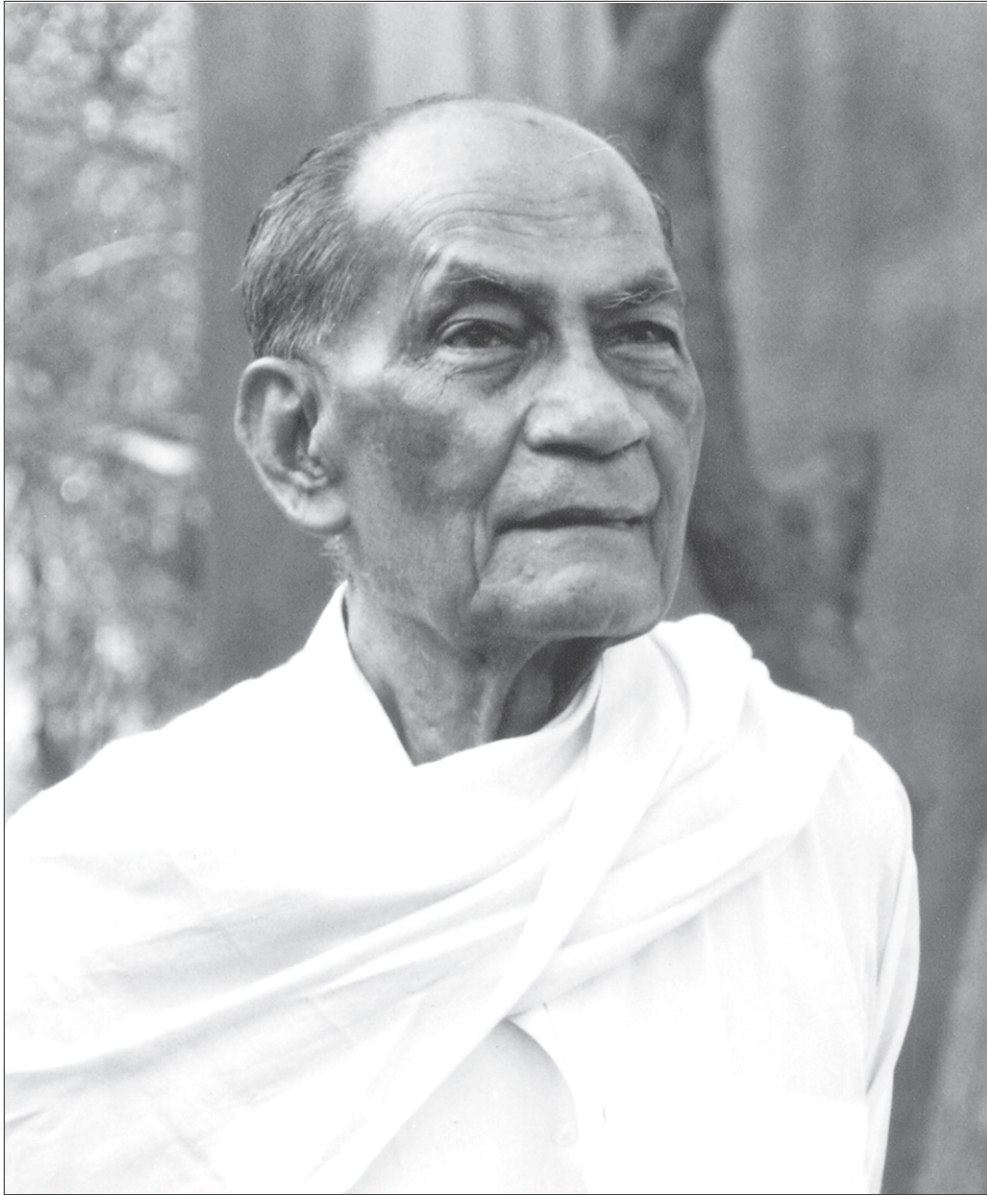


Collaboration

Fall 2006

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Vol. 31, No. 3



Nirodharan: 1903–2006

- Michael Miovic's humorous futuristic short story, "Minnie's situation"
- Shyam Kumari's "Humour in Sri Aurobindo's plays: The maid in the mill"
 - Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material
 - Gnostic knots • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Nirodbaran, Sri Aurobindo's personal attendant for 12 years, passed away on 17 July 2006. (Photo by Franz Fassbender)

The authors and poets

Gilles Guigan is a civil engineer from France who has resided in Auroville since 1980. He is one of the 'Executives' of the Matrimandir.

IDEA team members include Serge Brelín, Marc Tormo, Arnab Choudry, Martin Littlewood, Grace Aroha, Chandresh Patel, Sebastian Cortés, Petra, Jana, Subash, Estele, and Barbara.

Shyam Kumari is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and is an author, poet, editor, and director of a Sanskrit school in Pondicherry. She may be reached at shyamkumari@auromail.net.

Michael Miovic, M.D. is co-director of clinical psycho-oncology at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, and also works in the fields of Integral Psychology and consciousness studies. He may be reached at mmiovic@yahoo.com.

Narad (narad@alltel.net) lives in Cleveland, GA and, for several months each year, in Pondicherry. He is working to build the Matrimandir gardens, gives classes in music and horticulture in the Ashram, conducts 'OM choirs,' and assists in the work of various centers in the U.S.

Anie Nunnally (anie@earthlink.net) is a music teacher and member of the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles, and author of *The Golden Path*, a book on 12 disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Chandresh Patel is an entrepreneur and software engineer who recently relocated to Auroville, where he is a member of the IDEA team. He has a longstanding interest in writing poetry.

Larry Seidlitz (larry_seidlitz@hotmail.com) facilitates online courses for Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow in Pondicherry and is editor of *Collaboration*.

Table of contents

Collaboration, vol. 31, no. 3, Fall 2006

From the office of *Collaboration*

Notes on this issue	3
---------------------------	---

Current affairs

Recent activities at the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles	Anie Nunnally	4
The psychic touch: Glimpses of AUM 2006	Dmitri Boulakovski	4
Passings		5
Nirodbaran: Servant of the Divine	Larry Seidlitz	5
Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy: Founder of Aravind Eye Hospitals	Larry Seidlitz	8
Stuart Schoen	Anie Nunnally	9
Briefs		10

AV almanac

Completion of all structures at Matrimandir	Gilles Guigan	10
Integral Development of Entrepreneurship in Auroville	IDEA Team	11

Essays

Minnie's situation	Michael Miovic	12
Humor in the plays of Sri Aurobindo: The maid in the mill	Shyam Kumari	22

Source material

On taking the path of yoga	The Mother	28
Opening and surrender to the Mother	Sri Aurobindo	30

Gnostic knots

From Sri Aurobindo's <i>Humour</i>	Nirodbaran	32
--	------------	----

The poetry room

Surrealist	Sri Aurobindo	33
Nirod-da	Shyam Kumari	33
Gold sun-rose	Nirodbaran	33
Descent	Sri Aurobindo	34
Untitled	Nirodbaran	34
All this before us	Larry Seidlitz	34
The noons of splendour	Narad	35
Insincerity	Anonymous	35
Integral animal	Chandresh Patel	35

Apropos		36
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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue we have taken the theme of humor. In our last issue, we focused on death, and as a colleague likes to point out, several prominent people soon expired. As an antithesis, or antidote, I thought it would be well to lighten the atmosphere and bring in the spirit of joy and laughter. I trust that now no one will die of laughter, but if someone does succumb for some other reason, they may pass with a smile on their lips!

We feature two articles that should raise a smile on the face of nearly everyone—alive, that is—even those grieving death, taxes, politics, or other inevitable banes of our existence. The first is by Michael Miovic, a psychiatrist and gifted writer. The article is a fictional story set in the future, where technology and spirituality have both developed hand-in-hand in fascinating and humorous ways, whereas people and their concerns and ways have remained surprisingly . . . well, human. The story is well-written and delightful, and whereas it refers to some advanced technological innovations and terms, even those unfamiliar with science fiction will readily understand as much as is necessary to understand the story. (I'm still musing on the "time-sequence erasure.") We also get a glimpse of what "next age" spirituality may have in store for us, though some familiarity with current "new age" spirituality may give greater appreciation of its humor. The author has truly created a futuristic world, one that is at once innovative, plausible, and ridiculous.

The second article by Shyam Kumari recounts Sri Aurobindo's humor in his unfinished play, "The Maid in the Mill." In fact, this article is part of a series of articles on Sri Aurobindo's comedic plays that Ms. Kumari had written and published in *Mother India*. This article seemed especially appropriate for our theme in that it gives insight into Sri Aurobindo's humor based on a work that may be unfamiliar with many readers. Ms. Kumari has succeeded in selecting the spiciest dialogue while providing enough background to make the connections and enough enthusiasm to stimulate our own. The play was written when Sri Aurobindo was at Baroda at the turn of the twentieth century, and seems to be in the style of the Elizabethan-era plays. Thus its antiquity contrasts with Michael's futuristic setting, though both stories have a love theme. Along with love there is here the battle of the sexes, and we are treated with a feminist's joy in the triumphant wit and irony of the young maid Brigida over the chauvinist and arrogant Don Basil. The wit and verve of the dialogue is delightful, and at the end we only wish with Ms. Kumari that there were both more of it and a satisfying finale, though Sri Aurobindo seemed to give a glimpse of the ending by the pregnant conclusion of one of Don Basil's monologues—" . . . and if all this fails, Death! As a last revenge, I'll marry her. Saints!"

In "Current Affairs," we have articles on the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles by Anie Nunnally and on AUM 2006 by Dmitri Boulakovski. We also have articles on the lives and passings of two renowned Indian disciples, Nirodbaran and Dr. Venkataswamy, as well as on the life and passing of an American disciple who had long been connected with the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles, Stuart Schoen. In "AV almanac" we have news on the soon-to-be-completed Matrimandir, and on a new initiative for developing entrepreneurship in Auroville. In "Source Material" we have selections from the Mother's talks that are at once a warning and a reassurance about undertaking the path of Integral Yoga, and selections from Sri Aurobindo's writings about the "central secret" of the Integral Yoga—opening and surrender to the Mother. In our humor section, "Gnostic knots," we feature Sri Aurobindo's humor as expressed in some selections of his correspondence with Nirodbaran. Our poetry section features poems by Sri Aurobindo, a poem by Shyam Kumari about Nirodbaran, two samples of Nirodbaran's mystical poetry, and other poems by Narad, Larry Seidlitz, Chandresh Patel and an anonymous writer. In "Apropos," we have collected quotes from various spiritual teachers about the experience of *mukti*, "spiritual liberation."

The photographers

Franz Fassbender, who took the cover photo, is a long-time Aurovilian who runs PRISMA, a unit for advertising, design, DTP work, text preparation, and printing. During the last 10 years, Franz maintained a close contact with Nirod-da and frequently organised Auroville visits for him.

Flower photos were scanned from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram photographic book-set, The spiritual significance of flowers, by the Mother, with kind permission of the Ashram.

Larry Seidlitz (Larry_Seidlitz@hotmail.com) is editor of Collaboration.

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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; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Chandresh Patel, secretary.

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Current Affairs

Recent activities at the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles

by Anie Nunnally

The Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles, also known as the East West Cultural Center, was founded on 1 May 1953 by Dr. Judith Tyberg, named Jyotipriya by Sri Aurobindo. The center has had many locations in the area but is now situated on the west side of Los Angeles in a large house in a quiet residential neighborhood near the Pacific Ocean.

Jyotipriya was a noted Sanskrit scholar and authored *The Language of the Gods* and *First Lessons in Sanskrit Grammar*. She was a beacon of light for all those who attended her Thursday evening *Savitri* classes. She so inspired her students with her teachings of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga that many went on to live and practice their sadhana in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

At present our center's classes and programs continue on a regular basis and the center provides a sacred space and atmosphere for the teachings of Mother and Sri Aurobindo for the Greater Los Angeles area, as well as for the many visitors who come to us from other parts of the U.S., Europe and India.

Our Thursday night classes had focused on *The Mother's Vision*. However, recently we have begun study of *Letters on Yoga*. Our Saturday afternoon meetings had been given to the reading of *Savitri*. We will now be undertaking study of *Essays on the Gita*. Meetings are followed by meditation in Sri Aurobindo's relics room. The relics were installed on 15 August 1991 by Dr. Maheshwari and Robert Dane.

We host many guest speakers from India and the U.S. and have hosted the All U.S.A. Meeting (AUM) conference in 1993 and in 2003. Monthly, a collective karma yoga day is set aside for working in and beautifying our garden, cleaning the center, assembling memorabilia, and working on our stamp collection. Also monthly we have an informal gathering with a potluck dinner. Cultural presentations are given by our members or a special film from the Ashram is shown. Darshan days are observed with the creation of a lovely altar, flower arrangements, chanting, music, readings, meditation, and prasad.

Our guests this year have included renowned Indian shenai player Ustad Ali Ahmed Hossain Khan and tabla player Subhen Chatterji. The center sponsored their concert series in the U.S. this year and they visited us and gave a fascinating lecture on the history of the shenai along with a musical demonstration. Other visitors have included Dakshina and Angelo from the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, CA, who made a special visit to help us out during one of our karma yoga weekends. Aster Patel

from Auroville visited us and gave a talk after traveling to California following her presentation at the AUM conference in upstate New York in July. In August we had a visit from Navaja Llope, a graphic designer, now living in Pondicherry. Navaja has worked with us in the past designing some of our book covers. We look forward to continued work with her on future publications. Narad (Richard Eggenberger) visited with us from 7 to 11 September. On the 7th he gave a presentation on *Flowers and Their Messages*, and on the 9th gave a Power Point presentation on the Matri-mandir and conducted an "Om" choir with our group. On the 10th he gave a talk on *The Future Poetry* and offered recitations from *Savitri*.

In closing I would like to quote the following which is a portion from a letter that Jyotipriya wrote to the members of the board at that time and for those who would become directors in the future.

I wish to express certain ideals, policies and principles that have motivated the building of the East West Cultural Center this last 25 years and which I hope, when I am unable to carry on or should pass away, will be carried on and expanded as the New Age unfolds. This center is not a business or a sect or a popular or social activity. It is a service to the Divine to share and unite the best aspects of the spiritual and religious, philosophical and cultural and healing arts of the East and West for uplifting and leading to a Divine Life on earth. Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga and his teaching that "The Knowledge that unites is the true Knowledge" is the guide. Most of the labor that has built up the center has been dedicated karma yoga and income from professional teaching and offerings of members and interested friends, the sale of books, cards, incense. The spiritual teachings given in groups and personal counseling have been given free. May it continue to grow thus spontaneously with Divine backing with no catering to lower standards for attracting money. May the Divine bless the Work. —Dr. Judith Tyberg

This is the ideal that we seek to uphold. We aspire to honor the legacy left by Jyotipriya, "The Lover of Light," and to carry on her work for Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the manner which she has set forth in her letter to her last board of directors and for those who will serve the center in the future. Om Shanti.

The psychic touch: Glimpses of AUM 2006

by Dmitri Boulakovski

I go inwards, into my heart and feel waves of warmth, bringing back reminiscences of people, their shiny eyes, our meditations, our chats.

We all came to these woods that seemed to be contemplating



themselves to the chanting of a brook. We came from Pondy and L.A., from Boulder and Monterey to upstate New York with heaven's grace. We could have gathered in New Castle or in an old castle, in a dusty desert or on a rapidly melting ice cap, because it does not matter where, what matters is that it is us, the integral bunch, to whom less than integral is not good enough.

We are a snapshot of the humankind caught unawares. We are seekers and finders, computer wizards and psychiatrists, psychologists and optical engineers, the analysts and the analyzed, aurovillians and ashramites, writers and talkers, the physically fit and those whose pain is so strong that the next morning feels like a stone wall.

Alok told me that just a few years ago at these gatherings if you mentioned the notion of the psychic being you would often see a blank look on peoples' faces. Now when at the end of our meeting one of us said that throughout the conference he was bathing in psychic light we all nodded in complete understanding. What a change! I touch the feet of those who shared this light with us. Walking the bridge in your company is an inspiring proposition.

It is so hard to tell others about things that really matter to you, your spiritual experiences—the innermost treasures. They are like those beautiful little stones that a child finds in the garden and keeps in a box under the pillow. How would they react? Will they try to understand but yawn unwillingly? Will they be quiet for a minute and switch to more serious subjects?

It is so necessary every now and then to dissolve our defenses. Let us share and you will see the sky will not fall on our heads. On the contrary, through the opening in the clouds the sun is shining so brightly. To be understood is to be happy. One has to be vulnerable to move on; one has to dare to keep becoming oneself.

I was trying to listen to presentations with my heart, bypassing the mind. It was so liberating to hear one of us saying that the longer one lives the less one knows. What I felt in the presentations was knowledge melting into love. Neeltje's quiet voice is still reminding us: "absolute knowledge and absolute love are one." Up there, on the other shore—blissful contentment of a child playing in the caring light from above; down here—the world overwhelmed by ignorance and suffering; and in-between—a bridge to walk. Matthijs turned to us and said that what he really wanted to know is what each of us was experiencing on the way. That question broke down the wall. Everyone opened up like flowers at dawn and shared—sincerely, deeply, beautifully. To me that was the culmination of our meeting. That is what we came here for—to be enriched by a mutual opening.

A refined figure steps gracefully into the meeting room. Aster told us that the roots of all things human are in the body, and that it is in the physical that we will find surprisingly harmonious solutions to the problems we face. That sounded so far, but so true. I realized that my own focus was a thousand miles above ground. The body was an annoying object of an uphill struggle. How will it feel to really perceive the physical differently—not as a maze of

pitfalls and pains but as the source of delightful answers to the challenges of yoga?

So much will remain with me after we part—beautiful Mata-giri presences living so tangibly in Their light; the remarkable harmony among all of us who are so different and so close; all presenters giving their best in front of the audience that really listens; mantras that stop the rain; laughter that washes away grief; the elegant effort of those who made this experience possible; and the farewell hugs when a soul touches a soul.

Bye AUM 2006. Thank you for the psychic touch.

Passings

Nirodbaran: Servant of the Divine

by Larry Seidlitz

Dr. Nirodbaran Talukdar, Sri Aurobindo's personal attendant and scribe, passed away on 17 July 2006 at the age of 102. Nirodbaran, through his writings, has made a remarkable contribution to the world, and to devotees of Sri Aurobindo in particular. As the Mother said, "Thanks to Nirod, we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was. It is extremely interesting and very instructive."¹ This "unknown" side of Sri Aurobindo has to do especially with his personality, his personal way of interacting with people, his way of looking at things, his sense of humor, his daily activities. These things were particularly revealed in Nirodbaran's classic, *Twelve years with Sri Aurobindo*, his two volumes of *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, and his two volumes of *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*. Among his other writings are included *Memorable Contacts with the Mother*, "An Extraordinary Girl" (featured in the last issue of *Collaboration*), *Mrinilini Devi* (on Sri Aurobindo's wife), *Light and Laughter*, *Collected Essays and Talks*, biographies of Sri Aurobindo for both children and adults, three books of English poetry—*Sun Blossoms*, *Fifty Poems*, and *Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaren with Sri Aurobindo's Comments*—and two works of prose and two volumes of poetry written in Bengali.

Dr. Nirodbaran was born in Chittagong, which is now in Bangladesh. He was raised as a Buddhist. His father was a landholder and businessman, and his mother was highly educated and respected. His father passed away when he was only five years old, but his mother looked after him well. He was educated in Chittagong, and for a time at Vidyasagar College in Calcutta. Then he got the opportunity to study in England with help from a cousin, and studied Medicine in Edinburgh. He returned to India in January 1930, and immediately went to Pondicherry at his niece's request to visit her where she was living at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

He had already met Dilip Kumar Roy in Paris who had told him much about Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram, but he was not



much interested. When he arrived at the Ashram, Dilip was surprised, and arranged for a meeting with the Mother. Nirodbaran was captivated by her beauty—"She appeared to me a veritable goddess"—and she began looking at him intently and "smiling and smiling and smiling."² Afterwards she asked him a few questions about his practice of medicine. When he boarded the train to leave Pondicherry, wherever he turned he saw the beautiful face of the Mother. He took up a government job in Rangoon, and after two years went to Calcutta to set up a private practice. Within six months after that he left everything and came to the Ashram on 15 February 1933, at the age of 29.

He began working in the Building Department, and started a voluminous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. Later he took up other jobs, in the House-painting Department, then in the timber godown. In 1935, the Ashram doctor had to go away, and the Mother suggested that Nirod take his place. He did, but Nirodbaran had a rather serious demeanor, so some patients found him daunting. One day Sri Aurobindo wrote him, "Well, I don't know why, but you have the reputation of being a fierce and fire-brand doctor who considers it a crime for patients to have an illness. You may be right, but—tradition demands that a doctor should be soft like butter, soothing like treacle, sweet like sugar and jolly like jam. So!"³ Another time Nirodbaran wrote: "Couldn't touch K without making her burst into tears. These ladies think what heartless brutes, animals, these doctors are!" Sri Aurobindo replied, "Much safer than if they think, 'What dears these doctors are, darlings, angels!'"⁴ Nirodbaran frequently consulted with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother about his patients, and they took great interest in his work and often gave advice. These exchanges are recorded in Nirodbaran's *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, together with discussions about Nirodbaran's sadhana and other matters. The correspondence reveals Sri Aurobindo's sweetness and loving affection, as well as his delicious humor.

Then on 23 November 1938, on the eve of the Darshan, Sri Aurobindo fell and fractured his right thigh bone. A team of attendants was formed that included Nirodbaran, several other doctors, Champaklal and Purani. Initially, medical assistance was also obtained from outside, but after things settled down, the attendants alone looked after him. At first there were various complications such as swelling, bed sores, pain in the leg, and so forth which required treatment, but for the most part the attendants looked after Sri Aurobindo's personal needs. There were massages of the body and leg, there were physical exercises, and eventually there were walking exercises, for which Sri Aurobindo used Purani and Champaklal for support and later just Champaklal and a walking stick. Eventually he walked unaided.

During this period Sri Aurobindo began to engage with his attendants in evening talks, in which they casually discussed various matters, often punctuated with humorous repartees or jokes. These conversations formed the basis of Nirodbaran's books, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*. Eventually Sri Aurobindo returned to health and was able to give Darshan for the eagerly awaiting disciples on 24 April 1939. De-

spite his returning health, the attendants were not dismissed, and Nirodbaran continued to personally serve Sri Aurobindo until he left his body in 1950.

Nirodbaran's books on the evening conversations with Sri Aurobindo have given the world a glimpse into the work Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did for the Second World War. It is shown that they kept up with the details of the war, and in fact understood and predicted many of the events before their unfolding. We are given insights into Sri Aurobindo's military capacity, as if he himself were a military general predicting the moves of his opponent and planning counter measures. Even more than this we are shown how they intervened in the war with their spiritual power and lead it to its successful conclusion. For example, Hitler had fixed 15 August 1940—Sri Aurobindo's birthday—as the day on which he would conquer England and broadcast from Buckingham Palace. This was a sign, said Sri Aurobindo, that Hitler was "the enemy of our work." Regarding this day, Nirodbaran wrote: "... the radio news at noon said that 144 German planes had been brought down over England, in half a day, the biggest number so far. We commented it was the result of the Darshan. Sri Aurobindo laughed and said, 'The day of Hitler's triumphal entry into England!'"⁵

Another important contribution of Nirodbaran's is his poetry. His development as a poet is interesting because he started writing under Sri Aurobindo's guidance without having any previous knowledge or skill in the art. In two of his books of poetry, Nirodbaran published the poems showing Sri Aurobindo's revisions and sometimes hilarious comments. These are especially instructive in showing the Master's guidance, for example, he often highlighted lines that had a higher inspiration and quality, and sometimes indicated from which domain of consciousness they originated. The revisions show how a slight alteration could change a mediocre line into an exquisite one. Under Sri Aurobindo's inspiration and guiding hand, Nirodbaran flowered into a wonderful poet who was able to channel and express a spiritual and mystical inspiration from a greater consciousness. This training and ability served both Sri Aurobindo and Nirodbaran well when Sri Aurobindo's eyesight began to fail in his later years, and Nirodbaran became his scribe for the completion of his poetic masterpiece, *Savitri*.

In *Twelve Years*, Nirodbaran recounts his service as a scribe to Sri Aurobindo. After Sri Aurobindo's accident, Sri Aurobindo took up the revision of *The Life Divine*. The book came out in 1939 with much jubilation in the Ashram, and many autographed copies were sold or given away. When *The Life Divine* was completed, Sri Aurobindo took up *Savitri*. Nirodbaran recalled when Sri Aurobindo first asked him to take out some notebooks from the drawer and give them to him. At first Sri Aurobindo worked on his own. Then a new fair copy had to be written out, incorporating the many additions and revisions that Sri Aurobindo had made. The Mother suggested Nirodbaran's name, and he began taking up the work in the morning, sitting near the head of Sri Aurobindo's bed, using Sri Aurobindo's foot-



stool as a table. Around 1944, Sri Aurobindo's eyesight began to grow dim. Then Sri Aurobindo would ask Nirodbaran to read out different versions of the poem, and Sri Aurobindo would add new lines, revise old ones, or substitute lines from a different version. Nirodbaran commented:

He would dictate line after line, and ask me to add selected lines and passages in their proper place, but which were not always kept in their old order. I wonder how he could go on dictating lines of poetry in this way, as if a tap had been turned on and the water flowed, not in a jet of course, but slowly, very slowly indeed. Passages sometimes had to be re-read to get the link or sequence, but when the turn came of the *The Book of Yoga* and *The Book of Everlasting Day*, line after line began to flow from his lips like a smooth and gentle stream and it was on the next day that a revision was done to get the link for further continuation. In the morning he himself would write out new lines on small note books called 'bloc' notes which were incorporated in the text.⁶

It is difficult to explain in a few words the complexity of Nirodbaran's job in keeping track of the numerous successive changes to the increasingly massive manuscript as lines were changed, added, and rearranged. After a canto was completed, a fair, easily readable copy would be written by Nirodbaran and given to Nolini to type. But even then the typescript would receive another revision and more lines before being sent to the press. Then the press proofs would also receive another revision. The press started printing it canto by canto from 1946. Still, Sri Aurobindo's work on *Savitri* continued until about two weeks before the darshan on 24 November 1950.

After Sri Aurobindo's passing in December 1950, Nirodbaran served as a teacher in the International Centre of Education, the Ashram school, in English, French and Bengali literature. In this manner he has touched the lives so many students passing through the Ashram school. The following quote from a student probably speaks well for many others:

I was awed by his solemn looks and felt uncomfortable at his taciturnity. But he soon shed his mask of aloofness and befriended us, and we stuck by him loyally and opted for him as our English teacher for the next successive years until we finished our Higher Course.⁷

In addition to his teaching, Nirodbaran has also served as a kind of counselor or "elder brother" to many sadhaks who came to visit the Ashram wishing to learn more about the yoga and about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It is noteworthy that he has been an important link between the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. Aurovillian Shraddhavan, for example, has recounted in an essay how Nirodbaran had come out to the Matrimandir Worker's Camp to give a talk, probably in 1972, at a request from Seyril

Schochen.⁸ In the later 1980s, he would occasionally go out to Auroville with Champaklal. Once when the two of them heard that Shraddhavan was among a small group of Aurovillians who were not welcome at the Matrimandir, they made of point of inviting them to meet them there and then meditated together beneath the Banyan tree. Later in 1994, Nirodbaran came out to lay the Foundation Stone for the Savitri Bhavan—the Abode of Savitri:

Nirodbaran spoke only a few words, then read about thirty lines from *Savitri*. His words and voice were impressive, ringing. He seemed to be giving a much more momentous significance to this place than I had thought of. And in the silence that followed, there seemed to come a massive sanction from above. The silence became thunderous with a golden promise.⁹

In addition to supporting Auroville, Nirodbaran has also supported various other Sri Aurobindo centres. In this connection may be mentioned his support of the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research directed by Ananda Reddy. Nirodbaran had continually supported and followed the progress of the institution, and even just last year came out to give his blessings for the construction of a new building for the center. As is clearly evident by Nirodbaran's many activities throughout his long, productive and blessed life, he has been a true servant of the Divine.

It is fortunate that on 17 November 2003, for Nirodbaran's 100th birthday, the Gnostic Centre in New Delhi published a fine commemorative volume, *Nirodbaran: Divinity's Comrade*, edited by Hemant Kapoor. This 640-page book is beautifully done and gives a good overall picture of Nirodbaran's life and contributions. It includes more than 200 pages of selections from his own writings, excellent articles about him by various authors who knew him well, reminiscences about him by various family and friends, various essays dedicated to Nirodbaran focused on topics of his special interest, and numerous photos that include a fantastic portrait of Nirodbaran on the cover.

References

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Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy, founder of Aravind Eye Hospitals

by Larry Seidlitz

Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo who founded the Aravind Eye Care System (AECS) in India, passed away on 7 July 2006 at the age of 88. Dr. V, as he came to be known, was inspired to eradicate needless blindness. In 2005, five Aravind Eye Hospitals located in Tamil Nadu, South India, and two eye hospitals that are managed by AECS in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh and Kolkata, West Bengal, performed nearly 250,000 eye surgeries and attended over 1.7 million patients.¹ AECS's hallmarks are quality care at affordable prices, and providing free services to the poor while remaining financially self-supporting. About 75 percent of AECS's surgeries are conducted for free, and about two-thirds of outpatients receive free care; the remaining patients cover the costs. This is achieved through high quality, large volume care and a well-organised system that emphasizes maximum utilization of resources.

Dr. V was born in 1918 in a farmer's family in a small village in South India. His father was a follower of Gandhi who believed in striving for perfection, and instilled these values in his children. Dr. V received his medical degree from Stanley Medical College, Madras, in 1944. He then joined the Indian Army Medical Corps and spent several years stationed in various parts of India and Malaysia. In 1947 he developed severe rheumatoid arthritis, and was discharged from the Army in 1948. For a time he was unable to walk or even stand; he was confined to a hospital bed for more than a year. The disease left him with crippled fingers, restricted movement, and severe pain. Nevertheless, he turned to the study of obstetrics and then to ophthalmology. He developed special surgical instruments for his fingers, and trained them to perform eye surgeries despite the pain.

At someone's suggestion, he attended the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on 24 April 1950. In December 1950 he joined an eye hospital in Madras. An Ashram inmate came to the hospital for treatment; they met and became friends. He felt a pull to visit the Ashram again and he did. He made more friends at the Ashram and his visits became more frequent. He met with the Mother with the intention of telling her about his continuing physical problems—for example, that he still could not talk clearly or walk ten feet without severe pain—but when he saw her he did not remember to say this. He offered his services to the Mother as an eye doctor, and soon began examining Ashram patients. He would visit the Ashram about once a month. He worked at the eye hospital in Madras until 1956, and then became head of the eye department in the Madurai Medical School, about 200 miles from Pondicherry. He continued to come to the Ashram for dars-hans, for his birthday, and on other occasions. Later he operated on some Ashram patients, among them Amal Kiran, Udar Pinto,

and Nolini Kanta Gupta.²

In Madurai he had the opportunity to build the eye department at the Medical School and made it a training center for graduate students. In 1961, the State Government gave a mobile eye unit, but very little money, to provide eye camps in the neighboring villages. The village community came forward and supported the project. For each camp about 200 cataract patients would receive operations, and the community would feed the operated patients for about a week until they could return home. Around this time Dr. V was invited to the U.S.A. to learn about blindness rehabilitation, and was given a project to start a blindness rehabilitation center in Madurai. He attended the World Blind Rehabilitation Conference in New York and there he met Sir John Wilson, founder of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind in the U.K. Wilson learned of Dr. V's eye camps, and offered additional support. Dr. V began organizing more and more camps, which became very popular and received additional support by local industries and business people. In 1973, the State Government backed the project, and Dr. V organized massive eye camps, which restored sight to thousands of people. Under his direction of the eye department, the Madurai hospital became the second leading eye hospital in the country. Dr V became more and more involved in national and international efforts to prevent blindness. He felt the Mother's push behind his efforts and successes.

Then in 1976 he retired from government service and started the Aravind Eye Hospital with 11 beds in a rented house in Madurai. This humble hospital has now grown to be the biggest eye hospital in the world! Poor villagers are screened for vision problems in their villages, and those needing cataract operations are transported to the hospital, given food, operations, spectacles, and transported back to their villages—for free! Paying patients cover the costs for the poor. There is no support from the government or from foundations, but the free operations are partly supported by international non-governmental organizations. The Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai is also recognized for residency training and trains most of its own staff.

Two new branch hospitals were built in Tamil Nadu in 1985 and 1988, and two more in 1997 and 2003, the last located in Pondicherry. AECS also took up management of two eye hospitals in north India in 2001 and 2005, where it sent its own personnel to implement its successful model of care. AECS also established two community eye centers that perform many cataract operations daily, and several vision centres that provide examinations, counseling, community education, and refer needy patients to nearby Aravind hospitals. In 1992, AECS developed Aurolab, which makes ophthalmic products, such as intraocular lenses and spectacle lenses at affordable prices for the developing world. In 1996, AECS established a teaching and training institute, the Lions Aravind Institute of Community Ophthalmology. Whereas various research programs have been ongoing in Aravind Eye Hospitals since the 1980s, a current initiative is the establishment of a new Aravind Eye Research Institute to expand



initiatives in medical research. AECS's model of care and business is being studied world-wide, and is being implemented in other parts of the developing world. For example, the World Health Organization sends doctors and technicians to AECS for training in community ophthalmology, and the AECS sends its senior staff to other countries in the region to train eye specialists and hospital management.

In their training, doctors at AECS are gradually conditioned to work for longer periods in a concentrated manner, and thus treat more patients more efficiently than in most other hospitals. For example, in many hospitals in India doctors may work only about 30 hours per week, whereas at Aravind Eye Hospital they may work 50-60 hours per week in a more concentrated and efficient manner. At Aravind Eye Hospitals, each operating theatre has two operating tables; while the doctor operates on one patient, a second patient is prepped on the next table by attendants, and when the doctor finishes with the first he can immediately start on the next patient, saving precious time.³ In this manner, some surgeons operate on as many as 100 patients in a day. On average, surgeons at Aravind Eye Hospitals perform 10 times as many operations per year as surgeons in other eye hospitals in India.

AECS trains its staff to provide high quality care and treat all its patients with understanding and compassion. Many of its doctors, nurses, and staff come from nearby villages where there is a traditional family and community-oriented culture with values of honesty, sincerity, and chastity—AECS tries to provide a disciple of daily life and love and care similar to what they receive in their families. Often, it sends its doctors and other staff to the village eye camps where they develop love and affection for the people, as well as an understanding of their living conditions and an aspiration to help improve them.

AECS encourages its staff to become immersed in spiritual practice. It has a meditation room in its hospitals, and though there is no compulsion to go there, many do. The management and many of the senior staff are motivated by a higher aspiration to serve the Divine in their work and through it to strive for perfection. For example, Dr. V has said that he aspired to the Divine Grace to work in him and for the opening of his physical consciousness to the higher forces, and that he aspired to radiate love and goodwill and eliminate from his consciousness all pride and prejudice. He would visit the meditation room every morning and evening. Similarly, many of Dr. V's family members who work in the Aravind hospitals as managers or as doctors are devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and are dedicated to Dr. V's ideals to not only provide sight to the blind, but also to instill in others a spiritual aspiration for perfection. The meditation room, the aspiration of the management, and their encouragement to the staff to be guided by the Divine in their work combine to create a spiritual atmosphere in the hospitals. This spiritual atmosphere is physically evident in their cleanliness, light, order, beauty, and quiet efficiency. As Dr V has said, it is "an organization that seems to be linked to the higher consciousness."⁴

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Stuart Schoen

by Anie Nunnally

Stuart Schoen, my best friend and spiritual companion on the path of the Integral Yoga, left his material form on 7 August 2006 at the age of 71.

Stuart had been battling emphysema for nine years and his condition had reached advanced stages. After a brief hospitalization for heart arrhythmias he was released on 6 August. He was so happy to be out of the hospital, at home with me and in his own room surrounded by photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But his weakened lungs and heart could not withstand the strain.

He was a true Southern Californian and a child of the 1960s growing up on the area beaches with the music of the Beatles and the Beach Boys. He attended Fairfax High School where one of his best friends was Herb Alpert, Trumpeter and founder of the Tijuana Brass Ensemble. Stuart had been a avid surfer and spent nearly eight months once in Hawaii, while still in his 20s, just living the surfer's life!

Eventually he attended UCLA on the G.I. Bill after having served in the army reserves where he was stationed in Germany during the Korean war. He received a Bachelors Degree from UCLA in Industrial Design and at one time worked for the Disney Corporation as one of their draftsmen.

Stuart was a good artist and had a keen eye for beauty. He designed lovely covers for some of East West Cultural Center's early newsletters. He loved poetry and could recite many of Sri Aurobindo's poems and passages of *Savitri* from memory. His favorite poem of Sri Aurobindo's was "The Infinitesimal Infinite." He also wrote poetry and received some guidance and comments on his poetry from Amal Kiran in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Some of his poems have been published throughout the years in the magazine *Mother India*.

He came to the Integral Yoga in the late 1960s after having discovered Satprem's book *The Adventure of Consciousness*. Being very drawn to the book and eager to have his own copy he learned that he could purchase one at the East West Cultural Center on 9th Street. There he met Jyotipriya (Dr. Judith Tyberg) and began attending her classes.



He made extended visits to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry in 1979 and 1981. He stayed connected to the East West Cultural Center and was one of the people who helped Jyotipriya in a ceremony to burn the mortgage when it was finally paid off for the 9th street location. He also lived at the Center from 1990-1994 after it moved to the West Side of Los Angeles at the current Marshall Street location. He served on its board of directors during that time period as well.

Stuart is mostly remembered for his wit, outspokenness and generosity of spirit. He was fearless and absolutely courageous of will when faced with standing up to the truth.

Throughout our years together I witnessed his generosity through his loving care of me, his giving at the East West Cultural Center, and to the many souls who came through our portals here in Marina del Rey. Together we had hosted so many people from Auroville, the Ashram, from centers in Europe and from all over the United States. He loved showing our out-of-town guests around the Los Angeles area in his Ford Mustang GT convertible. He would put the top down and take us to the highest look-out point atop the Hollywood Hills so that we could look down on a breathtaking view of a sparkling and bejeweled Los Angeles at nighttime.

In his last years, while being able to work at home as an independent investment advisor and fund raiser, he had immersed himself in the re-reading of *Savitri* (which he had completed once again after many readings) and was every morning reading *The Life Divine*. Each day he would take the time to discuss with me what he had read for that day. He had told me that he believed the Mother had sent him to take care of me so that I could be free to do Her work.

I shall greatly miss his kind and benevolent presence, his intelligence, his sense of humor, his loyalty to truth, and most of all for the inspiration he gave to me through his strong aspiration and dedication to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

He now rests with Them.

Peace and Love to all. In Their Light.

Briefs

An archival collection of photographs of disciples and devotees from the 1960s to the present is being developed by Narad (Richard Eggenberger) to be kept in one of the libraries of a Sri Aurobindo Center in America. He requests all who have photos of Ashramites, Aurovilians and disciples from America, Europe and Canada to send them to him, especially close-up photos of people rather than group shots where the faces are not prominent. If the photos need to be returned, they will be scanned and returned to the donors as requested. Please send your photos to: Narad, P.O. Box 2826, Cleveland, GA 30528. He will be in Pondicherry from 3 November 2006 to 1 March 2007; during this time photos may be sent either to his home where they will be held until his return, or to Narad, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002, India.

AV almanac

Completion of all structures at Matrimandir

by Gilles Guigan

The coming months will see a lot of changes at Matrimandir as we are aiming at completing all structures for the 36th anniversary of the laying of its foundation stone—that is on 21 February 2007. Completing the inside of Matrimandir itself consists mainly of completing the inner skin and the twin spiral ramps. We intend to complete also Matrimandir's outer face and the twelve 'petals.' Some may wonder why these twelve segments of crater are called petals; it is because Matrimandir, like the Mother's symbol, represents a full-blown lotus symbolising the Divine consciousness.

The Mother told Roger Anger that, from inside, Matrimandir should appear like a translucent sphere bathed in a particular kind of light. She gave him as a sample a piece of saree whose colour is that of the 'Auroville' hibiscus, which she named 'Beauty of Supramental Love.' On 11 July 1970, while speaking to Satprem about different shades of 'Grace light,' She told him about this particular light: "And if I want an entirely material action (but this is recent, it's recently, since that new Consciousness came [on 1 January 1969], then in its physical action, on the physical, it becomes slightly coloured: it's luminous, it's gold with pink in it, but it's not pink."

The inner 'skin' is actually white and light of this particular colour will be projected on it. It consists of 768 triangular frames in aluminium within which a white fabric made of fibre glass is stretched. This work is proceeding as per schedule and about one-eighth of the triangles are now in place. The foils, of the exact colour, which will cover all portholes are yet to be made in a factory in Germany, but as they are all the same, it should not take much time to install them. At night, this coloured light will be produced by 1,320 LED modules whose colour will be adjustable by computer. These modules are presently being manufactured in a workshop in Auroville.

According to Dr. Karan Singh, present Chairman of the Auroville Foundation: "the walk up the ramp symbolises the ascent of human consciousness in an upward spiral, culminating in the Supramental vision, and the double helix can be seen to stand for the two channels—Ida and Pingala that enclose the fiery *kundalini shakti*, the spiritual power that pervades the universe and is located in potential form at the base of the human spine." Work on these twin spiral ramps is also progressing steadily now. Their steel structure has been entirely scraped and repainted. Their underface will be covered with gypsum panels (work to be sub-



contracted to specialists) and their floor will finally consist of light-weight and super rigid honey comb panels made of aluminium in Oakland, California. The order has just been placed. The type of 'white' curved glass to be utilised for the parapets is about to be finalised (mid September) and should not take long either to install. Auroform will then make the wooden handrail which will come on top of the glass parapet. The white carpet which will cover the honeycomb panels won't take long to install either.

Work on the four entrance doors is also progressing well. Their steel frame will receive golden tiles and crinkle glass. Their automatic opening mechanisms are also being assembled.

We also want to complete Matrimandir's outer face. All golden discs, including the four very large ones above the four entrances, will be installed and the decoration above the four entrances (the golden 'shields') will also hopefully be in place—at least on the north and west entrances.

The space below Matrimandir—the lotus pond and surrounding area—is already almost complete.

The 12 meditation rooms representing the Mother's 12 'Virtues' will all be complete—though only two or three will be equipped with their AC units; the others will only have forced ventilation to start with, but this should not be a problem during the winter. Maintenance work is also going on to clean the large petals, re-do all joints between stone slabs and apply a coat of water-repellent to prevent black fungus from developing again on the red 'Agra' stones.

A lot of work in the gardens will also be complete by the end of February: paved pathways, contouring, irrigation system, planting of lawns; but Matrimandir will not be complete as long as its twelve gardens are not complete. These probably represent 'the twelve powers which are necessary for the complete manifestation' and, as yet, no design has been finalised and approved—but proposals have been made and more are coming.

We want to take opportunity of the fact that lots of friends of Auroville will be visiting Auroville and/or the Ashram during the last week of February to show them these finished structures. We are discussing the possibility of organising some function to celebrate this important step towards the completion of Matrimandir. We are all thinking here of a family reunion rather than a public function with VIP's and media.

Integral Development of Entrepreneurship in Auroville (IDEA)

by the IDEA Team

Integral entrepreneurship is the co-creation of an innovative and evolutionary enterprise based on a systemic development of value-based products, services and community projects with the aim of supporting an ever progressing and sustainable society where relations of harmony, mutuality and unity with fellow hu-

man beings and nature are integrated with the generation of prosperity, beauty and knowledge for the benefit of both the individual and the collective under the guidance of the higher spiritual consciousness.

Mission and Vision

The mission of the IDEA project is to provide both a physical and virtual space for the research, exploration and exchange of knowledge, ideas and successful case studies in Integral Entrepreneurship.

The IDEA vision is that through the exploration and promotion of innovative, sustainable entrepreneurial business, service and social models we can facilitate an increased trend toward conscious, collaborative enterprises that support a truly sustainable economy for Auroville. This vision is guided by the ideals expressed by the *Mother's Vision of the Auroville Economy*.

Meeting the Challenges

The IDEA project will meet these challenges through the innovation of new enterprise models that go beyond the traditional conventions of knowledge requirements for entrepreneurship. This will be accomplished through the establishment of an experimental laboratory (physical and virtual) for the development of cutting-edge research and collaborative explorations into integral entrepreneurship through:

- Extensive study and evaluation of innovative case studies
- Comprehensive cataloguing and archiving of all relevant research and knowledge
- Facilitation of world-class round-table dialogues with pioneering leaders in the integral entrepreneurial paradigm
- Hosting of creative and practical conferences and workshops
- Development of online learning programs and virtual collaboration portals
- Creation of actual entrepreneurial enterprises based on models developed through the centre
- Advancement of collaborative partnerships with leading-edge learning centres around the world
- Institution of a social venture pool to support the creation of new entrepreneurial pursuits

The initiative to create laboratory and training centre for integral entrepreneurship in Auroville emerged, along with several other initiatives, as a result of the Knowledge, Business and Consciousness dialogue held in February 2006. These initiatives formed the basis of the *Auroville Vision 2012*.

First Steps

As a first step toward realizing its goals, the IDEA team is



organizing a series of preparatory sessions leading up to a two-day workshop in October 2006 for Aurovilians and friends in the bioregion. This workshop will build on the information gathered in the Knowledge, Business and Consciousness Seminar as well as from knowledge gathered from papers, discussions and various Auroville subgroups' work initiated over the last year. The IDEA workshop will focus on the needs, aspirations and goals of established as well as future enterprises in Auroville. The mission of the workshop is to gather information and participation toward the development of the IDEA Development Cell and Training Centre.

Essays

Minnie's situation

by Michael Miovic

I.

As Minnie reviewed her situation, she decided it was not good. Ted wasn't exactly the fiancé she had hoped for, her parents were only mediocre, her job was lackluster, and all in all her life had grown quite boring.

She blinked her eyelids to activate the communicator, ran through the list of numbers in her neurobook, and intruded into Sandra's thoughts rather abruptly. "Sandra," she said impatiently, "where are you?"

"On Pluto with Jeff, looking at the new golf course. The grass looks really real, you should see it, it's just like on Earth."

"Oh," Minnie said absent-mindedly, "that sounds nice. Listen, can you go down to Genmart with me?"

Sandra paused, which was not a good sign as far as Minnie was concerned. "How about Tuesday?"

"Okay," Minnie said, the disappointment coming through.

"I bet you're gonna go there right after we terminate, aren't you?" Sandra said. "Aren't you?"



Michael takes a smiling look into the future.
(Photo courtesy Michael Miovic)

"Yeah."

"Well, have a nice time . . . oh, and call me Tuesday."

"Fine," said Minnie, tuning out Sandra. She drummed the tabletop with her fingers. Most of her friends were into the planet-touring thing, zipping around with their boyfriends or husbands, but Minnie didn't much care for other planets.

She snatched her purse and stepped out of her homedome. She walked a few minutes to relax and take in the greenery and smell the gentle breeze perfumed with pine scent. She passed a patch of bioluminescent roses and stopped to enjoy them. They came in all colors—scarlet, yellow, flaming orange, violet, white, indigo blue—and they self-illuminated every time the breeze swayed their stems more than about 10 degrees from resting position. "Beautiful," she said to herself as she bent a stem and cupped her hands around a blossom in order to see the bioluminescent action better. "Must be firefly genetic code that someone spliced in."

She considered plucking one, but then decided not to disrupt the patch. She set on her way again, feeling more relaxed.

In a couple of minutes she pushed the button and transported to Genmart. Inside the store was the usual buzz of excitement, with crowds of people milling around the new display cases. She checked her bank to review her account: 500 solars. That was enough to get started, and in a pinch she could always trade some years off her life for more, at least temporarily. She approached one of the counters, hoping for a decent sales rep. She disliked the kind that played up the shock factor, as though anything could be truly shocking anymore.

"May I help you," a mid-30ish blonde said to her cordially, "looking for an enhancement, or maybe just some information?"

Minnie pushed up her sunglasses and used them to hold back her jet-black hair. She looked down into the display case at all the little holograms. "What's that one over there?" she asked, pointing at the green dragon eating its own tail.

The rep tapped it and it grew to half life-size. "A genetic reconstruction of a 13th century Chinese dragon," she explained, "it breathes heatless fire so it won't ruin the furniture. House trained. Nice pet."

"Oh," Minnie said, tapping it back down to micro-size again, "I thought it was one of those salamanders that regenerates every time you accidentally step on it."

"Sold out," the rep said apologetically, "but we can make one for you in three days, if you want. The new models are crossbred with warblers so they sing when squashed."

"No need," Minnie said, moving on impatiently.

The rep watched her respectfully. "Contemplating marriage?" she inquired discreetly, sounding as if it were just a guess, although it was clearly a mindscan.

Minnie nodded, putting her shades down over her eyes for no particular reason.

"We can help," the rep offered. It was a sincere offer, and that annoyed Minnie almost as much as if it had not been. She had developed a distaste for helpful bureaucracies and altruistic marketing. The smoothness of it all was irritating, like years of perfect weather without relief.



But Minnie decided to give the woman a chance since she meant no harm. She pushed her shades back up and sighed. "I'm confused by the choices," she began, "you know, it's not like I'm unhappy with what I have, but, sometimes, well . . ."

"You dream of more," the rep finished her sentence. She paused to think and review the millions of options. She was intent on her work as she consulted the desktop brain.

Minnie watched with growing fascination. After sometime her curiosity got the best of her. "What do you think of those new desktops? Do they get grumpy like the old ones did when the glucose level drops?"

"Oh, these?" the rep looked up from her labors after a moment, "they're great. Amazing new features. The cranium is featherweight helico-carbon for extra protection, and the frontal cortex coils 360 degrees around the surface of the brain so you get major cognitive enhancement. The limbic system has been entirely re-engineered with an affective sympathy regulator, so it literally cannot get grumpy, and the downsized cerebellum contains homeostatic glucose-regulating cells that essentially eradicate any problems with blood sugar levels. You could forget to feed this thing for months and it would still produce at full speed and in a good mood."

"How 'bout the oxygen?"

"Absorbed through the nasopharyngeal ports or split off from water molecules if need be. These brains work at the bottom of the ocean and in deep space equally well. Of course, in space you need a supply of nutritional pellets, and in all extreme environments the voice function doesn't work so you have to use the telepathy function or holographic mind-projector."

Minnie nodded and let the rep return to her search. She was querying the desktop brain through a subvocalizing interface and listening to the replies on some frequency that Minnie couldn't capture; no doubt a copyright patch had been placed on the transmission.

The rep paused for a moment. "How

important is money to you?"

"It's not all of happiness," Minnie replied.

"True, but have you heard about the new mega-merging man? We've got several models now."

"What's that?" said Minnie flatly. The name itself sounded vulgar.

"Well, these are mentally and physically perfect men, of course . . ."

"Of course," Minnie echoed with ennui as she inspected her fingernails.

". . . Who migrate to distant solar systems, grow large corporate business there, and then conduct a series of buyouts and takeovers culminating in intergalactic mergers. The profits are considerable."

The rep paused to look at Minnie for some sort of clue or reaction, but Minnie was nonplussed. "And the point is?"

"The point is you can then use the profits to buy back years on your life at very advantageous exchange rates, which we guarantee contractually with the original purchase."

Minnie shifted her weight back and forth from one heel to the other as she considered the option. At length she said, "and love?"

"Good question," the rep said, querying the desktop brain again. "No love in this model, but we can give you the love module upgrade when it comes out in a few years . . ."

"No thanks," Minnie said cheerily, happy that at least one thing in her life was clear.

"Minnie!" her mom's voice burst into her mindsphere suddenly, "Minnie!"

"What mom?" said Minnie, annoyed at the intrusion.

"Minnie, are you down at Genmart again?"

"Yes, mom, anything wrong with that?"

"No, of course not, Minnie, we respect your freedom." Then came the obligatory sigh, followed by the usual silence, capped with the inevitable advice: "Minnie, why don't you just settle down with Ted. He's a nice boy. You've both got so many options, what with all the new enhancements that come out every year.

Your father and I are happy, and when we were young we didn't have any of these tools."

"Thanks mom," Minnie said in a nasal drone. She winced and nodded to the rep apologetically. "Okay mom . . . yeah, I love you, yeah . . . we'll be there, don't worry . . . no, I'm just looking . . . when, Sunday? Okay, love you, bye." As soon as mom was gone from her mind, Minnie zeroed in on the rep again. "So what can you do for me on the love front?"

The rep hesitated, well trained to handle that most ambiguous of all customer requests. "Well, love is a multi-faceted thing. It really depends on what you're looking for. Could you tell me more about what you might have in mind?"

Minnie played tough. "You guys are supposed to be the experts."

The rep didn't miss a beat. "For you, I think it will be important to focus on the heart-chakra connection, and build a portfolio around that."

"Let's not forget the sex," Minnie quipped, immediately sorry for being flip-pant.

"No, of course not, that is part of the package deal. But you have spiritual influences in your aura, so we have to keep that in the foreground as we consider the options."

Now Minnie leaned forward, definitely more interested.

"Of course we have several different lines of soul-mates, both de novo and upgrades for your existing partner, and many of our customers are quite happy with those . . ."

Minnie lost interest again. The last phrase rung of platitudes and predictability. "What about the boredom of routine, what can you do for that?"

"A lot" the rep answered confidently, "we now have several different strategies available for our clients who prefer adventure. We can program a random-event generator into your man's genetic code so as to produce any variety of novelties at unexpected times, and we can risk-stratify these unpredictability factors to suit your tastes. We have high, medium, and low-risk programs."



"Tell me some of the risks."

"In the mild category we have weight change, odd breath odors, skin-color alterations, stupid hobbies, easy tearfulness, excessive wish to communicate, minor vices, attention deficit disorder, unusual hair growth, to name but a few." She paused to catch her breath, then continued on at a rapid rattle. "In the moderate category we have job loss, affairs, marital separation, both normal and premature aging, alcoholism, bankruptcy, compulsive hoarding behaviors, and sexual dysfunction—all to test your commitment. And in the severe category we have sudden and tragic death, wife-beating, participation in cults, terrorist sleeper-cell involvement, perpetration of child abuse—"

"Child abuse?" Minnie squawked in dismay, "you wouldn't!"

"Of course we can repair the child," the rep added hastily, "and in several ways: psychotherapy, neural reprogramming to erase the event, willed reincarnation in another body (either identical clone or new baby), spiritual intervention by angels to prevent the crime, time travel to return to the past and seek other options, and massive lawsuits against the perpetrator."

Minnie nodded her head to check off each of the proposed reparations, miffed at herself for having reacted with outrage after all these years of shopping. "Lawsuits?" she quizzed the rep, "how will that help the child?"

"It won't directly, but you can get pain and suffering awards to finance any of the other options."

Minnie still looked skeptical.

"The high-risk program is probably not for you," the rep said diplomatically, "most of our clients who get it are pathological novelty-seekers and historians interested in sampling more primitive motifs."

"What else?" Minnie said gruffly.

The rep looked down at her hands for a moment, showing professional contrition for having offended Minnie's tastes. "I would be happy to introduce you to a colleague if you prefer," she offered quietly.

"No, that won't be necessary," Minnie answered. This was the only part of shopping she disliked—the pained rep who induces a guilt trip. "So, what do you have in the sex line?" she said flatly, not because she was interested but simply because she was irritated.

"Several new items and improvements," the rep perked up again, going about her work brightly. She moved over to another display case and retrieved a handful of enhancement kits discreetly packed in jewelry boxes. "Let's see," she said, reading the tags on the boxes. "We have kundalini amplifiers, ecstasy neuropeptides delivered in liposomes, high potency pheromones, time-circuit regulators, spatial perception discombobulators . . ." And her voice droned on as Minnie's attention drifted to the dressing rooms down the hall, where customers of all ages were going to try out various enhancements. A couple of teenage girls went in together giggling and came out giggling in short order. Several professional-looking women spent considerable time evaluating their products, then went to the legal counter to haggle over contractual issues. A gay guy went in and made a lot of noise, then an old man entered and was followed shortly by paramedics who carted him away on a stretcher, apparently dead. Minnie turned away, disappointed with the banality of human desire.

The rep had stopped talking and was watching Minnie respectfully. Minnie fell silent and looked ashamed of herself. She didn't know what to say. "Sometimes," the rep offered tentatively, "ordinary sex is actually the best thing. It's comforting not to have to be perfect."

Minnie looked up, relieved. That last comment sounded like the voice of experience. "You think?" Minnie queried her hesitantly, unsure of herself. Their eyes met briefly and the rep blushed.

"Well I'm not allowed to express personal opinions," she replied hastily, snapping back into professional role in case Minnie was a mystery shopper. "I'm just repeating what various customers have reported."

There was an awkward moment of

silence as the two women looked at each other across the eerie gulf of a glowing display case, wishing for more friendliness than company regulations permitted. "It's okay," Minnie said confidentially, "I won't tell your manager."

The rep averted her gaze. Minnie looked down and noticed that one of the rep's index fingers was quivering slightly on the display case, and that her wedding band was not new. The rep brushed the blonde bangs out of her eyes, looked around furtively, and then said in a conspiratorial whisper, "Let's just say that one of our most *regular* clients tried these new enhancements to spice up her marriage, and she said it felt like eating too much dessert. Okay as an occasional treat, but too much of a good thing is a bad thing, and anyway you feel healthier without it." Her voice trailed off and then she stood up straight and added in stiff legalese, "Customer feedback is available on our company infospace."

Minnie smiled and relaxed, satisfied that she had gotten to the heart of the matter. "Thanks," she said casually, "I'm not really interested in this line of enhancements anyway."

The rep smiled back and packed away the enhancement kits. "Anything else I can help you with today?" she asked politely.

"No, not really," Minnie said, scanning the display cases for anything she might have missed.

"Then may I make a suggestion for a small gift item?" the rep offered. "Very popular right now."

"Sure," said Minnie, her curiosity piqued.

"Antigravity cell-gel. Good for any part of the body. Many of our older clients use it for breast lifts."

Minnie looked intrigued, so the rep showed her a bottle of the colorless miracle liquid. Minnie turned the bottle back and forth in her hand and then opened the top to smell the potion. It was odorless. "Hmm," she mused. "Okay, sounds good."

The rep charged it to her account, looking pleased that Minnie had found something she liked.



“Oh, and can you gift wrap that?” Minnie added as an afterthought. “Purple, for my aunt, her favorite color.”

The rep did as requested and Minnie left the store in a better mood than when she had entered.

II.

When Minnie woke up, she found that Ted was gone and the homedome had drifted into a stand of redwood trees. She went to the window to see: the dome was resting on a branch about 50 yards above the ground. She yawned and lazily directed it back onto the clearing, dropped to 10 yards altitude, and put it on autopilot circulate to follow the baby deer in the glen.

She had a cup of tea and roamed around the dome aimlessly. The floors were too stiff for her taste. Ted liked it that way, God knows why. He was always cranking up the tensile fibers up to full strength, like concrete. Minnie dialed the modulator down to trampoline tenor and bounced around for a while, making all the living room furniture roll to and fro. After she had done her 30-minute cardio exercise, she set the floor at boxing ring firmness and brightened the transparency to translucent in order to see the morning light filtering up from below her feet. Then she took a jasmine-scented sonic bath and played with her skin settings for a while. One tap and she had the Chinese charm look, two taps for Aryan appeal, three for South Indian sultry, four for Aborigine ardor, five for Egyptian elite, six for classic Cleopatra, seven for African absolute . . . she settled for Persian princess and plopped down on the couch to fiddle with the wallpaper a bit. After scanning the galaxy for novel inspirations, she fired up the Top 100 on morning parade. The patterns danced and drifted across her liquid-crystal lined walls

with accompanying music. The one from Vega 7 with astral moonscapes wasn't half bad.

Finally she was ready to make the call. She did a short meditation to harmonize her chakras, and then connected with Padmini.

“Minnie!” said Padmini joyfully, “what a pleasure to see you! How are you my dear?”

“Fine” Minnie said cheerily, “I like your diamond necklace. Wouldn't want to try anything new, would you?”

“Diamonds are forever” Padmini joked back. “How's Ted?”

“Said he was traveling out of body, but I can't find the body, so who knows,”

A council of yogis and yoginis was convened, and they did tapasya for 100 days and 100 nights. In their meditations they saw that two souls were ready to take on this auspicious human birth together—”

Minnie replied. “And the kids?”

“Oh, they're down swimming in that new icky green stuff from Genmart, what do you call it?”

“Sea Slime 3.3.”

“That's the stuff,” Padmini said.

“My brother's kids, Jeff and Anne, are into it, too. They collect all the versions and swap them at school.”

Padmini nodded silently, and gazed upon Minnie with her doe-like eyes. There was a long pause, then “So, have you set a wedding date yet?”

“Oooohhhh” Minnie wined in frustration.

“Oooohhhh” Padmini mimicked her with affection.

“I can't decide,” Minnie said, “I was down at Genmart yesterday and—”

“Minnie!” Padmini scolded her.

“Ravi and I are so happy together without all these things,” they both echoed each other simultaneously.

“But it's true,” Padmini protested,

“think of love Minnie. You don't need these silly enhancements, they're just after your solars.”

“Easy for you to say,” Minnie pouted and fished for sympathy. “Pre-arranged Hindu marriage and all that. At least with Ravi you knew ahead of time. What if Ted isn't perfectible?”

“Nonsense,” Padmini said, “you know that you can be happy if you are both sincere.”

“Tell me about pre-arranged marriages again,” Minnie said, like a little girl wanting to hear the same fairytale for the 100th time.

Padmini indulged her. “Well, it goes like this: when the astrologers said the time was right, my parents went to their guru,

Dharmananda Swamiji, and with his blessings they prayed to God for a perfect match. A council of yogis and yoginis was convened, and they did tapasya for 100 days and 100 nights. In their

meditations they saw that two souls were ready to take on this auspicious human birth together—”

“Is this really true, Padmini?”

“Absolutely. How can I speak untruth when I have just invoked the guru's name?”

Minnie remained quiet. Sometimes Padmini was a little over-serious.

“So these two souls were located,” Padmini continued.

“You and Ravi.”

“Correct. And then a puja was performed to invoke blessings of the supreme Mother.”

“Why not just do that part in the first puja?” Minnie teased her.

“Ah,” Padmini said, “because this is different and that is different. Everything has an order and a process, this is what our shastras say.”

“Okay,” Minnie acceded, “so then?”

“So then, with the grace of the Divine Mother, and having followed the correct



process of invocation, my parents met his parents and together the two families hired a team of genetic engineers."

"That's in Bangalore, right?" Minnie interrupted.

"No, Mysore, because my uncle is stationed there at Atmagen."

"Oh. And?"

"And the genetic engineers consulted some astrologers and also did their own pujas to Lakshmi and Saraswati and Ganesh—"

"But I thought they were genetic engineers?"

"Hanh," Padmini honked a nasal affirmative in the Indian fashion, and added a traditional head-wobble for good measure.

Minnie wobbled her head in return.

"Stop mmicking me" Padmini retorted.

"Sorry." Minnie apologized. "And then?"

"So, having obtained blessings from all the gods and goddesses for their project, the genetic engineers took a list of qualities to include in the code from my parents, Ravi's parents, Guru Dharmananda, their Guru Swami Brahmananda, our teachers and their teachers, his boss at Atmagen, my music teacher Srimati Nalini Premashree, auntie, uncle, his godparents who are Christians, two mullahs in our family's home village, technical advisors at IIT, government advisors Delhi branch, researchers at Sri Aurobindo Institute of Spiritual Technology, Auroville . . ."

Minnie stopped listening after awhile as the list rattled on. "And then what, I mean, after they got all the recommendations and blessings?"

"So when all the genetic codes were solved, matched, and cross-checked, then finally our two families held maha-puja together and on Shivaratri the implantation was downloaded by process of bio-telepathy from Mysore. Both Ravi and I have perfect memory of that auspicious event as our souls were fully conscious of the conception."

"Wonderful. And then?"

"We have been happy ever since."

"Never fight?" Minnie prodded.

"Never" said Padmini solemnly.

Minnie mulled that one over for some

time. "Don't you get bored?"

Padmini's answer was swift and authoritative: "Beauty is a continually unfolding evolution that moves from perfection to higher perfection, from harmony to higher harmony. How can there be boredom in that?"

Minnie was stumped. "Okay, enough of the serious stuff. Where are you going this weekend?"

Padmini's tone lightened up. "Oh, Ravi and I are taking the kids to Satyaloka to watch the Supermind pour down from the Sachchidananda."

"What's that?"

"That is a plane of the Divine consciousness. It is very beautiful and harmonious."

"Didn't you just go there last weekend?"

"No, we went to Anandaloka to enjoy the bliss of Lord Krishna's dancing and—"

"But isn't that also God?"

"Hanh," Padmini wobbled a yes, "of course, these are all different forms and levels of God."

"And weekend before last?"

"We went to listen to the Gandharvas sing in the Intuitive Mind."

"What are gandharvas?" Minnie asked, baffled.

"Those are like angels, only we wanted to see and hear them on this particular level of consciousness."

Minnie was quiet for a while. She feigned profound meditation, and after a long silence said ceremoniously, "And have you been to Skopjaloka?"

Padmini's eyes widened in wonder. She quickly scanned all the Hindu shastras for a reference, but in vain. "No," she answered, preoccupied and puzzled with the fact that the Indian sacred texts were still incomplete. "Where's that?"

Now Minnie had her. "It's a medieval town in Slovenia."

"Do they have gods and goddesses there?"

"No, but they have an old castle."

Padmini mulled over this new information, not seeming to catch the humor. "Well," she reflected at last, "architecture

is also a form of God, so we can take the kids there next weekend and notify the Ministry of Shastras in Delhi."

"Take the Sea Slime along," Minnie suggested. "The kids can swim in it after eating some ice cream."

"That is a good idea," Padmini acknowledged. "Okay, bye love," she said, sending Minnie a beautiful rainbow of love from her heart chakra.

"Bye," Minnie said, reflecting it back with amplified harmonies from the Intuitive Mind, "see you at the office tomorrow."

"Nice," Padmini commented. "See, you *are* capable of happiness. Settle down with Ted."

"Ciao" Minnie said as they faded out of each other's awareness.

III.

Minnie hadn't passed more than a minute contemplating Padmini's wise counsel before her younger brother, Todd, exploded into the middle of her living room in a shower of sparks. He picked himself up, batted out a few flames spurting from his legs, and held his arms out wide to greet her.

"Minnie, my lovely sister!" he belted. "Give me a kiss."

"Yuk," she grimaced. "You look like a friggin' iguana."

"What?" he asked in mock indignation. "What's wrong? Don't you like my new enhancements?"

"No, not really," she said, eyeballing him with disgust. "You've got the skin of a lizard, hair like a red porcupine, and alligator eyes. It's revolting."

"What about my new webs?" he replied, spreading his fingers wide and proudly showing off the dark green interdigital webbing. He turned sideways to display his spine as well, "and check out the new vertebral spikes. Taken from dinosaur code. Wicked wonderful, eh?"

"Yeah, right. Have you asked Jenny to kiss you yet?" Minnie said sarcastically.

Todd was offended. He stalked around a bit and sulked. "Awe, c'mon Min," he whined. "You know I'm just kidding. It's all for show anyway, it doesn't



mean anything. Hey, I love you big time!" He moved to hug her, but she recoiled.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," he advised gaily. He beckoned her towards him invitingly. "C'mon, give your kid brother a smooch right here on the cheek."

Minnie was reluctant, but her resolve was waning. After all, she thought to herself, he *is* okay for a teenage male.

"Hey, didn't you hear," Todd pressed his advantage, "I'm celibate now. I'm gunning to get into one of those new Tibetan sanghams for Wild Westerners."

"No way," Minnie said in disbelief.

"Yes way!" he boasted.

She gave him a hug. "I'm proud of you."

He was much pleased and plopped himself down on the couch, put his webbed feet up on the coffee table and changed the liquid-crystal wallpaper to the lizard-on-an-acid-trip motif.

"Cosmic," he quipped, "hey, when are you and Ted tying the knot?"

"Dunno," Minnie said glumly, "soon maybe."

Todd inspected her with compassion for a moment, then spouted precocious wisdom: "you know what you need to do?"

"What?"

"You need to join a spiritual community, get some collective consciousness. No couple is an island unto themselves."

"Thanks guruji," Minnie said, "how cometh this profound insight?"

"No really," Todd protested, "don't just dismiss me 'cause I'm your kid brother. All my friends are doing it and it's profoundissimo. Tom and Sarah are in the Christ Consciousness collective up by Seethrough Woods, Aman joined the Society for Gnostic Scientists, and Arati is a Buddhist nun now."

"What's the point?" Minnie inquired skeptically.

"Evolution, my dear. Biology recapit-



Lord Krishna blissfully playing his flute. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

ulates theology. Survival of the most sacred and all that. The soul embodies ever higher levels of consciousness and—"

"Have you been talking to Padmini again?" Minnie interrupted.

"And what if I have?" Todd retorted testily.

Minnie just snorted. "Hmpf. We'll see how long you and your friends last in the new fad. I bet it'll end as soon as you have to get up at 4 a.m. to meditate."

But Todd wasn't listening anymore; he was busy playing with the liquid-crystal wallpaper. "Whoa!" he groaned in amazement, "check out this one, Overmental Ocean!" Swirls of deep blue and milky white slowly drifted across the entire interior surface of the homedome, as lotus flowers and gods and goddesses occasionally blossomed out of the shifting eddies of color. A soundtrack with temple gongs and resonant "Oms" accompanied the vision.

"Superb," Todd said, as he materialized some popcorn from the food generator. "Or how 'bout this one? Supramental

Sunshine." Now the whole dome turned golden orange, with subtly modulated coalescing and dissolving forms that defied description but were always on the verge of turning into something recognizable.

"Wicked!" Todd exclaimed. "Feels like liquid bliss!"

Minnie snatched the control pad out of his hand and set the pattern back to her original settings. "Okay, tell me the truth now. Why are you really here?"

Todd feigned indignation and innocence. "Hey, what's up?"

Minnie glowered at him.

"Okay, okay" Todd threw up his hands in defeat. "Can't a man take a little break anymore?"

"From what?"

Todd was silent for a long while, looking disgruntled and embarrassed in alternation. "It's not my fault," he said at last.

"What?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Nothing?" Minnie raised her Persian princess eyebrows to form sharp angles that became her more than she had expected, so she quickly saved a snapshot in the mirror.

"Nothing remains of mom and dad's new intergalactic camper dome. It attained nirvana."

"With you at the controls," Minnie accused him.

"Welllll," Todd tried to qualify her inflexible conclusion, "that's one interpretation of events, but I would argue that there are others."

Minnie stared at him long and hard. "You know how much that costs, don't you?"

"It wasn't my fault," Todd protested. "No one told me it was heliotropic."

"So what happened?" Minnie growled at him.

"I took it out for a test ride, you know, because dad isn't a very good navigator."

"Oh, please!" Minnie exclaimed with full exasperation, "spare me the crap."

"I took it out with my friends to make mandalas in the sky over the International



Past-Life Regression Conference at Atlantis . . .”

“And get to the point,” Minnie pressed him.

“And we decided to open up the hatch to make a half dome, and then we used the floor as a spring-board,” Todd explained.

“And, and, and” Minnie assailed him further.

“And I set the auto-hover as usual, and then we did this really cool group sky-dive from one mile up, straight into the ocean. You should have seen it, Min,” he recounted with growing excitement. “We were all really tuned into each other, and full of love and peace, and like radiating blessings to all sentient beings. We were *definitely* performing some heavy good karma. Wanna see a picture of the plunge on the wallpaper? I can download it.”

“What happened to the dome, Todd?” Minnie snapped.

Todd rested his chin in his hands and let out a long, slow, defeated sigh. “It is no more. Transcended this earthly existence. Went to meet its maker. It, well, it . . . it just sort of drifted up and away. It floated off into the stratosphere and then hyperspaced into the sun before we could catch it.”

Minnie dropped her jaw, appalled. She was speechless.

“Made a nice plume of fire as it went,” Todd offered weakly, as if this singular artistic fact offered consolation. “I can download the picture if you wanna see.” His voice trailed off.

“Mom and dad are gonna roast you alive,” Minnie said. “They’re gonna peel that new lizard skin right off your bloody body.”

Todd looked at his sister ruefully, woe written large across his iguana-like physiognomy. Suddenly, he threw himself impulsively at her feet and pleaded. “You’ve gotta help me, Min, you’ve gotta help me. Now I’ll never get into the Tibetan sangham, I’ll never get in. They told me I have to wait for my next life if I have done any-



Flower named by the Mother “new world.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

thing to disrespect my parents. They’re really strict, Min, I mean it.”

Minnie worked her jaw hard as she stared down at her brother groveling at her feet. A whole minute passed before she had composed herself enough to speak without kicking him in frustration. “All right,” she conceded, “so whatta we do? What do you propose to fix this, um, *little problem*?”

“You could lend me the money to buy a new one,” he said quickly.

“Todd!” she screeched in shock, “you know how much one of those costs!”

“You could marry a mega-merger man,” he suggested without much conviction, “or get Ted the upgrade, like, right now.”

Minnie shooed him away from her feet in disgust and paced around the home-dome as she contemplated the options. Finally the solution came to her. “Okay, we’ll do this,” she began slowly.

Todd was all ears, even though it was hard to locate any on his iguana head.

“I’ll give you my 500 solars,” Minnie said carefully, emphasizing every syllable.

Todd spread his fingers wide to show off his interdigital webbing, in honor of his sister’s great sagacity.

“After you go to Genmart and trade in that new lizard get-up for store credit in my name.”

Todd scowled in disapproval.

“Do you want my help or not?” Minnie challenged him.

“Fine,” Todd acceded.

“Then you take all the money down to Time Traders Inc.,” Minnie continued with grave determination, “and buy enough time to take you back before your little incident.”

“What if 500 aren’t enough?” Todd worried.

“Then trade in years off your life.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Todd objected, “call me old fashioned, but it just doesn’t sound good. Besides, the exchange rates are bad on time

right now.”

“Got any other solutions?” Minnie interrupted curtly.

Todd thought about it. “No.”

“Well then,” she concluded. “Once you’ve got the time, then you go over to the nuclear fusion lab and confess everything to uncle Freddie and beg forgiveness.”

“No!” Todd gasped in horror at the prospect. “Uncle Freddie is okay, but do I really have to beg forgiveness?”

“If you want that dome back,” Minnie said grimly.

Todd sank a little lower on the floor and covered his face. “Alright.”

“And then,” Minnie continued with some excitement about the next part of the plan, “we ask him to splice your blank time span into your space-time continuum and delete the disaster sequence, which he can dispose of inside the fusion reactor.”

Todd contemplated that move with fascination. For once he had to grant that his sister had actually hit upon a good idea. Since nuclear fusion reactions were contained by constantly deleting and destroying the time-sequences involving reactor meltdown, who better to solve the problem at hand than uncle Freddie?



"Finally," Minnie finished her presentation, "you go to any lama or yogi for blessings, then take your sincere aspiration to repair your mistake to a futures shop and weave a new story. Voila."

Todd silently reviewed the entire plan in his mind, then said, "pretty good. Just one small hitch: what about my friends, Min? They all saw the event, too, so don't we have to delete their disaster sequences also?"

"You obviously haven't been doing your intentionality homework, Todd" Minnie said in her most supercilious manner. "Everyone knows that the ultimate meaning of events is a function of the cross product between the karmic intention of their authors in past-time reaching forward and the translation of any particular event-stream-of-consciousness reaching backward from the future to consummate the past. Thus, any soul stationed in the present can alter the past by transforming the future-reaching-back component of the bi-directional time continuum, if it takes on responsibility for the karma involved. And when it does, the entire web of awareness related to any particular event or set of affected events will automatically adjust, and other participants' memories will be altered accordingly. Thus, some of your friends may think they had a dream about the dome drifting off, some may think they saw it on mind-vision, some will see it as scrap themes when they change settings on the wallpaper, and so on."

Todd looked at her with a very attentive and thoughtful expression. "Interesting. I'd like to write that in the paper I have due next week. However, if I may linger on one small point of interpretation, Professor, it seems that the word 'responsibility' may be a neologism? I am not familiar with that term. Could you please define it for me?"

Minnie kicked his shin in disgust. Todd yowled and then disappeared in a shower of sparks as he set off on his mission. "No solars until you bring me the receipt from Genmart!" Minnie yelled after him, her voice echoing in beautiful sonic fractals that spiraled around the wake of

Todd's fast-receding vortex of space-time displacement.

"Too bad," Minnie muttered to herself when she was alone again. "I could have used those solars for a really good enhancement."

IV.

"Hi honey, I'm home," Ted called out as he slipped into the homedome. He went into the bedroom, rustled around for a while, then came out in shorts and a t-shirt. He gave Minnie a peck on the cheek. "How was your day?"

"Okay," Minnie said mildly, wishing to conceal the whole drama with Todd, at least for the moment. "And yours?"

"We got 'em!" Ted announced vigorously, full of pride and satisfaction.

"Got who?"

"The telomere robbers." Ted said. "Nabbed a gang of 50 in a double deception sting."

"Oh, them." Minnie said, not showing quite enough enthusiasm. "That's nice."

"Nice?!" Ted retorted, "how about essential. Like now you can go to sleep tonight knowing you'll have some viable DNA left in the morning. You know, the crime in this country is getting ridiculous."

There was a silence as they each scanned absent-mindedly through various multimedia junk mail on the coffee table. "Hey, how 'bout this one?" Ted said, projecting an ad onto the wall. "Free relocation to any spot on earth, answer by August 15."

"I dunno," Minnie said, "Don't you like it here?"

Ted thought about it. "Well, the only great thing, really, is that patch of bio-luminescent roses that the Taylor triplets made. Did you see them? They glow in the wind."

"Yeah," said Minnie brightening up, "we should go look at them tonight. So the triplets made them?"

"Yup, fourth grade science experiment. They got school honors. I hope our kids turn out like that."

Minnie was silent as she dreamed about having kids.

"You know, honey," Ted said after browsing the ads awhile longer, "I've been thinking. Whatta ya say we move? The crime in America is endemic, the lawsuits endless, and there's zilch for collective consciousness. We could go to Europe—"

"Too small," Minnie nixed the idea immediately.

"Or how 'bout the Middle East? Israel, Palestine, you know. We could enjoy the political stability and the kids could grow up learning about brotherly love and religious cooperation. Great example for them."

Minnie wasn't keen on this option, either. Ted rustled through the ads and posted another one on the wall. "Or this," he said, as idyllic scenes of Africa began to rise out of the wallpaper and circulate in the air as bubble holograms. Snippets of music and a throaty, happy female voice accompanied the scenes of kids and cattle with this message: "Come to Africa, land of riches, land of the heart."

Minnie screwed up her nose in skepticism. "We don't have family there."

"Highest average standard of living in the world," Ted objected, "and 12 African states are absolutely crime-free. My friends say its wonderful. The people, the natural setting, the more relaxed way of life, the financial opportunities . . . what the hell are we doing here?"

"The mile-high redwoods are majestic," Minnie offered, "and American life can't be that bad if the Taylor triplets can engineer bio-luminescent roses in fourth grade."

"Private school," Ted grumbled.

"We can afford it," Minnie said.

"Welcome to America!" Ted jumped up, gesticulating wildly. "Where you can buy your way out of any problem. Never mind God, never mind your neighbor—you can be happy all by yourself. It's wonderful!"

"It's not that bad," Minnie objected.

"And everyone has their own personal therapist, trainer, spiritual advisor, geneticist, broker, pet psychic, and team of lawyers," Ted rolled on.

"Don't forget my hairdresser," Minnie said nonchalantly, "she's pretty good."



Ted's delivery stumbled and slowed down, confounded by the hairdresser. "And what you don't have now, you can buy at Genmart tomorrow."

"You know what your problem is," Minnie interrupted his tirade.

"What?"

"You're prejudiced against Genmart, that's what this really about."

"Me?" Ted said incredulously, pointing at himself, "Me? Prejudiced against Genmart?"

He looked at Minnie as if betrayed, then said sarcastically, "no, not at all. I think we should spend every last solar there. Doesn't matter if we end up starving on the street, as long as we help the Company's profit margin."

"Starving on the street?" Minnie jeered at him. "Have you been watching 20th century junk clips again? We don't have streets anymore."

"It's a way of speaking," Ted tried to defend himself, "a literary device."

"Or freeways," Minnie said didactically, "or starvation, Ted. America is a great place to live. The problem is that we're not happy."

"We?" Ted pointed back and forth between the two of them. "How about you," he said, his index finger coming to point firmly in her direction. "Ever since you fell in love with Mr. Perfect down at Genmart," he accused her.

"Shut up," Minnie snapped. She stormed into the bedroom and sealed the entry port. Ted banged on it in frustration, but to no avail.

"Min!" he called out, "c'mon honey, open the port." He waited for a while, but still no reply. "Hey, I was just kidding about Mr. Perfect," he offered in a conciliatory tone, but still no reply.

He went back and slumped on the couch, picked up the controller and started to play mindlessly with the wallpaper settings. Disgruntled, he muttered to himself about the defects of the X chromosome,

"too much redundancy, nothing works if all the damn alleles don't agree, and they never do. Can never get anything done."

After the requisite half hour had passed, he went and groveled at the port a little more. Eventually, with much coaxing and apologizing, the door slid open and he went into the bedroom. Minnie was lying on the bed with her head under the pillow, recovering.

He wondered what to do. He paced around awhile searching for the right words, but couldn't find any. So he went over to the food generator and came back with an offering. "Here, have a sizzled sea urchin," he said in his most loving tone, "it's good for the arteries."

Minnie reached for it without looking

she said, "olives without pits do not grow on trees."

Ted raised his eyebrows. "You paid money for that?"

"No, we were celibate for six months and then I had to purify myself in the Temple to Athena below Delphi. Don't you remember?"

"Oh yeah," Ted said vaguely, the memory just barely coming back. "Hm. That was different."

"It means," Minnie explained to him, "that all natural things have flaws in them, but that those flaws can be a stimulus for spiritual growth."

"Oh," Ted said laconically, "so there's hope for us. You know, I actually like gnawing on the olive pit. Reminds me of

how I gnaw on your nerves." With that he placed his hand on her hair and began to stroke it gently.

Minnie swatted his arm in feigned discontent, so he pulled her closer.

"And the astrol-
oguer?" Ted asked,

"what does she say."

"The planets are aligned."

"And your therapist?"

"He says my resistance to marriage is all transference," Minnie replied, "but he won't tell me transference to what."

"And the hairdresser?" Ted queried.

"She thinks you're cute."

"I paid her to say that," Ted poked fun at Minnie, whose face was now beginning to reveal traces of emerging satisfaction. "And your geneticist?"

"That we can fix any problem that arises."

"And the broker?"

"That we have a solid financial base."

"And your parents?"

"That I should settle down with you."

"And the lawyers?"

"That I should wait ten years before I divorce you, so that I can get more money in the settlement."

"Lovely," Ted said, "such uplifting advice."

*As world after world of awareness burst
around her like ephemeral soap bubbles,
she was elevated ever upwards towards
some untouchable mystery far overhead.*

and started to pluck out the spines one by one, each pluck vividly expressing her oodles of anger and resentment. After she had cracked open the shell and nibbled on the innards, Ted said, "we're both under too much stress, this whole wedding thing has gotten out of hand. Why don't we just elope this weekend?"

Minnie was silent so he shut up. Finally she burst out with the truth, "What if we're not made for each other like Padmini and Ravi?"

Ted lay down on the bed next to her and folded his arms behind his head so that he could better contemplate these imponderable mysteries of existence. "I dunno," he said, "what does your guru say about us?"

"And I quote," she said, "the Divine answers every sincere aspiration."

Ted mulled it over. "Well that's a bit vague. Have you consulted the Delphic oracle?"

Minnie nodded. "And I quote again,"



"I will, you know," Minnie pouted at him, fishing for more sympathy, "unless you treat me like a princess."

"Ohhh," Ted cooed at her as she cuddled up next to him, "poor thing, your life is so terrible. Nobody loves you enough."

Minnie nodded in agreement.

"And your heart," Ted asked at long last, "what does your heart say?"

"That I love you," she said candidly.

"And your head?"

"That you might not be perfectible," she said with equal candor.

Ted flexed his underwhelming biceps. "I can go to Genmart and get a mega-merger man upgrade, with extra muscles and a third frontal lobe."

Minnie laughed and sniffled at the same time, reaching for Kleenex to wipe her nose. She sat up and said, "actually, no you can't—because our wedding savings are gone. I gave it to Todd because of an, um, well, a family emergency."

"Oh, you mean the case of the vagrant camper dome?" Ted said wryly.

"How did you know about that?" Minnie replied in amazement.

"Todd came to me babbling about some crazy plan to buy back time and delete the disaster sequence in uncle Freddie's nuclear reactor."

"That was *my* plan," Minnie said defensively, "and it's a good one."

"Aha," Ted said, as though now, at last, all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. "That explains all the unnecessary complexity."

Minnie scowled. "It's a serious problem, Ted. Mom and dad's retirement is in that camper dome."

Ted played it cool as he delivered the punchline: "Yeah, well, it's a tough world. Olives without pits don't grow on trees."

Blood rushed to Minnie's face as she started to rise up in fury.

"But not to worry," Ted added casually, just in time to avoid decapitation. "I retrieved the dome from Venus. Hope Todd doesn't lose it on the way home."

Minnie was dumbfounded. "Are you serious? Did you really get the dome?"

"Of course," Ted said, "you think I would just leave it there?"

Minnie was puzzled. "You mean it didn't vaporize?"

"Hell no," Ted explained. "Do you really think the manufacturer would sell a heliotrope without some sort of anti-Icarus plan? Imagine the lawsuits. They'd go bankrupt."

"True," Minnie said, "I didn't think about that. How did you figure that one out?"

"Called up the manufacturer. Turns out the dome is coated with a fancy new sunscreen and is programmed to circle suns at close range rather than flying straight into them. Voila."

"What about the plume of fire?"

"That was just a flare signal sent out when the sunscreen heated up beyond the trigger point. Helps to locate wandering vehicles."

"Clever," Minnie acknowledged. "So how did you actually get the dome back in the end?"

"That was the easiest part," Ted explained. "You remember Marcia?"

"You mean your ex-girlfriend from college," Minnie said.

"Well, not girlfriend," Ted contested the allegation. "But anyway, that's not the point. The point is that she's the American consul on Venus now. Can you believe it? Talk about a boring job. All she does is sit there with a team of scientists and look at sunspots. My call made her week, gave her something to do for a change. She went out and retrieved the dome."

"That was nice of her," Minnie said. "We'll have to send her a thank you card."

"Right," Ted said dryly. "And while you're at it, send me one, too."

Minnie blushed and gave him a hug. "Alright," she said. "You win the evening argument for a whole month. I'll give you credit for that."

"Wow," said Ted, flabbergasted. "A whole month! You must really love me."

"I do," said Minnie, now more comfortable with those weighty words than when the day began.

They cuddled on the bed for a while and then dimmed the illuminator. Minnie programmed a circle of transparency in the floor so they could watch the biolumines-

cent roses glow like huge, rainbow-colored fireflies in the darkness. Crickets and fairy-bells resounded in the glen, thrumming and tinkling to the slow pulse of the breeze. Eventually Minnie drifted off to sleep, and somewhere in her dreams she found herself lifted up by a huge arm of milky-blue light. It swept through the meandering stream of her consciousness like the saving hand of God, leaving scattered petals of starlight swirling in its wake. As world after world of awareness burst around her like ephemeral soap bubbles, she was elevated ever upwards towards some untouchable mystery far overhead. Then the hand let her go and she fell as a feather onto a glass platform from which she gazed down and saw endless spheres of beauty and awe gyrating slowly below her feet like luminous clockwork.

In the morning Minnie awoke gently, her thoughts trailing soft spirals of light that wafted through her mind like incense. Ted was still sleeping, so she got up and went to the window to look at the roses, but they were gone. In their place she found a flat expanse of slowly undulating ocean whose breast rose and fell to the moaning of a distant foghorn. Minnie rested her chin on the windowsill and breathed in the sea air thickened with morning fog. Apparently the homedome had drifted offshore in the night. Puzzled, she recalled the strange dream, which now came back to her underscored with a phrase like a subtitle: "From the paths of the morning star I come, and into these mortal rounds cast the spell of Infinity." She knew this statement was not her own thought, but something vast and living that descended upon her from another world of existence.

Musing on this unearthly pronouncement and the ethereal hand that had penned it, Minnie wandered around her homedome in a daze. And as she did so, she noticed that every object in the dome was imbued with a milky-blue aura and was silently breathing the air of infinity. Contemplating this odd start to the day, after some reflection she decided that her situation was not so bad after all. No, it was not bad at all. In fact, it would do just fine.



Humor in the plays of Sri Aurobindo: The maid in the mill

by Shyam Kumari

“Humour is the salt of life. Without it the earth would have gone to blazes long ago.” Thus wrote Sri Aurobindo the master yogi. His realization of the Ananda Brahman, the Supreme as bliss, seems to have created the most prominent facets of some of the characters in his comedies. In these plays an irrepressible urge to gaiety surfaces again and again, even in the face of disaster, doom and annihilation. These projections of the Divine Humorist are like dancing sunlit waves on a mighty ocean of laughter. Nothing can check them, be it rebellion or torture, impending destitution or certain death. The combined strengths of the furies unleashed by man’s ambition and ill-will are foiled by the living swords of delight such as Cydene and Diomedes of Perseus the Deliverer, and Nureddene, Doonya and Anice Aljalice of The Viziers of Bassora.

These delicate yet adamant, soft yet strong, lovable yet formidable, pliable yet unyielding creations of Sri Aurobindo are like echoes of the frolics of gods, an overflow of the Ananda that, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the substance of the universe. Happy in their speech these high-staking players are too irreverent to be awed by the pomposities of kings or the wrath of ignorant commoners. Who can imprison a smile? Or deny the waves their right to surge in uproarious joy? Let us lighten as well as enlighten our moments by a passing survey of feminine moonbeam beauties and their sunbeam male counterparts.

These women in Sri Aurobindo’s plays are no mere playthings of men. They are free human beings playing their sublime roles in the arena of life with a total disregard for decorum and norm, and the twin evils of seriousness and gloom have been banished from their hearts forever.



Prolific Shyam Kumari at her desk. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

Most delightful amongst these luminaries, these roman candles of humor are Brigida, a cousin and companion of Ismenia, the heroine of the play “The Maid in the Mill”—an incomplete work of Sri Aurobindo’s—and her adversary, the whetting-stone for her razor-sharp wit, Basil, cousin and comrade of the hero Antonio. Though this piece of fun and frolic and felicity remained incomplete, yet there is enough to bring a glow to the gloomiest face. Brigida’s tongue is a veritable sword of Saraswati which annihilates by its nimble flame-thrusts the monumental ego of the renowned Basil, who describes himself thus—

... whom men call the witty and eloquent Basil? Did I not laugh from the womb? Was not my first cry a jest upon the world I came into? Did I not invent a conceit upon my mother’s milk ere I had sucked of it?¹

In the second scene of Act I we see these two delightful and formidable adversaries come face to face. Their humor and wit clash and clang, sparks fly and side-splitting laughter leaves us weak and

gasping. With consummate skill the author first makes Basil brag of his mental prowess, his sure technique that can drive beautiful maids to abject surrender, his flamboyant foolproof devices and schemes to subjugate them. The playwright gives him enough rope to hang himself a hundred times over. To the incredulous query of Antonio he answers:

Flat treason! was not man made
Woman’s Superior that he might
control her,
In strength to exact obedience and in
wisdom
To guide her will, in wit to keep her
silent,
Three Herculean labours. 0 were
women
Once loose, they would new-deluge
earth with words,
Sapiently base creation on its apex,
Logic would be new-modelled,
arithmetic.
Grow drunk and reason despairing
abdicate.
No thunderbolt could stop a
woman’s will
Once it is started.²



He further elaborates to Antonio his method:

Basil—First I would kiss her.

Antonio—What, without leave asked?

Basil—Leave? Ask a woman leave to kiss her! Why

What was she made for else?

Antonio—If she is angry?

Basil—So much the better. Then you by repetition

Convince her of your manly strength, which is

A great point gained at the outset and moreover

Your duty, comfortable to yourself.

Besides she likes it. On the same occasion

When she will scold, I'll silence her with wit.

Laughter breaks down impregnable battlements.

Let me make her smile and there is conquest

Won by the triple strength, horse, foot, artillery,

Of eloquence, wit and muscle. Then but remains

Pacification, with or else without

The Church's help, that's a mere form and makes

No difference to the principle.³

Carried on by the force of his words he gives further free rein to his tongue—

I'll teach that also. 'Tis but making her

Realise her inferiority.

Unanswerably and o'erwhelmingly

Show her how fortunate she is to get you

And all her life too short for gratitude;

That you have robbed her merely for her good,

To civilize her or to train her up:

Punish each word that shows want of affection.

Plague her to death and make her thank you for it.

Accustom her to sing hosannas to

you

When you beat her. All this is ordinary,

And every wise benevolent conqueror Has learnt the trick of it.

Then she'll love you for ever.⁴

After such high-sounding bragging it is but natural for the more reticent Antonio to challenge this "pen and paper strategist." The challenge is thrown and Basil picks up the gauntlet, and just then enters Brigida. For a moment her beauty and personality daunts even the supremely self-confident Basil and common sense tells him not to try his wild scheme on her. But he had gone too far in his bragging and with Antonio gently egging him on, it is too late for retreat. In his foolhardy confidence he thinks he will break this butterfly on the wheel of his satire, being innocently ignorant of the genius of this vivacious virago awaiting him in the wings. He proceeds to hang himself to the eternal delight of the readers. Brigida steps on the stage as if on cue. The duel is on, the adversaries seem well-matched, for isn't Basil the renowned wit and wisecracker of the town?

Basil little knows that what he has taken for frail and pretty holiday-barge is the admiral's armed flagship itself. He fires the first exploratory shell by asking Brigida rather familiarly and patronizingly if the letter she had brought was for him, "To me sweetheart?"

To this innocent-seeming query which is yet full of innuendos, Brigida answers with a full broadside:

I have the inventory of you in my books, if you be he truly. I will study it. Hair of the ordinary poetic length, dress indefinable, a modest address,—I think not you, Señor,—a noble manner,—Pooh, no! —a handsome face. I am sure not to you, Señor.⁵

Here in a few sentences Brigida reduces Basil to nothingness. He reels under this deadly fire from this most unexpected quarter. He fumes and fumbles and when Antonio laughing at his discomfiture asks

him to open his batteries he begs for a moment of respite. Meanwhile Brigida takes on Antonio and makes him ludicrous for his simple query—" . . . Fair one, from whom comes this?"—by answering "Why, Sir, I am not her signature; which if you will look within, there I doubt not you will find a solution of your difficulty."⁶ She mocks with gentle solemnity the exaggerated emotional love-sickness of Antonio—

Sir, you pale,

Extremely. Is there no poison in that letter?⁷

While Brigida is thus laughing at the expense of Antonio, who is lost in the wordy missile of his lady-love, Basil awakens to the fact that his adversary, though so young, is a very clever one. He collects his scattered wits, recharges his batteries and newly loads his cannons with badinage, and lets go: "Your face seems strangely familiar to me. Have I not seen you in some place where I constantly resort?"⁸

To this veiled innuendo Brigida at once answers with a hundred-dollar shot making a travesty of his own character by an equally seemingly innocent answer, "O! Sir, I hope you do not think so meanly of me. I am a poor girl but am honest."⁹

This whip-lash not only throws doubt on the character of Basil but also makes his companions and their haunts seem questionable. Poor Basil is left spluttering and stuttering "How, how?" Now the reader is treated to some superbly jocular word-play:

Basil—You have a marvelously nimble tongue. Two words with you.

Brigida—Willingly, Señor, if you exceed not measure.

Basil—Fair one—

Brigida—Oh Sir, I am glad I listened. I like your two words extremely. God be with you.

Basil—Why, I have not begun yet.

Brigida—The more shame to your arithmetic. If your teacher had



reckoned as loosely with his cane-cuts, he would have made the carefuller scholar.¹⁰

Basil is baulked at each step. Brigida makes him look like an uncouth village buffoon. He loses his temper and swears:

Basil—God's wounds, will you listen to me?

Brigida—Well, Sir, I will not insist upon numbers. But pray, for your own sake, swear no more. No eloquence will long stand such draft upon it."¹¹

Thus with the help of jestful nonsense, waggery and wisecrack, pun and satire, Brigida brings down the edifice of the monumental ego of Don Basil. To this laughing sunbeam no flower is sacrosanct, no person too high. In the flame of her laughter are burnt to ashes all the comically grandiose schemes of Basil. He discovers that compared to this arc-light of the heavens, his brightness and sparkle are faint rays of an earthen lamp. Now he decides to put into action the "artillery of muscle power" by trying to kiss Brigida. Though his ego is tottering a little at the recent blows it has received, yet his male sense of superiority is still intact. He believes no girl can resist his macho personality and his fancy methods. He decides to seal Brigida's lips once for all and put her in her proper womanly place, a willing slave to male strength. So without much fanfare he announces:

Basil—I will kiss you.

Brigida—Oh, Sir, that's a prophecy. Well, death and kissing come to all of us, and by what disease the one or by whom the other, wise men care not to forecast. It profits little to study calamities beforehand. When it comes, if I cannot do better.

Basil—By my life, I will kiss you and without further respite.

Brigida—On what ground?

Basil—Have I not told you, you are beautiful?

Brigida—So has my mirror, not only

once but a hundred times, and never yet offered to kiss me. When it does, I'll allow your logic. No, we are already near enough to each other. Pray, keep your distance.

Basil—I will establish my argument with my lips.

Brigida—I will defend mine with my hand. I promise you it will prove the abler dialectician of the two.

Basil—Well.

Brigida—I am glad you think so, Señor.¹²

Brigida's words are a joyous and supremely self-confident mind's nimble laughter-darts which unfailingly reach their mark, to penetrate and shatter the armor of Basil's quick intellect. He seems to fumble for repartees which even if they come are too late and totally inadequate to parry the brilliant raillery of Brigida. She reduces Basil to abject defeat leaving him in impotent fury and futile regrets. But, while sailing away in victorious regalia just out of habit Brigida fires a parting salvo or two at the love-sick Antonio, an indirect barb at his over-effusive and gushing wordy torrent: "Hold, hold, Señor. You may tell her all this yourself. I would not remember the half of it and could not understand the other half."¹³

Yet she does not depart before giving a further pulverizing blow to the vanquished and annihilated Basil:

Sir, if your sword be half as ready and irresistible as your tongue, I would gladly have you there with him, though St. Iago grant that neither proves necessary. You look sad, Sir, God save you for a witty and eloquent gentleman.¹⁴

Thus she puts the seal of completeness on her victory and on Basil's defeat. By the use of pun and parody, burlesque and word-play, the author weaves a romance of delight. The reader is left gasping like the out-classed and out-manoeuvred Basil at the quick wit, rapier-sharp repartees, dexterous turning and twisting of words, deadly irony, ambiguity, and witti-

cism of this girl who is "but eighteen or a miracle."¹⁵

Though in all fairness to Basil we must remember that Brigida knew of his reputation and so came fore-armed, yet Basil did not even dream that maids could encroach on the domain of intellect which he thought was the divine prerogative and exclusive privilege of males. Now he realizes to his own cost that Brigida is an arrow shot from the bow of the god of wit and humor. He is dazzled, dashed, cowed and is left bemoaning:

God grant that I am not bewitched also! Saints and angels! How is it? How did it happen? Is the sun still in heaven? Is that the song of a bird or a barrel-organ? I am not drunk either. I can still distinguish between a tree and a squirrel upon it. What, am I not Basil? whom men call the witty and eloquent Basil?... Death! And have I been bashed and beaten by the tongue of a girl? silenced by a common purveyor of impertinences? It is so and yet it cannot be. I begin to believe in the dogmas of the materialist. The gastric juice rises in my estimation. Genius is after all only a form of indigestion, a line of Shakespeare the apotheosis of a leg of mutton and the speculations of Plato an escape of diseased tissue arrested in the permanency of ink. What did I break my fast with this morning? Kippered herring? Bread? Marmalade? Tea? O Kippered herring, art thou the material form of stupidity and is marmalade an enemy of wit? It must be so. O mighty gastric juice! Mother and Saviour! I bow down before thee. Be propitious, fair goddess, to thy adorer.

Arise, Basil. Today thou shalt retrieve thy tarnished laurels or be expunged for ever from the book of the witty. Arm thyself in full panoply of allusion and irony, gird on raillery like a sword and repartee like a buckler. I will meet this girl tonight. I will tunc her with



conceits, torture her with ironies, tickle her with jests, prick her all over with epigrams. My wit shall smother her, tear her, burst her sides, press her to death, hang her, draw her, quarter her, and if all this fails, Death! as a last revenge, I'll marry her. Saints!¹⁶

In Scene II we find our irrepressible Brigida gently mocking and sweetly teasing the love-lorn lady Ismenia who is trembling in eager expectancy to know the answer and the reaction of Antonio. Anyone else also would be all palpitation in her place for she had staked her heart and, much more, even her honour. Realising fully well her pathetic condition, her trepidation and extreme nervousness, Brigida prattles on of this and that.

Brigida—Santa Katarina! How weary I am! My ears too! I think they have listened to more nonsense in these twenty minutes than in all their natural eighteen years before. Sure, child, thou hast committed some unpardonable sin to have such a moonstruck lover as this Antonio.

Ismenia—But, Brigida!

Brigida—And his shadow too, his Cerberus of wit who guards this poetical treasure. He would have eaten me, I think, if I had not given him the wherewithal to stop the three mouths of him.¹⁷

Ismenia is all burning impatience and exclaims:

Ismenia—Why, Brigida, Brigida.

Brigida—Saints! to think how men lie! I have heard this Basil reputed loudly as the Caesar of wits, the tongue and laughter of the time; but never credit me, child, if I did not silence him with a few stale pertnesses a market-girl might have devised for her customers. A wit, truly! and not a word in his mouth bullet-head Pedro could not better.¹⁸

At each reproach and every sigh of

impatience from the sorely tried Ismenia, instead of telling her straight away what she is dying to hear, she lets her tongue wander here and there. This incarnate insouciance talks of cut bottles, nasturtiums, of summer house and Pedro and above all of Basil, “Don Wit, Don Cerberus, Don subtle three-mouths.”¹⁹

Even the gentle lady Ismenia is reduced to reproaches which in themselves are delightful witticisms. “Ismenia—Will you tell me, you ogress, you paragon of Tyrannesses, you she-Nero, you compound of impossible cruelties?”²⁰

Our dedicated tease further lengthens her discourse by putting off the sweet disclosure for which poor Ismenia is dying.

Brigida—Saints, what have I done to be abused so? I am coming to it faster than a mail-coach and four.

You would not be so unconscionable as to ask me for the appendage of a story, all tail and nothing to hang it on? Well, Antonio took the letter.

Ismenia—Yes, yes and what answer gave he?

Brigida—He looked all over the envelope to see whence it came, dissertated learnedly on this knotty question, abused me your handwriting foully.²¹

Giving up the battle of reasoning with Brigida, Ismenia kneels before her cousin to beg for Antonio's answer. Even then this delightful mistress of all the sense and nonsense of the world prattles away, egging on Ismenia further till she is driven to ‘gentle violence.’ Then and only then the she-tyrant reveals to her that her love is fully reciprocated. When dishevelled Brigida reproaches Ismenia for her roughness Ismenia takes a leaf out of Brigida's own book and answers:

Ismenia—Hear her, the Pagan! A gentle physical agitation and some rearrangement of tresses, ‘twas less punishment than you deserved. But there! that is salve for you . . .²²

Brigida's penchant for fun is endless

and her quest for the ridiculous, the off-beat and the effervescent is incessant. Now in a masterly harangue of pert witticisms, this paragon of sarcasm, this epitome of pure mischief pokes fun at the effusive, gushy, classically, lovelily words of Antonio:

Brigida— . . . But to speak bare facts, Ismenia, I think he is most poetically in love with you. He made preparations to swoon when he saw no more than your name; but I build nothing on that, there are some who faint when they smell a pinch of garlic or spy a cock chafer. But he waited ten minutes copying your letter into his heart or some such notebook of love affairs; yet that was nothing either; I doubt if he found room for you, unless on the margin. Then he began drawing checks on Olympus for comparisons, left that presently as antique and out of date, confounded Ovid and his breviary in the same quest; left that too for mediaeval, and diverged into light and heat, but came not to the very modernness of electricity. But lord! what a career he ran! He had imagined himself blind and breathless when I stopped him. I tremble to think what calamities might have ensued had I not thrown myself under the wheels of his metaphor. The upshot is, he loves you, worships you and will come to you.²³

Then in a show of superiority and bravado she declares that the happiness of lovers is not a thing that she values. “. . . No, I will be the type and patroness of spinsters, the noble army of old maids shall gather about my tomb to do homage to me.”²⁴

But her vagrant heart has already escaped and she has invited “Don Witty-pate”²⁵ to accompany Antonio. The mating game is on. It is the season for turtles to coo and for magpies to chatter together. The scent of battle is in her nostrils. She



has tasted victory and is eager for more of it. Her high enthusiasm for ridicule seems insatiable. Her sprightliness seems doubly dear to the readers.

In Scene IV she jauntily sets out to demolish the remains of the ego and self-confidence of poor Basil. This ego he has gathered by life-long labors. Frolic and fun, exuberance and exhilaration gush out like wordy fountains of irony and animation if she as much as opens her lips. She is full of fume ever ready with sarcasm, provocation, burlesque and is pining to parody and make pulp of Don Basil. Brushing aside the tears of helpless laughter the reader is left blinking as much as poor woe-begone Basil. The volatile variety of her moods, the sharp brilliance of her verbal arrows, make us raise our eyes to heaven for a moment. And the male readers may feel a ready sympathy for the pulverized reputation of Basil. The ladies may say "Bravo" under their breath to this razor-tongued prattler, who vindicates the honor of all women in the field of debate and takes a worthy revenge on the representative male for their millennial subjection.

We see in Scene IV Antonio discoursing in the time-honored phrases of moon-struck lovers and for his hyperboles Basil is ready enough with witticisms — "Here's a whole epic on an ounce of oil, a poor, drowned wick bought from the nearest chandler and a fly sodden in it . . ." or:

. . . Am I mad?
Do you think I'll trust a lover? Why,
you could not
Even ask the time but you would say,
'Good Sir,
How many minutes to Ismenia?'²⁶

But his renowned wits desert him as he sees Brigida coming—

. . . 'Tis the she-guide,
The feminine Mercury, the tongue,
the woman.²⁷

Brigida at once sets out to demoralise further the already cowering Basil,

Were you not hiding when I came

up to you?
What was it, Sir? A constable or
perhaps
A creditor? For to be dashed by a
weak girl.
I know you are too bold.²⁸

After tormenting Basil thus, Brigida leads Antonio to Ismenia and comes after a while and, finding all quiet, soliloquizes thus:

No sound? Señor! Ismenia! Surely they cannot have embraced each other into invisibility. No, Cupid has flown away with them. It cannot have been the devil, for I smell no brimstone. Well, if they are so tedious I will not mortify myself with solitude either. I have set Don Cerberus on the stairs out of respect for the mythology. There he stands with his sword at point like the picture of a sentinel and protects us against a surprise of rats from the cellar; for what other, wild beasts there may be to menace us, I know not.²⁹

For a moment Brigida becomes serious. She is put out and disappointed by her easy victory, by her own top class. No one comes even near her category. She despairs of finding a worthy adversary, her peer, and laments:

. . . These men! these men! and yet they call themselves our masters. I would I could find a man fit to measure tongues with me. I begin to feel lonely in the Alpine elevation of my own wit. The meditations of Matterhorn came home to me and I feel a sister to Monte Rosa.³⁰

Yet she accepts her fate and knowing that to find her equal is impossible, accepts the fact that her heart has strayed into pursuit of Basil:

Certainly this woman's fever is catching, and spreads a most calamitous infection. I have

overheard myself sighing; it is a symptom incubatory. Heigh-ho! when turtles pair, I never heard that the magpie lives lonely. I have at this moment a kindly thought for all suffering animals. I begin to pity Cerberus even.³¹

And to Basil she says, "Put up your sword, pray you; I think there is no danger, and if one comes, you may draw again in time to cut its tail off."³²

Thus at each step she makes Basil taste gall and wormwood. His grey matter is stifled, and choked by her torrential tongue and he mutters:

. . . If it were not treason to my wit, I begin to feel this strip of a girl is making an ass of me. I am transformed; I feel it. I shall hear myself bray presently. But I will defy enchantment, I will handle her. A plague! Must I continually be stalemated by a wile-o'-the-wisp, all sparkle and nowhere? courage, Basil.³³

But before the outwitted and bewildered Basil can gather his powers of railery Brigida fires a close shot: "You meditate, Señor? If it be to allay the warmth you have brought from the stairs, with the coolness of reflection, I would not hinder you."³⁴

Thus the duel goes on. The boa-constrictor has her prey in her sight. He sits there fascinated and trembling and yet willing and happy to be devoured. For Cupid makes defeat a glory and victory a regret. When Basil tries to kiss Brigida she provokes and harasses him further:

Brigida—Ah, Señor; beware, living coals are dangerous; they burn, Señor.

Basil—I am proof.

Brigida—As the man said when he was bitten by the dog they thought mad; but it was the dog that died. Pray, Sir, have a care. You will put the fire out.

Basil—Come, I have you. I will take ten kisses for the one you refused



me this forenoon.

Brigida—That is too compound an interest. I do entreat you, Sir, have a care. This usury is punishable by the law.

Basil—I have the rich man's trick for that. With the very coin I have unlawfully gathered, I will stop her mouth.

Brigida—O Sir, you are as wasteful an accountant of kisses as of words. I foresee you will go bankrupt . . .³⁵

By a simple ruse Brigida disengages herself. Basil pretends he had let her go willingly—

. . . Because I knew that to stop your mouth was to stop your life, therefore in pity I have refused your encounter³⁶

This is a telling shot, a minor comeback for the banished Basil, balm to his affronted heart. Here for the first time the sorely tried Basil makes one solitary hit. His score which was zero till now to the hundred-and-one of Brigida rises by one notch; alas, woe to the male ego that it does not rise any higher. For our virile brazen virgin does not let it pass unavenged. She is unabashed and at once lets go a fusillade:

Brigida—Was it, truly? Alas, I could weep to think of the violence you have done yourself for my sake. Pray, Sir, do not torture yourself so. To see how goodness is misunderstood in this world! Out of pity? And make me take you for a fool!

Basil—Well

Brigida—O no, Señor, it is not well, indeed it is not well. You shall not do this, again. If I must die, I must die. You are scatheless. Pray now, disburden your intellect of all the brilliant things it has so painfully kept to itself. Plethora is unwholesome and I would not have you perish of an apoplexy of wit.

Pour it out on me, conceit, epigram, irony, satire, vituperation; flout and invective, tuquoque and double-entendre, pun and quibble, rhyme and unreason, catcall and onomatopoeia; all, all, although it be an avalanche, It will be terrible, but I will stand the charge of it.³⁷

Basil flusters and flounders, and sinks lower and lower in the mire of his defeat—

Basil—St. Iago! I think she has the whole dictionary in her stomach. I grow desperate.

Brigida—Pray, do not be afraid. I do not indeed press you to throw yourself at my head, but for a small matter like your wit, I will bear up against it.

Basil—This girl has a devil.³⁸

Bngida further presses her advantage and puts the seal of complete victory over the hapless Basil:

Brigida—Why are you silent, Señor? Are you angry with me? I have given you no cause. This is cruel. Don Basil, I have heard you cited everywhere for absolutely the most free and witty speaker of the age. They told me that if none other offer, you will jest with the statues in the Plaza Mayor and so wittily they cannot answer a word to you. What have I done that with me alone you are dumb?³⁹

She savours fully her frolicking and mischievous victory and razes the last vestige of Basil's reputation: "O Sir, have pity on the whole world and be always silent."⁴⁰

Thus this wonderfully audacious girl with her bold gaiety rattles our dear Don Basil. Her merry provocations are endless, her glad self-assurance—which biased male readers may call nerve and cheek, insolence or presumption—is truly laughter's nectar and, since all is supposed to be fair in love and war, one cannot call her methods wrong. Her alertness and perspicacity would do honor even to a Socrates.

Poor Basil finds himself annihilated and getting more and more enmeshed in the net of her wit and charm.

Full of sparkling badinage, this incomplete play is a thing of joy forever. If only the happy playwright had completed it, it might have been the brightest jewel amongst the comedies of the world.

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Source material

On taking the path of yoga

by the Mother

Mother, here it is said: "He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite." (Sri Aurobindo)

It is a magnificent sentence!

And it is absolutely true. There is in *Thoughts and Glimpses* also a sentence like this where I think he [Sri Aurobindo] uses the word "God" instead of the Infinite. But the idea is the same—that it is God who has chosen you, the Divine who has chosen you. And that is why you run after Him!

And this is what gives—that's what he says, doesn't he?—this is what gives that kind of confidence, of certitude, precisely, that one is predestined; and if one is predestined, even if there are mountains of difficulties, what can that matter since one is sure to succeed! This gives you an indomitable courage to face all difficulties and a patience that stands all trials: you are sure to succeed.

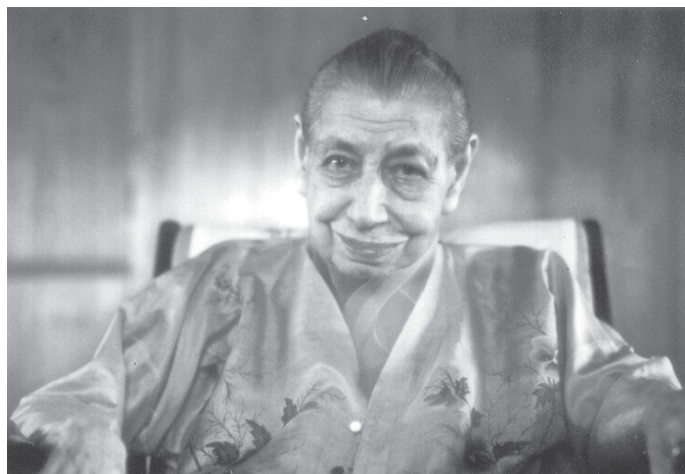
And it's a fact—in fact, it is like that: the moment you thought about it, well, you thought about it because someone thought about you; you chose because you were chosen. And once you have been chosen, you are sure of the thing. Therefore, doubts, hesitations, depressions, uncertainties, all this is quite simply a waste of time and energy; it is of no use at all.

From the moment one has felt just once within himself: "Ah! *this* is the truth for me," it is finished; it is finished, it is settled. Even if you spend years cutting your way through the virgin forest, it's of no importance—it is finished, it is settled.

That is why I told you one day, "After all, you all are here because you have wanted it somewhere; and if you wanted it somewhere, it means that the Divine wanted it thus in you."

So there are some who follow a very straight path and arrive very quickly; there are others who love labyrinths, it takes longer. But the end is there, the goal is there. I know by experience that there isn't one being who, were it only once in his life, has had a great urge towards . . . it doesn't matter how he calls it—let us say the Divine for facility of speech, who is not sure to arrive; even if he turns his back on Him at a certain time, it's of no importance—he is sure to arrive. He will have to struggle more or less, will have more or less difficulty, but he is sure to succeed one day. It's a soul that has been chosen, it has become conscious because its hour has come—once the hour has come, well, the result will follow more or less quickly. You can do this in a few months; you can do it in some years; you can do it in some lives—but you will do it.

And what is remarkable is that this freedom of choice is left to you and that, if you decide within yourself that you will do it in this lifetime, you will do it. And I am not speaking here of a perma-



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

nent and continuous decision because then you can arrive in twelve months. No, I mean: if you have suddenly been seized by this "I want this", even once, in a flash, the seal is put, there, like that. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 7, pp. 343-344)

Some people start on the way and then, after some time, they find it heavy-going, tiring, difficult, and also that they themselves, their legs don't walk well, their feet begin to ache, etc. You see, they say, "Oh it is very hard to go forward." So instead of saying, "I have started, I shall go through," which is the only thing to do, they stand there, stop there, lamenting and saying, "Oh, I shall never be able to succeed" and then they leave the path. So, obviously, if they leave the path, they will never succeed. This is to lose one's faith.

To keep one's faith is to say, "Good, I have difficulties but I am going on." Despair—that's what cuts off your legs, stops you, leaves you like this: "It is over, I can't go on any longer." It is indeed finished, and that's something which should not be allowed.

When you have started, you must go to the very end. Sometimes you see, to people who come to me with enthusiasm I say, "Think a little, it is not an easy path, you will need time, you will need patience. You will need much endurance, much perseverance and courage and an untiring goodwill. Look and see if you are capable having all this, and then start. But once you have started, it is finished, there is no going back any more; you must go to the very end."

Sometimes I tell them, I tell them that I give them a few days or a few months. There are some to whom I have given a few years for reflection. I told them, "Look well, be quite sure." But once they come and say, "Now I have decided, I want to start," it is good. Now, one must go on to the very end, whatever the cost; even if it is very difficult, one has to go to the very end.

When one draws back from the path, one draws back for the present life or . . .



In this, you see, there are many different cases, and they depend on the nature of the drawing back. If it is a small set-back or a small halt, you can start again. But it is ten times more difficult than before.

Why?

Why? Because it is so. Because you have accumulated obstacles in yourself by your cowardice and weakness. All those difficulties which you must conquer are like spiritual tests which you have to pass. And if you fail in your test, *well, the next one will be much more difficult*. This is the general occult law. One can't escape it. If you are faced with making an effort and making progress, if you fail . . . And note that in the present conditions you are not warned beforehand, which makes the test much more difficult to pass. In former days, the days of old, the candidates were told, "Now, prepare yourself. You are going to undergo terrible trials: you will be enclosed in a coffin, you will have to face terrible dangers. But these are tests to find out if you have the necessary qualities." A man forewarned, you understand, is as good as ten, as we say. Once they were warned that it was a trial, they did not take it seriously and it was much easier.

But that's no longer the practice. This is no longer done. It is life itself, the circumstances of each day which are the trials through which you have to pass. Some people instinctively feel that they are facing a decision that's to be taken, a special effort that's to be made, and they make this effort within themselves and cross the step. These acquire a much greater strength to cross the next step. When one has gained a small victory over his lower being, the next time he has a much greater strength to take the next step. On the contrary, if one is blind, ignorant, stupid or ill-willed and, instead of saying "yes" to the trial that faces him, he revolts or refuses it, then, you see, this is expressed by: "One has not passed his test, one has failed in his test." But the next time, one is compelled not only to make an effort to conquer this, but to make a still greater effort to redress the wrong one has done to himself. So it is much more difficult.

But these things happen to everyone on the path, all the time, perhaps even daily. There are small things, there are things a little bigger. The small ones one can turn, you see, by chance the right way. For the big ones one must first have a kind of instinct. One must pay attention and do the right thing in the right way. But there are other things still. When one is at a critical moment of his development, and it is absolutely necessary to cross the step in order to go forward—at that moment, there are always two possibilities: that of crossing the step, and then one immediately makes a terrific progress; or else to become slack, and then this indeed is more than a halt, even more than a set-back, it can be a very serious fall into a chasm. There are abysses from which one does not come up again; and so, in this case it means a life lost.

But if one has within, besides the part that has given way and fallen, if somewhere one has a very ardent flame, if one is ready for anything, all possible suffering, all possible effort, all possible

sacrifices to redress what one has done, in order to climb back from the bottom of the abyss, to find the path again, one can do it. This flame has the power to call the Grace. And with the Grace there is nothing impossible. But it must be a real flame, something very powerful, because when one is at the bottom of the hole it is not easy to come out of it. Between the first kind, which is simply a little halt on the way and which makes the next step just a little more difficult, and the last one I am speaking about, there are many degrees; and so one can't say that if one leaves the path it is for a lifetime. That would be only an extreme case.

But if one leaves the path, it is even very difficult to find it again. What is strange is that in leaving it one loses it. There are legends of this kind in all countries: of people who have left the path and then later searched for it and never found it again. It was as if it had vanished. They lost it and this truly is a very sad thing.

But when you are on the path, I said this—I was just saying it—when you are on the path, do not ever leave it. Wait a little, you can hesitate as long as you want before taking it; but the minute you set your foot on it, it is finished, don't leave it. Because this has consequences which can even extend to several lives. It is something very serious. That is why, besides, I never push anyone to take the path.

You are quite a number of children here; I have never asked anyone—only those who came to me and told me, "I want it." And to these also, unless I am absolutely sure of them because it is written in their destiny that they have come for that, I always say, "Think about it, think, be quite sure that this is what you want and nothing else." And when they have reflected and decided, it is finished. One should no longer move away, one should go straight to the end. I mean, one should not leave the path any more. One should go forward at all costs and try not to stop too often on the way, because it is easier to continue even if it is hard, you see, than to begin all over again when one has stopped. A much greater effort is needed to get going again than to continue on the way.

And you see, logically I should not say it, but I have already warned all who are here, I have told them, "Don't ever take lightly all the circumstances of each day, all the tiny little things of life, all the small events, you know; never take all this lightly." Never react with your lower being. Each time you are told to do something or not to do it—you are not told this very often, but each time you are told, before reacting think a little, try to find in yourself the part which reacts. Do not react just like that with what is most commonplace in you. Enter within yourself, try to find the best in yourself and with this you must react. *It is very important, it is very important.*

There are people who mark time for years because they haven't done this. There are others who seem to fly, so fast do they go, because they pay attention to this. And those who don't do that throw the blame always on the Divine. They accuse the Grace. They tell her, "It is You who deceived me, it is You who put me into difficulty, it is You who made me stumble, it is You who are a monster," not exactly in these words, but their thought is like



this. And so, naturally, they make their case worse because they push away even the help they could have had in their difficulty. There we are.

I could tell you many more things, but it will come gradually. In any case, if you can keep within yourself a confidence, a candid trust which does not argue, and the sense of . . . yes, it is truly a kind of trust that what is done for you, in spite of all appearances, is always the best thing to lead you in the quickest way possible out of all your difficulties and towards the goal . . . if you can keep that strong in you, well, your path will become tremendously easier.

You will tell me that it is very difficult to keep it, but children keep it very well. They must have truly come upon particularly detestable parents to lose it; but if their parents are simply good enough, they keep this very well. Well, it is this attitude; if you can tell yourself, “Good, perhaps the divine Grace deserves our confidence,” simply this, nothing else, you will avoid many difficulties, many. In fact this avoids many difficulties even in ordinary life, and many worries. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 6, pp. 441-445)

Opening and surrender to the Mother

by Sri Aurobindo

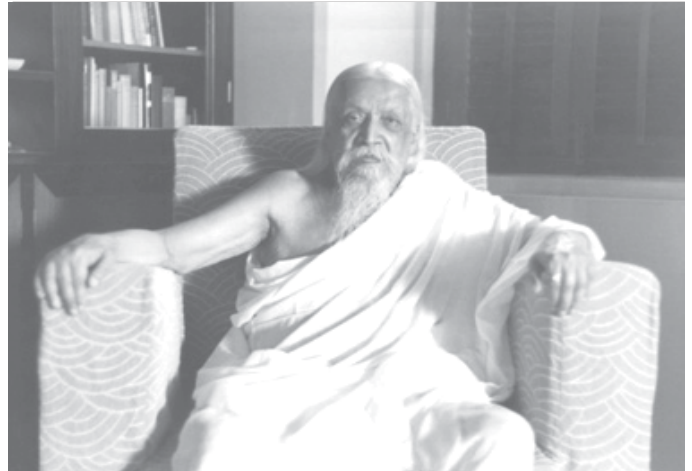
The following excerpts from Sri Aurobindo’s letters are from the book, The Mother, with Letters on the Mother and Translations of Prayers and Meditations, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.

By remaining psychically open to the Mother, all that is necessary for work or Sadhana develops progressively, that is one of the chief secrets, the central secret of the Sadhana. (p. 121)

It is only those who are capable by aspiration and meditation on the Mother to open and receive her action and working within that can succeed in this Yoga. (p. 121)

You have only to aspire, to keep yourself open to the Mother, to reject all that is contrary to her will and to let her work in you—doing also all your work for her and in the faith that it is through her force that you can do it. If you remain open in this way, the knowledge and realisation will come to you in due course. (p. 122)

To practise Yoga implies the will to overcome all attachments and turn to the Divine alone. The principal thing in the Yoga is to trust in the Divine Grace at every step, to direct the thought continually to the Divine and to offer oneself till the being opens and the Mother’s force can be felt working in the *âdhâra*. (p. 122)



Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

To be open is simply to be so turned to the Mother that her Force can work in you without anything refusing or obstructing her action. If the mind is shut up in its own ideas and refuses to allow her to bring in the Light and the Truth, if the vital clings to its desires and does not admit the true initiative and impulses that the Mother’s power brings, if the physical is shut up in its desires, habits and inertia and does not allow the Light and Force to enter in it and work, then one is not open. It is not possible to be entirely open all at once in all the movements, but there must be a central opening in each part and a dominant aspiration or will in each part (not the mind alone) to admit only the Mother’s “workings,” the rest will then be progressively done. (pp. 123-124)

To remain open to the Mother is to remain always quiet and happy and confident—not restless, not grieving or despondent, to let her force work in you, guide you, give you knowledge, give you peace and Ananda. If you cannot keep yourself open, then aspire constantly but quietly that you may be open. (p. 124)

Openness is not always complete from the first—a part of the being opens, other parts of the consciousness remain still closed or half open only—one has to aspire till all is open. Even with the best and most powerful Sadhaks the full opening takes time; nor is there anyone who has been able to abandon everything at once without any struggle. There is no reason to feel therefore that if you call you will not be heard—the Mother knows the difficulties of human nature and will help you through. Persevere always, call always and then after each difficulty there will be a progress. (p. 127)

It is by the constant remembrance that the being is prepared for the full opening. By the opening of the heart the Mother’s presence begins to be felt and, by the opening to her Power above, the Force of the higher consciousness comes down into the body and works there to change the whole nature. (p. 127)



The Mother's peace is above you—by aspiration and quiet self-opening it descends. When it takes hold of the vital and the body, then equanimity becomes easy and in the end automatic. (p. 128)

If an adverse Force comes, one has not to accept and welcome its suggestions, but to turn to the Mother and to refuse to turn away from her. Whether one can open or not, one has to be loyal and faithful. Loyalty and fidelity are not qualities for which one has to do Yoga. They are very simple things which any man or woman who aspires to the Truth ought to be able to accomplish. (p. 129)

I have said that the human vital does not like to be controlled or dominated by another and I said that that also was a reason why Sadhaks find it difficult to surrender to the Mother. For the vital wants to affirm its own ideas, impulses, desires, preferences and to do what it likes, it does not want to feel another force than that of its own nature leading or driving it; but surrender to the Mother means that it must give up all these personal things and allow her Force to guide and drive it in the ways of a higher Truth which are not its own ways: so it resists, does not want to be dominated by the Truth Light and the Mother's Force, insists on its own independence and refuses to surrender. These ideas of breakdown and personal frustration are again wrong suggestions and the dissatisfaction with yourself is as harmful almost as dissatisfaction with the Mother would be. It prevents the confidence and courage necessary for following the path of the Sadhana. You must dismiss these suggestions from you. (p. 131)

There is not much spiritual meaning in keeping open to the Mother if you withhold your surrender. Self-giving or surrender is demanded of those who practise this Yoga, because without such a progressive surrender of the being it is quite impossible to get anywhere near the goal. To keep open means to call in her Force to work in you, and if you do not surrender to it, it amounts to not allowing the Force to work in you at all or else only on condition that it will work in the way you want and not in its own way which is the way of the Divine Truth. A suggestion of this kind is usually made by some adverse Power or by some egoistic element of mind or vital which wants the Grace or the Force, but only in order to use it for its own purpose, and is not willing to live for the Divine Purpose,—it is willing to take from the Divine all it can get, but not to give itself to the Divine. The soul, the true being, on the contrary, turns towards the Divine and is not only willing but eager and happy to surrender . . .

The surrender must necessarily be progressive. No one can make the complete surrender from the beginning, so it is quite natural that when one looks into oneself, one should find its absence. That is no reason why the principle of surrender should not be accepted and carried out steadily from stage to stage, from field to field, applying it successively to all the parts of the nature. (p. 131-132)

What you say of Sadhana is true. Sadhana is necessary and the Divine Force cannot do things in the void but must lead each one according to his nature to the point at which he can feel the Mother working within and doing all for him. Till then the Sadhak's aspiration, self-consecration, assent and support to the Mother's workings, his rejection of all that comes in the way is very necessary—indispensable. (p. 135)

The effort demanded of the Sadhak is that of aspiration, rejection and surrender. If these three are done the rest is to come of itself by the Grace of the Mother and the working of her force in you. But of the three the most important is surrender of which the first necessary form is trust and confidence and patience in difficulty. There is no rule that trust and confidence can only remain if aspiration is there. On the contrary, when even aspiration is not there because of the pressure of inertia, trust and confidence and patience can remain. If trust and patience fail when aspiration is quiescent, that would mean that the Sadhak is relying solely on his own effort—it would mean, "Oh, my aspiration has failed, so there is no hope for me. My aspiration fails, so what can Mother do?" On the contrary, the Sadhak should feel, "Never mind, my aspiration will come back again. Meanwhile I know that the Mother is with me even when I do not feel her; she will carry me even through the darkest period." That is the fully right attitude you must have. To those who have it depression can do nothing; even if it comes it has to return baffled. That is not tamasic surrender. Tamasic surrender is when one says, "I won't do anything; let Mother do everything. Aspiration, rejection, surrender even are not necessary. Let her do all that in me." There is a great difference between the two attitudes. One is that of the shirker who won't do anything, the other is that of the Sadhak who does his best, but when he is reduced to quiescence for a time and things are adverse, keeps always his trust in the Mother's force and presence behind all and by that trust baffles the opposition force and calls back the activity of the Sadhana. (p. 135)

Never allow this idea "I am not able," "I am not doing enough" to come and vex you; it is a tamasic suggestion and brings depression and depression open the way to the attacks of the wrong forces. Your position should be, "Let me do what I can; the Mother's force is there, the Divine is there to see that in due time all will be done." (p. 328)

What is needed is perseverance—to go on without discouragement, recognizing that the process of the nature and the action of the Mother's force is working through the difficulty even and will do all that is needed. Our incapacity does not matter—there is no human being who is not in his parts of nature incapable—but the Divine Force is also there. If one puts one's trust in that, incapacity will be changed into capacity. Difficulty and struggle themselves then become a means towards the achievement. (p. 328)



Gnostic knots

From Sri Aurobindo's Humour*

by Nirodbaran

Nirodbaran: Why are we made of so many contradictory elements?

Sri Aurobindo: It takes many ingredients to make a nice pudding. (p. 19)

Nirodbaran: Is it that the path to the Divine can't be made easy lest all leave the ordinary world?

Sri Aurobindo: Perhaps it is to prevent the world from coming to a sudden end by a universal rush into beatitude. (p. 19)

Nirodbaran: I hear from all quarters that you are buried in letters. In the near future there will be millions of letters heaped upon your Supramental segregation, if you don't relinquish it and come out boldly.

Sri Aurobindo: Come out and have millions and millions of admirers heaped upon my promiscuity? Thank you for nothing! The letters can be thrown into the W.P.B. more easily than the admirers can be thrown out of the window. (p. 36-37)

Nirodbaran: Today's microscopic exam shows that N has a soft sore which is contracted in only one way. And it is very contagious.

Sri Aurobindo: If it is contracted only one way, why should I tell him it may be due to an indirect contact? If it is very contagious, how is it contagious? Only by one way? If so, nobody here is going to do the deed willingly, I suppose. Please clear this point and don't write Delphic oracles. Leave that to me as my monopoly. (p. 72)

Nirodbaran: Today P came for her eyes. All on a sudden she burst out into sobs—God knows why!

Sri Aurobindo: God doesn't.

P is a sort of weeping machine—touch a spring even unintentionally and it starts off. (p. 73)

Nirodbaran: Mother is giving us doctors very good compliments, I hear, that we confine people to bed till they are really confined!

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. Mother did pass on that epigram. Doctors were born to hear such remarks. (p. 74)

Nirodbaran: A carpenter beaten by a rat.

Sri Aurobindo: Say, say! I never heard of a rat beating a man before! He ought to go to the criminal court, instead of the hospital. (p. 82)

Nirodbaran: One thing I find among patients here, especially ladies, that they want to be served quick—five minutes at most! They can't wait, they must go, they have work, etc. etc.

Sri Aurobindo: Important people, you see—necessary for the world action—can't be kept waiting. (p. 92)

Nirodbaran: So Dr. B. has departed! But now perhaps the avalanche will roll down on me. Will you save and help?

Sri Aurobindo: Help, I can. But save? Well, an avalanche is an avalanche. (p. 92)

Nirodbaran: Servant has boil on his face. Not very happy about it.

Sri Aurobindo: He is not? Hard to satisfy these people!

Nirodbaran: I am sorry! I meant I am not happy.

Sri Aurobindo: I supposed so. (p. 102)

Nirodbaran: Last night I tried to compose a poem. It was a failure, I fell asleep over its first two lines.

Sri Aurobindo: You call it a failure when you have discovered a new soporific? (p. 55)

Nirodbaran: Really Sir, you have caught a magnificent fellow for Supramentalisation, what?

Sri Aurobindo: Well, sir, in the Supramental world all kinds will be needed, I suppose. Then why not a supramental ass? (p. 27)

Nirodbaran: Very glad to hear, Sir, that you are too busy; only we have been hearing that so often and so long since, that by now the Supramental or any Light should have tumbled down!

Sri Aurobindo: It isn't so easy to make it tumble.

Nirodbaran: But jokes apart, I hear from a reliable authority that the Descent—Supramental Descent—is very near. Is it true, Sir?

Sri Aurobindo: I am very glad to hear it on reliable authority. It is a *great* relief. (p. 27)

Nirodbaran: You referred to "circumstances being exceptional" as regards my early success in English versification. But how are they exceptional?

Let me know

How 'tis so

A dullard like me

Bursting like the sea

With the heart of the Muse

Makes his rhythm fuse?

Sri Aurobindo:

You are opening, opening, opening

Into a wider, wider scopening

That fills me with a sudden hopening

That I may carry you in spite of gropening

Your soul into the supramental ropening. (p. 51)

* Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram under this title in 2000.



The poetry room

Surrealist¹

I have heard a foghorn shouting at a sheep,
And oh the sweet sound made me laugh and weep
But alas, the sheep was on the hither shore
Of the little less and the ever-never more.
I sprang on its back; it jumped into the sea.
I was near to the edges of eternity.
Then suddenly the foghorn blared again.
There was no sheep—it had perished of ear pain.
I took a boat and steered to the Afar
Hoping to colonise the polar star.
But in the boat there was a dangerous goose
Whom some eternal idiot had let loose.
To this wild animal I said not “Bo!”
But it was not because I did not know.
Full soon I was on shore with dreadful squeals
And the fierce biped cackling at my heels.
Alarmed I ran into a lion’s den
And after me ran three thousand armoured men.
The lion bolted through his own backdoor
And set up a morose dissatisfied roar.
At this my courage rose; I grew quite brave
And shoved myself into a tiger’s cave.
The tiger snarled; I thought it best instead
To don my pyjamas and go to bed.
But the tiger had a strained objecting face,
So I turned my eyes away from his grimace.
At night the beast began my back to claw
And growled out that I was his brother-in-law.
I rose and thought it best to go away
To a doctor’s house: besides ’twas nearly day.
The doctor shook his head and cried “For a back
Pepper and salt are the remedy, alack.”
But I objected to his condiments
And thought the doctor had but little sense.
Then I returned to my own little cot
For really things were now extremely hot.
Then *fierily* the world cracked *Nazily* down
And I looked about to find my dressing gown.
I was awake (I had tumbled to the floor).
A shark was hammering away at my front-door.

—Sri Aurobindo

To Nirodbaran

Will you tell me, O revered Nirod,
O chosen servant and friend of God!
Who taught you service so gentle and sweet?
And how many times did you get to touch
Sri Aurobindo’s flower-soft feet?

You wrote to the Avatar with sparkling wit,
Invoked Sri Aurobindo’s humour,
And gave humanity a priceless gift.
You made him parry and pun.
Many a time didn’t the Lord give you quite a run?
It was as if a scintillating game was being played
By the One with the One.
How could you stand so near the Sun?
How could you have the courage to tease
Him, who gives Life its eternal lease?
From which high heaven did you descend?
Of your eternal quest what a wonderful end!

At times when I see you walk from place to place,
I suddenly hope to see Sri Aurobindo’s face.
I bow to you, O rare instrument of the Lord,
Who are forever bound to him with friendship’s cord.

—Shyam Kumari

Gold sun-rose²

Along the border of my consciousness
The vision of thy timeless beauty glows;
Each wandering mood is orbéd in tranquil space
With the subtle fragrance of thy gold sun-rose.

Life’s dream-ward flames quiver with a delight
As if some voice had whispered to their ear
The intimate approach of the Infinite
Around the margin of its diamond sphere.

My mortal joys are changed into a pure
Awakening of thy shadowless ecstasy,
Where nothing of humanity can endure
Born from the clay’s time-rooted memory.

I drink from thy heart’s deep a luminous wine
And grow into an image of thy Thought,
Each movement made a part of thy divine
Immensity, with fathomless mysteries fraught.

—Nirodbaran



An orange hibiscus *rosa-sinensis*: "Beauty of tomorrow manifesting the Divine." (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

Descent³

All my cells thrill swept by a surge of splendour,
Soul and body stir with a mighty rapture,
Light and still more light like an ocean billows
Over me, round me.

Rigid, stone-like, fixed like a hill or statue,
Vast my body feels and upbears the world's weight;
Dire the large descent of the Godhead enters
Limbs that are mortal.

Voiceless, thronged, Infinity crowds upon me;
Presses down a glory of power eternal;
Mind and heart grow one with the cosmic wideness;
Stilled are earth's murmurs.

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings;
Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions,
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow the heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's;
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,
Ecstasy's chariots.

All the world is changed to a single oneness;
Souls undying, infinite forces, meeting,
Join in God-dance weaving a seamless Nature,
Rhythm of the Deathless.

Mind and heart and body, one harp of being,
Cry that anthem, finding the notes eternal,—
Light and might and bliss and immortal wisdom
Clasping for ever.

—Sri Aurobindo

Untitled⁴

Behind a magnificence
Of laughing dawn
The ancient wings of Night
Are slowly withdrawn.

A rapturous rhythm now moves
The beats of my heart,
Each throb a shadowless
Flame-counterpart

Of some mystery unknown
Behind the slow
Footsteps of time, some gold
Eternal glow.

The brooding dragon-thoughts
Drifting away,
Make a hushed vacancy
Of my mortal day.

Invisible wonders come
Through a magic air
Mirroring a strange Beauty
In my soul of prayer.

—Nirodbaran

All this before us

All this before us is thyself;
The moments float on wings of fire
Out of thy still, blue infinity,
Carrying whispers from thy lyre,
And moods of enchanting felicity.

Clothed in hues multitudinous
In patterned forms of curve and line,
Thy endless beauty's tapestry,
Trimmed with a sparkling diamond shine,
Reflects the light of thy mystery.

The myriad faces of thy glory
On bird and beast and thinking man
Are captive in thy mystic trance,
Entwined in thy intricate plan,
Like lovers twirling joined in dance.

—Larry Seidlitz



The noons of splendour

The twenty-fourth of August and no sun,
Clouds veil her face, the skies of pewter made,
Expectantly the earth in stillness lies
And birds move silently in the deep shade.

A light not wholly real pervades the land
It seems the trick of an illusionist
Or secret energy content to work
In the dense and all-pervading morning mist,

A settled atmosphere of deep reserve.
The Spring of happy days is now behind
And Summer's riot captivates the sense.
Earth's final flowering is to my mind

The preface of regenerative sleep.
Autumn's colours lead to Winter's rule
And all our Springs are born from that white peace,
The fallen leaf is but the blossom's fuel.

For man there is neither rest nor journey's end
His greatness is assured, he cannot fall
Though his past a stone that weighs the future down
Bright are his dawns, the noons of splendour call.

—Narad

Insincerity

There is a moment when you decide
What is wrong and what is right.

You told me, "Look, this is that moment."
And I didn't—
Because I'm insincere—
But I will one day.

Starting today, I will look at my insincerity in the face
and say, "this is insincere—
Insincere, insincere, insincere . . ."

And I will be able to move—
From Tamas to Jyoti,
From Asat to Sat,
From Mrityu to Amrita.

I don't believe what I say
But I will say it anyway
Because this may be the first step.

—Anonymous

Integral animal

Here I am, a living zoo!
Specimen of the cosmic lab.
Rising from the mire and the goo
Reaching for the ultimate slab.

Little different from the monkey,
I reach for the moon and star.
Oft I'm called, you little turkey
When I cross limits and hold no bar.

Glutton like a pig on big feast,
In guilt, I jog to burn it off.
In rage I snarl like a beast,
Yet gentle as a dove, I bear any scoff.

I am sly like a fox,
Politicking my ultimate vantage,
But noble as lion, no box
Can stay my progressive advantage.

Proud as a peacock,
I preen on small victories,
As a patient beaver, absorb the shock
Of raging life, shelving experience in categories.

Busy as a bee, with a mean sting
Of poetic satire, am off to Lodi hive.
Sharing joy of Karma Yoga in a ring
We kick ass, oft slam high five.

Herding as cattle is *not*
Our lot, in freedom we decree,
For a collective AUM, we take a shot
On a deeper spiritual note, in Truth agree.

—Chandresh Patel

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3. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5*, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 563.
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Apropos

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life, and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all. —Sri Aurobindo

It is the Spirit of God that actively sustains every form and force in the universe; yet He is transcendental and aloof in the blissful uncreated void beyond the worlds of vibratory phenomena. Those who attain Self-realization on earth live a similar two-fold existence. Conscientiously performing their work in the world, they are yet immersed in an inward beatitude. —Sri Yukteswar

There is no moment when the Self is not. So long as there is doubt or the feeling of non-Realization, the attempt should be made to rid oneself of these thoughts. They are due to the identification of the Self with the not-Self. When the not-Self disappears, the Self alone remains. To make room, it is enough that the cramping be removed; room is not brought in from elsewhere. —Ramana Maharishi

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness. —Sri Ramakrishna

One feels a perpetual calm, perpetual strength, one is aware of infinity and lives not only in infinity but also in eternity. One feels immortality and does not care about the death of the body. And then one has the consciousness of the One in all. Everything becomes the manifestation of the Brahman. For instance, as I look round this room, I see everything as Brahman. —Sri Aurobindo

The only thing that is truly effective is the change of consciousness; it is the inner liberation through an intimate, constant union, absolute and inevitable, with the vibration of the supramental forces. The preoccupation of every second, the will of all the elements of the being, the aspiration of the entire being, including the cells of the body, is this union with the supramental forces. And there is no longer any need at all to be preoccupied with what the consequences will be. What has to be in the play of the universal forces and their manifestation will be, quite naturally, spontaneously, automatically, there is no need to be preoccupied with it. —The Mother

When your mind is wandering about elsewhere you have no chance to express yourself. But if you limit your activity to what you can do just now, in this moment, then you can express fully your true nature, which is the universal Buddha nature. This is our way. —Shunryu Suzuki

The same power that makes the fire burn and the water flow, the seed sprout and the trees grow, makes me answer your questions. There is nothing personal about me, though the language and the style may appear personal. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Realization is for everyone; Realization makes no difference between the aspirants. This very doubt, whether you can realize, and the notion “I-have-not-realized” are themselves the obstacles. Be free from these obstacles also. —Ramana Maharishi

... Besides the great solitaries who have sought and attained their self-liberation, we have the great spiritual teachers who have also liberated others and, supreme of all, the great dynamic souls who, feeling themselves stronger in the might of the Spirit than all the forces of the material life banded together, have thrown themselves upon the world, grappled with it in a loving wrestle and striven to compel its consent to its own transfiguration. —Sri Aurobindo

The Lord has created all men from the illimitable joy of His being. Though they are painfully cramped by the body, God nevertheless expects that men made in His image shall ultimately rise above all sense identifications and reunite with Him. —Sri Yukteswar

Everything is Buddha's activity. So whatever you do, or even if you keep from doing something, Buddha is in that activity. Because people have no such understanding of Buddha, they think that what they do is the most important thing, without knowing who it is that is actually doing it. People think they are doing various things, but actually Buddha is doing everything. —Shunryu Suzuki

When you listen to someone, you should give up all your preconceived ideas and your subjective opinions; you should just listen to him, just observe what his way is. We put very little emphasis on right and wrong or good and bad. We just see things as they are with him, and accept them. This is how we communicate with each other. —Shunryu Suzuki

While the mind is centred in the body and consciousness is centred in the mind, awareness is free. The body has its urges and mind its pains and pleasures. Awareness is unattached and unshaken. It is lucid, silent, peaceful, alert and unafraid, without desire and fear. Meditate on it as your true being and try to be it in your daily life, and you shall realize it in its fullness. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj