness of the human nature, free of somberness and gravity is the path that is open to us. Why not make the best of it?

Our small group in the South San Francisco Bay area has been in the habit of playing basketball regularly. The group is a mix of boys and girls, novices and experienced, eight-year olds to 50-year olds. We start with some warm-up exercises and practice shots. Captains are identified who then chose and supervise their teams. When more than two teams are available, the third team usually stands by to watch or rest or practice. One of the players from the third team volunteers to referee, keep score and keep time. This structure has been found to work well for our group whose dynamics, as already mentioned, are subject to large degrees of variations.



While most of us, if not all, are aware of and attempt to follow the yogic attitude during this activity, it has been noticed that often we get carried away by the calls and lures of the general human reactions, affinities and attitudes towards the sport. We, for instance, are more concerned about winning the game. Again, we tend to take it as a hang-out hour, a time-pass routine. This laxity on one hand and excitement on the other results in an unsafe, injurious, and discordant atmosphere. It is only on rare occasions that we attempt to improve our skills. Rarer still is our self-awareness focused on the faults and limitations of our nature or the habits which hamper our progress in the path of yoga, to which this activity should primarily be dedicated.

Since yogic self-discipline is a very subjective matter even when practiced in a collectivity, this article shall leave it to the reader to discover for himself the mechanism and system which he can put into practice as a solution to the issue based on his understanding of the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. However, I would like to say something about the subject with respect to a general improvement of the atmosphere and attitude towards the sport that could provide a better infrastructure for the practice of self-discipline.

I strongly believe that basketball is by design a game of skill and beauty, not a mere pass-time sport. I consider its variations of shooting styles, dribbling, and passing as the real *raison d'être* of the game. The rules of basketball, in my view and experience of the game, are primarily to allow and encourage these aspects of it to grow and develop in the players. Therefore, we find the player in possession of the ball being given a higher degree of right-of-way than the defending player. It is only thus that he is able to bring out the best in himself with a degree of safety and joy. The style of disposing, stealing, over-guarding, and unsafe body contact that we consider to be normal and necessary is a wrong and distorted view in which we should not be interested, and certainly not take as the way of the game.

This is how I have seen, viewed, understood and played the game in the days of my sports life in the Ashram School at Pondicherry. Whenever I have watched a game being played there, I have seen in it always a clean game, a safe game, a skilful game, a game of beauty. I remember the movies about basketball and other sports that were shown to us to watch and learn from, in which stress was laid on acts of skill, new styles and new rules introduced and old ones modified to suit the newer styles and skills so as to allow them to settle into the body of the game. The rules then, in my view, are important guides to which we must adhere, not for the sake of following the letter of the law, but to ingrain into our body and its reactions the right response and habit natural to the spirit of the game. Our body should be able to do what our mind understands and knows and wants to bring out on the field. Therefore, there are rules and the necessity of watchful adherence to them. Safety, harmony, beauty grow with self-discipline.

With the above in mind, I would like to share my views on some aspects of the game. There may not be any specific rule I



Some members of the South Bay team: Front row: Nikhil, LK, Larry, Shyam, Lopa, Kanchen. Back row: Bhavi, Vasudeva, Prabuddha, Girish, Rohit, Nihal, Chandresh. (Photo by Kalpana Patel)

can quote or no document I can point to as the *law*, but as these have been ingrained into my consciousness over the past 30 years and refuse to be dislodged in spite of strong suggestions from the professional media or general opinions, I take them as the truth of the game and its spirit. In short, my attempt is lay down the spirit of the game as I know it and not its rules.

Possession of the ball: The player in possession of the ball is its master. He should be given room and time to play out the act hiding in the undercurrents of his physical consciousness. To this effect we must obey the rule of not-snatching and dispossessing. There should not even be the idea to just tap away the ball, leave alone grabbing and stealing it. It is only on rare occasions when two players come into possession of the ball simultaneously, such as when collecting it after a rebound or any free throw, that some tussle can be there. But that too should get quickly resolved as invariably both players know who the real possessor of the ball is or should be. One of them should let go. In good games I have seen that happen each and every time. But when it becomes unclear and irresolvable then the rule of jump-ball comes into effect. There is another rule that comes to the rescue in the professional scene when a player decides to keep the ball in her possession for an undue period of time. (This is what one finds objectionable with the right-of-possession rule—what if she does not pass?) It is a valid objection and the designers of the game came out with a time limit rule on individual possession of the ball. The player *must* pass or shoot within the time limit. Likewise there is a time limit for team possession. They *must* make a shooting attempt within a time-limit. When considering these rules in combination, it becomes evident that the whole intention of the sport is to have a game of action and fun.

Guarding: The defending player should guard or block the advance of an opponent only when he is in a position to face him



squarely against the line of advance. Reaching into the offender from the side or behind, even when done with utmost care, may not always be safe and subjects the body to a mechanical habit that becomes difficult to control and check. In practice, however, the referee does show some degree of leniency towards the defender as long as the action is safe and natural. This allows the offender's skill in dodging, tackling and feigning to develop. Any intentional or repeated act of unqualified guarding is not in the spirit of the game. This is a rule that we must practice very consciously in our games from the point of view of safety. However, it is against the spirit of the game if no sincere effort is made to guard when one is expected to.

Blocking: By blocking is meant the act of defense when the offender is taking a shot at the basket or passing the ball to a teammate. Here again, a clean block is effected only when the defender is facing the offender, her blocking action is in line with the trajectory of the ball, and her hand does not cut into the offender's cylinder before the ball is released. Contact with the ball while it is still in possession of the offender is allowed and even recommended but the action should not be to dispose, snatch or steal but rather to discourage the offender from passing or shooting. This is the intention of the block. A good offender will respect it and attempt to find a gap, develop a feign, show a superior skill. All this leads to a refinement of the individual as well as the group game. However, should the offender decide to complete her action in spite of the block, she should be given sufficient freedom to do so while all the time maintaining the threat. The mistake we make, in my view, is that we feel blocking is the defender's birth-right, and that it is achieved as well with an aggressive action. For a clean and safe game, we should consciously avoid this.

Rebounding: It is recommended to reach for the ball with a jump, short or high, depending on the situation. The jump must be straight up without any travel. It is a foul if one knocks off a player due to his momentum of forward leap. Again it is recommended to try to take possession of (collect) the ball rather than merely be an obstruction to the offending team. In our game, we often tend to just stand, lean over the other person and grab the ball (this is what the tall players do) or throw our body and arms into the other person (who is often our own team-mate) in order to knock it out of his control. In the spirit of a clean game and a game that is safe and fair and provides scope for class, clever and stimulating moves and actions, playing the ball in the air is the way. This is what we see and admire in the professional games. This is what we should attempt to bring out in our games too.

Over-guarding: This is an act when a defender tends to cut into the freedom of the offender by reaching well into his cylinder not only with his hands but with his body also. The basketball guidelines and rules are quite definite about this aspect of the game. By design, they allow greater freedom of movement and right of way to the offender. In fact, using the pivot, once the offender gets himself out to a new cylinder, the defender cannot come into his way with his body. He is allowed to move into a new position himself and only then take on the action of guarding.

This time delay is usually enough for the offender to make her next move. But in our games, our natural defending habits are contrary to this rule. When we find the offender trying to turn, pivot or feign a move, we throw all our body and arms around him, above him, and on him with a conviction that that is the way of the game.

Dispossessing while dribbling: Tapping away the ball from the offender either while he is dribbling on spot or dribbling and advancing is a dirty business, even when done with the most clean hand. Firstly, it results in a mechanical habit that is difficult to check and which we clearly know is wrong. Secondly, it is disheartening to the offender because his action is left incomplete when the ball suddenly disappears in mid-air, and also because the defender often knocks into his hands or body. Thirdly, it is unsafe. It is better, at least in our games, to respect our cylinders, guard and block within the guidelines given above, and allow the offender to complete his move of passing or shooting. If he is able to dodge or feign us, it should encourage us to improve our defending skills. If the offender fails to complete his move to his satisfaction, it should encourage him to better it or find a newer style.

The defending stance: The natural position of the defender, even as recommended by basketball training books and schools, is to stand with knees bent, slight lean in front, arms bent at the elbow and raised to head height or stretched forward to a point where the cylinder of the offender begins. Usually players keep one hand in front at the level of the waist and the other raised up above the head. Some keep both hands raised up to head height. Even when the offender is dribbling right in front of you, or holding the ball right in front of your nose, it is unwise to commit and attempt to dispose him of it. Be prepared to block or collect the ball once he lets it go and only when he lets it go.

Shooting and passing: Our normal tendency is to give more stress on making shots and scoring than passing. We find joy when we are successful in making baskets. We appreciate our teammates for the same reasons. This is clearly a play of psychology, for had the scoring been based on good and successful passing rather than on shooting, our mind and heart would experience as much joy, and our effort would be turned towards self-improvement in passing with as much energy. The truth of the matter is that passing is closer to the spirit of the game than shooting, for shooting is an individual gain while passing releases a collective joy. One should be conscious of the positions of one's teammates as well as those of one's opponents. Passing should be done before getting into trouble rather than afterward. Often we want to outrun the defense rather than pass the ball to a teammate, take a new position, and receive the pass in return—a more tactical and less expensive move.

A change of perspective and an openness to change is all that is required to convert this mundane activity into a glorious and refreshing harvest of joy, love, enthusiasm, and progress—surely a rich score for one's little basket. And if this is true for basketball, is it not true for all sports?



Chronicles

How I came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

by Shyam Kumari

Sri Aurobindo says, "All life is yoga." Life after life, the soul seeks its guru and, through the guru, the Divine. My present life's quest began when I was only three years old, when my soul consciously resumed the quest that was interrupted by its previous death and rebirth.

I was born in the mid-1930s in north India in a deeply religious family. As in most other Sanatani Hindu homes of the time, the life of my family was centered around God and gods; Sri Rama and Sri Krishna were not remote mythical figures for us—they permeated our lives in every aspect. From the point of view of the soul's efflorescence, I had a privileged childhood and, until the time I was 12, I lived in an enchanted world. One or other religious festival took place almost daily, often celebrated on a big scale. Our city's Rama-lila celebrations ran for a month and each night a different episode of Sri Rama's life was staged. For Deepawali, the day celebrating his victorious homecoming, the festival of lights, we lit a thousand oil lamps in our house for which we would hand-roll wicks for a whole month in advance. And we celebrated the birth anniversary of Sri Krishna with fasting and fervor. In the weeks leading up to the auspicious day, families would make tableaux of his life. By word of mouth, we would come to know which were the best tableaux in the city and visit them. Thus, over and over, we emotionally felt the joys and suffered the pains of Sita and Radha. The songs of the saint queen Mira Bai filled us with fervent love for the Divine. The stories of devotees like Harishchandra, Dhruva and Prahlad formed a strong link with the Divine. I believe that this religious and spiritual atmosphere brought a great

emotional broadening in my being.

Sixty years ago there was no TV to distract us. Religious festivals wove a magic cocoon of mystery and godliness in our hearts. Even the mundane celebrations of marriages and births were permeated with the fragrance of religious ceremonies. Thus, in spite of a thousand childhood heartbreaks, distractions, innocent joys, and ephemeral sorrows, God was never far from us. Mythology and religion, pilgrimages and rituals, Ganga-bathing, and camping in tents for weeks in freezing weather on the banks of holy rivers were normal events in our lives.

While for most people religion was a prop for the well-being of the outer life and a promise for rewards or punishments in the afterlife, for me it was the central issue, the *raison d'être*, of life. When I was three, our family went on its annual pilgrimage to Garhmukteshwar, a holy place on the banks of Ganga, not far from Delhi. In the wilderness, a million or more people camped on the holy river's banks, in temperatures hovering around freezing. A simple meal of *khichdi*, a mixture of rice and lentils, laced with the ever-present sand of the Ganga, was cooked for the day's two meals. But such was the devotional fervor that neither the rich nor the poor minded the hardships.

On this pilgrimage, my conscious quest for the "real" and "living" God began. One evening, after the simple meal was over, I cajoled my mother to take me to the makeshift market where in rickety stalls, images of dozens of gods and goddesses, rosaries, peacock-feather fans, sandalwood blocks, and other items connected with worship were sold. Sixty-plus years on, I still remember the scene. It was dark. Each shop had lighted one or two small kerosene lamps for illumination of their wares. The air was thick with the smoke of hundreds of cow-dung-cake fires on which thousands were cooking their gruel or *chapattis*. In that kilometer-long market, I stood expectantly before the first stall, holding the hand of my mother, and innocently asked the shopkeeper, "I want to buy God." The enthusiastic shopkeeper showed me images of different gods and



Shyam Kumari. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

Avatars but I insisted, "No, I want to buy 'Real' God." The poor shopkeeper was baffled. That evening, from the first shop to the last I went with my indulgent mother, asking expectantly, "Do you sell 'Real' God? I want to buy 'Real' God." When my mother tried to persuade me to buy an image of one of the gods, I declined, protesting, "It is made of clay. I want 'Living' God. Let us go to the next shop." Hopefully enquiring at each of the shops, ultimately I came to the last one. Yet, He, whom I wanted, was not for sale anywhere. My mother placated me by buying a large image of one of the gods.

Another rich strand of spirituality was added to my life when, at the age of four, I was enrolled in a girls' school that followed in the footsteps of revolutionary Hindu reformer Swami Dayananda, who tried to bring about a revival of the Vedas. In our school, before the classes began, all the students chanted Vedic Mantras, and havans (religious ritual involving offering of fragrant ingredients as a sacrifice to fire) were performed every day.

My parents' families were not only religious, they had an undercurrent of spirituality too, I now realize. Once, early in the morning while on way to the temple, my great-grandfather had the darshan of Sri Rama and Lakshman.

I am truly indebted to my maternal grandfather, Lala Nihalchand, who molded



my childhood and had the greatest influence on me. He lived a householder's life only until his mother's death and the marriages of his two daughters were solemnized. Then, having educated his sons and thus fulfilling his worldly duties, he renounced the worldly life and lived for fifty years the life of *vanaprastha* (forest hermit) in Rishikesh, where Lala Charandas of Mathura put him in charge of his Ganga Ashram. When I was nine or ten, during my three-month long summer vacations, I went to stay with him and my grandmother. That vacation was the most formative period of my childhood.

Grandfather taught me all the six systems of Indian philosophy, which, I confess, I hardly understood then. But more important was the atmosphere of the holy place. Early in the morning, my grandfather went to a secluded bank of Ganga, bathed in the river and then meditated on the river bank for more than an hour. During that time, all alone with God and Ganga, surrounded by mystic hills, I floated flowers and frolicked in the pure waters and heard the chanting of birds. In the evening I attended the enchanting Ganga *arati* (oil-lamp worship of the Ganga).

The most important event of that memorable visit was when my grandfather presented me with what seemed to my eyes a whole library. I was a voracious reader and could read several hundred pages a day. One day I asked grandpa to give me a book. He gave me an abridged Hindi translation of the epic *Mahabharata*. I finished the five- or six-hundred page book by mid-day and again clamored for a book. Grandpa exclaimed, "But I gave you the *Mahabharata* in the morning." "I have finished reading it," I replied. Grandpa found it hard to believe. He quizzed me for an hour and was astounded when I answered all his questions. He was pleased and I believe the Lord who was looking after my spiritual needs at each step—the Immanent Divine seated in the hearts of all of us—inspired my grandfather. He was a man of few words. He put on his shirt and in that scorching mid-day sun of May, he took me by boat to the other bank of the Ganga to

Gita Bhavan, where numerous religious and spiritual books were sold. Pointing to the books on display he told me, "Buy as many books as you want." I jumped up in excitement because there was a veritable treasure of scores of illustrated biographies of saints and devotees. Pointing to book after book, I bought more than 60 storybooks.

Grandfather also took me to visit several saints living in Rishikesh. At that time, I didn't pay much attention to them, but they saw me and now I realize that what a blessing it is to come in the presence of holy men. Some of them took notice of me and, I believe, are still now helping me from the subtle plane.

Exposure to Western literature

The Lord had arranged my life in such a way that, in miraculous ways, he made available the books I needed to read, made me meet the persons I needed to meet. Having laid a firm foundation of devotion in my child heart, now my Lord Sri Aurobindo added another strand for the broadening of my soul.

I was already a voracious reader—and recognized as such. The headmistress of my school had decreed that I could borrow four books a day from the school library though the general rule was for two books a month. Over time, I devoured the whole library of about 1200 to 1400 titles. I read the whole of Premchand, Prasad, Pant, Mahadevi, Rahul Sankratyayan, Bhagwaticharan Verma, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinoba Bhave, and translations of the works of Tagore, Sharat Chandra, Bankimchandra, Kanaihya Lal Munshi, to name a few. I read books that were so heavy in weight I would carry them with difficulty, and that were so deep in content that I could hardly understand them, yet I read them all, each one over and over again.

By the age of 12, I was reading Shelley and Keats. And a little later on, Shakespeare. During the summer vacations when the school closed and I could not get books from the school library, I read the

textbooks of my father and uncles of their Bachelor of Arts courses.

Our next door neighbor was a young man who aspired to appear for the Indian Civil Service exam. A taciturn and awe-inspiring person, no child was allowed to play on the terrace in front of his room, let alone enter his room. His nieces were our friends with whom we played hop-scotch and other games for hours. From a vantage point, I had a clear view of his two big cupboards with glass doors, full of English books. I yearned to read all those books. The Lord, who was guiding my steps from book to book, from one consciousness plateau to another higher one, one day made me speak to my neighbor's niece, "Prem Lata, please ask your uncle, will he lend me his books?" Prem Lata mustered enough courage to convey my request to her unapproachable uncle, and it was a still greater miracle that the uncle agreed. Every day, from over the common wall between our two houses, I received two books, a treasure-trove indeed. Thus was opened to me a new world. I suffered and wept with all the English heroines. The pain of Tess became mine. I slept with *War and Peace* on my chest and read Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* countless times. Weillhem Meister and Count of Monte Cristo taught me invaluable lessons. Socrates and Huxley and the impish humor of Shaw left indelible footprints on my mind and soul. How I wept over Jude the Obscure, thrilled while reading *Kenilworth* and other historical novels of Sir Walter Scott and the magic tales woven by the Bronte sisters and became one with the characters created by Charles Dickens. My identification with the characters was total. I used to pale every time the servant of Dr. Hyde returned with a salt that could not turn him back to his usual form. My heart suffocated every time I read of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina throwing herself under the wheels of the train.

With this immersion in hundreds of the best classics of the West, and thus coming in close contact with the Western way of life and culture, at the age of 14, I became an agnostic and a communist. The pain and injustice of life was felt as some-



thing monstrous and unimaginable. But the search for the “Real” God never left me even during this interlude of agnosticism; when due to the inexplicable inequality of life and cruelty of death, I dared to deny God. And then to write a *finis* to this communist phase of my being the Lord put in my hand a book by Prince Kropotkin that made me see the hollowness of communism.

Due to the early spiritual influence on my psyche, I cherished the ideal of *brahmacharya* (celibacy), while due to the influence of literature, one part of my being became an incorrigible romantic. I imagined heavens and El Dorados on earth and love in fairy-tale style, where charming princes meet Cinderellas. The Lord would not suffer me to stay with any mundane ideal for long. The Hound of Heaven was herding me at considerable speed along the roads of life. Romantic illusion can last not one but many lives. So a surgical operation was needed, and the Lord lifted his scalpel and cut without compunction all notions of the sacredness of human love. He decided to kill the beauty

of romance in my heart. When I was most sensitive, maybe 12 or 13, I came across the Hindi translation of a book about Russian brothels by Alexander Kuprin. After reading that brutal book, which highlights the most sordid aspects of sex, at that age of most gentle and heightened sensitivity, Kamadev, or Eros, the Lord of Love, basically lost his power over me. And though I had to pay nature’s debt by loving and grieving, by being a wife and a mother, and though human love did enter my life in a big way due to which, for a time, I rejoiced and suffered as most mortals do, in essence, after reading that book, Eros had lost the battle in me even before it began. That is why at the age of 24, in search of a star to hitch my wagon to, in search of something greater and higher than what life offers, in search of some divine ideal, I was to come to Pondicherry, to the Mother

and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

India’s freedom struggle

Another strong undercurrent in my early life was my love for India. At that time, the late 1930s and the early 1940s, the struggle for India’s freedom from the British was at its height. My mother’s brother, Radha Raman, spent nine years of his youth in British jails for his pro-independence activities. With fervor we children went around in processions, shouting Bande Mataram and singing patriotic Hindi songs like *Jhanda uncha rahe hamara* (Let our flag fly high) and

I was already a voracious reader—and recognized as such. The headmistress of my school had decreed that I could borrow four books a day from the school library, though the general rule was for two books a month. Over time, I devoured the whole library of about 1200 to 1400 titles.

Vijayi vishwa tiranga pyara (Let our beloved tricolor flag triumph). My birthplace and home town, Muzaffarnagar, is only 80 miles north of Delhi, and national leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Aruna Asaf Ali, Achut Patwardhan and others came several times to our city. Once, when I was four or five years old, I went to watch a reception given to Jawaharlal Nehru at a local business establishment. I was perched on the shoulders of the shop assistant of my grandfather when the police made a baton-charge and Nehru-ji jumped in and plucked me out of the melee.

Because my uncle was in the forefront of the freedom struggle in our city, many of these leaders visited his home. I felt so proud when I was asked to pour tea for Aruna Asaf Ali or was granted the privilege of putting silver foil on the dessert

prepared for Jayaprakash Narayan. The freedom struggle was so grim and my emotional identification with it was so intense that I felt the suffering of all those who participated in it.

I read proscribed books like *Raja Nandkumar Ko Fansi* (Hanging of King Nanda Kumar) and *Bharat Me Angreji Rajya* (English Rule in India) over and over again, as well as the biographies of famous leaders and martyrs like Subhash Chandra Bose, Khudi Ram, Chandra Shekhar Azad, and many others. We wept for these patriots and sang songs about them. But apart from shouting slogans and marching in processions, I did not get a chance to actively participate in the struggle; India became free when I was only 13.

Further education

It was my good fortune that my father and uncle had decided that girls in the family should be educated. This was, for those times, a remarkably radical attitude. They got our girls’ middle school upgraded to a high school and then later to an intermediate college. Their aim

was simple and limited: to help the girls of the family become “graduates.” Then, in case a girl was ever widowed, she could become a schoolteacher and support herself.

Our city had several intermediate colleges for boys but none had graduate courses. So that girls of the family graduate, my father, uncle and their forward-looking friends who were active in the educational life of the city, had to provide the same facility to the boys of the city.

Thus a graduate course was introduced in Sanatana Dharm Intermediate College of our city and consequently, in that most orthodox city and in spite of being born in a very conservative family, I had the opportunity of studying in a co-educational institution. Fifty years ago, in a socially backward region of India, it was a revolutionary development. The oppor-



tunity to interact with boys liberated me from the age-long traditional inhibitions of an Indian girl. Otherwise, at that time and in that milieu, girls didn't even talk to boys who were not of the immediate family.

As I mentioned, for some time I had lost belief in God due to the hundreds of English books I had read, and especially due to the influence of the communist ideology, which seemed to be the only answer to the world's innumerable ills. Then the Lord smiled and put on another uncle's table, in Delhi, the book *In Search of Secret India* by Paul Brnton. That one book put me back firmly on the path to spirituality. And I soon discovered anew Sri Ramakrishna and life took on intense devotional fervor. After reading the biography of Sri Ramakrishna my belief in, and devotion to, God deepened, but I stood baffled on the shores of life because neither Sri Rama, nor Sri Krishna, nor Sri Ramakrishna could explain the injustice of the world. These Avatars had also suffered cruelly, nor had they any remedy for the creation's ills except for annihilation, a soul-merger in the Divine. Their aim was to live as best as one could, with the hope to merge in the Divine after death and by attaining *moksha* (liberation), to come out of the cycle of birth and re-birth. But the world was called unreal and there was no redemption offered for it.

This was my problem. I love this world dearly: its dawns and eves, its doves and peacocks, its heroes and thinkers, even its sick and lowly. To leave the world as it is and to strive for personal liberation didn't make much sense, nor did it have any appeal for me.

I graduated at the age of 16 with a Bachelor's degree, and then faced a dead-end; my education suddenly ended. My family offered to appoint a full-time professor for my Master of Arts studies but declined to send me to live in a boarding house in Delhi, and I declined private studies. There was no meeting ground. Then the family began searching for a suitable bridegroom.



Ms. Kumari shortly before coming to the Ashram.
(Photo courtesy Shyam Kumari)

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Then Lord Sri Aurobindo decided to reveal himself. It was a dark period for me. It was 1951 and I was only 16 years old. After a vibrant school and college life, I was now cooped up in the house with nothing to do. In desperation to be out of the house, which seemed more like a prison, and out of that aimless passing of time awaiting a husband, I went on a pilgrimage to Gangotri and Yamunotri, the sources of the sacred Ganga and Yamuna rivers, with my uncle and aunt. My uncle, R. R. Goel (now a realized soul and a Guru) was at the time the district engineer of the Tehri Garhwal region in the foothills of the Himalayas. My uncle and the district collector (a senior administrative bureaucrat), B. N. Maheshwari, decided to tour the interior of Tehri together as one family. The way to Gangotri and Yamunotri and back consisted of a trek of 500 miles. There were no roads, only mountain trails hallowed by numerous pilgrim feet over the centuries. Mr. B. N. Maheshwari and his wife, Vimala

Maheshwari, were devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We lived and walked 500 miles together. I heard much about the Ashram, the Mother, and Sri Aurobindo from Mrs. Maheshwari. It seemed as if the portals of heavens were being opened for me. I was totally captivated. This seemed the El Dorado, the Millennium.

These two devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had decided at the height of youth to lead a celibate life. This impressed me deeply because the higher part of my nature believed in *brahmacharya*, even when the emotional being loved passionately in the human way. Of many such diverse strands is the human nature woven! I came totally under the spell of Mrs. Maheshwari and thought, "If she is so pure, how much greater must be her Gurus!" Then and there I decided that after returning from that pilgrimage, I would take 200 rupees from my father's safe and run away to the mysterious land of Pondicherry. On the banks of Ganga, walking on the holy trails, in the mystic Himalayas surrounded by pine and oak trees, day after day, for nearly two months, I heard of my Lord Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and their Ashram. My fate was sealed, my path decided.

Yet, it was not a direct devotion. I admired Mrs. Maheshwari so much that I decided to follow her guru. I didn't realize that such indirect obeisance will be accepted neither by a guru nor by God. On the last day of our pilgrimage, Mrs. Maheshwari chanced upon a booklet in her suitcase, "Words of the Mother", and passed it on to me. The very first sentence was surely addressed to me: "Do not come on this path out of admiration for anybody . . . come only when it is the call of your soul." I stood like a statue. I didn't know anything about my soul and I had decided to take this path out of admiration for Mrs. Maheshwari. Thus the Mother showed me that it was not enough to love Mrs. Maheshwari and it had to be the call of my soul. But of my soul I knew nothing. Therefore, I postponed the plan to run away to Pondicherry.



Marriage

My father's forward-looking attitude towards Hindu women was limited to their education. At the age of 18, I was married to a government officer who had no spiritual aspiration. I loved him and gave birth to and lost a child. The life of ease which the officers lived, where one went to dinners and picnics, watched films or played bridge, where the prime object in the lives of the wives of these brown "sahibs" was to have lots of saris and jewellery, to give birth to children, bring them up, to marry them, grow old and die, made no sense to me. Soon this ordinary life, lived ordinarily, palled. Even emotional love lost its flavor.

Five years later, I took stock of my life. I was 23 and had nothing to live for. The country was independent, otherwise for the freedom of the country one could live or die. The highest realization that Hinduism offered was *moksha*, liberation from death and birth, which didn't interest me. Then I studied a little bit of Islam and Christianity. They had nothing to attract me. Since I had read the book by Prince Kropotkin, communism too had become a busted god.

Still my love for humanity tied me to life. I dreamt of curing the ills of humanity, to bring heaven on earth by some human means, through some human agency. Then one day I went to a village for social service with the wife of the chancellor of Roorkee University, where my husband was doing his Masters in engineering. Sitting on the string cot in a villager's house I had a rare insight, one may call it even a revelation. In one moment it became clear to me that even if we could give food and housing to all the poor, it would not solve the problem of life, because the problems of the rich are worse than those of the poor, and legendary philanthropists like Kings Ashoka and Harsha, who gifted away their whole treasures, have not changed much in the world.

The last hope was lost, this remaining illusion of setting the world right through philanthropy was destroyed by an intuitive perception. For me there was left no ideal in the world worth living for. Riches, name and fame, family and human love or even *moksha* were not sufficient reason for living. Then why should one live and how should one make the world better?

I believe that mine had been an age-long search, continued from one life to another, for a "God" or a "guru" who will make the world beautiful and life free of pain. I felt that surely if God is God, then there must be a better destiny for humanity than this disease- and death-ridden life. But how to solve its problems when

have considered me crazy. But being liberal minded and sensing my misery, he put me on a train to Madras. When, after a journey of four days and three nights, I reached the Ashram and saw the Mother, all my questions just vanished. I found everything in her. As soon as I saw her, I knew that I was her chattel and child and had been so forever. I belonged no more to myself. I fell totally in love with her.

Those first few days in the Ashram were heavenly. I saw the Mother several times a day and she was in the Playground for more than an hour. I was privileged to work in the Mother's fruit room on the first floor of the Ashram main building, near the Mother's balcony, from where she emerged like the Dawn Goddess to give darshan in the morning to all of us who assembled on the street below. I realized this was my life, my home. After one month in the Ashram, I went back to arrange my affairs, tie some loose ends and come back for good the following year.



Ms. Kumari at the sacred Ganga. (Photo courtesy Shyam Kumari)

Postponement

At the end of 1959 I applied through someone to be accepted forever in the Ashram. The Mother replied, "Let her come, then we will decide." I had told this person to

convey the Mother's reply in such a way that my husband, even if he read the letter, would not get an inkling of my intention. It might not have been possible to come if he or my father's family came to know of my intention. This person wrote, "We want you to come for the first anniversary of the Supramental descent [February 29, 1960]. Bring necessary items such as a mosquito net." This I took as an acceptance, because the Ashram guesthouses provided mosquito nets and only permanent residents needed their own. Therefore, silently I took leave of my family and friends and kept some books aside, which I hope would be sent to me and came with just some clothes.

First visit

The end of the search was nearing. In 1959, desperate to find some meaning in life, I requested my husband, "Allow me to visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for a few days. If, in the Ashram I find some ideal worth living for, I will live, otherwise I will come back and commit suicide." He must

convey the Mother's reply in such a way that my husband, even if he read the letter, would not get an inkling of my intention. It might not have been possible to come if he or my father's family came to know of my intention. This person wrote, "We want you to come for the first anniversary of the Supramental descent [February 29, 1960]. Bring necessary items such as a mosquito net." This I took as an acceptance, because the Ashram guesthouses provided mosquito nets and only permanent residents needed their own. Therefore, silently I took leave of my family and friends and kept some books aside, which I hope would be sent to me and came with just some clothes.



After a month in the Ashram, I asked the Mother to give me permanent work. She replied that my heart was so developed that I was ready to take up yoga but needed more experience. I was shattered by her refusal and pleaded for being accepted. The Mother wrote,

It is not from disgust for life and people that one must come to Yoga.

It is not to run away from difficulties that one must come here.

It is not even to find the sweetness of love and protection, for the Divine's love and protection can be enjoyed everywhere if one takes the right attitude.

When one wants to give oneself totally in service to the Divine, to consecrate oneself totally to the divine's work, simply for the joy of giving oneself and serving, without asking for anything in exchange, except for the possibility of consecration and service, then one is ready to come and will find the door wide open.

I give you the blessings given to all my children wherever they are in the world and tell you, "Prepare yourself, my help will always be with you."

Dazed with grief I returned. But life had to be lived. I had postponed having a child, since my aim was to live in the Ashram, but now that I had to return, it didn't seem fair to my husband to deny him a child, and a son was born in 1961.

Soon after my husband was transferred to Lucknow, a university town. My husband was generous, "You always lamented that you could not finish your studies. Now you can study. We might not get the chance again." But in the meanwhile Mr. Maheshwari also was transferred to Lucknow and Mrs. Maheshwari, who had led me to the Mother, said,

"Shyam, after so many years you have a child. If you join the university, who will look after your son? The Mother does not like children to be left with servants." I was in a dilemma. I wrote to the Mother, explained the situation and added, "Mother, if I go to the university my heart reproaches me that you are neglecting your child for your ambition, if I don't, my mind reproaches that you are being lazy. Mother, please you decide whether I should study or not and if yes, please choose the subject." I enclosed a list of subjects and received her telegram: "Mother's blessings for Hindi M.A."

Protected by the Mother's blessings I plunged into my studies. Just before the examinations, my son broke his leg and many other serious family problems arose, but I went on doggedly and stood second amongst almost a hundred students. I brought my son to the Ashram when he was three, and the Mother gave him the Sanskrit name *Kim*. I didn't know that I have to ask the Mother again and the Mother didn't ask me to remain, so I went. Anyway, I believed Kim was not ready to leave his father. I again asked the Mother what I should study further. Amongst the various possibilities, one was research on Kabir, a saint-poet of Hindi. I received her telegram with blessings for Hindi research.

Again I plunged in studies of the mystic sage-poet Kabir. In 1966 I came to the Ashram yet again but again I knew my son was not ready to leave his father.

Finally here

Two years passed. In 1968 I heard by chance that the Mother was very ill. My whole being cried for her, "What if she too leaves, like Sri Aurobindo did? Then I will never get a chance to serve her." After a month, during the winter school vacations of my son, I came to Pondicherry with him. On the train, seven-year-old Kim was insistent that we should return before his school opened. But when we got closer to Pondicherry he changed his mind and said he would like to study in the Ashram school. We reached here on Christmas eve, 1968. The Ashram school's year starts

on 16 December. When Kim came to know this he wrote to the Mother, "Mother, you must admit me. I am late for there and I will be late for here too." The Mother accepted us on 22 January 1969. He became a student in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, the Ashram's school, and She appointed me a teacher in the same institution, a responsibility I still fulfill today. A few years later, I got divorced from my husband, ending ties with that part of my life for good.

When I first came to Pondicherry in 1959, I knew nothing of the philosophy, the Avatarhood of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, or that they have brought down the supramental consciousness on earth which will gradually transform the creation. That one day, not in a very distant future, all will be "sky and god," that humanity will be redeemed, that man will be one day "at least equal to gods."

Until that auspicious time, we will have to cross the *Vaitarni* or the Acheron a few more times, but having taken a million births this prospect does not daunt me. There is hope in my heart that in a not very distant future God will repay his debt to his children and that Sri Aurobindo will mould us in his own likeness; of course, in his own way, in his own time. When the dawn is sure, it does not matter if the night be long.

To belong to Sri Aurobindo, to know that he holds the reins of my destiny, that he is there protecting me, is a supreme assurance, the greatest boon for which one can ask. My destiny is secure. I feel so grateful that sometimes I want to embrace this holy earth of Pondicherry. My heart cries out in gratitude to Sri Aurobindo, "O Lord, I can never repay my debt of gratitude to you. You have raised me—who am so insignificant, so unworthy, so ignorant—from a life of darkness into spiritual light. You hold me close and watch over me. Again and again I thank you for uplifting me, for freeing me from the bondage of *maya*, for liberating me from all illusions, and for giving the assurance that one day humanity will be transformed and all life divinized, that the travails of creation have a happy denouement."



Essays

Sacrifice and the Triune Path

by Martha Orton

In three chapters of Book I of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo describes a dynamic process central to the integral yoga: the concept of sacrifice. In Chapter IV, titled “The Sacrifice, the Triune Path and the Lord of the Sacrifice,” Sri Aurobindo describes two major forms of sacrifice that occur in the universe. The first of these is the sacrifice made by the Divine through the descent of the Purusha from the vast oneness into the world and matter. This sacrifice, the highest and greatest, precedes the second, the sacrifice made by the existence to the Divine, and both initiates it and makes it possible. Sri Aurobindo states: “This descent, the sacrifice of the Purusha, the Divine Soul submitting itself to Force and Matter so that it may inform and illuminate them, is the seed of the redemption of the world of Inconscience and Ignorance.” (*Synthesis*, p. 98) The second form of sacrifice is that made by the manifest existence in its unconscious or conscious growth towards the Divine. This sacrifice ultimately leads human beings onto the triune path of yoga and union with the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo states that the sacrifice on the part of humanity is ongoing and inevitable as human beings interact with all around them. They give various capacities of themselves, and in exchange, receive from their surroundings. He describes the purpose underlying this action: “For it is only by this giving and receiving that it can effect its own growth while at the same time it helps the sum of things.” (*Synthesis*, p. 99) In addition, Sri Aurobindo addresses both the level of awareness and the spirit in which sacrifice is made. He observes that egoistic or unconscious sacrifice leads to only limited reward, whereas conscious sacrifice offered with



Always keep the flame of sacrifice burning.

love for and commitment to the Divine leads to true joy and fulfillment. The underlying purpose of conscious sacrifice, true self-offering, is expressed in his statement: “All true love and all sacrifice are in their essence Nature’s contradiction of the primary egoism and its separative error: it is her attempt to turn from a necessary first fragmentation towards a recovered oneness.” (*Synthesis*, p. 99)

While sacrifice on the part of humanity is integral to its nature and its purpose of existence, the return for the sacrifice is also assured, naturally present and expressed through the Divine descent. The Purusha has descended upon earth, awakening earth’s awareness and igniting its offering to the Divine, and it both responds to and fulfills the ultimate purpose of the sacrifice. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

Our sacrifice is not a giving without any return or fruitful acceptance from the other side; it is an interchange between the embodied soul and conscious Nature in us and the eternal Spirit. For even though no return is demanded, yet there is the knowledge deep within us that a marvelous return is inevitable. The soul knows that it does not give itself to God in vain; claiming nothing, it yet receives the infinite riches of the divine Power and Presence. (*Synthesis*, p. 101)

For the practice of the integral yoga, it is inspiring to understand that any and all sacrifice, conscious or unconscious, fully sincere or even mixed or partial in its nature, nevertheless has the potential to lead ultimately to the goal of unity with the Divine, the true purpose of man’s life upon earth. Even sacrifices offered to others or to any aspect of the Divine become offerings to the one Divine Presence because of its true omnipresence. Sri Aurobindo writes of a progression from involuntary to voluntary sacrifice concomitant with the growth of consciousness. Once the offering becomes voluntary, spiritual growth both deepens and accelerates, even if done mentally in a superficial and mechanical way, for this creates a conscious connection with the Divine.

The integral offering

Sri Aurobindo writes of the importance of offering all aspects of life and action, the mundane and ordinary as well as one’s inner aspirations and higher thoughts and deeds. He states that doing so enables the offering to become integral and complete as one grows in devotion and intimacy with the Divine. It assists in the realization that not only is all contained within the Divine, but also that the Divine is in all, and the Divine is all. When the offering becomes full and integral—an offering of all one’s thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and actions, a true and sincere sacrifice of all the parts of the being—it leads to identification with and union with the Divine. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that “only a supreme self-abandonment attains to the Supreme.” (*Synthesis*, p. 102)

Sri Aurobindo details three important results of the practice of sacrifice. The first of these is devotion for the Divine, which can be cultivated and developed through the discipline of sacrifice. Sri Aurobindo states that even self-offering without devotion leads ultimately to true devotion. This is so because the offering of one’s actions develops an ongoing connection with the Divine that grows in closeness and intimacy. Ultimately this relationship deepens and grows into a profound love



for the Divine, thus becoming the yoga of love as well as the yoga of works.

The second result is the development of knowledge of the truth of existence, which Sri Aurobindo describes, in part, as follows:

Next, the practice of this Yoga demands a constant inward remembrance of the one central liberating knowledge, and a constant active externalizing of it in works comes in too to intensify the remembrance. In all is the one Self, the one Divine is all; all are in the Divine, all are the Divine and there is nothing else in the universe,—this thought or this faith is the whole background until it becomes the whole substance of the consciousness of the worker. (*Synthesis*, p. 104)

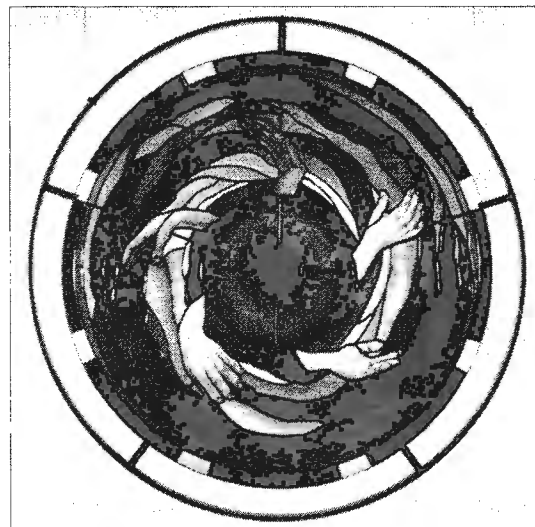
This intense, all-encompassing awareness of the Divine leads to a knowledge beyond ordinary human perception and mental capacity. As Sri Aurobindo states: “In its close, if not long before it, this way of works turns by communion with the Divine Presence, Will and Force into a way of knowledge more complete and integral than any the mere creature intelligence can construct or the search of the intellect can discover.” (*Synthesis*, p. 105) It is important to note that, once again, this result of the sacrifice, knowledge, combines with human action and works to fulfill its role in the yoga. It is not a static knowledge, but a knowledge integrated into life and existence.

The third result of the practice of sacrifice is the complete consecration of one’s being—heart, mind, will and actions—to the Divine, and an abandonment of egoism. All sense of a separate self must be dissolved; one must live only for the Divine. Accordingly, all action is done in the service of the Divine, for love of the Divine, and as a selfless offering to the Divine alone. Sri Aurobindo states: “In this way of doing and seeing, all works

and all life become only a daily dynamic worship and service of the Divine in the unbounded temple of his own vast cosmic existence.” (*Synthesis*, p. 105) Abandoning the ego and directing one’s self fully towards the Divine merges into the sacrifice of work, as one uses work as a field for sacrifice and the progressive surrender of one’s ego. It also merges into the development of devotion as one grows in love through the selfless, egoless, offering of work. Finally, it joins with the development of knowledge as one grows in the realization that the Divine is all and all is the Divine and that the Divine is in truth both the recipient and the doer of the sacrifice.

As they combine, the three results of sacrifice—love for the Divine, knowledge of the Divine, and consecration of the entire being to the Divine—come together to form the triune path. This is a path of yoga based on work as an offering to the Divine, infused with the power of love and devotion, and informed and enriched by the power of knowledge. In this threefold path, the three aspects merge, support, and become one in their progress. The triune path ultimately leads to the true goal of existence, union with the Divine. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo’s use of the term sacrifice is fully in harmony with its original and literal meaning, which is to make holy, to make Divine. In describing the elements of sacrifice, Sri Aurobindo does so with detail, richness, and depth that go beyond the mere conveying of definition, information, and description. He conveys, as much as is possible through words, the various experiences involved in sacrifice and their results. In this way, his writing resonates with a vibrant sense of challenge and opportunity for those aspiring to follow the triune path of integral yoga.

Sri Aurobindo explains that a transformation of the entire being is necessary for the true and complete union with the Divine, a “union by identity.” (*Synthesis*, p. 122) He states that “A union of our in-



Lacher prise (Let it go). (Stained glass artwork by Hélène Gagnon)

strumental being no less than of our soul and spirit must change our imperfect nature into the very likeness and image of Divine Nature . . .” (*Synthesis*, pp. 122-123) He describes this as being possible only through a complete change of consciousness in which all the parts of being ascend far above their ordinary human level in their transformation. Having established this basis of spiritual development through sacrifice and the goal of transformation of human nature, Sri Aurobindo proceeds in Chapters V and VI, “The Ascent of the Sacrifice—1 and —2,” to explain the processes of this ascension.

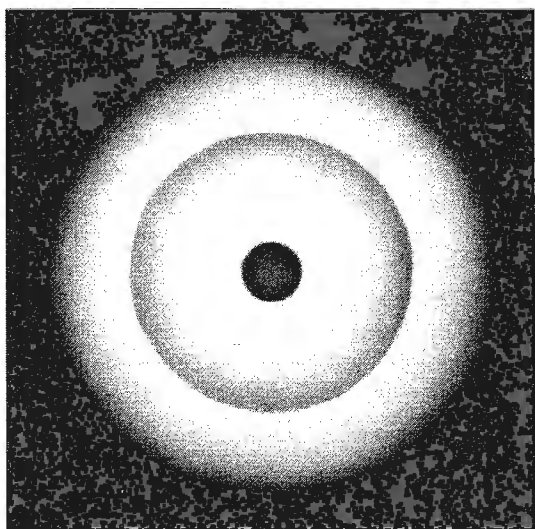
Sri Aurobindo describes a path of yoga in which the offerings of work, love and knowledge are made to the Divine and done so dynamically and integrally. He stresses the importance of the sacrifice going beyond that of the outer nature and outer works to include the sincere offering of the inner movements of the self so that the sacrifice is complete, encompassing all parts of the being, and leaving nothing behind in the process. Sri Aurobindo states: “The inner heart of all work that is made into a sacrifice is a labor of self-discipline and self-perfection by which we can hope to become conscious and luminous with a Light from above poured down into all our movements of mind, heart, will, sense, life and body.” (*Synthesis*, p. 125) Through this sacrifice, the individual progresses to



become more like the Divine in his or her nature and to an inner oneness with the Divine in consciousness.

In a major departure from traditional paths of yoga, Sri Aurobindo proposes a path which does not disparage or reject life and works in the world, but rather embraces them as part of the path, indeed as essential. He does so in full recognition of the challenges they pose to the untransformed human nature and the risks that the individual on the path may be waylaid by diversions or confounded, at least for a time, by the obstacles inherent in life and action in the world. Sri Aurobindo asserts that a path incorporating life and works in the world is necessary to address, through sadhana, all the parts of human nature and transform them. He states:

An ascension towards a greater consciousness, an occupation of our mind, life and body by its powers has been accepted as the outstanding object of the Yoga: but still life here, not some other life elsewhere, is proposed as the immediate field of action of the Spirit, — a transformation, not an annihilation of our instrumental being and nature. (*Synthesis*, pp. 125-126)



One. (Artwork by Hélène Gagnon)

Sri Aurobindo proposes a path which does not disparage or reject life and works in the world, but rather embraces them as part of the path, indeed as essential.

While avoidance of the world or withdrawal from it can comprise a kind of spiritual life, it does not include the full integral and dynamic potential of work and action, the interplay of the elements of life that engage all parts of the being. Consequently, avoidance and withdrawal cannot lead to the transformation that is the goal of the yoga. Therefore, the task is to go forward into life, offering oneself and one's actions with increasing devotion, sincerity and completeness to the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo dismisses both asceticism and religion as inadequate for the true goal of human life, the full and complete union with the Divine. Asceticism is regarded as inappropriate to this goal as it essentially comprises a denial and negation of the world. Religion is regarded as inadequate to the purpose as it takes up only those parts of human nature which suit its aims and leaves the others behind, leading to a partial, uneven and incomplete spirituality. Religion also contains several traps or obstacles to higher spirituality. One of these is the tendency for religion to be used as an excuse to serve the human ego. Another set of problems with religion are the obstacles to true spirituality posed by emotionalism, fanaticism, and dogmatic oppression, elements that are aligned more with falsehood than with truth. Furthermore, religion generally tends to create a false duality, dividing the world into the sacred and the profane. In contrast, in the integral yoga, all is seen as sacred, as an expression of the Divine Force and Presence, and as capable of transformation and union with the Supreme. In addition, Sri Aurobindo explains that both ethics and altruism, while high-minded in their essence, are also unsatisfactory and inadequate to transform human nature.

The transition

So, without the traditional supports of asceticism, religion, ethics and altruism, Sri Aurobindo addresses the question of how humans are to progress through the transitional stages from the beginning of the spiritual quest to its fulfillment, facing all the hazards of life in the process. He says:

In sum, it may be safely affirmed that no solution offered can be anything but provisional until a supramental Truth-Consciousness is reached by which the appearances of things are put in their place and their essence revealed and that in them which derives from the spiritual essence. In the meantime our only safety is to find a guiding law of spiritual experience—or else to liberate a light within that can lead us on the way until that greater direct Truth-Consciousness is reached above us or born within us. (*Synthesis*, p. 128)

The grace, protection and guidance which are needed to progress through the transitional stages from an ordinary mental, vital, and physical being to a truly spiritualized being all come from opening the consciousness to the Divine, receiving the power and influence of the Divine Shakti and surrendering oneself to her. It is through this surrender that the purification of the various parts of the being is made possible. This occurs as all one's works, love, knowledge, and indeed self, are offered to her. In turn, the Divine Shakti takes up all that is offered, purifies it, and ultimately transforms the being. Sri Aurobindo states: "The guiding law of spiritual experience can only come by an opening



of human consciousness to the Divine Consciousness; there must be the power to receive in us the working and command and dynamic presence of the Divine Shakti and surrender ourselves to her control; it is that surrender and that control which bring the guidance." (*Synthesis*, p. 129) However, the nature and degree of the surrender determine the results. Sri Aurobindo describes the key elements involved in this transitional phase of moving away from ignorance and toward the truth-consciousness in the following passage:

But the surrender is not sure, there is no absolute certitude of the guidance as long as we are besieged by mind formations and life impulses and instigations of ego which may easily betray us into the hands of false experience. This danger can only be countered by the opening of a now nine-tenths concealed inmost soul or psychic being that is already there but not commonly active within us. That is the inner light we must liberate; for the light of this inmost soul is our one sure illumination so long as we walk still amidst the siege of the Ignorance and the Truth-Consciousness has not taken up the entire control of our Godward endeavor. The working of the Divine Force in us under the conditions of the transition and the light of the psychic being turning us always towards a conscious and seeing obedience to that higher impulsion and away from the demands and instigations of the forces of the Ignorance, these between them create an ever progressive inner law of our action which continues till the spiritual and supramental can be established in our nature. (*Synthesis*, p. 129)

As the depth and fullness of the surrender increase, the influence of the Divine Shakti progresses from initially prompting one's actions, to taking control of one's actions, and finally to taking up one's actions completely, including doing the work of the yoga.

Therefore, the awakening of the psychic being, the light of the Divine within, enlightens the human consciousness, and turns the being more fully towards the Divine. It helps the individual negotiate its way through the traps and minefields of ignorance and falsehood. The psychic being aids in the purification of the mind, vital and physical as it rejects what is false in them and selects and cultivates all that is true. Sri Aurobindo describes the action of the psychic being in this manner: "It is the very nature of the soul or the psychic being to turn towards the Divine Truth as the sunflower to the sun; it accepts and clings to all that is divine or progressing towards divinity and draws back from all that is a perversion or denial of it, from all that is false and undivine." (*Synthesis*, p. 144) It is therefore this liberation of the psychic being that directs the individual more and more fully towards the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo states: "It is one of the decisive moments of the integral Yoga, when this psychic being liberated, brought out from the veil to the front, can pour the full flood of its divinations, seeings and impulses on the mind, life, body of man and begin to prepare the upbuilding of divinity in earthly nature." (*Synthesis*, p. 141) Under the influence of the psychic being, the consciousness turns towards the Divine and opens and surrenders to the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Shakti, who blesses with her Force. As the depth and fullness of the surrender increase, the influence of the Divine Shakti progresses from initially prompting one's actions, to taking control of one's actions, and finally to taking up one's actions completely, including doing the work of the yoga.

The three higher forms of work or action

Corresponding to the triune path, Sri Aurobindo conceptualizes work itself as threefold: "the works of Knowledge, the works of Love, the works of Will-in-Life." (*Synthesis*, p. 130) It is in the progressive offering of these three to the Divine that the being advances from its lower, ordinary self, to its higher, spiritualized self. Sri Aurobindo details the works of knowledge, love and life along the spectrum from their lower to higher states, and describes how each is manifested and spiritualized when turned towards the Divine. For example, he states: "The Yogin's aim in the practical sciences, whether mental and physical or occult and psychic, should be to enter into the ways of the Divine and his processes, to know the materials and means for the work given to us so that we may use that knowledge for a faultless expression of the spirit's mastery, joy and self-fulfillment." (*Synthesis*, p. 133) The essence of the difference between lower or higher knowledge or love or will is the consciousness behind it; this determines the entire quality and composition of each.

Sri Aurobindo views knowledge as existing far beyond sense-perception and the mind, as residing in the realm of Intuition and proceeding from the spiritual consciousness. The ultimate form of knowledge is the truth-consciousness, which can be reached through a progression from higher mind, illumined mind, intuition, to overmind and then to the divine gnosis, "the seat of the divine Truth-Consciousness." (*Synthesis*, 139) This pro-



gression plays a significant and integral part in the action of the yoga and transformation, as Sri Aurobindo explains:

As the light of each of these higher powers is turned upon the human activities of knowledge, any distinction of sacred and profane, human and divine, begins more and more to fade until it is finally abolished as otiose; for whatever is touched and thoroughly penetrated by the Divine Gnosis is transfigured and becomes a movement of its own Light and Power, free from the turbidity and limitations of the lower intelligence. It is not a separation of some activities, but a transformation of them all, by the change of the informing consciousness that is the way of liberation, an ascent of the sacrifice of knowledge to a greater and ever greater light and force. (*Synthesis*, p. 139)

Sri Aurobindo regards true love to be a divine universal force uniting all, a force beyond ordinary human attachment, ego and desire. It is only this love that the psychic being supports, in fact yearns for. Through the influence of the psychic

being, the lower forms of love are transcended, and ultimately the sacrifice of love is fulfilled in the union with the Divine. The psychic being guides one through the obstacles of vital and egoistic attachment and the snares of the Ignorance, and directs the being toward adoration and love for the Divine. The power of Ananda, or the divine bliss, fills and enriches one's life and works, making these more truly part of the sacrifice and complicit in the ascent of the being.

Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the importance of complete transformation, including offering not "only the works of Love and Knowledge" but also "the works of will and power, possession and acquisition . . ." (*Synthesis*, p. 162) so that all is caught up and swept into the movement of transformation:

In Life itself there is the seed of its own salvation, it is from Life-Energy that we must get our leverage; for though there is a saving light in knowledge, a redeeming and transforming force in Love, these cannot be effective here unless they secure the consent of Life and can use the instrumentation of some delivered energy at its center for a sublimation of the erring human into a divine Life-Force. (*Synthesis*, p. 162)

As the surrender of works and all the parts of the being becomes more complete and under the influence of the Divine Shakti in collaboration with the psychic being, they become progressively purified and expressive of their divine qualities.

Sri Aurobindo proposes the direct and complete rule of the Divine over the being resulting in a comprehensive and integral transformation of the consciousness, a true divinization of the human nature, and a complete union

with the Divine. This transformation comes through an integral offering, the awakening of the psychic being which then leads and guides the inner and outer change, and surrender to the Divine Shakti, which then purifies and uplifts all the being to higher levels of consciousness and takes up the action of the yoga. There are three conditions set forth for the transformation to occur. The first is the abolition of desire and the replacement of the desire-soul with the true vital being. The second is to subordinate the life-force and the mind into instruments of the Divine, by the awakening of the psychic being which must take its true place as the leader and guide of the being. The third condition is the abolition of the ego and the turning of all life to the Divine.

While Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that the path he envisions is not an easy one, he puts forth two rules that can help the seeker avoid hazards on the way. These are to avoid the movements of the ego and desire that may lead one off course, and to listen to the inner voice of the spirit that can serve as the true guide. With these rules in mind, the seeker will be better prepared to pursue the integral yoga described so fully and eloquently in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Its integrality and goal of a complete change of consciousness set it apart from all previous paths. It is altogether remarkable in its conceptualization of an integral transformation of human nature, incorporating life and works in the world, acceptance and inclusion of the Life-Force and the manifestation, and its goal of both inner spiritual change and outer transformation.

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A pink rose, which was given the significance "loving surrender" by the Mother.



Technology and the titan: Reflections on Sri Aurobindo's observations of civilization and barbarism (Part 1)

by Richard Carlson

In the human consciousness everything is very slow. . . . As soon as one is truly in touch with the psychic, one loses this kind of narrowness and of agony also, this agony which is so bad: "I must be quick, I must be quick, there is not much time, I must hurry, there is not much time." One does things very badly or doesn't do them at all any more. But as soon as there is contact with the psychic, then indeed this disappears; one begins to be a little more vast and calm and peaceful, and to live in eternity. —The Mother, Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 6, p. 334

The dharma of science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without prepossession and prejudgment, with no other first propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes. Science and philosophy are not bound to square their observations and conclusions with any current ideas of religious dogma or ethical rule or aesthetic prejudices. In the end if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or narrower aesthetic idea can give us. — Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, p. 214

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. —Arthur C. Clarke, Profiles of the Future

Often many of us in the practice of integral yoga do not realize just how much the productions of science, already mediate our activities of practice. Our failure to notice the mediation is not to be faulted but rather, should be taken as a signal that the technology is working correctly. These technological mediations are meant to be transparent to our practice of meditation. They act as a diaphanous medium which allows the presencing of the kerygmatic, or the revelatory, to seep into the subtle depths of consciousness. The fact that whenever a passage from *Savitri* or *The Life Divine* jumps off the page and grabs our soul, and we do not pause to give thanks to Mr. Gutenberg for being the mage who gave the world the printing press, means that the medium is working as it should.

At its best, technology is a medium that allows us to flawlessly interface with phenomena that otherwise would remain physically or psychologically distant. If we were to give too much

attention to the technological medium it would obscure the message in much the same way that paying too much attention to how we move our feet may slow our pedestrian movement. Once we master the use of the medium, we can place our faith in it, leaving us free to concentrate on the goals we had in mind when we began its use.

Faith in the medium, however, is best left blind only when all prior conditions for determining the authenticity of the message coming through it have been met. It is only when we have already tested and verified the truthfulness of the message, or can wholly trust our intuitions about it that we can freely offer up our reveries to the radiant communication which technology as a diaphanous medium reveals.

At other times we ignore the medium at our own peril, for communication media also possess the uncanny knack to be a superb arbiter of idolatry and ideology. Any medium that can conjure up transparency as to reveal the kerygmatic surely has use value for the propagandist as well. In short, although we know that in a certain way luminous messages can emerge through the "magic" of media, we should not neglect to pay attention to the medium itself because in many instances the "medium is the message." (McLuhan, 1996)

If we were to pay more attention to the medium we should surely give praise to Cartier-Bresson and hail his mastery of photography. His photographs of Sri Aurobindo have been occultly at work for years facilitating our personal experience of darshan with Sri Aurobindo. These images are burned into the photographic plates of our creative imagination and take on an inner form and meaning to us all. In this instance, technology is a vehicle of bhakti and a means of presencing the grandeur of enlightenment.

The medium of technology has also facilitated our meditative practice through the invention of audiotape. Without the technology of the tape recorder, the Mother's immortal reading of *The Hour of God* and Sunil-da's organ music would have vanished without even leaving a trace to pass down to future generations.

At its extremes, the experience that technology renders transparent can be both simulation, for example, a copy or counterfeit, or it can be a sacrament, for example, a vehicle of the sacred or liberation. In its most vulgar usage, technology is a tool of propaganda that helps sway opinion and create ruse. As an instrument of propaganda, technology enforces our servitude to the machine, the state, and the corporation. In contrast, technology as a tool of revelation is a vehicle of knowledge and liberation.

There is, in fact, no simple way to moralize the impact of technology on human consciousness. The complexity of the relationship between technology and its creators is further complicated by the fact of its cybernetic birth. By virtue of its origin in, and projection of, the human mind, our tools are part and parcel of humanity itself. This is to say that technology is an extension of human consciousness itself, and facilitates our structural



coupling with our environment.

When we speak of human evolution or an evolution of consciousness we must remember that humans co-evolve with their tools and machines. In fact, it can be argued that history first comes into the light of consciousness only through a reciprocal cybernetic relationship between evolving humanity and its adaptive tools.

Humans come into the light of history with tools. Tools are their first primitive forms of machines. By tools we generally mean a more complicated apparatus, an assemblage of parts acting together for a common purpose. Although the assemblage of parts would appear to be mere inorganic systems, in addition these apparatuses fulfill an even greater vital longing of humanity, in the words of Karl Marx, "tools extend our personal power, and machine subjects us to impersonal organization." (Marx in Mazlish, 1993, p. 59)

Technology may in itself be morally neutral and an inanimate entity, but it is not somehow magically other than consciousness. In their continuum and complexity, tools are essentially extensions of consciousness. Technology, in fact, is animated by the same will and desires as those of its users and creators. This view of technology is not merely anthropomorphic but reflects the fact that our tools augment our very humanity itself.

Marx, and as we will later see, Nietzsche, had good reason to believe that tools and technology were extensions of human power. They are extensions of the vital will for survival, perseverance and domination. In fact, our tools are so intimately entwined in our adaptive strategies for survival that it would be hard to imagine a physical reality other than one whose evolutionary track was dependent on a cybernetic fit between humans, their tools, and their environment.

Rather than survival of the fittest, it is survival of fit between organism and environment that determines evolutionary success. (Varela, 1987, p. 56) The success of humanity's technological endeavor is dependent on the quality of the fit it maintains with its environment. The quality of the fit, although defined by human inten-

tion, is created and maintained through technological extension. Technology is entangled in our very becoming in the world, enacting our intentions, servicing our desires, maintaining our fit with the environment.

Technology is so intertwined with our survival that, "We cannot realistically think of the human species—or human history—without a machine, as we understand evolving human nature, our guidelines tell us that human nature not only evolves but does so in intimate connection with humanity's creation of machines." (Mazlish, 1993, p. 59)

No longer merely instruments of survival, in the twenty-first century our tools and machines have also become devices by which we extend our senses into domains of phenomena that otherwise would remain unknown and occult. These technological augmentations are extensions of our human senses and make available to us information that would otherwise remain outside the realm of cognition. We can think of augmentations as comprising two categories: prosthetic and cosmetic.

Whereas prostheses *compensate* for physical constraints, cosmetic augmentations *enhance* physical capabilities or appearances. This is to say, that in addition to compensating for our deficiencies as human beings, technology also augments our physical capabilities, performance, functionality, and beauty.

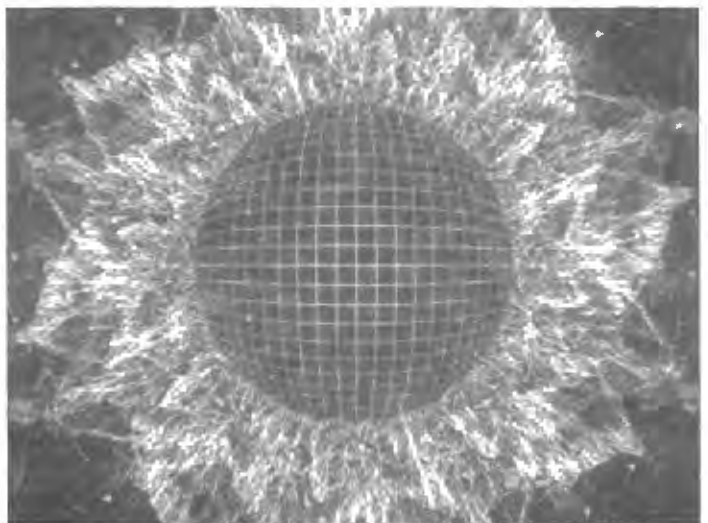
The cosmetic enhancement of the normal or the prosthetic compensation for the abnormal is rapidly blurring the distinction between human ends and technological means. More precisely, this distinction frays the boundaries of what we would otherwise nostalgically consider

safely as within the domain of human consciousness.

In the cybernetic encounter with our own creations it becomes swiftly apparent that consciousness extended in technology transcends many of the constraints imposed upon it by the physical dimensions of its flesh and bone vehicle. This of course offers hope to millions who are physically challenged and are in need of prosthetics.

The goal of a flawless interface between human and machine in physical prosthesis is one of the many promises made by the field of biotechnology. For example, in cases of physical disabilities related to some spinal chord injuries, electro-mechanical devices are connected to the portions of the nervous system to help transmit nerve impulses and compensate for lost motor and sensory functions. For example, we have long used pacemakers to assist a beating heart. The latest in cardiac technology, the first implantable artificial heart, has recently been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

There are countless examples of the ways in which tools and technologies have improved the life conditions of the sick and those in need. From the simple crutch to the bionic limb, all manner of devices have been invented to aid the disabled or the enable the incapable. These inventions have without doubt enhanced



Technology: instrument of transformation or cataclysm?



the quality of life of millions of people.

Examples of compensation for physical disabilities are rather mundane, however, when compared to the promises biotechnology may hold in store for us at the dawn of the new millennium. These cosmetic applications of technology that will augment the physical functioning of a healthy

human body during the course of a lifetime are astounding indeed. This augmentation may even begin before birth as the manipulation of genetic information promise the ability to create “designer babies” for parents who would like their sons or daughters to have certain physical traits, such as a particular hair, skin, or eye color.

In fact, in the near future, parents may not have to go through the obligatory preliminary physical activities necessary to bring a child into the world. The research into cloning a human being and incubating a human fetus in an artificial uterus is well under way. In this context we should remember what the Mother said, that the future conception of the gnostic being will be via a sexless act! Indeed, what are the implications of that statement in a future that foreshadows the incubation a cloned fetus in an artificial uterus?

What has long been thought of as science fiction is rapidly becoming science fact! The cloning of animals has already begun in an attempt to harvest life forms to regenerate portions of the nervous system and to fashion healthy human organs. Xenotransplantation, or cloning animals for organ harvesting, is already in progress. Biopharmacology, which includes the large-scale breeding of animals for making new drugs, is also well underway.

Already in progress is the creation of transgenic organisms, known as “chimeras,” in which genes of different species



“Techno-enthusiasts predict that the disembodied mind will accelerate to the escape velocity of immortality.”

humans, animals, plants are spliced together to manufacture new kinds of beings. Recently in China, a researcher brought the embryo of such a chimera to the 500 cell stage before terminating the experiment.

Just as amazing as the ability of scientist to reprogram species limits are the promises being made by the new field of synthetic biology. A research lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) states unceremoniously that it is attempting to genetically build a biological organism from scratch. (Morton, 2005)

Not to be outdone by synthetic biology is nanotechnology, which such technological optimists as Ray Kurzweil—who has had an exemplary record in predicting recent technological innovations—predict will, in the not too distant future, create robotic entities roughly the size of an atom, which will be ingested or introduced into our bodies and brains to enhance physiological and cognitive functions. Kurzweil says that “Brain implants based on massively distributed intelligent nanobots will ultimately expand our memories a trillion-fold and otherwise vastly improve all our sensory pattern recognition and cognitive abilities.” (2003, p.35)

That’s right, Kurzweil says one trillion-fold! This is due to the fact that the implanted nanobots will map the trillion naturally existing neural connections and double them. To temper his techno-opti-

mism and better appreciate our all too human limitations it may do Kurzweil good to read Jorge Luis Borges’s (1964) story, “Funes the Memorious,” about a child who after being disabled by an accident, was condemned to remember every detail of every object and event he ever witnessed.

It is apparent when reading such technologically optimistic authors as Ray Kurzweil or robotic enthusiast Han Morivac that their accounts of progress are calculated solely in terms of the magnification of computation power and the miniaturization of bio-electric circuitry that have sparked the acceleration of the exponential arc of technological evolution. It is an evolution that is increasingly measured not in terms of years but in terms of nano-seconds. In their most striking visions of the future, these techno-enthusiasts predict that the disembodied mind will accelerate to the escape velocity of immortality as it uploads into an eternal mechanic embodiment.

Lost to the techno-utopian account of mind and consciousness in their lust for pure speed and artificial environments are the qualitative states of consciousness that define our humanness. These qualitative states of consciousness, for example, the smell of Marcel Proust’s tea soaked madeleine, which in calling forth a myriad of childhood associations and memories, are of immeasurable value to the feeling life. More profoundly, in the quest for ultimate efficiency through ever faster technology, the techno-optimist misses entirely that which the Mother speaks of when she extols the slowness of human consciousness and its ability to still itself until it resonates in the silent poise of the soul, when “one begins to be a little more



vast and calm and peaceful, and to live in eternity." (The Mother, in Dalal, 2002, p. 54)

The productions of instrumental reason are accelerating rapidly and certainly our values are also modulating in accordance with the changes they introduce. In creating new beings with unique capabilities inbred in them by artificial design or crossing species limits our values perhaps will one day shift in the way we view these technological augmentations: "Eyes that allow us to see the sky in terms of patterns of gravitation waves like migrating birds, genetically modified hearing at the level of previously inaudible sounds, is the likely new order of values of the twenty-first century. The ethical consequences of this cultural change are decisive since what is challenged today is not simply the goals of technology but what it means to be human, to be post-human, to literally have a mind interfaced to the speed of digital networks." (Kroker 2004, p. 178)

The science of biotics, which is the cross discipline involving the interface of biology and computers, is rapidly dissolving the hardware needed to connect humans to the networks of cyberspace. Biotics shall one day provide unmediated communication between the human brain and computers regulating the environment. The science of robotics, nanotechnology, recombinant DNA, genetic engineering, embedding silicon chips in the body and brain, virtual reality and voice recognition software, are emerging technologies which promise to blur ever further the boundary which separates natural from artificial entities.

In his book *Natural Born Cyborgs*, Professor Andy Clark of Washington University argues that "Bio-technological unions are evolving with a speed never seen before in history. As we enter an age of wearable computers, sensory augmentation, wireless devices, intelligent environments, thought-controlled prosthetics, and rapid-fire information search and re-

trieval, the line between the user and her tools grows thinner day by day. This double whammy of plastic brains and increasingly responsive and well-fitted tools creates an unprecedented opportunity for ever-closer kinds of human-machine merger." (Clark, 2003, back cover) This, Clark argues, is an entirely natural event.

Whether or not the human/machine merger is natural may be debated, but what is clear is that we become overly reliant on technology soon after it is introduced. An example of this is the internet which in the span of less than a decade has become an indispensable tool for millions of people. The internet combines access to the global Alexandrian library with an ability to instantaneously communicate with any of its nodes on the planet. The internet is an

Whether or not the human/machine merger is natural may be debated, but what is clear is that we become overly reliant on technology soon after it is introduced.

informational ecosystem made up of numerous interdependent elements. The internet is also a good illustration of order emerging from chaos. Millions of agents acting in parallel according to simple rules of protocol, form an enormous computer to interconnect, interact and convey information which provide solutions to a wide variety of problems in a decentralized matter.

In fact, some perceive the internet as the emerging central nervous system of an entirely new order of planetary consciousness. This type of consciousness is akin to that called by the Jesuit philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin, as the "Noosphere," which he described as a "prodigious biological event represented by the discovery of electromagnetic waves, in which each individual finds himself (actively and passively) simultaneously present over land, sea and every quarter of the earth" (de Chardin, 1955, p. 252).

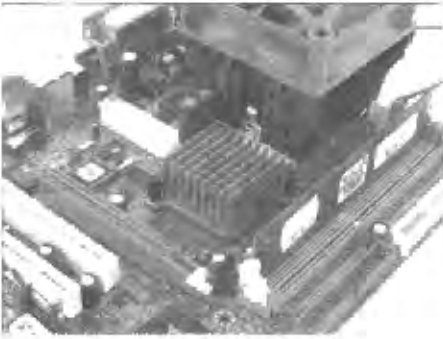
The new planetary civilization can also be called the global village: described by Marshall McLuhan as a community in which "every margin is a potential centre; every electronic periphery the galactic center of a new media hub, every media externalization of the central nervous system an opportunity for radical altered perception." (Kroker, 2004, p. 170)

Interestingly, this convergence of consciousness through media was foreseen earlier than in either McLuhan or Teilhard in the writings of James Joyce, whose study of Vico's, *A New Science*, published in 1744, is one of the earliest treatises on the collective evolution of consciousness. This led him to a synthesis of the two primary modes of time perception, evolutionary and cyclic, in a helical theory of history that culminated in a vision of the "man-technology encounter" as a fantastic machine. "Throughout *Finnegan's Wake*, the complex play with the compounds of tele- and their relation to the convergence of media builds up to its culmination in the climactic merging of film, cathedrals, and dream with

visions of the work itself as an imaginary electromagnetic machine, "the vicociclotometer, a tetradomational gazeocroticon." (Theall, 2003, p. 150)

More complex however, than even the writing of James Joyce on technological convergence is the attempt to determine the precise boundaries that separate human and machine. Any judgments regarding the distinction between humanity and its inventions is perhaps more of a function of culture than of natural distinctions themselves. For example, should we refer to the first president of the United States as a cyborg since he had wooden teeth?

The symbiosis which enjoins man and machine may not be quite so easy to entangle when defaulting to deeply rooted cultural beliefs regarding nature. But when one looks closely one understands that one of the main stories in the evolution of human history is the symbiosis of human-



"Technological change is exponential."

ity and its inventions. In symbiotic fashion man and machine mutually enhance each other's chances of survival, as both are structurally coupled in an ecological fit. In this relationship both humans and the machines they create co-evolve, to satisfy each other's needs and, anthropomorphically speaking, to fulfill each other's desires. This cybernetic interaction of man and machine enables the transference of our human will into the perpetual circulation of information flowing through the planetary networks of the world wide web and the global communication system.

This vital feedback loop of man and technology animates not only the source codes and information we create but imbibes the actual physical presences of machines with an emergent form of vital consciousness. This transfer of human will and intent intensified by technology is possibly best described as *hyper-vitality*. This hyper-vital being has been exponentially increasing during the information age, enlarging itself through the invention of transistors, mass transportation, and global communication technologies. Its nourishment requires an insatiable lust for speed. The resultant pace of life consumes us all with its ever increasing thirst for pure velocity.

"Any serious assessment of the history of technology shows that technological change is exponential. In exponential growth a key measurement such as computational power is multiplied by a constant factor for each unit of time (e.g., doubling every year) rather than just incrementally increased." (Kurzweil, 2003, p. 42) The exponential advances in techno-

logical innovation outrace the more measured pace by which we humans evolve in linear time. This makes it much more difficult for us to fully grasp many of the ethical implications our own creations warrant, and to reflect on the issue of just who is serving whom.

The exponential advances in innovation allow the hyper-vital consciousness to exploit the ratiocination of its human hosts who encircle the globe with fiber optic cables, satellites, and radio antennas to further its adaptive strategy. This cybernetic loop of man and the hyper-vitality of the network ensure the continuity of each other's existence. This symbiotic relationship was described with ironic wit by the visionary philosopher of media and communications, Marshall McLuhan:

Man becomes as it were the sex organ of the machine world as the bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms. The machine world reciprocates man's love by expediting his wishes and desires namely providing him with wealth. (McLuhan, 1964, p. 56)

One good example of human-machine symbiosis is the automobile:

Humanity maintains a fleet of 500 million vehicles, extracts the energy and feeds them, builds roads for their circulation, garages for their repair, and factories for their reproduction. In return for the maintenance and reproduction of the automobile "species," cars allow humans to travel at greater speeds, to act more effectively, conquer distance, provide pleasure and social status. (De Rosnay, 2000, p. 76)

The process of symbiosis of man and machine is, of course, not always a positive one. To use the example of the

automobile again, it has been one of the greatest single contributors to destruction of the environment and air quality. A ferocious consumer of human life, some 42 thousand families a year in the United States grieve for one lost in the peril of overcoming distance by through accelerated motion. In many instances the desire for speed is simply humanity's death wish.

But the paradox of our existential situation compels us to fetish speed, to overcome distance, to communicate, to mutually sustain and enhance existence in the global village, to make life easier in all respects, to cure illness. In many respects science embodies much that is best in humanity. Science has helped eliminate many of the scourges that have beset humanity, and has facilitated the quality of life of much of the world's population.

Although the advances of science have alleviated many ills that have plagued humankind for millennia, it has in the process created its share of pangs. As science races to solve the biological and catastrophic misery that enslaves our species, the devastation caused through the intended or unintended consequences of its inventions produces great suffering as well. This extent of this devastation can be seen by comparing the incidents of deaths by biological and catastrophic causes to those deaths caused by being on the wrong end of the feedback loop returning from our own devices. (www.geocities.com/dtmcbride/hist/disasters-war.html)

The paradox of technology as the arbiter of our well being, as extension of our body, and yet as the servant of our self-destruction is here described by Jean Baudrillard:

From a classical (even cybernetic) perspective, technology is an extension of the body. It is the functional sophistication of a human organism that permits it to be equal to nature and to invest triumphantly in nature. From Marx to McLuhan, the same functionalist vision of



machines and language: they are relays, extensions, media mediators of nature ideally destined to become the organic body of man. In this "rational" perspective the body itself is nothing but a medium. (1994, p. 111)

On the other hand, Baudrillard says, in the apocalyptic version of "*Crash*"—an automobile crash—"technology is the mortal deconstruction of the body—no longer a functional medium, but the extension of death." (1994, p. 111)

When one inhabits the vehicles, networks, cyberspaces and virtual systems created in the symbiosis of man and machine, the relationship can quickly tilt in favor of the artificial entity. Anyone who has had an automobile accident, has been stuck in a traffic jam in a major city, who had been held hostage by a network crash, whose novel vanished before the save button was pressed, or who feels intellectually choked by the all too pervasive flickering of commercial messages over the omni-present television screen, knows all too well the technological imbalance that is masked by human helplessness.

In his recent book, *The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism*, Arthur Kroker (2004) argues persuasively that one of the primary concerns of the new knowledge economy is to seamlessly insert human flesh into the high performance speed of digital culture. In the knowledge economy, our use-value is maximized as virtual consumers or as service workers in service of the hyper-capitalist enterprise itself. This hyper-economy manufactures technological innovation that is driven by a limitless flow of virtual capital, circulating through digital networks at the speed of thought across the global marketplace.

Because Kroker sees the technological enterprise as motivated by the growth of unconstrained capitalism—hyper-capitalism—human values appear to succumb to technological efficiency. In this scheme human beings meet their humiliat-

ing reduction as servo-mechanisms to the machine, or as standing reserve for technological exploitation. Kroker advances the argument that on its present evolutionary track, culture and science are headed toward their logical outcome in the form of a Nietzschean nihilism.

Nihilism heralds the deconstruction of all metaphysics or the validity of any transcendent ideal or value. In Nietzsche's words, "There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power." (1968, p. 404) The almost pathological behavior of the world's largest corporations in the pursuit of profit is testimony to the will to power. The exploitation of the world's poorest workers, the wanton disregard of environmental concerns and the corruption of national and international political process are just some examples of the will to power, or the will to profit, lording it over the whole world.

Even the notion of corporate responsibility maybe an oxymoron as attested to by Nobel laureate Milton Friedman. Friedman is considered one of the great economists of the twentieth century and is an ardent supporter of free market capitalism. Friedman, who has advised many major multi-international corporations, states quite plainly: "Corporations must make as much money for their shareholders as humanly possible," regardless of the social consequence . . . There is thus only one instance when corporate social responsibility is warranted, when it is "insincere." (Friedman in Bakan, 2004, p. 34)

The cultural absence of values in a society which fetishes technology and unconstrained capitalism creates a void which is quickly filled by a Nietzschean "will to power." Thus, the technocratic society yields not only a greater possibility for wealth and physical well being, but also constructs a form of nihilism in which the will to power is transmuted into a pure will to technology, through which power is manifest.

How does this vital "will to power" animate technology?

(To be continued)



The will to power and the will to profit are "lording it over the whole world."

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Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

Source Material

Sri Aurobindo on the present crisis

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being; but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego. At the same time Science has put at his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this

universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life-unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out to something ideal. The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonising light of the Spirit, must welter in a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life. Man has harmonised life in the past by organised ideation and limitation; he has created societies based on fixed ideas or fixed customs, a fixed cultural system or an organic life-system, each with its own order; the throwing of all these into the melting-pot of a more and more intermingling life and a pouring in of ever new ideas and motives and facts and possibilities call for a new, a greater consciousness to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonise them. Reason and Science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater

Science at its limits, even physical science, is compelled to perceive in the end the infinite, the universal, the spirit.
—Sri Aurobindo



unity of whole-life.

A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way. The evolution of Mind working upon Life has developed an organisation of the activity of Mind and use of Matter which can no longer be supported by human capacity without an inner change. An accommodation of the egocentric human individuality, separative even in association, to a system of living which demands unity, perfect mutuality, harmony, is imperative. But because the burden which is being laid on mankind is too great for the present littleness of the human personality and its petty mind and small life-instincts, because it cannot operate the needed change, because it is using this new apparatus and organisation to serve the old infraspirtual and infrarational life-self of humanity, the destiny of the race seems to be heading dangerously, as if impatiently and in spite of itself, under the drive of the vital ego seized by colossal forces which are on the same scale as the huge mechanical organisation of life and scientific knowledge which it has evolved, a scale too large for its reason and will to handle, into a prolonged confusion and perilous crisis and darkness of violent shifting incertitude. Even if this turns out to be a passing phase or appearance and a tolerable structural accommodation is found which will enable mankind to proceed less catastrophically on its uncertain journey, this can only be a respite. For the problem is fundamental and in putting it evolutionary Nature in man is confronting herself with a critical choice which must one day

be solved in the true sense if the race is to arrive or even to survive. The evolutionary nîsus is pushing towards a development of the cosmic Force in terrestrial life which needs a larger mental and vital being to support it, a wider Mind, a greater wider more conscious unanimsed Life-Soul, Anima, and that again needs an unveiling of the supporting Soul and spiritual Self within to maintain it. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 1053-1055)

The Mother on the manifestation of the supermind

The first obscure material movement of the evolutionary Force is marked by an aeonic graduality; the movement of life-progress proceeds slowly but still with a quicker step, it is concentrated into the figure of millenniums; mind can still further compress the tardy leisureliness of Time and make long paces of the centuries; but when the conscious spirit intervenes, a supremely concentrated pace of evolutionary swiftness becomes possible.—Sri Aurobindo

I am reading this to you because I have been asked about the action of the Supermind, and I had compared this manifestation of the Supermind to that of the mind which, according to all modern scientific discoveries, took nearly a million years to evolve from the animal brain, the ape-brain, to the first human brain. And I told you that, consequently, one should not expect this to take place in a few months or a few years, that it would obviously take much longer. Some people, it seems, thought that I was announcing that the superman would not come before another million years! I want to correct this impression.

Sri Aurobindo has said that as the development rises in the scale of conscious-



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

ness, the movement becomes more and more rapid, and that when the Spirit or the Supermind intervenes, it can go much faster. Therefore we may hope that in a few centuries, the first supramental race will appear.

But even that is rather disconcerting for some people, for they think it contradicts what Sri Aurobindo has always promised: that the time has come for the supramental transformation to be possible . . . But we must not confuse a supramental transformation with the appearing of a new race.

What Sri Aurobindo promised and what naturally interests us, we who are here now, is that the time has come when some beings among the elite of humanity, who fulfil the conditions necessary for spiritualisation, will be able to transform their bodies with the help of the supramental Force, Consciousness and Light, so as no longer to be animal-men but become supermen.

This promise Sri Aurobindo has made and he based it on the knowledge he had that the supramental Force was on the point of manifesting on the earth. In fact it had descended in him long ago, he knew it and knew what its effects were.



And now that it has manifested universally, I could say, generally, the certainty of the possibility of transformation is of course still greater. There is no longer any doubt that those who will fulfil or who now fulfil the conditions are on the way to this transformation.

The conditions Sri Aurobindo gives in detail in *The Synthesis of Yoga* and in still greater detail in his last articles on the Supramental Manifestation.* So now it is only a question of realisation.

* Written in 1949-1950, and later published as a book entitled *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*.

Sweet Mother, now that the Supermind has descended, why can't one pass from the rational mind directly to the Supermind?

Who said that one can't?

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

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

I think that all possibilities are predictable and that all sincere aspiration and complete consecration will have a response, and that the processes, means, transitions, transformations will be innumerable in nature—not at all that things will happen only in a particular way and not otherwise. (*The Mother's Vision*, pp. 582-584, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2002)

Book Review

***God Shall Grow Up: Body, Soul, & Earth Evolving Together*
by Wayne Bloomquist
(available through: www.pondypub.com
and waynebloomquist@sbcglobal.net)**

Reviewed by Rick Lipschutz

As influential as Sri Aurobindo is, we are not aware of him. Once introduced, we may discover that we have a lot in common. What we've felt as dreams, vague yearnings, intimations, unformed hopes, he has named, expressed clearly, and worked to give a shape or even begun to build.

The pervasive push toward integrality, the transformation of human nature, the movement toward world-union, the insistence

on creative diversity rooted in oneness, the growing synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, the strengthening connection between spirit and matter, and the drive many of us feel towards a new stage in human evolution—all can be traced to his action in the world.

Nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature shortly before his death in 1950, this Cambridge-educated Bengali began a bold futuristic evolutionary yoga that promises to justify these millennia of human suffering with a divine life in a divine body, right here on planet earth. Literature from his own pen and others about his novel and non-gymnastic form of yoga is abundant. The wise men have talked at sleep-inducing length. None of it so far has managed to acquaint the American public with Sri Aurobindo. This is the book that will break the ice.

At last, a yoga that embraces all of life, explained patiently in a way we all can understand. Wayne Bloomquist shares an adventure to which “everyone is invited, even urged to participate.” His writing, more bold than some, more clear than others, has the feel of a good conversation. He has a gift for explaining the most esoteric subject simply, with the apt example. He provides practical spiritual exercises—some so designated, others introduced so subtly they are easy to miss.

To get his message across, make it immediate and authentic, he breaks a time-rusted taboo and shares his own spiritual experiences. “I want somebody to tell me what is the soul of a man!” asks Blind Willie Johnson for every human being. Well, Bloomquist tells us, in a full-bodied presentation, fleshed out with the story of his life, in the book's concluding section. He also breaks an unwritten rule not to speak (except at philosophical arm's length) about the supermind.

This new yoga is a journey some haunting inner call may be moving us to take. It is for “pilgrims of perfection” satisfied with nothing less than the permanent establishment of a new state, not within the boundaries of any land mass, but the cells of the human body. It is “a new state of embodied consciousness” that Sri Aurobindo called supramental, not because it is mind fully developed, but because it is the next stage beyond the mind, with its flawed intelligence and its massive distractions.

This new faculty promises, after certain conditions are fulfilled, to be just as accessible to us humans as our mind is today, and to be much that mind could never be. Two spiritual pioneers of the East and West, Sri Aurobindo and his equal and collaborator Mirra Alfassa Richard (or the Mother), “not only showed us the way to the next age but prepared it for us.” The result is that our paths can now be smoother, more rapid, and “move with some relative ease to transformation.” Our embattled planet will become in time a more harmonious one where “Love has a chance to come and stay.”

Bloomquist, beginning in the 1970s, took up the Mother on her offer that still stands to not only personally oversee, but to do “our” yoga herself and grace it with success. He asks us only to be open to the possibility that transformation can take place now.

He allows our understanding of this journey, one of body



and life as much as the mind and soul, to build gradually. In the first section he introduces us to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in two chapters and begins to tell his own story.

Wayne Bloomquist is a now-retired real estate appraiser and a father who is now in his second marriage. Aggrieved by a life-long unrest, dissatisfaction, an emptiness nothing could assuage, he tried many approaches till "a new track" led him to Integral Yoga in 1969 and to Pondicherry, South India in 1973, for the first of frequent visits. Then a graduate student, he travelled to India with his future second wife on a pilgrimage and to work on his dissertation. He was devastated when the Mother died in Pondicherry only days after his arrival in India. Through the culture shock, the mosquitoes, and a series of challenges, he persisted. His life's companion told him of a vision that she had. The Mother had appeared to her and apologized: "I had to go. It was time. I could not wait for you."

Bloomquist poured his heart out at the Samadhi, the courtyard of the Ashram where the bodies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are buried. After a difficult time, he tells us, "my suffering had turned to joy." He came away from India with much more than the bulk of his doctoral dissertation; he had developed a lifelong intimate relationship with the Mother. To keep that joy with him and growing, establish it permanently in every cell of his body, is a process that has taken over 30 years and is still going on. "It is not desire," he claims, "but delight that is our destiny."

The second section of *God Shall Grow Up* deals with matters that affect us all. "Suffering" dives into our lamentable state from multiple angles, with compression, empathy of experience, and clear exposition of a way through. He explores other subjects with equal penetration and precious personal example. "Oneness," he writes, "can be experienced in substance as well as in mind." Perhaps better! And we will never look at good and evil, or death for that matter, in quite the same way again. Beauty will open us to soul, soul to greater beauty, in a creative progression that once gathering sufficient momentum need never stop.

It is the third section that comes to the heart of the matter. The author explains that we have always had the divine in us as a presence. What is new is that the divine is now emerging from and through matter itself, not to replace but transform it. Matter, no longer inert as any block of wood, is becoming conscious of its own truth.

The crucial agent of our growth is exactly what we've been working on, building through it all—our soul. The soul through our long difficult evolution forms a "work in progress," a spiritual personality or individual conscious subtle form called the "psychic being." According to the author, "It is each individual's supreme creation that is molded out of the essence of life itself." This psychic being is the only part of us that, while yet anchored in the physical, is spontaneously open to the Divine. "We can concentrate on our heart center and aspire for that tiny flame there to grow and consume our nature." So that we may "become an integrated being and not a dysfunctional collection of warring inner factions," it is key to our spiritual maturation process to

"integrate all the parts of our being around our soul."

The Mother, the integrating force of the Integral Yoga, with some collaboration from us can accomplish this; with her grace the soul-presence can extend even to the cells its attitude of openness. And, much more easily now that Sri Aurobindo has completed the process, creating a "passage" out of what was before only "a void and a silence," the aspirant can rise "above" to "overhead spiritual-mental planes" which can descend and be incorporated into our ordinary working parts. But, "if our consciousness is to change radically, our body must change to contain it."

It has taken Bloomquist half his life to find in his own experience (which says it all) that "the key to the transformative process is to fix the Supramental Force in our body so that there is one mass of Supramental vibration throughout every part of us. The vibration becomes part of our body permanently . . . It is *fixed in matter*." This begins a process, requiring an unknown time period, known as supramentalization.

Among Westerners, Satprem, it is true, has written interpretatively from experience and brilliantly of the supramental transformation. But the path of this intrepid genius, laced with torture suffered in a concentration camp, may not be accessible or appropriate for the average American dedicated by nature to the pursuit of happiness. The Mother spoke of a sunlit path that proceeds not only towards but also in the Light. She felt it was possible (and far preferable) to go through this evolutionary process with a minimum of suffering. Bloomquist believes that "translating heaven into a human shape" need not be a hellish experience.

The United States, once and perhaps still home to many adventuresome spirits, is expected to play a unique role in the transformation. Bloomquist addresses this book primarily to the American public because of its "openness to change, its high energy, its freedom and its mastery over the material domain." He gives us in plain English the broad lines of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy disentangled from mystification. He has taken to heart Sri Aurobindo's advice to turn our spiritual aspiration over to the Mother (whom he seems to know very well).

He has integrated this yoga creatively and uniquely in the fire of his own being, and he lays this challenge before us: to leave behind our grubbing egos and not only become growing souls but concretely and in every respect what we are in our essence. Even our seeming deficiencies may contain the seed of a hidden aptitude for the greatest adventure of all. We may have the willingness to be fools in the service of the future, and to be not so burdened down with beliefs in the inevitability of fate or karma or the need for lifetimes to reach one's goal.

The author of this book, a fairly representative American, speaks to those of us who are ready to act on "a simple aspiration," who have what has been called "the audacity of hope," who like Sri Aurobindo believe that nothing is impossible and don't hesitate to question everything. After all, if he can do it we all can do it. Something about this whole daredevil enterprise seems downright American.



The poetry room

A pedestal of prayer

A mightier task remained than all he had done.
To That he turned from which all being comes,
A sign attending from the Secrecy
Which knows the Truth ungrasped behind our thoughts
And guards the world with its all-seeing gaze.
In the unapproachable stillness of his soul,
Intense, one-pointed, monumental, lone,
Patient he sat like an incarnate hope
Motionless on a pedestal of prayer.

—Sri Aurobindo
(*Savitri*, Book III, Canto 3)

She leads us

Onward, upward
Into the light, into the bright
Future
She leads us
Over each obstacle our nature raises.
Our darkest secrets never phases
Her sublime loving smile,
Encouraging each tiny effort while
She sweeps us up in Her tremendous wake.

Onward, upward
Into the light, into the bright
Truth of our being,
She opens our seeing,
Seizes our heart,
Squeezes each part
Through the wringer of life,
Until all that is left is the ready vessel
To be what She wills.

Onward, upward
Into the light, into the bright
Future
She marches;
Into far luminous regions She beckons
And seems to disappear
Then suddenly is near
Our hand to take
Our life to make
Her own.

—Dakshina Vanzetti

Integral Yoga

The discipline of Integral Yoga
Is a labor subtle, complex and long;
A myriad facets to cut and polish
From a substance dull, resistant and marred.

The Artist Supreme alone would accept
To craft from such material a being of light,
A diamond vessel of divine translucency
Reflecting hues of ethereal splendor.

The human nature's first crude stuff that felt
The first hammer blows took aeons to shape,
Slowly formed and coalesced from elements
Disparate, blown from worlds unknown and strange.

The soul's long growth began semi-conscious,
Careening side to side out of control
Down steep rocky banks to the flood below,
Washed up on shore somewhere to be reclaimed.

When awareness dawned of a Power above
That moves these million turns of event,
It was as if the sky opened to sun—
Yet this was only the first morning glow.

Suddenly it seemed that one was not alone,
Senselessly dropped on a barren island
With no escape, no direction to go;
A path was found, a bridge to meaning glimpsed.

That view at first was seen through an early mist,
An intimation of possibility
That there was more to come, a completion
Of one's unfinished and fragmented being.

There began a hungry groping for knowledge—
Who or what one was, why one was here,
How one came to be, where one was going;
Then answers came, a solution emerged.

A picture of the whole came into view
An intricate web of beauty and power
Unfolding over time, moving towards something
Still unknown, but marvelous and real.

Everything existed in this wholeness:
Good, evil, nothingness, completeness,
All the terror and bliss imaginable;
All joined forever in the Absolute.



The fantastic and brutal here were tied
Inextricably, hard fact and fairy dream,
In conflict, working out their differences,
Seeking their harmonious unity.

Each person had a unique role to play,
Expressed forces, qualities, tendencies,
Gave them tangible form and body,
Moved with them towards the future's promise.

Behind all things stood the One, the Supreme;
All forces and forms derived from Her Alone,
Divine Mother of all, a Conscious-Force,
Guiding all to its ultimate fulfillment.

She laid the laws of the evolving world,
Stayed its course to its divine destiny,
But gave her children freedom to pursue
Their limited ends to learn and grow through life.

To those who asked she gave her strong support
To heal and lead to a new existence,
Beyond a petty pleasure and comfort,
Beyond a struggling ignorance and pain.

Now one had to choose the part one would play:
To be a champion of the Light and Truth,
Or a spokesman of falsehood and suffering;
Now each act became a test of resolve.

A trial of preparation began,
The purification of one's nature,
The turning of all one's many impulses
And proclivities to a higher ideal.

In this, the Mother's Grace became essential,
A constant friend and aide to whom one turned
To help eliminate obstinate errors,
One's resistance and insincerity.

After long persistent struggle and work,
Calling always her superior force
With faith and patient determination,
Obstacles were uprooted, a ground was cleared.

A wider opening came from above,
A deeper calm and a mightier force.
A stronger aspiration rose from below,
A truer, selfless surrender and love.

In quiet concentration a stillness
Seized the body and freed the consciousness
Allowing it to observe silently
The action and thrill of a higher Force.

At times intense yearning of aspiration
Rushed up in waves through the body and head.
Sometimes mystical streams of dynamic bliss
Circled the head or entered and enthralled.

Love and adoration rose like incense
Filling the days with a hallowed perfume,
The Presence touched of a personal God
An infinite Being, a father and friend.

In work a calm and steady confidence
Reposed in the Mother's guidance and strength.
Work became a sacred service and trust,
A duty of delight, an act of love.

The life blossomed with a divine sweetness,
Resumed an elegant simplicity,
And basked in the joy of nature's beauty;
A rose in a garden turned to the sun.

These states developed with time as waves
Growing in frequency, volume and pitch;
Each layer of being slowly was tuned
To vibrate in these rhythmic chords of Truth.

This opening out of the soul in life
Foreshadowed greater changes still to come:
Divine descents of wall-less peace and light,
Transforming power, ecstasy's extreme.

Flashes came even from these rarer heights
As if a promise or beckon beyond,
A sign from the One from whom they were cast,
A Mother's smile full of fathomless love.

These experiences came not by strain,
But freely as a grace of the Divine,
The upward thrust was a pure surrender,
An entire self-abandon in the One.

To live in the Mother's embrace was all,
To feel caressed in her love and strength,
To be lifted and carried like a child,
Given to her alone, this was the way.

—Larry Seidlitz



Auroville

Wet with the rains of morn,
The red mud roads
Lead to the place unique,
Where is Auroville's way
'Mid the jungle and flower.

This way we all seek,
Larger than the world,
Light and limpid,
Is here and near, yet far,
Broader than our thoughts,
Breath of our breath,
The thing sublime,
Upholding all.

In Sailam and Samasti
And Ami and Vérité's groves,
In the courts of Certitude,
Or in Sharnga and Pitanga's halls,
'Neath jungle canopies of Green-belt space
Or in the view from new buildings,
Is the life of something else astir,
Forming in a hundred ways
The threads of tomorrow's tapestry.

This Auroville we see, and this we deem,
Harks back, through seas of sight
To another direction of our lives,
Another source sublime,
Which carries our soul's surge
Towards the marvel.

—Vigyan Agni

O Truth!

O Truth! Thou shining golden orb of light
who sits atop the world and regal-like
dispenses with Thy rays of knowledge bright.

O Truth! O Truth! Thou wondrous kingdom vast
whose measure lies beyond the mortal's grasp.
Thou ultimate divine iconoclast!

O Truth! Come down and set the whole world free.
Come down and share with us Thy vast infinity.

O Truth! Descend and make of this earth Thy home
and here amongst men let Thy golden sunbeams roam.

—Angelo Salerno

Promontory

They carry the sun down.
They are the red cry
come out of the ashes.
Through the high passes they ascend,
a mountain of eagles.
They jump in the sun
tasting liquor of sunlight.
There is no range beyond which
they cannot rake their talons,
falling from the vaporous
grey heavens over headland
waters till they stand
in the place of thunder.

The first alphabet
on tongues of fire descends
to the beach where we play
the old shell game,
our inert rebirths.
Floating driftwood shatters and splits,
and we shift above the sand,
bits of brown seaweed
woven round our ankles.
It is enough to know
when an eagle takes us
it will not let us go,
that when we come up
from the deep cleft,
the rock will be lifted,
thunder's trumpet muted,
the braille of a breeze.

The moment is always there,
we throw ourselves
out: a blind tiny night scream,
we walk far Pacific waters,
swoop down through crags
and draw to where a lizard
crawled down a lightning bolt.
The silent one who dreams us awake
wills us to unending flight
to wheel in clouds above white towers,
to feel the current flowing,
to land in what night, on what world,
with that eerie, silent grace.

—Rick Lipschutz



Mayetrei

When her illustrious husband
Was to leave for a life
More spiritually intense,
He was to move into the dense
Forests of the Himalayas in
The north in a cave as a dweller that lives
Each day for God and the Great Universe.
The cadence, so far, of his life was over,
Yet the flame effervescence was to burn,
Burn brighter for the Lord
Of the Universe, the Purushottama,
And become one with His consciousness.
That was his goal that remained
To be fulfilled and completed.

Mayetrei gazed at the skies
With a heavy heart, her fathomless eyes
Filled with tears. She pondered and
Felt a deep satisfaction to be a wife to
Such an illustrious one.

In love and knowledge, she was unbeaten.
Their divine love was unbeaten, for he could
Relieve his heart on the snowy bosom of hers.
A loving bliss and a loving existence was
The rishis' goal in life for it enhanced the
Powers of Yagyabalkha, for she was the
Symbol of the great Shakti, the source of
Love and knowledge, energy and bliss.

When the noon was high,
The hour of parting came nigh.
The great one looked at Mayetrei.
He was calm and his Mantra was
Entering a new sphere of Gayetri.
A new domain, a new horizon of fulfillment
Awaited him, so he spread calm around.
She for long was lost in the pain
Of an approaching separation which
She never before experienced.
On the threshold of her mud abode
She sat wistfully with a lingering
Pang in her heart.

2

On the other side of the rishi stood Katyani,
His other wife, a playful damsel youthful
And rich in her looks with bright attire.
The rishi said to her, "Well, now do the needful,
Divide all wealth of the ashram." Her eyes sparkled

But she was quiet in expectation. She thought, will
The great one consider her love and bestow the
Blessings on her? Enamored as he is, she knew,
By her lashya, which he often compared to the
Lila of Prakriti, and smiled often at her childish
Pranks, or would he . . . her heart stooped low in pain,
Would he give all his wealth, gifted to him by
Kings and princes, to Mayetrei, who cares for nothing
And craves none. But the rishi was only too full of her.
For Mayetrei was a constant consort of his in his pursuits
Of the unknown. Perhaps together they tread the milky
Way, that stretches from one end to the other end of the sky,
Blissfully embracing each other they float in the starry skies
Gazing deep into each other's eyes and clasping in love.
Those were the spiritual journeys that Mayetrei could
Only give for she had the love and knowledge and the
Understanding of the spiritual kind. Katyani knew this well
And she tended the cows, and fed the inmates and
Managed all that was to be managed and all she did
In an effortless youthful fashion. Her illustrious husband
Was well aware of it all. Yet, in her depth of thought
She thought, "who would not love Mayetrei?
Ineffably loveable is she."

3

The rishi called Mayetrei, "now my dear," and
Her luminous eyes she lifted at her illustrious
Husband in pain and in love and in one gaze of hers
She melted his heart. The rishi put his right hand,
Enfolded his left arm around her slender waist and said,
"All is yours and what you want to part with you may give to
Katyani.

You shall rule the ashram in my absence for all is yours."
Mayetrei kneeled in deep veneration to touch his feet.
Her tears swelled and her voice choked for she knew
He will be gone, perhaps forever and her eyes will
Keep on gazing but never will she get a glimpse of him.

Her veneration of love would not have ended
But the rishi called her again to accept all his material
Possessions that were gifts from kings and princes.
In reverence Mayetrei now stood up and wiped her
Tears that flowed irresistibly, and now with folded hands
She uttered these words:

"That which is not to give me immortality,
What shall I do with that, Oh lord? I cannot
Accept thy splendoured objects for those
Are nothing without the essence of spirituality."
Thus she is remembered forever in the annals of
India's heritage of renunciation.

—Susmita Chatterjee



Apropos

In the totality of the change we have to achieve, human means and forces too have to be taken up, not dropped but used and magnified to their utmost possibility as part of the new life. —Sri Aurobindo

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

Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them. —Albert Einstein

Because we will protect ourselves from ourselves to the point of destroying ourselves—Lord have mercy. —R.S. Thomas

God waits for man to regain his childhood in wisdom. —Rabindranath Tagore

The Lord abides in the heart of all beings. —The Gita

God gives the things of this earth a certain color and variety and value, causing childish folk to argue over it. —Rumi

For everything you have to pay. In every field, at all times, that is the rule. You have to work for a thing before you can hope to get it. —M.P. Pandit

The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit. —Anonymous

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. —Norman MacEwan

It's rigged—everything, in your favor. So there is nothing to worry about. —Rumi

Always circumstances come to reveal the hidden weaknesses that have to be overcome. —The Mother

It is as the love of the Divine grows that the other things cease to trouble the mind. —Sri Aurobindo

Contentment . . . is not a resigned acceptance but a glad acceptance of what is given to us by nature, by providence, by circumstances. This contentment is the seed of what later develops into a perpetual joy, the delight of existence. —M.P. Pandit

Whence shall he have grief, how shall he be deluded who sees everywhere the Oneness? —Isha Upanishad

The false can never grow into truth by growing in power. —Rabindranath Tagore

Do you think God lets you cling to any branch? Wherever you make an attachment, it will be broken. —Rumi

In works, aspiration towards Perfection is true spirituality. —The Mother

Inside the Great Mystery that is, we don't really own anything. What is this competition we feel then, before we go, one at a time, through the same gate? —Rumi

Peace and stillness are the great remedy for disease. When we can bring peace in our cells, we are cured. —The Mother

There is no act in this world that will ever cause the mirror to look away. There is no act in this world that will ever make the mirror say "no." —Hafiz

Dark clouds become heaven's flowers when kissed by light. —Rabindranath Tagore

Life is a mission. Life is sacred. Treat life with the respect and care it deserves and life will treat you with the same consideration. —M.P. Pandit

What paralyzes life is failure to believe and failure to dare. —Teilhard de Chardin

It is in love with you and is holding back only because it knows of your lack of self-denial. —Rumi

Mind in its purest play is like some bat that beats about in caverns all alone, contriving by a kind of senseless wit not to conclude against a wall of stone. —Richard Wilbur

It is the highest truth which the soul must seek out by thought and by life accomplish. —Sri Aurobindo

For lovers, the only teaching is the beauty of the Beloved: Their only book and lecture is the Face. —Rumi

To approach god by love is to prepare oneself for the greatest possible spiritual fulfillment. —Sri Aurobindo

Do not brace yourself against suffering. Try to close your eyes and surrender yourself, as if to a great loving energy. —Teilhard de Chardin

Above us, within us, around us is the All-Strength and it is that we have to rely on for our work, our development, our transforming change. —Sri Aurobindo

The undisciplined man doesn't wrong himself alone—he sets fire to the whole world. —Rumi

Thought feeds itself with its own words and grows. —Rabindranath Tagore

Before the stone becomes ruby, it is its own enemy. —Rumi

Self-discipline is when your conscience tells you to do something and you don't talk back. —W. K. Hope

We must develop the sensitivity, the urge to appreciate the soul of beauty, a sense of order and harmony in our day-to-day life. —M.P. Pandit

Never, never, never give up. —Anonymous