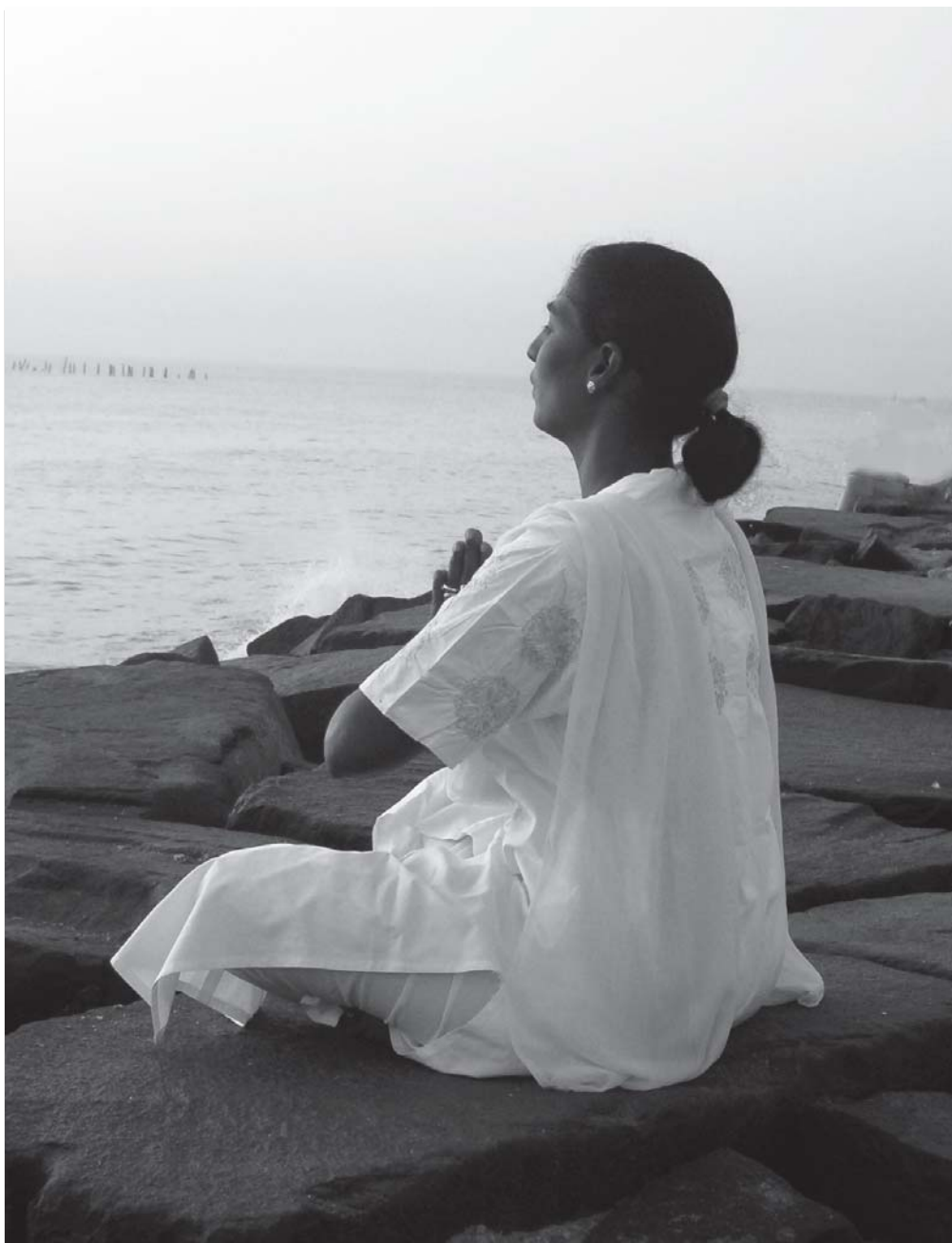


Collaboration

Winter 2008/Spring 2009

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 33, No. 3



Larry Seidlitz on Practices in Integral Yoga • Santosh Krinsky on Nonviolence •
James Anderson on Transcending Nature •
Review of A.S. Dalal's book, *Eckhart Tolle and Sri Aurobindo* •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Sunrise meditation at Pondicherry seashore.
(Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

The authors and poets

James Anderson, of Anglo-Irish descent, lives in Pondicherry and is part of the journal team of *NAMAH*, a journal that examines Integral Health, published by the Sri Aurobindo Society.

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Gilles Guigan (gillou@auroville.org.in), a Parisian civil engineer, settled in Auroville in 1980. He has worked with CSR, Solar Kitchen, and Matrimandir, and has compiled the Mother's words on Auroville and on the Matrimandir.

Bridget Horkan (bridget@auroville.org.in), an Irish Aurovilian who arrived four years ago, is an experienced yoga teacher who has offered her considerable administrative and leadership skills to several Auroville village outreach units.

Kailas Jhaveri has been a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since 1964. Her biography, *I am with you*, from which her poem was taken, was published by the Ashram in 2007. Her address is Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry, 605002.

The late **Kamalakanto**, a Bengali poet, joined the Ashram in 1949; he contributed poems to various journals in India and abroad. The poem selected here was published in his book *Petals* and *Sparks* by Sri Aurobindo's Action in 1988.

Amal Kiran, whose name given by Sri Aurobindo means the "clear ray," is the editor of *Mother India*, and a prolific author and poet. At age 104, he is the eldest member of the Ashram.

Santosh Krinsky (santoshk@msn.com) is the founder of Lotus Press, publisher of U.S. editions of Sri Aurobindo's writings, and the President of the Institute for Wholistic Education, devoted to the development of spirituality in daily life.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, we focus on various aspects of the sadhana, the spiritual practice of the Integral Yoga. The first essay on this topic by me, Larry Seidlitz, discusses a large number of specific practices and techniques that readers can select from and incorporate into their own personal practice. I find that newcomers to the Yoga are often confused about how to practice it, perhaps because in most other paths there are quite specific exercises and techniques that are systematically taught and form the core of their teachings. While I provide some general suggestions based on my personal experience, the vast majority of methods described are based on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's suggestions cultivated from their voluminous writings and talks. They cover a fairly wide ground, from various types of meditation and concentration, to organizing and purifying the outer life of physical tasks and activities, to approaching one's work and career, to developing a deeper, inner poise and equality, to nurturing faith, openness, and receptivity.

The second article on this topic was written by Santosh Krinsky; it concerns the development of *ahimsa*, usually translated as nonviolence or harmlessness. This principle is one of several qualities to be developed in preparation for the higher status of the yogic consciousness according to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, an important classical text on yoga written some centuries before Christ. But as Santosh describes here, it is not merely an outward nonviolence or harmlessness that is enjoined, it includes subtle psychological forms as well. Whereas this principle is not stressed in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga as such, nevertheless, its cultivation and practice is consistent with the purification of the mental, vital, and physical nature which is an integral part of this Yoga. Therefore, the penetrating analysis of *ahimsa* presented by Santosh is a useful contribution for practitioners of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga dealing with an issue not often considered from this perspective.

The third essay, by James Anderson, focuses especially on the sadhana of the body and the physical consciousness. James discusses his own experiences and inner work of bringing the higher spiritual consciousness into the body consciousness in order to transcend and transform its limitations. This work is a fundamental requirement in the Yoga, but it often is overlooked when vital or mental obstacles are in the forefront, and the body itself is relatively fit and healthy. For transient illnesses, we typically resign and submit ourselves to their iron grip, knowing that they will soon pass. But when the body's limitations become long-standing and prominent, then the work of opening its consciousness to the higher spiritual consciousness becomes more pressing. James' valuable insights and experience in this realm illuminate for us the unique qualities and possibilities of this inner process.

Following these essays, we feature in our Source Material section extracts from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings on central aspects of the sadhana. In particular, we have selected important passages on the emergence of the psychic being, the key to rapid and smooth progress, and passages relating to sincerity in our practice and self-giving to the Divine, another fundamental requirement and power in the Yoga.

In addition to these primary essays on the practice of the Yoga, we have in Current Affairs an article by Rich Carlson describing a popular and interesting website called Science, Culture, and Integral Yoga (SCIY), and information on various centers and activities in the U.S. Integral Yoga community. In Auroville Almanac, we feature a bold proposal by Gilles Guigan for reorganizing the internal structure of Auroville's administration, and another article providing an update on the many activities related to Auroville's Village Action project. We also present a review by me of A.S. Dalal's recent book examining and comparing Eckhart Tolle's and Sri Aurobindo's views on enlightenment. We follow with a fine selection of spiritual poetry, and close our issue with inspiring quotations in *Apropos*.

The authors and poets continued

Nirodbaran was Sri Aurobindo's attendant and scribe. He learned to write poetry under Sri Aurobindo's guidance. He passed away in 2006.

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Publisher: *Collaboration* (ISSN 0164-1522) is published by the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA), a California nonprofit religious corporation, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA; e-mail: saa@collaboration.org.

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Subscriptions: A one-year subscription (three issues) to *Collaboration* is \$20 (\$32 for airmail outside the USA, except India; in India, send Rs. 150 to Larry Seidlitz, 39 Vanniar St., Vaithikuppam, Pondicherry 605012). A patron subscription is \$40 or more. A sponsorship subscription for your resident friends in India is \$4.

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

About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville and supports various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: Theresa Boschert, coordinator; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Chandresh Patel, secretary.

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



Current Affairs

SCIY website examines relation of Integral Yoga with developments in science and culture

by Richard Carlson

Science, Culture, Integral Yoga (SCIY) is a blog-zine (blog + online magazine) that was founded after the 2005 AUM conference on science and spirituality by Ron Anastasia, Debashish Banerji, and Richard Carlson. The website presents articles, essays, news, reviews, and features that relate to themes concerning an interface between developments in contemporary science, culture and Integral Yoga (IY). The site serves approximately 22 thousand viewers (distinct servers) per month. Users are able to post comments to articles posted by the editors. Such comments generally lead to further conversation with the editors and other participants.

The web site has evolved over time but currently represents an attempt by editors of SCIY to engage Sri Aurobindo's writings with the realities and possibilities of contemporary culture and current events to ascertain if a space—even a virtual one—can be cleared for a meaningful dialog between the two. The editors' view of the contemporary world is that it is simultaneously post-modern, post-colonial, post-secular, and post-human (a.k.a. post-humanist), even as it remains fundamentalist, fascist, neo-liberal (a euphemism for neo-colonial), and primitive. As such, any dialogs that may follow on between interpretations of the Integral Yoga and the contemporary world are bound to be complex.

The editors of SCIY make no claims to holding any privileged position in their formulations of Integral Yoga and, in fact, believe that since the passing of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, anyone attempting to understand the yoga in relation to the present will necessarily invoke their own interpretative framework. As such, SCIY attempts to critique and redress what it considers to be two of the dominant interpretations of IY today, which can be called fundamentalist and new age.

While the fundamentalist interpretation derives from a conservative perspective that marries IY to a Hindu orthodoxy or to its more extreme form Hindutva, its new age interpretation can be traced to associations with an American libertarian culture of the post-war generation fascinated with mystical surfaces, psychological obscurities, and the techno-optimism of free markets. The former interpretation leads to the institutionalization of IY as religion while the latter generates a superficial understanding of IY as a variant of pop culture.

SCIY attempts to avoid the Scylla of fundamentalism and Charybdis of New Ageism by encouraging articles and essays that

are critical and experientially honest. It therefore does not support the pervasive practice of using de-contextualized quotations from Sri Aurobindo or the Mother to justify orthodoxies and pretensions, nor does it focus on issues of new age science or spirituality. It is the view of the editors that these kinds of documents and posts can be retrieved from other Sri Aurobindo or new age web sites and SCIY seeks to fill a niche that is not being addressed elsewhere.

The organizing ideas of SCIY are rather to address current events and contemporary theory from a perspective of IY. Topics may relate to many areas including the arts, sciences, economy, politics, sociology, darshanic traditions, even sports, but in general, consideration of these issues are anchored in a critical and interpretive perspective. The most common posts on SCIY are those that 1) relate IY to specific current events, 2) relate IY to contemporary theory, 3) relate IY to the current trends in the arts and humanities, and 4) relate IY to cutting-edge science and technology.

SCIY also considers issues of social justice and honors IY's tradition of resistance to reactionary politics and imperialist ambitions. As such the editors of SCIY believe that the electronic media that serves as the platform for SCIY also facilitates a process in which society is retribalized. The editors modify Marshall McLuhan's pentecostal vision of the tribalized global village in the belief that electronic forums on the Internet, at their worst and best, can serve to either empower groups to form identity networks organized around exclusionary themes of religion, ethnicity, and race or can enable networks of individuals willing to participate in inclusive dialogs—a medium to apprehend and integrate a diversity of perspectives that are essential to a transformative global understanding.

In this sense SCIY is unabashedly progressive in its vision as it is critical in its mission to interrogate the possibility of a conversation between a particular system of yoga born of an ancient culture and a global culture that may best be described as post-human.

The editors feel that the potential for a wider global dialog is implicit in IY itself which announces its vision of the post-human as the spiritualized superman. While recognizing that the first specter of the superman may have been imagined at the dawn of human history in the Vedas and Upanishads, SCIY also encourages a dialog with the superman—*übermensch*—whose genealogy can be traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche at the cusp of modernity. While investigating cross-cultural and cross-epochal texts, SCIY seeks to open a dialog with those post-modern thinkers whose lineage can be traced back to Nietzsche and includes Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, and their interlocutors and descendants.

In fact, far from viewing the recent history of philosophy in its post-metaphysical phase with its emphasis on difference as dissenting from the integral ontology of Sri Aurobindo, the editors of SCIY view contemporary writing as the natural evolution of discourse, in the same light as Sri Aurobindo conceives a



future poetry, as a further unfolding of the spirit in time. Although on the face of it, the academic gyrations of post-modern theory may seem contrary to the spirit of Sri Aurobindo's writings, on closer inspection the editors of SCIY view much contemporary scholarship as facilitating a transparency of mind, vital intention, language, and ideology that seeks to resist the hypnotic simulacra of commercial interest and the plunder of economic barbarians. The question "What are the social conditions of an integral yoga?" aligns itself with such a concern, and underlines the SCIY's editors' preference for answers grounded in the historicity of culture rather than in psychological universalisms.

Thus, SCIY's editors also strive to put post-modernism and IY in dialog, as both make clear the limitations of reason and the capacity of the mind to solve existential problems, and both refuse sub-rational dogmas and the oracular manipulations of cultic power. In defining the limits of the rational structures of the European Enlightenment, post-modern theory converges with certain expansive perspectives of Sri Aurobindo that straddle the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern (post-human) epochs. In addition to defining the limits of discourse, most progressive post-modern voices share with Sri Aurobindo a transformational vision of the world that enjoins knowledge/power for a beneficial harmony of society.

SCIY also highlights contrasting perspectives between current theory and IY, while seeking to augment theory with valuable insights from IY. At times giddy from its discovery of the fallibility of scientific and logical positivism, post-modern scholarship appears skeptical of any certainty of knowledge whatsoever, and usually defines knowledge as only fitting within the constraints of the rational mind. SCIY takes the position that alternative non-western ways of knowing, especially those accessible through the yoga of Sri Aurobindo, would prove valuable to contemporary thought by rendering transparent creative epistemologies that can push the boundaries of rational understanding while resisting the global culture of nihilism flattening the world through the ideology of consumption.

Additionally, SCIY probes questions of bio-cultural evolution and compares and contrasts them with developments we witness today. For example, while contemporary critical scholarship envisions a future community, future body, and future species that will be made possible through advances in science and technology, SCIY seeks to address the relationship between the humanoid species evolving through technological transformation and the evolutionary advance of the spiritualized species that Sri Aurobindo heralds as supramental.

Finally, SCIY also serves as a virtual bulletin board to facilitate conversations of events within the IY community. To these ends it has been at the forefront in discussing issues of importance to those seeped in the culture, study, and practice of IY. An example of this is its treatment of the recent controversy surrounding the new biography of Sri Aurobindo, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, by Peter Heehs.

Briefs

The Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles invites visitors Sunday evenings from 6-8 p.m. for satsang, starting with a reading from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, followed by discussion, and ending with a meditation in the relics room. The center is also open to visitors for meditation and purchase of books by appointment. All four darshans are observed at the center, and frequently there are guest speakers and visitors from the Ashram/Auroville, other centers, and the local area. Recent visitors include R.Y. Deshpande from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Rosine Debode from Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, and Anie Nunnally from her home in Mississippi. Anie will be returning to Los Angeles in April to resume her service at the Center.

The center has available space for a devoted sadhak who feels the calling to live at the center for an extended period and join in our collective life. Please contact us at: East-West Cultural Center - Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles, 12329 Marshall Street, Culver City, CA 90230, 310-390-9083, email: EWCC@SriAurobindoCenter-la.org

The Online Savitri Circle via Skype is open to all those who are familiar with *Savitri* and are called to its transformative power! Presently, participants are part of a Skype conference call about once a week to read *Savitri* and meditate together. Each session lasts 35 minutes and follows a structured format. It is a non-conversational meeting for reading and silent meditation. We would like to expand the *Savitri* reading via Skype to more people on a more frequent basis. Please call or email Shari to be added to the Online Savitri Circle and receive some basic instructions on how we operate. In addition, we need experienced readers and volunteer organizers for our Skype circle. Shari Hindman and Aubrey Hornsby: 303-499-9665, 303-944-8777 (Shari's cell), email: sharilhindman1@comcast.net

The Institute for Wholistic Education has several websites that may be of interest: www.wholisticinstitute.org has photos of its facilities and articles on spirituality, www.aurobindo.net focuses on Sri Aurobindo's writings, and www.mppandit.com features talks, lectures, mantras, and chanting by Sri M.P. Pandit. Other activities at the center include "one on one" counseling and study; sponsorship of the Sri Aurobindo CD Rom free giveaway project for educators, centers, schools and libraries; and a program providing free US editions of Sri Aurobindo's writings to Sri Aurobindo centers. Contact info: 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405; 262-619-1798; institute@infobuddhism.com

The Sri Aurobindo Circle of Seattle invites you to gather with us at weekly and monthly meetings to read and discuss the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Weekly meetings take place on Tuesdays from 7-8:30 p.m. Monthly retreats take place on the first Sunday of each month from 2-7 p.m. and conclude with a vegetarian potluck. All gatherings close with a meditation. For more information, contact Diane Thome at (206) 365-2386 or dthome@u.washington.edu.



AV almanac

A new internal organization for a new consciousness

by Gilles Guigan

This new proposal dated 1 January 2009 is one of several proposals being discussed in an ongoing dialog about Auroville's future development.

Humanity is now deeply immersed in a global and multifaceted crisis of enormous proportions. Auroville was conceived to show a way out of this crisis and thus become the city the earth needs by providing an example of true living and by being a living embodiment of an actual human unity. Forty years after its inception, do you feel that our community has become something the earth needs? Do you believe that, until now, it has seriously tried to organise itself to spring boldly towards future realisations and deliver on these promises? I don't. This proposal is for those who are convinced that we urgently need to stop drifting aimlessly and take steps to become ONE body moving consciously and steadily towards its objectives.

1. Aims of Auroville and of its internal organisation

Peace and Human Unity are the aims assigned by the Mother to Auroville, and she kept on stressing that for these to be achieved, the Aurovilians had to master their ego and desires, become consciously in contact with their inner being, and eventually become the willing servitors of the divine consciousness. The three main components of the Mother's program to stimulate the change in consciousness (individual and collective) without which these aims cannot be achieved are:

A. Developing further a system of unending education which considers human beings as living souls (expressions of the Divine) and teaches us to seek guidance and inspiration from our psychic being to find just what we need in order to become what we truly are.

The Mother wrote (about the Ashram school but obviously it applies also to Auroville): "We are not here to do (only a little better) what the others do. We are here to do what the others cannot do because they do not have the idea that it can be done. We are here to open the way of the Future to children who belong to the Future. Anything else is not worth the trouble and not worthy of Sri Aurobindo's help."

B. Developing an internal economy based on collective property and offering and managed for the "welfare of all."

The Mother based Auroville's economy on the following rules:

- There shouldn't be any private possession/property within Auroville.
- Every individual and every business unit has to contribute (work, money, kind) to the township according to their respective possibilities. Money shouldn't be the sovereign lord and shouldn't circulate within Auroville.
- The township has to provide for each one's real and simple needs—as far as possible in kind (not necessarily the same for everyone). It also has to provide for each one's sphere of action (a work that is useful to the community).
- The township has to be self-supporting but its development should be financed from outside as otherwise building a city for 50,000 volunteers would "take centuries."

C. Developing a new system of governance, or rather a new organisation, headed by the highest consciousness available.

The Mother did not want a system based on parliamentary democracy ("the rule of the lowest common denominator") with its elections (the falsehood of public opinion) by which representatives of some kind of constituencies (ethnic, nation, gender, age-group, sector of activity, etc.) are elected to defend the vested interests of particular sections of our community, instead of those of Auroville as a whole.

• She was "very fond of good organisation" and wanted us to create a clear and flexible structure, saying that "what can be done to make the organisation easier is a sort of plan or general map, so that everyone need not build his position but will find it ready for him." She wanted this organisation to be such that "NATURALLY, according to his own receptivity, his own capacity, his inner mission, everyone takes up the post which in the hierarchy he truly and spontaneously occupies, without any decision." She also said:

- "I do not give positions to the sadhaks—I give them work; and to all I give an equal opportunity. It is those who prove to be most capable and most sincere, honest and faithful that have the biggest amount of work and the greatest responsibility." Hence those amongst us who are the most capable, sincere, etc. will wear several caps...
- "The conditions for organising—for being an organiser (it's not 'governing,' it's ORGANISING) the conditions for being an organiser should be as follows: no more desires, no more preferences, no more attractions, no more repulsions—a perfect equality for all. Sincere, naturally, but that goes without saying: wherever insincerity creeps in, it acts like a poison. And then, only those who are themselves in that condition are capable of discerning whether someone else is or is not. And now, all human organisations are based on: visible fact (which is a falsehood), public opinion (which is another falsehood), and the moral sense, which is yet another falsehood!"



- She also kept on stressing on the need for collaboration and thus of coordination: “The true spirit of Auroville is Collaboration and must be more and more so.” Imposition should be avoided as far as possible.

If put seriously into practice, these three objectives would effectively deter from joining /remaining in Auroville those who are not interested (for themselves and their children) in the aims of Her education system, and/or are not ready to offer their work/money, and/or are not interested in mastering their ego and desires, and/or are attached to power, and/or are mainly concerned with some vested interests, and/or are unwilling to abide by a collective discipline.

2. Main shortcomings of our present internal organisation

Though the Mother wrote that “to hand over the management of Auroville to any country or any group however big it may be is an absolute impossibility,” a growing number of important decisions are now taken by government appointees. We need to acknowledge that we have called this calamity upon ourselves by persistently refusing to organise ourselves effectively. There is a lack of interest (to say the least) on the part of too many in putting into practice our objectives:

- Despite the efforts of many teachers, there is too little support in our community for the type of education the Mother wanted, and many parents are sending their children to schools outside Auroville (some parents now want our community to pay for these). On the other hand, many parents feel that the particular needs of their children are not provided for.

- Too many of us are fully in possession of some Auroville assets (land, house, unit, etc.). Too many do not do any work that is useful to the collective. Too many are now demanding a ‘maintenance’ fully in cash (=a salary). Too many want to be able to continue to use their (personal or business) money freely within Auroville. The enormous and unacceptable disparities in ‘maintenances’ and lifestyle are neither based on our ideals nor on the market value of the contribution made by individuals to the community.

- There is an increasing demand for holding popularity contests on the main office holders, for direct elections in which votes would be focused on people who would defend the vested interests of some constituency—instead of the interests of Auroville as a whole. Some want people to volunteer and then be voted for; while experience shows that those who want to occupy a particular position should not occupy it while those who are most qualified for it usually do the work without feeling the need for an official position. Some object to the holding of more than one position. (All this is in contradiction with the Mother’s words.)

The opposition to an effective administration is due mainly to three factors: 1) some of us haven’t bothered to learn about the Mother’s intentions for Auroville; 2) some refuse to trust their fellow Aurovilians (and thus hand over power to government appointees); and 3) some fear that they might not be able to continue

to turn their back on Auroville’s ideals. Refocusing our community on its key objectives will thus require a clear plan of action and a lot of collaboration, determination, and fortitude, but also a lot of patience, understanding, humanity, and flexibility on the part of those who will push for this refocusing.

Lack of a clear structure and of sufficient cooperation between activities: Despite the Mother’s words, Auroville’s administration remains a quasi-headless body consisting of a heteroclite collection of working groups which operate mostly without coordinating their actions/policies with any other groups. Many groups are very jealous of their own prerogatives and refuse what they claim to be unacceptable interference by the Working Committee (WC).

If I am well informed, the present FAMC and L’Avenir are appointed by the Governing Board and are thus answerable only to it—and this is weakening very seriously our own organisation. The result of all this is that no body is in a position to take responsibility for Auroville’s administration as a whole (and hence this task is left to government appointees), and there are plenty of grey areas, loopholes and contradictions in our policies, and we are not moving towards the implementation of our key objectives. Another result is that most Aurovilians (me included) have since long lost track of all the groups having some authority and of the extent of their respective mandates.

Example of a lack of coordination which is in my view totally unacceptable as it is responsible for some of our main problems: Being a member of our community implies some commitments from the individuals and from our community but nobody monitors whether these two commitments are indeed met adequately by both parties. As long as such will remain the case, the task of both the Entry Group and the groups which are supposed to provide for the welfare of all will remain impossible and it won’t be possible to maintain properly all deserving Aurovilians.

3. Objectives of this proposal

To group Auroville’s activities in seven Departments of related activities so that these, and their respective policies and/or budgets, may be better coordinated. For example:

1. Human Resources Department (membership, contribution-monitoring and welfare).
2. Education, Culture and Research Department. (including Matrimandir.)
3. Business Department.
4. Planning and Development Department. (incl. municipal services.)
5. Finances and Accounts Department.
6. Local Outreach Department (Relation with our local neighbours).
7. Information and Reception Department. (including Guest-Houses)



To have three to five Department Coordinators coordinate the activities of each Department and hold regular durbars.¹ (That makes 21, 28, or 35 Department Coordinators).

Each Department would hold a durbar (by turn) every two months where all Aurovilians would be invited. During the first part of the durbar, the Department Coordinators (and other key persons of this Department) would report on the activities of the past two months and on their future plans. During its second part, which would be chaired by some neutral persons (i.e.: the R.A. Service), the Department Coordinators would hear grievances and answer questions.

These durbars would have to be taken very seriously for the sake of transparency and answerability. The Department Coordinators (who would have to be confirmed by the RA) would take responsibility publicly for the actions of their respective Departments.

To have as members of the WC seven Department Coordinators who would thus represent all seven Departments and coordinate all in Auroville's activities/policies.

The Department Coordinators would choose amongst themselves their representative at the WC. Whenever there would be a need for a broader forum to discuss some important issue, all the Department Coordinators would be called for a meeting. The WC would share the budget among all seven Departments and would also hold durbars every two months.

4. How to reach this objective

A. Creation of seven Departments

Let other Aurovilians and Working Groups present some other grouping proposals and let a General Assembly decide which grouping to adopt. As these groupings could be modified any time later, we should not spend too much time arguing on this question.

B. Appointment of the Department Coordinators

The appointment of the three to five Department Coordinators per Department should not be a popularity contest or be done by elections. We need to realise that our common interest is to appoint competent people who are capable of ORGANISING (it is not governing) a particular Department so that it delivers what it is meant to deliver.

As the Mother said that the organisation should be such that one occupies one's place automatically, for this very first batch we would have to find a way to 'prime' the system. One could for example try to appoint some eight (instead of three to five) Department Coordinators for six months to one year, with the understanding that after this period, three to five only would remain as Department Coordinators having emerged by themselves as those who have been most effective at coordinating these areas of work.

Proposal of how to appoint this first batch of ($8 \times 7 = 56$) Department Coordinators:

- Four coordinators for each Department could be nominated

by the Aurovilians working in what would thus become a particular Department.

- One coordinator for each Department could be nominated by the outgoing WC. As it is in my view imperative that there should be some continuity in the WC (as well as in other key groups), the outgoing WC could decide who amongst themselves would continue (three or four members) and in which Department they would serve respectively for another year both as Department Coordinator and as WC member.

- One coordinator for each Department could be nominated by the Auroville Council.

- One coordinator for each Department could be nominated by a General Meeting once one would know the names of the coordinators already appointed.

- The seven coordinators appointed in this manner for each Department would then nominate the eighth and last coordinator.

- In order to ensure that these coordinators would be able to work together effectively, they would have to meet some conditions (in particular about the objectives to be achieved).

- Every two years one of the Coordinators of each Department would have to be replaced by someone else working in this Department. This replacement should take place as "naturally" as possible.

C. Appointment of the WC members

The eight Department Coordinators would nominate amongst themselves a member of the new Working Committee to represent their particular Department and coordinate its activities/policies with that of all other Departments. As said above, at least three members of the outgoing WC would remain members of the WC and at the same time would be amongst the coordinators of a Department. Department Coordinators and WC members would have to be confirmed by the Residents' Assembly.

5. Conclusion

Our community, and humanity as a whole, have to undergo some very serious changes if we want not only to continue to progress, but to survive. As the Mother once wrote, it has become a question of "Truth or the Abyss."

If there are enough Aurovilians interested to take this proposal as a base for discussion they should meet together and improve it to make it their common proposal to our community. It would be good if the Aurovilians who have some different ideas could also meet and formulate their own proposals.

Eventually one would either end up combining several proposals or request the Residents' Assembly to vote for the proposal it finds best. The more comprehensive each proposal is, the better it would be. (They should, for example, include clear objectives.)

¹Durbars were held by Indian rulers to interact with their subjects and enable them to voice their grievances. Holding regular durbars is still part of a Collector's duty.



Village Action updates

by Bridget Horkan

The following updates about various projects connected with Village Action were prepared as minutes of the Auroville Action Trust (AVAT) monthly meeting in Irumbai on 27 July 2008. Present at the meeting were Alain (AVAT & Auroville Coastal-Area Development Centre—ACDC), Anbu, Ann, Elke (Auroville Village Action Group—AVAG), Angelika (Deepam), Balu (Mohanam), Bhavana (AVAT), Bridget & Kathy (Thamarai), Catherine & Danny (Wellpaper), Lavkamad & Shubalakshmi (Auroville Industrial School—AIS), Lourdes, Joss & Padma (Pitchandikulam), Manfred (Auroville Health Service—AVHS), Rod Hemsell (Integral Rural Development (IRD) project leader), Selvaraj (AVAT), Shivaraj (Martuvam), Zerina (Life Education Centre—LEC). Alain was chairperson for the meeting, and the notes were prepared by Bridget.

Tulir training: Anbu reported that a group of Tamil Aurovilians and staff attended a workshop on child sexual abuse (CSA) given by the Chennai-based NGO Tulir. She was happy to report on the competence of this NGO and the valued training received. Those attending from Auroville were those that work mainly in schools or health services, other participants on the course were from many organisations that had much hands-on field experience and validated the statistical reports with their experience. They painted a bleak picture of the current state of incidences of abuse and the social and cultural taboos on the subject. The statistics presented showed at least 40 percent of children interviewed were exposed to some form of sexual abuse; this increased to levels of 53 percent in larger cities such as Delhi. The most striking thing for the Aurovilian team was the high proportion of perpetrators coming from family members or near relatives and the high level of incidents with girl children. Education of children and family members around this subject was seen to be key to tackling the problem.

The participants will meet on 27 July at 5pm in ACDC office with the intention of creating a mandate for a group to form who will provide support and build awareness and response mechanisms. This group is open for all to join, will meet once a month and wants to build a constructive plan of action with both short and long-term goals, that may include close links with educators and the police, further training, establishment of awareness campaigns, counselling facilities and child line centres.

Integral Rural Development Project: (Report by Joss and Rod) A promise has been given by the Secretary of the Planning Commission, Government of India, of 15 crore to get this seven-year projected project started. A pilot project will be developed over two years that will be expanded into a seven-year project that could expand further. In the words of Dr. Pitroda, “could Auroville deliver a pattern for the country that could be applicable and cop-



Bridget and Kathy of Thamarai, which provides services to villagers.

ied all over India?” The project will operate through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), provide knowledge-based and IT-enabled services to villages for promoting sustainable livelihoods and education, using an asset-based and market creation approach that will focus in six areas

comprising (a) education & livelihoods; (b) health; (c) agriculture & environment; (d) energy; (e) shelter and (f) advanced technologies. Joss reported that the Tamil Nadu government, the Knowledge Commission and corporate India are all showing huge interest and that “we have got to get it right.” Rod continued that a base of operations will be built up in Auroville to build a rural model that could be replicated. In order for this to happen documentation of the process and procedures will be important.

The first phase will bring together experts in areas such as social work, technology, marketing, infrastructure, etc. in a series of seminars that would facilitate a dialogue and interface between experts to develop clear principles of sustainability and livelihood development and to create a detailed plan for the seven-year project. Its goals include: creating assets for the purpose of development of livelihoods in the villages, learning to live sustainably and with each other, providing the principle of education and creating a population in the Auroville bioregion that is knowledgeable and able to move towards locally viable development goals.

Adyar project Chennai: Joss shared that this project is going well but that work conditions are very challenging as this area has been used as a rubbish dump, sewer and graveyard. The aim is to re-establish ecological harmony and provide environmental education so that the area becomes an example and training model for the ecological transformation of Chennai. Alain added that there seems to be a shift in awareness at governmental level on the importance of waste management, and a recent conversation with Dr. Lucas confirmed this.

Monthly Meeting: Alain suggested that a monthly sharing of those involved in village development network would be useful. Bhavana welcomed the presence of Rod, Joss and team, and Danny and team, who are not members of the AVA Trust, and suggested that this monthly meeting include others who are committed working with villagers in the bioregion. This was agreed.

Unit updates

Isaiambalam school: Bhavana shared that Kavitha and Nir-mala from Isaiambalam school were invited to West Bengal to present a paper on the Rishi Valley method for teaching English. For 20 years the Marxist government has not allowed English to



be taught. There is now a shift in attitude but no teachers in the state are competent enough to teach English so authorities are looking outside the state for help. Thus the Isaiambalam team were asked to share their expertise. The school is very happy as the team received much praise and appreciation for the presentation and admiration at the ease of this method of teaching. It was also the first time Kavitha and Nirmala travelled such a long distance. The return leg was done by airplane, another first for them.

Auroville Industrial School: Lavkamad reported that the architectural plans and new estimate for the school's extension are ready, and the building contractor, Mohan, will start 21 August. The school is also exploring the academic level it would like to offer (i.e., degree, diploma, etc.).

Mohanam Cultural Centre: Balu reported on a warm reception received for a recent performance given by 60 of their students and their senior teachers in Alankuppam temple area. Next month there will be a traditional Koota show in Auroville. Five members of the Mohanam Team have also taken part in International Youth Leadership programs in Colorado, USA, over the past four years.

Auroville Village Action Group: Anbu reported on the success of the Women's Festival held on 6 July 2008 at Irumbai headquarters. 3500 women attended. These types of initiatives help to foster self-confidence and group-support and many women/families in need have been financially and otherwise supported by the women coming together and offering what they can. There is ongoing training and economic support available through the Government and this is offered to the most active and responsible groups. There is a need for enterprise development and marketing, and Anbu was delighted that Catherine, who has expertise in this area, is in Auroville for a number of months to help. Kathy is also assisting Anbu at present.

The Paalam team of ACDC will move into the Irumbai headquarters shortly and the two activities will work together. An integration workshop is planned that will address issues of class and gender to ensure a smooth transition.

ACDC outreach: Lourdes reported on the Global Warming Awareness programme offered to schools at one-day visits to the Botanical Gardens. They have catered to 25 village schools and four teacher programs so far. Three schools have established gardens as have eight families in Edayanchavadi. Satyamoorthy is the person responsible for delivering and coordinating the program, which has been filmed and documented, and the initiative has been picked up by the government. Alain added that a wonderful book on water awareness has been produced by ACDC in co-operation with Harvest for school distribution.

Life Education Centre: Zerina reported that LEC are encouraging their girls to finish their education. Most of last year's students have gone back to school, with three of the girls going to university. They continue to work with small group counseling sessions and are offering health education for the girls and their mothers.

Deepam: It has been a busy summer as the project gets extra



Members of the Thamarai team send their greetings. (Photo courtesy the Thamarai team).

children with physical disabilities when the local schools close for summer holidays (these children came for full days.) Now they have many new village children and also more and more Aurovilian children with special needs for such services as physiotherapy and speech therapy. At the moment the project caters for 20 day-care and about 30 smaller children who come several times per week for their individual therapies. Angelika spent time in Germany promoting the project.

Wellpaper: Danny reported that Wellpaper will soon move from Auromode to Saracon and will also have a small workshop in Sve Dame. The training phase of their project is now officially over. Four groups with 50 women have now become independent, sustainable production units and Wellpaper continues to do their marketing and sales. New product development is an ongoing area of exploration between the women and Wellpaper.

Martuvam: Shivaraj shared that things are developing well in the Herbal garden and that the children were recently exposed to a four-week, two-hour daily music therapy program.

Thamarai: Bridget reported that all is well at Thamarai—the night school, playgroup, and the tours of Auroville for village groups are all progressing well. The project has recently developed a weekend program of dance, music, art, and ecology given by village teachers along with Tiago and Ana. This program will also include field trips from time to time. The Edayanchavadi Healing Centre—a co-creation between Villagers, Thamarai project, and Langara College in Vancouver, Canada—will open at the end of September. Its purpose is to provide a healing clinic and educational centre which revives and sustains ancient Tamil healing practices, while integrating modern science, yogic science, Integral Yoga-based complementary healing practices, and bio-sustainable green practices. Initially it will be open Monday–Friday from 10 am–1 pm.



Essays

Practices in Integral Yoga

by Larry Seidlitz

Introduction

One of the most common complaints about the Integral Yoga is that there is no clear set of practices to follow. Sri Aurobindo's main text on the Yoga, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, focuses more on the principles underlying the Yoga than on specific practices or techniques. While some concrete practices are suggested, these are scattered among its complex explanations of spiritual psychology and philosophy. Because the path of Integral Yoga differs for different people, and even differs for the same person at different stages in his or her development, *The Synthesis of Yoga* focuses on the general principles which can be expressed in different forms. To some extent, this relative lack of description of specific practices is made up for in Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga*, the collection of his correspondence with various disciples. Here we can find more specific guidance, but the collected letters run to more than 1700 pages, and pertain to many different subjects as well. The Mother also has provided guidance in practicing the yoga in her talks and writings, however, these also tend to be scattered among the thousands of pages of her collected works on various issues. While it would be inconsistent with the Integral Yoga to prescribe a specific set of practices that are applicable to everyone following the path, it may be useful to provide a relatively simple set of practices that people, especially beginners, may like to use or choose from according to their possibilities and preferences. Even experienced practitioners may benefit from reviewing and reinvigorating their practices with these guidelines. That is the aim and aspiration of this paper.



Larry at his office in the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry. (Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz)

Another reason why laying out a set of practices may be useful is that this Yoga which aims at the transformation of our human nature is extremely difficult, and confusion about how to proceed on the path may compound the difficulty. Human nature provides great resistance to its change and transformation, and behind this resistance are powerful cosmic forces antagonistic to the aims of the Yoga. Especially strong and relevant here is the pure inertia inherent in the physical consciousness that resists any and all efforts toward spiritual growth and change. A strong, concentrated effort and discipline is needed to break this resistance and to set our feet firmly on the path and moving, however gradually, towards its high aims.

Thus, it is important to develop a regular, concentrated practice, in whatever form is suitable to the person and circumstances. This will help ensure that the aim and practice of the Yoga may be kept in view, and that a steady progress on its long process of transformation may be made. It is sufficient if the beginning steps are small, if they can also be made regular and persistent. Even small steps will gradually increase the focus and energy available to make bigger steps and lead to an increase in the frequency and intensity of our Yogic practice. Because interruptions in practice may nevertheless occur, despite our best efforts to avoid them, it is important not to get discouraged, but simply

to try to get back into the rhythm of concentrated practice as soon as possible.

Meditation and concentration

A simple but effective starting point is to clear out a place and set aside a time for concentrated sadhana. We should create a space in our home where we can sit quietly to concentrate on our spiritual practice. This does not need to be a large space, perhaps simply the corner of a room where we can sit quietly on a cushion or chair with a small table nearby. If you feel comfortable with it, place a photo of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother there. If you like, prepare a place to burn incense or light a candle. It is preferable to keep the place set up at all times, so we can go there to meditate whenever we feel moved to, but it is sufficient if we can utilize the place at a certain time or times specifically set aside for concentration.

Preferably, that would be everyday, but this depends on our inner condition and predilection for concentration. Even just once or twice a week may be sufficient as a starting point. Whatever frequency we choose, we should try never to miss. If we must miss, we should make up the time as soon as possible afterwards. It is best to choose a particular time of the day or night for the concentration, but if we have difficulty conforming to an exact time, we should try to go at *approximately* the same time. This can be at whatever time seems most convenient and appropriate. There is a tradition in yoga that very early morning is the best time for meditation and concentration, but it is perhaps more important that it is done at a time that is convenient and we are less likely to miss. This punctuality, once it gets established, is helpful to our practice because our physical nature, once it gets into a routine, likes to stay with the routine.

During this period of time aside, we can engage in one or more types of activities, such as reading spiritual books, prayer and devotion, repetition of a mantra, meditation, and concentration. The amount of time set aside can vary depending on our inner condition and predilec-



tion, but I suggest a minimum of 15 minutes, and preferably 30 minutes to an hour. The time can be gradually increased when we feel moved to do so, and it will not hurt to spend longer than the usual time if we feel like it. While 30 minutes may seem quite long for meditation or concentration for someone not accustomed to it, I suggest using the first part of the time for reading spiritual books. Reading any of the books by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother helps to put the consciousness into contact with their spiritual Presence, and this is one of the primary aims of our spiritual practice. We can choose any of the books that we are drawn to and read a little—for example, for 15 minutes—at the beginning of each period of concentration *with the aspiration to come into closer touch with their consciousness*. After reading, our consciousness will be better prepared for meditation or concentration.

There are quite a number of different ways of meditating and concentrating, and we can choose whichever we feel most inclined to at the time. One way is to simply pray, to quite simply and sincerely inwardly talk to Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, to the inner Divine, or to our highest Self, as we feel inclined to. We can ask for their protection and help, whether generally or for more specific aims. It is especially valuable to ask for their guidance and assistance in aims related to our spiritual development. Just as reading puts our consciousness into relation with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's spiritual Presence, prayer does the same, perhaps in an even more intimate way.

In addition to this more personal and spontaneous method of prayer, there are also a number of specific prayers and mantras that have been given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that we can say or repeat. Several of the most popular ones, which have been repeated countless times by many disciples and imbued with their aspirations, are as follows:

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mira
Open my mind, my heart, my life,
To your light, your love, your power,
In all things may I see the Divine.

Make of us the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born against the past that seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we be ready to receive them.

Om namo bhagavatè (Om, an invocation to the Lord; *namo*, I bow to or express my obeisance to; *bhagavatè*, the Supreme Lord).

Sri Aurobindo Saranam (Sri Aurobindo is my refuge).

Om Anandamayi Chaitanyamayi Satyamayi Parame (Om, Mother of Bliss, Mother of Consciousness, Mother of Truth, the Supreme).

Ma Ma Ma ... (*Ma* is Sanskrit for the Mother).

Om Om Om ... (*Om* is said to be the original sound, which is expressive of the Divine Reality).

When our mind is relatively more active, repeating a mantra is often easier than trying to quiet and control the restless thoughts. The mind then becomes concentrated on a simple activity, and the random thoughts quiet down naturally. Focusing the mind on such an activity is an easier way to the quiet the mind than struggling with it to stop thinking. Moreover, the use of a mantra has the advantage that both its significance and vibrations are expressive of the Divine, and thus it helps to orient our consciousness towards the Divine.

It should also be added that the repetition of a mantra is a good way to progressively expand the practice of yoga into the normal activities of life. There are often moments during the day when the mind is free to concentrate on a mantra while physically we are doing some simple, routine activity—for example, when walking some distance, when driving, when waiting in line, when exercising, when cooking, when cleaning the house. These times can be 'won back for the Divine' simply by us-

ing them to repeat a mantra. It may be further mentioned that repeating a mantra constantly—particularly a short, simple one such as '*ma, ma, ma, ...*'—throughout the day during one's normal activities, has been advocated as a simple and powerful approach to the sadhana of the Integral Yoga. The rationale is that always repeating the Mother's name makes her constant Presence with us conscious and therefore effective. The Mother herself for a time repeated a mantra constantly during her later years, and spoke about its power and effectiveness.

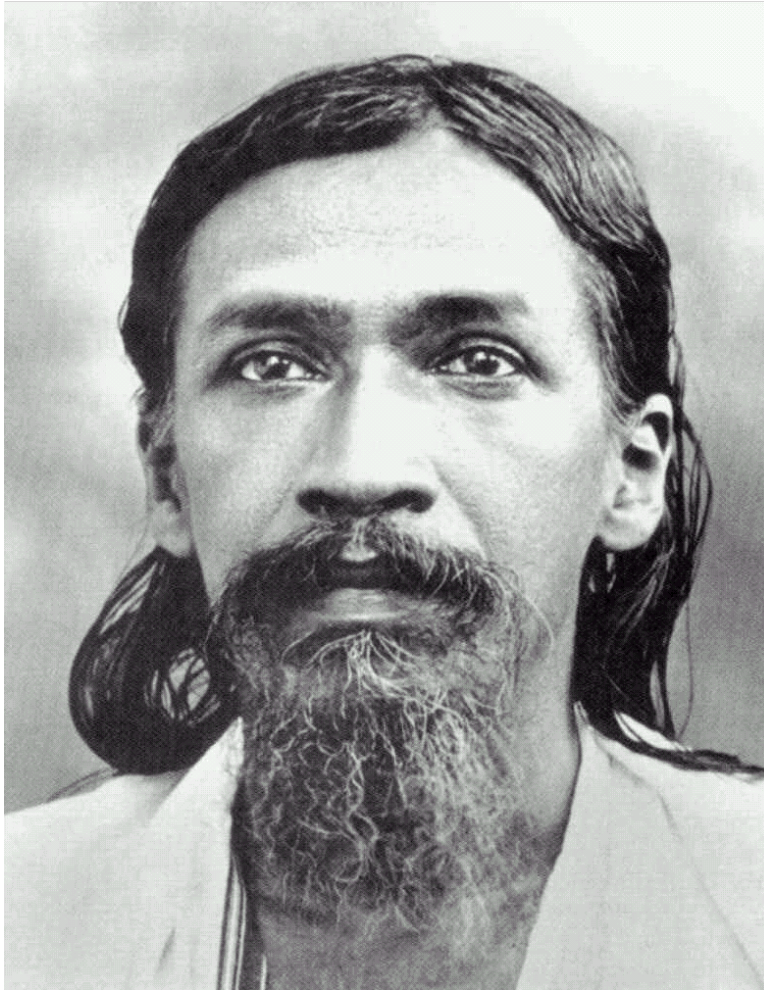
During the period set aside for concentrated practice, another form that this can take is simply thinking about, or contemplating a particular subject or topic related to the yoga. For example, at the start of the day, we can contemplate our planned activities, and consider how they may be done in a way to further our spiritual growth—for example, by making an offering of them to the Divine rather than thinking of personal reward, and by doing them as harmoniously and perfectly as possible, without ego or selfishness. At the end of the day, we can contemplate the activities we have done during the day and how well they conformed to our spiritual ideals, and where and how they fell short. We can consider what were the factors that may have led us away from acting up to our highest standards, and how that might be prevented in the future. This method can be a powerful help in changing the nature. Another approach to contemplation, which Sri Aurobindo once suggested, is to meditate on the idea of "God in all, all in God, and all as God" (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 722), because it is the highest idea that embraces all other truths. In this form of meditation, then, we allow the mind to think about the particular idea that is the subject of the meditation.

A different method of concentration is to find the witness poise of consciousness that silently observes our own thoughts occur but does not become involved in them. That is, it does not lose its poise and forget itself and become identified with the thought activity. We can start by quietly listening to all the sounds around, even



our own breath. As the quietness deepens, we may begin to hear our thoughts. If we can find in ourselves this poise of the consciousness and take our station there, observing our thoughts but not initiating them, it can be very useful to practice this witnessing of the thought activity. This poise of the mind is called the mental purusha, and if we learn to station our consciousness in it, we can begin to open up to the universal purusha, the Self, the silent consciousness which similarly stands back from and observes the universal movement of nature, prakriti, but is uninvolved in its movement. This latter experience, once it becomes constant, is one of the fundamental realizations of the Integral Yoga, and is an important step towards mastery and transformation of the nature. Similarly, identifying with the mental purusha and observing our thought activity is a helpful step towards gaining control over our thoughts. By standing back from the thoughts, the thought activity tends to quiet down automatically. By quietly exerting the will for the thoughts to cease from this poise of the consciousness, the thoughts tend to do so readily.

Another method that has been suggested is to concentrate the consciousness at the place of the heart center at the middle of the chest. This is the seat of the psychic being and its consciousness, the soul personality. Its character is more of intuitive feeling than mental thought. One method of concentration at this place is to feel our aspiration to the Divine rising from this point in the chest upwards as in a flame. This may be felt as a yearning, an intense will, or as an ardent self-giving to unite with the Divine above. It may also be



Sri Aurobindo, circa 1915. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

felt as a pure love and surrender of ourselves into the hands of the Divine. It may also be felt as a rising of deep gratitude to the Divine for his presence and action in our life. All of these feelings are characteristic of the psychic being, and an important aim of the Integral Yoga is to bring out these psychic feelings and make them dominant in the consciousness. It is also possible to accompany these movements of the psychic consciousness with the repetition of a mantra, in which case it should be felt as being repeated by the consciousness in the heart rather than in the head.

We can choose any of these methods for concentration as we feel moved to at the time. The two methods mentioned last—that of standing back from the

thought activity in the mental purusha, and that of centering the consciousness in the heart center and its aspiration towards the Divine—are two of the most powerful and direct methods for attaining two primary realizations of the Integral Yoga, that of the Self above, and that of the psychic being, respectively. Both realizations are necessary in the Yoga, and it is useful to keep them in mind as important objectives in our spiritual practice.

Organization and purification of the physical life

Of course, the Integral Yoga is not something to be practiced 30 or 60 minutes during a day or a week; the aim must be to make it continuous throughout the day and night, even during sleep. But we should recognize that at the beginning it is

not continuous. So it is necessary to build inroads into our daily life and bring the sadhana there. Generally, the ordinary life is made up largely of various physical tasks and concerns. The aim in this yoga is not to renounce the physical life, but to bring the spirit of sadhana into all its activities.

One way to do this is to develop a new sense of order and care with respect to our physical surroundings. We can begin by organizing and cleaning the physical environment in which we live. If we wish to bring the Divine Presence into ourselves and into our homes, then we should make and keep the temple clean. So a good place to start is to clean our own home, and this means not simply a superficial cleaning but a thorough and meticulous one done



in the spirit of making it fit for the Divine. Once we accomplish this, we will surely feel a greater light and harmony surrounding us, and we may take it as our duty to maintain this order and spiritual atmosphere. Similarly, we should keep our bodies and clothes clean and neat. After all, we are attempting to live a divine life.

Beyond this, we must bring a growing sense of recognition of the Divine in our care and treatment of physical things. Material things are not to be treated roughly, disdainfully, selfishly, unconsciously, as if they had no intrinsic value apart from what they give to us. We must begin to view each thing as a form of the Divine, with its own unique place and function in the economy of the universe, and treat it with respect. This is not to say that all things must be treated in exactly the same way as if there were no differences among them, but it does mean that we should begin to look at things more deeply, not simply for what they can provide to us, but for what they are in themselves. We tend to think of material objects as if they had no consciousness and therefore a very limited value. But we must begin to see and feel that the Divine is behind and in *all* things; that each thing is a front or face of the Divine, and that the full Divine is consciously behind and in it. This is the yogic way of looking at nature and at the world, and it can bring with it a new appreciation and a growing delight in all of our contacts.

Practically this means that we should treat all material things carefully and respectfully, as forms of the Divine. Moreover, each thing has its place and function, and as each of us is the guardian or trustee of various material things, it is our duty to see that they are kept clean, in order, in their places, and used for their specific purposes. At a certain time, like all things, particular things may have outlived their usefulness, and may need to be discarded. Or certain things—for example, debris, dirt, or insects—may accumulate where they do not belong and should be removed or destroyed. Common sense should prevail. At the same time, such practical necessities need not interfere with our growing perception of the Pres-

ence behind and in all things.

Naturally, what has been said about the Divine Presence in material things applies also to living plants, animals, and human beings with whom we come into contact. And as these manifest a greater consciousness than material things, and are more sensitive to rough or inappropriate treatment, it is more incumbent upon us to treat them with care and respect. While it is not appropriate to treat every person or living thing the same, or to mistake the inner Divine Presence for outer consciousness and perfection, we should certainly have and maintain a respect and goodwill for all beings, whatever the apparent limitations or defects of their outer nature. We should recognize that they, like us, are evolving divine beings, traveling on the path to a divine efflorescence. Whereas like us they may be imperfect in the expression of their inner divine qualities, and may still be unconscious of the Divine within them, this does not in itself erase their inherent value or essential divinity. Instead of feeling either superior or inferior to others based on outer appearances or on superficial differences, we should feel ourselves as fellow beings on the long evolutionary path to the divine consciousness. With this attitude, we may more readily learn from others and they from us and all assist each other on the way to the Divine.

One of the necessities of physical life is eating. Since we embrace the physical life in this Yoga, we can utilize the act of eating to assist us in our progress. A cardinal aim of Yoga is to eliminate desire from our lives, because desire ties us down to the ordinary consciousness of the ego which perceives itself as a being separated from others and the world, a consciousness which stands in the way of the realization of our true divine being. Eating provides a daily exercise in overcoming desire. Certainly, people differ in the extent to which they eat out of desire—for some, life revolves around the desire for food, for others, it is hardly a noticeable concern. But whatever its relative importance in our life, eating should be done as an activity aimed at maintaining the body, not for the satisfaction of desire or the pleasurable

sensation of good taste. Therefore, food should be taken in the right amount and of the right type for the health of the body; it should not be taken solely out of consideration for taste or the pleasure of eating. While it is not forbidden to enjoy the taste of food, or to prepare food that is tasty, this should not be a dominant concern. On the other side, while it is important to eat healthy foods, it is not necessary to become so preoccupied with the nutritional value of food that it takes a central concern in our life. Generally, eating should take a relatively minor importance in the overall life; we should concentrate on the Divine and on our sadhana and spiritual growth, not on food. A useful exercise to instill this attitude is to take a few seconds before eating to consciously offer our food to the Divine, with a concentration on the idea that the energy in the food is a form of the divine force ingested to support the maintenance and growth of the divine consciousness in our lives.

In addition to eating, another important activity for the maintenance and fitness of the body is exercise. Because the Integral Yoga aims at the perfection and transformation of the life and body as well as of the development of the higher spiritual consciousness, exercise takes on a special importance. The body is naturally the base of the physical consciousness, and the physical consciousness is especially subject to *tamas*, the principle of inertia. Therefore, physical exercise is a direct way to counteract the tendency towards inertia in the consciousness, and can be a substantial help to sadhana. The specific form that our exercise takes is less important than its regularity. A daily walk, a weekly run, regular cycling, regular sports activities such as tennis or basketball, practice of martial arts or hatha yoga, exercises such as stretching, push-ups and sit-ups, weight lifting, gymnastics, track and field events, and other activities are all ways to keep the body strong and fit. Naturally, more intensive and frequent exercises may have a greater impact on the body, but at the same time we should keep physical exercise in balance with other activities and priorities of life. Like eating, it should



be done moderately for the maintenance of the body, not simply for the pleasure of the activity. Like with eating, it is useful to instill this attitude by making a conscious offering of the activity each time before starting.

Because most of us spend about a third of our lives sleeping, it is very helpful to utilize this time for sadhana. According to yogic knowledge, the inner consciousness leaves the body during sleep and moves in the inner planes of the consciousness. Normally upon waking, all memory of these activities of the inner consciousness is erased, though they may nevertheless exert an influence upon our waking state. If we gain a better control of where our consciousness goes during our sleep, into which of the lower or higher worlds, and what it does there, it is helpful for our inner progress. Naturally, it is preferable for sadhana if the inner

consciousness goes into the higher levels of consciousness during sleep rather than sinking down into the subconscious or roaming through the lower vital consciousness.

As an aid in this, the Mother has suggested systematically relaxing all the muscles and nerves in our body before going to sleep. Similarly, we should relax and quiet the mind's thought activity. She has recommended repeating a mantra before going to sleep, which is usually helpful in quieting the mind. While repeating the mantra, she advises to concentrate in an offering of our whole being to the Divine. From this state, we may pass into a kind of trance, and from that, into sleep. Regardless of whether we go into a trance, she suggests that this is the most favorable way to enter into sleep from the yogic point of view, and facilitates our passage into the higher planes of consciousness during sleep.

I would like to add here a related practice that is a useful preparation for sleep:

reading *Savitri* for a short time. Reading *Savitri* is very much like repeating a mantra, and has a similar effect upon the consciousness. There is also something special about reading it aloud to recommend it as a practice. By reading just three pages consistently night after night, we not only sleep better, but deepen our understanding of the Yoga, and deepen our inner connection with the Divine. The previously mentioned practice of relaxing the body and quieting the mind can usefully be preceded by this practice of reading *Savitri*.

Upon awakening, the connection with the inner consciousness is usually broken as we abruptly enter into the waking state. Therefore, to retain this connection and as

The Mother has recommended repeating a mantra before going to sleep, which is usually helpful in quieting the mind. While repeating the mantra, she advises to concentrate in an offering of our whole being to the Divine.

a help in remembering our inner activities during the night, the Mother recommends remaining very still, quietly recalling the consciousness which went out. She suggests gently pulling at the consciousness which has gone out, without haste, in a state of attention and concentration. Then the last dream may gradually come back into our awareness, and we then gradually try to recover its memory as completely as possible. Once that dream is recalled, we can then continue to slowly pull the previous dream into awareness. The dreams may come first as a vague impression, but if we persist, an indistinct memory, or a fragmentary memory may come, and eventually, a more distinct memory.

Another approach that may be helpful for remembering dreams is to make a strong mental formation before going to sleep to wake up after a dream, with the intention to write it down at that time. While writing down the dream, the details tend to rise in the memory. Using this method, it is possible to progress from rarely remem-

bering a dream to remembering several dreams per night. Over time, we are likely to experience and remember many interesting, symbolic dreams, which give new insights into our nightly inner activities as well as our waking life.

Work

Dedicated work is a central aspect of the Integral Yoga. In Yoga, work is not to be done out of the usual motives—to receive monetary recompense and enjoy the pleasures it affords, to obtain power or position over others, for the pride it gives or to appear respectable or attractive to others, or even for the simple pleasure or joy we get from doing the work. Naturally, some or all of these factors may be there in the early stages of yogic practice, but they are to be gradually replaced by an attitude of doing the work as perfectly as

possible as an offering to the Divine for the Divine's purpose and not for our own personal benefit. This occurs mainly as a gradual, inner change in attitude and consciousness, but these changes should have corollaries in the outer expression of the work too. For example, the usual motives should become less prominent in the choice of work. The choice should be determined more by an inner predilection or guidance rather than outer rewards. Here, our inner nature, qualities, abilities, tendencies may be helpful indicators. However, unless or until there is some reasonably clear inner indication that changing our type of work is required, it may be more useful in the beginning to focus on changing how we approach and do the work rather than changing the type of work itself.

A relatively simple discipline to help effect the change in attitude required is to make a conscious offering of the work each time we begin and complete it. This in itself may be difficult to get established as



a regular practice at first, but once it does get established it becomes relatively easier to maintain it and increase its frequency. This discipline is useful because it gets the consciousness concentrated in the true attitude towards our work and activities, however briefly, whenever they are performed. It is relatively more difficult to maintain this conscious awareness of offering while doing the work itself, because the consciousness naturally gets concentrated on the work and its execution. This is alright, and even to remember and think of the Divine with the outer consciousness during the work itself may interfere with its execution and diminish its quality. A continuous memory and concentration on the Divine during the work activity can gradually develop, but it generally does so as a result of a split in the consciousness between an

inner part of the consciousness that maintains a conscious contact and memory of the Divine, and an outer part of the consciousness that is concentrated on and engaged in the work. This division between the developing inner consciousness in contact with the Divine and the outer consciousness focused on outer activity grows gradually with the overall sadhana, but it is directly supported by the repeated offering and dedication before and after the work is done.

The Mother once suggested a useful and powerful practice to heal the division between the inner consciousness focused on the Divine and all the activities of outer life. It consists essentially in imagining that she is there with us as we carry out our daily activities. For example, starting from the morning when we get out of bed and brush our teeth, we should imagine she is there with us as we brush. If we drive to work, we can imagine she is there with us as we drive. Whether we imagine her physical presence or her spiritual presence does not essentially matter. This practice



The Mother with her gracious smile. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

can be especially useful when we are faced with a difficulty or a decision to make. We should try to do nothing that we would not do in front of the Mother. This imagined sense of the Mother being always with us reflects a fundamental truth, for indeed the Divine is always present.

Another important way to bring the spirit of sadhana into our work and activities is through the development of organization, harmony, peace, and quiet concentration in all our activities. Just as cleanliness and order should be established in our home, it should be established in our physical work environment and activities. Our work tools, whether they be books and papers or wrenches and screw drivers, should be kept in order. Our relations with our superiors and subordinates should also be kept harmonious and peaceful. They should be viewed as superiors or subordinates only in the sense of their functional organizational relationship for the purposes of carrying out the work as efficiently as possible, not in the sense of superiority or inferiority in essential worth

or value. Like other persons, they should be treated as different expressions of the Divine having an underlying essential oneness with ourselves and with the Divine; therefore with respect and care. However, for the purposes of the work, we should relate to our supervisors and subordinates according to our responsibilities. Sometimes this may mean carrying out directions from our superiors that we disagree with for the sake of maintaining order and harmony in the work organization. Similarly, it may mean being insistent or at times even severe with subordinates, though anger should be avoided and respect should be maintained. Tact, understanding, and interpersonal skill should be the hallmarks in our dealings with both our superiors and subordinates. More generally, there should be developed a spirit of cooperation, harmony,

and good will in relationships with co-workers. We should view the work enterprise with its various organizational structures and interpersonal relationships as a particular collective embodiment of the divine working towards a particular divine purpose, in which we play our part in the whole as best as we can. Naturally, dispersion in useless chatter or frivolous activity detracts from serious and quality work and concentrated sadhana. We should work in a quiet and concentrated way, whatever the behavior of others. We should not be overly concerned with the misbehavior of others, or try to coerce others to behave as we would like them to, unless it is our specific responsibility to do so. Our own example will be a more powerful instrument for influencing others than our pleadings or complaints.

Whereas the spirit of sadhana in work that has been described can be brought into whatever work we do, a specialized work done in offering for the growth and establishment of the collective Yoga can be a useful element of our karma yoga. I am



referring here especially to voluntary service towards one or more of the various collective activities and enterprises associated with the Integral Yoga or aligned with its aims. These include the various Ashrams, centers, study groups, businesses, and other organizations that aim to express in outward form the spirit of the Yoga and the Divine. This type of volunteer work has several advantages. One is that if pursued without regard for monetary recompense, it provides a surer sign that this particular motive is not driving the activity. Monetary donations to such organizations represent further progress in this direction. Second, it may more directly assist in the establishment of Yoga and its spirit in the collective consciousness of humanity. A third advantage is that it may put us into contact with other individuals consciously pursuing the Integral Yoga, from whom we may learn. A fourth advantage is that by being a part of a collective carrying out the spirit and work of the Yoga, we enter into a flow of the collective divine energy and activity and make ourselves an instrument in its larger work and aims. Of course, the main motive of such work should be our simple self-offering to the Divine.

Living within

In previous sections I have discussed how to introduce yogic practice into many of the activities of daily life. In this section I will discuss various aspects and ways of cultivating the general yogic poise of living within. In most people, the consciousness is projected outwards towards the world and its many varied activities, and it often becomes dispersed and fragmented as it confronts and deals with an unending stream of outer impacts. In Yoga, the consciousness must gradually relinquish this primarily outgoing movement and become concentrated and centered within, and fo-

cused on the Divine. Whereas a complete withdrawal from the world and its activities is as a rule prohibited in the Integral Yoga, a withdrawal from various outer activities and contacts that are unnecessary and tend to disperse the conscious and deflect it from its inner focus is often advisable. The ultimate aim is to be permanently centered in the inner consciousness in union with the Divine while also engaging in outer activities, but in the initial stages of Yoga, it is important to concentrate on establishing this inner poise from which we can act outwardly in the true way. Therefore, it is often useful to examine our outer activities and their effects on our consciousness, and withdraw ourselves from those which are unnecessary and harmful.

The Mother once suggested a useful and powerful practice to heal the division between the inner consciousness focused on the Divine and all the activities of outer life. It consists essentially in imagining that she is there with us as we carry out our daily activities.

For example, parties or even social interactions with particular individuals that tend to lower and disperse the consciousness can often be usefully avoided. Other ways in which the consciousness may tend to get exteriorized and fragmented are through watching television, playing video games, and surfing the world wide web. Social interactions and recreational outlets can often be usefully reduced, and when needed, they can take different forms more conducive to Yoga. In this connection it may be noted that deeply listening to some forms of music, especially classical forms and certain 'new age' music, can be a good way to go deeper within into the inner consciousness. Similarly, engaging in other creative arts such as writing prose or poetry, making handicrafts, drawing, painting, and sculpture, are also productive ways to use our free time to help awaken the inner consciousness.

A primary aim in the Yoga is to develop equality, more commonly referred to as

equanimity, with regard to the various impacts and difficulties of life. The development of this attitude and inner poise is closely intertwined with the notion of living within. It is not possible to live within centered in the inner consciousness if we are constantly being thrown off balance by the shocks of life or upset whenever our personal preferences or vital desires do not pan out. Equality means to keep our inner center and poise under all conditions. We should not lose it in excited and eager grasping at pleasure, nor in disturbance by unpleasant circumstances or events. It can and must be developed to the extent that we are both inwardly and outwardly unshaken by any outward occurrences, however wonderful or adverse

they may seem. It does not mean, however, that we should not strive for what is right, or that failure and falsity are as good as success and truth. It does not mean that we should dull our senses to unpleas-

ant things, or that we should not discriminate between things. What it does mean is that we should not become mentally or vital upset by things that happen, that we should remain centered within and deal with outward circumstances, not out of desire or repulsion, anger or fear, but out of inner quietude, clear perception, and inner strength.

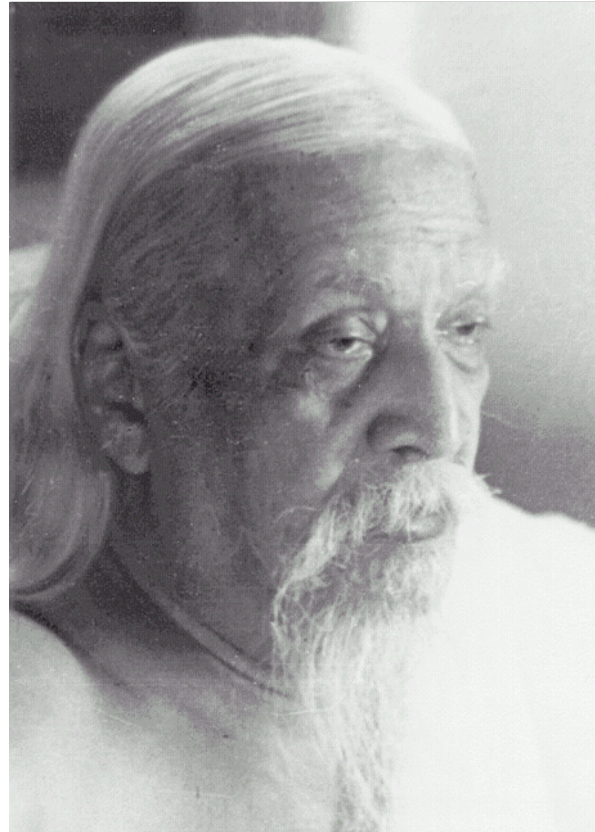
Naturally, an area in which this inner poise of equality gets most tested, and thus provides the amplest opportunity to develop it, is in our interpersonal contacts with others. In this context, equality means especially not to become upset, angry, disappointed, jealous, envious, fearful, or anxious by what other people may say or do. Instead, we should look at these things calmly and squarely, "without distortions created by personal feeling, and try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress



one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements,—anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest,—not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to speak and act in the rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit.” (Letters on Yoga, pp. 662) Sri Aurobindo explains that it is not easy to achieve this poise and ability in any perfect measure, but that we should always try to establish and strengthen it.

Another way in which our equality is tested is through the various inner and outer difficulties we face in life and in sadhana. We should learn to remain quietly unmoved in the face of adverse events that happen, whether in the world at large, to those we are close to, or to ourselves. Such events can be taken as tests of our equality, and as opportunities to strengthen and extend it. We may have to live or work in circumstances which appear adverse, and which may seem to make sadhana and the development of inner peace and quietude impossible. Ultimately, however, inner peace and an inner union with the Divine are not dependent on outward conditions. Indeed, by remaining concentrated within in communion with the Divine, it is possible to become inwardly detached from and unaffected by even severe pain and the most deplorable conditions. Again, this does not mean that we must passively accept adverse conditions or events, that we should not try to change them for the better or to counteract them in appropriate ways. Indeed, sometimes this may be exactly what such things are “trying to tell us,” but this can be done more effectively if we act in a calm and deliberate manner, rather than as an emotional reaction to the circumstances.

What has been said for outer events and circumstances also pertains to inner events and circumstances. It is not helpful



Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobind Ashram)

to become depressed or discouraged by even persistent mistakes, wrong movements, or what may appear as a lack of progress. Feelings of guilt, disgust, or self-directed anger only disturb the sadhana more. The inner change required in the Integral Yoga is extensive and difficult; it requires great patience and perseverance. The resistances of our nature to change, and the difficulties in changing, must be dealt with very coolly, with a clear perceptiveness and unruffled persistence that is neither shaken by temporary failures nor elated by momentary successes.

Sri Aurobindo has discussed three different approaches towards developing this inner equality: endurance, indifference, and submission. We can develop and extend our ability to endure the impacts of the world, whether these assaults are mental and aimed against our cherished ideas and ideals, emotional and aimed against our feelings, vital and stimulating our instinctual reactions, or physical and affecting our sense of comfort. This

way reposes on the will, and we train this capacity by consciously confronting and even welcoming adverse impacts, gradually increasing our capacity to bear them without reacting.

The second approach reposes on the intellect—we cultivate an intellectual indifference to the impacts of things, an attitude that refuses to be caught in the attractions or repulsions of the senses or the dualities of the outer mind and nature. We draw back from the petty joys and troubles of life and take less and less interest in them, as if they were children’s games. We see that life is full of transient comings and goings, and learn to take interest instead in the deeper, abiding truth of the spirit. In this way, we detach ourselves more and more from the petty circumstances and events of the outer life.

The third approach leans on the emotional being, and has relations with the development of devotion. Here we develop a resignation to circumstances founded on a submission to the will of the Divine. We learn to accept adversities as an imposition of the Divine for the Divine’s own purposes, whether for its universal will, or for our own personal growth. Indeed, often we find that we grow more through adversity than good fortune. By understanding and taking this viewpoint, we can learn to accept even the severest blows of life as coming from the Divine, as his hammer and chisel shaping our nature into a fit instrument and form for his habitation and use. Sri Aurobindo explains that the cultivation of any or all these approaches towards equality helps us to become conscious of a separation between the inner being which quietly bears, disengages from, or accepts the impacts of the world, and an outer part in which the customary reactions continue for a time to occur, but gradually lose their force and hold, and begin to reflect the poise of the inner being.

This development of equality to the impacts of the world and its difficulties



supports the development of the inner witness consciousness which was one of the central objects of the discipline of concentration discussed earlier. Deep within, there is a part of us which is separate from our outer nature and unaffected by it. It is one of the principle aims of the Integral Yoga to take our poise in this inner purusha, and it is from that poise that we can hope not only to remain unaffected by the adversities of life, but to gradually change and transform the outer nature itself so that it shall reflect the inner peace and harmony of the Divine. Our periods of concentration can focus on the cultivation and extension of this inner purusha consciousness, while all the adverse circumstances of our life can be used to further strengthen it so that we may not get dislodged from it under even the most extreme conditions. Just as in the periods of concentration, prayer or mantra can be useful to concentrate and quiet the consciousness, so too in the midst of difficulties these methods may be useful adjuncts. In successfully dealing with adversity, inner peace and quietness, and a quiet leaning on or an ardent call for the support of the Divine are the most effective remedies.

Faith, openness, and receptivity

In the preceding sections, I have focused primarily on practical things that we can do to establish and develop a regular discipline of sadhana. But it would be misleading to suggest that by personal effort alone we can achieve the far-reaching aims of the Integral Yoga. What actually is required is a combination of personal effort and the Grace and Action of the Divine. The divine power, referred to in this Yoga as the Mother, is the real power in the Yoga and effects the transformation of the consciousness that the Yoga envisions. Our personal effort is required in part because the Divine Power works through it, and in part because the Divine asks for our consent to our own change. A sustained and intense personal effort is the sign of our consent and call to the Divine to effect this spiritual change and divinization of our consciousness and life. But one of the

most effective ‘tricks’ of the Yoga is to call on the Divine to help or to itself effect the necessary growth and change in our nature, rather than relying solely on our own efforts.

The effective use of this ‘trick,’ however, presupposes several conditions that must be laid as a foundation. First and foremost, there must be faith in the Divine and in the divine power. This faith comes essentially from a contact with our soul or psychic being, and is not dependent on outward signs or proofs. It may start with a “suspension of disbelief,” that is, an openness to the possibility that the Divine exists, is concerned with our personal life and development, and is able and ready to act in and on us. This openness and beginning of faith may be sufficient to bring with it some experience of the Divine’s presence, some feeling of its peace, light, force, or delight which can further nurture the faith. It can then be further cultivated through prayer, aspiration, a persistent inner calling on the Divine for spiritual guidance and help.

Faith can also be supported by a growing intellectual or intuitive understanding of the spiritual principles underlying the Yoga, for example, of the idea that this world and that we ourselves are manifestations or partial expressions of the one Divine that is behind all things and who unites all in its infinite existence and consciousness. This principle cannot be proven scientifically, but it can be supported by compelling rational arguments which Sri Aurobindo and many others have provided us. Faith may also be supported by reading or listening to the accounts of those who have received help and support from the Divine in their life and spiritual practice. Actually, all of our efforts to come into inner contact with the Divine can help in the development of faith, as well as in the development of direct inner experience of the Divine, which can further strengthen and confirm our faith.

Together with faith is the need to become open and receptive to the divine power when it intervenes. This openness means to keep the consciousness turned towards the Divine, free from other move-

ments, and expecting and able to receive what may come from the Divine. Confidence and trust in the Divine, an inner leaning on the Divine, helps to keep our consciousness open and receptive. Also needed is plasticity in the consciousness, a flexibility and subtlety that can feel or perceive the action of the divine power when it comes, and distinguish its action from mental or vital movements. In contrast, rigidity in our mental viewpoints, in a skeptical or pessimistic outlook on our spiritual possibilities, can interfere with the more potent, swift, and incalculable action of the Grace. A subtlety of perception, awake to the subtle promptings of our soul, to inner indications of the thing to be done or not to be done, to sensations of a luminous peace, love, or protection, or to inner warnings associated with unease or discomfort in certain situations, may develop as adjuncts to this growing inner opening and receptivity to the divine power, and are useful signs of their presence and development.

Progress in the Yoga follows a winding and obscured path, difficult to understand, perceive, or predict, because it moves through the twists and turns of the ignorant lower nature towards the light and vastness of the Divine. While the lower nature is still active and untransformed, it is difficult to perceive how and to what degree we are progressing. Change may be occurring in the inner parts of our nature which are unknown to the outer parts with which we identify, and may manifest outwardly only later, or rarely at particular moments, or in diluted or distorted ways. Therefore, it is necessary to persistently move forward on the path with faith—in the Divine’s wisdom, love, and power—in spite of all delays, detours, or appearances of obstruction or incapacity. We must learn to always depend on the Divine, calling on its help and intervention. The knowledge and power of the Divine are omniscient and omnipotent, and if we resolutely put ourselves in its hands, surrender to its will and action, we can be sure of our successful navigation through all the trials and difficulties of the Yoga, to the supreme deliverance and transformation.



Ahimsa—The virtue of nonviolence

by Santosh Krinsky

This article was written with the intention of introducing students and practitioners of Patanjali's Yoga to the inner dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

In the practice of yoga, one of the concepts taught as a preliminary practice is known as *ahimsa*, generally translated as nonviolence, although sometimes referred to as harmlessness. This concept is intended to purify the seeker to prepare for spiritual realizations that are not achievable if the psychological “platform” of consciousness is too disturbed. The practice of violence is simply too disrupting and thereby conflicts with a spiritual focus.

It is an interesting exercise in self-awareness when one begins to examine the various impulses to action in the course of daily life to seek out the actual instances and roots of violence. Eventually the seeker begins to understand that the question is not as simple or straightforward as expected, and that at subtle levels of consciousness, violence takes many unexpected forms.

Physical violence involves altercations in which physical blows are exchanged with another. As with all types of violence, physical violence can be defensive or offensive in nature. Defensive violence is defined as warding off an attack on oneself or another. Offensive violence is defined as perpetrating an attack on another. In most cases, it is quite easy to distinguish defensive from offensive violence when it comes to physical altercations; and many yogis will advise that nonviolence is not the same as pacifism; thus reminding us that self-defense, and by extension, defense of those for whom one is responsible, is sometimes necessary in the world.

There is sometimes a subtle distinction to be made as to whether defensive violence against an attack is *really* defen-

sive. For instance, sometimes aggressive language or unfair tactics may be used to provoke someone into attacking, so that there appears to be a justification for the “defensive” violence. It is clear that governments recognize that defensive responses are more legitimate than offensive violence. There is a long history of aggressors either using trumped up acts of aggression to legitimize their going to war or provoking an attack through relatively secret actions behind the scenes. An example that comes to mind is the start of the invasion of Poland by Germany in World War II, an event sparked by an alleged Polish attack on the German border, which in fact was carried out by German provocateurs dressed in Polish army uniforms. Another example is the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which expanded US involvement in the Vietnam War. It was later found to have been entirely trumped up by the government of the USA. Similarly, the justification for a new doctrine of pre-emptive war put forth by the recent administration of George W. Bush to support the invasion of Iraq was an expansion of the concept of defense to attack a country on the basis that it might at some time in the future pose a threat to the USA, and that it had supported the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington DC by al Qaeda, a charge that was totally trumped up. The common thread in all these cases is the attempt to make aggression legitimate by making it appear to be defensive in nature.

On a personal level, we see things like race-baiting or the use of provocative, inflammatory language to stir people up, which then “justifies” a violent response. A march by the Ku Klux Klan through Skokie, Illinois was largely judged to be an act of provocation to incite violence, for example. This happens frequently in individual, interpersonal interactions where we see bullying or domination occurring one on one. The principle is the same whether it occurs at the individual, group, or societal level.

We see the interplay of subtle forces more clearly at the level of vital and emotional violence, where individuals create energetic situations that breed violence.

Sometimes this is through emotional calls intended to band together individuals against another person or group, or as a result of anger, fear, hatred, lust, and greed acting upon the consciousness and breeding an atmosphere filled with hostile energies. Individuals can easily be moved by the emotional power of a clan, tribe, group, or nation, particularly under the spell of a charismatic emotional leader, and thus we see that individuals can frequently be caught up in violence churned at the societal level.

At the mental level, violence is perpetrated through the development of ideas and plans that inherently manipulate situations for the sake of ideology, or that plan for control and mastery for the sake of gaining and holding power. Just about any ideology can be used to create circumstances leading either to overt or covert violence. For instance, covert violence could involve setting up economic circumstances by “stacking the deck” in an economic system so that a small plutocracy controls most of the wealth, exploiting through actual or virtual slavery most others in society. Such ideological violence can easily be seen wherever one finds a huge and inordinate disparity between the wealth in the hands of a small elite versus a large disenfranchised minority. Similarly, we find it where the decision-making power for the actions and goals of the society are set by a small minority and others are forced to comply with that direction even if it goes against their own individual or ideological directions. This can be seen in the case of religious fundamentalism and nationalistic or imperial fervor that creates an environment for pogroms, sectarian violence, or crusades to occur.

A more subtle view of violence can be even seen in the way we choose to organize our societies and our economic life on a macro level. For instance, the industrial, consumption-oriented society which developed in the USA and Western European countries has not only seized control of inordinate amounts of the world's resources (particularly energy resources, thereby limiting access for the vast populations in other parts of the world), but has also



created a serious change in the world climate through global warming and the effects of environmental pollution. One can argue that as long as it was unconscious there is not an issue of nonviolence. But once it becomes known and recognized, continued propagation of actions and systems that increase suffering and dislocations to other beings sharing the planet clearly becomes an act of violence and thus subject to review and modification as we strive towards harmlessness.

If we expand our view of harmlessness to include interactions with others, it is easy to understand that one of the biggest motivators of aggression is fear. Another motivation is a narrowly defined self interest. We thus hunt wolves to extinction because they exercise their normal instincts to eat in an ever-shrinking habitat. We wantonly spray pesticides to eliminate bees because we are uncomfortable with and afraid of them. We eliminate enormous areas of the rainforest, and the beings that depend on that rainforest, to satisfy our modern-day craving for a diet based on meat. The long-term impact on the environment, the food chain, and the balance of nature is totally ignored as we strike out in unreasoning fear with violent reaction.

So as to not mislead ourselves, we must realize that violence can be extremely subtle and that it includes acts that undermine the confidence and self-image of others or ourselves. The impact of such acts can be long-term suffering. This can be seen in the reactions of children to negative reinforcement in their education process; as well as in the way that many people in cultures around the world treat women by reinforcing the image of an artificially defined beauty or defining them as subservient sexual objects.

Violence also occurs at the level of thought and emotion which has real physiological impact, as well as sets up vibratory patterns which subtly influence those around us, including those at whom the violence of thought or emotion is being directed. Thus, simply refraining from an outward manifestation of the violence does not satisfy the concept of *ahimsa* because the practitioner of yoga, the yogi,

is interested in creating a psychological platform capable of sustaining development of consciousness. Thus, the psychological impact is every bit as important as the outward act.

As we recognize the violence that permeates our individual and collective existence, it then becomes essential to determine what can be done to make progress toward the goal of nonviolence or harmlessness.

The first step is self-examination and recognition of the triggers of violence within ourselves. The understanding of the deep roots of violence in all its forms within our actions and reactions is essential for any long-term process of integrating *ahimsa* into our psychological makeup and thus achieving one of the important bases of yogic practice.

The second step is to start where one is and begin to address these issues by systematically working to reduce the reactions of violence within ourselves and expanding the scope of these changes over time. The cultivation of inner peace and non-attachment is an essential step toward creating the right psychological atmosphere for *ahimsa*. It is important to understand that the psychological reaction of violence is to some degree “hard-wired” into the human psyche through long millennia of history and culture. To deal with its entrenchment in us, it is necessary to begin to act as the witness of the psychological responses within oneself and disentangle those things that are attempting to provoke our response of violence. We should also develop strategies of alternative responses to retrain and re-code our reactions. We must restrain the outward manifestations of violence, but this does not go far enough. Eventually, all the inner roots of the reaction need to be purified and redirected, and this is where the real work must actually take place.

The third step is to be able to develop such an unshakable peace that nothing can disturb or move one to violence in thought, word, or deed. This step is part of the consummation of the practice of yoga and contact with the yogi’s atmosphere.

The legends of lions laying down with lambs in the presence of a man of peace are apocryphal and speak to this realization.

It is one thing to acknowledge and adopt the need for *ahimsa*, the practice of nonviolence; it is quite another to actually accomplish the realization. It needs to be seen as a process that takes place over time and includes the realization that becoming angry with oneself for missteps along the way is not really useful. It is important to recognize the slips for what they are, part of the long, back-and-forth process of making progress in the yogic path, and not let them disturb the long-term vision or action. Concurrently with the inner realizations come the outer actions, since inner and outer are irrevocably tied to one another as a unity. Steps can be taken to begin to transform the way we educate children, for instance, by avoiding the use of corporal punishment and by helping them understand the options available rather than resorting to violence. On the societal and cultural level, it is important to inject the evolutionary perspective which acknowledges and considers alternative viewpoints and approaches, such as we see when different nations, religions, or cultures begin to work with mutual support, dialogue, and ecumenism rather than using warfare and domination as the standard for relationships. The extension of the concepts recognized internally in one’s own practice leads inevitably to creating an atmosphere of support, goodwill, and increasing harmony in our relationship to the societies in which we live.

Eventually, the concept of *ahimsa* leads to the dynamic realization of the absolute oneness of all life. We begin to recognize that violence directed towards another is violence directed towards oneself. We understand more deeply that the law of karma, the chain of cause and effect, implies that no energy or action is lost, but inevitably produces consequences. Thus, we find that *ahimsa*, one of the preliminary practices of yoga, can lead us right to the gates of the ultimate universal and transcendental realizations that are the consummation of yoga.



Transcending nature

by James Anderson

This article is a journey of discovering the body through means of the spirit. The author shares his efforts at self-healing through inner means: its trials, joys and strengths with all who are open-minded about such an approach. Reprinted from NAMAHA (Vol 16, issue 3) October, 2008.

*I am no more a vassal of the flesh,
A slave to Nature and her leaden
rule;
I am caught no more in the senses'
narrow mesh.
My soul unhorizoned widens to
measureless sight,
My body is God's happy living tool,
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.
— Sri Aurobindo*

Now and then I find myself submerged in cloud. The effect can be quite suffocating: it is like being bound into a tight shell. It cramps and limits the being. As I climb higher though, the haze starts to thin, but still it somewhat blurs my view. A new world of rapture is manifesting before my eyes but I am unable to see it. Occasionally, though, the cloud parts slightly and I perceive some hint of a new creation of unimaginable beauty.

Ahead of me stands a vast mountain range that I intend to traverse. I am not alone; there are others climbing too. Over the centuries, a few great ones have scaled these very peaks. Higher and higher these masters climbed but still, I am told, there were these wisps of cloud around. Perhaps that is why some accepted the inevitable, closed their eyes and detached themselves in blissful solitude from the world below. Man in general, however, is rarely able to rise above the smog. I feel that he largely accepts it as his lot and it has become for him a fact of life.

So what is this cloud? It is just an image of the nature which engulfs him, or to be more precise, the *prakriti* of mind, life



James Anderson in Pondicherry. (Photo courtesy James Anderson)

and matter. In its ignorance, it blurs his sight and separates him from the true consciousness. The lower nature imposes a gravitational force: it chains man to the soil. Indeed it has an important role in the divine play itself as it constantly reminds him that his work is still undone.

But nature can be transcended. We do not have to accept it; we can go beyond. We do not have to accept our present limitations; we can go through them. The process of yoga is, indeed, one of transcendence. And there is the sun after all. When it rises to its full glory, this sun of truth will eventually burn away the clouds. Our vision will become crystal clear and a clear path will eventually guide us down to the luminous world below. Man can at last step forward to his divine destiny.

Laws of nature

Nature has built a mighty edifice. To support this superstructure, she has constructed a myriad of laws. These laws, so immutable in appearance, are partly formulated to satisfy man's own image of littleness. They keep him within narrow limits. I believe that he has become accustomed to them and, to a certain extent, he takes them for granted. To question them is futile as layer upon layer of human knowledge bases itself upon them.

Perhaps I might also include certain medical knowledge in that category. From personal experience, I have found that sometimes its science seems altogether too ready to consign what it considers as 'lost causes' onto the scrapheap. At the bottom of this, I feel, lies an almost fatalistic awe of these so-called 'laws of nature.' They stand like a towering fortress and impede man's advance. The only way to reclaim our divine birthright is to exceed these boundaries, but most of us do not even conceive of that possibility. To humanity at large, these laws are simply unchangeable and absolute; there is nothing that can be done about them.

The law of physical decomposition, death, is possibly the most striking of them. But just how absolute is it? The Mother adamantly states that the 'forces of decomposition' can indeed be thwarted:

It is only the physical being which grows and decomposes. But this comes from its lack of plasticity and receptivity and by its very nature; it is not inevitable. Therefore there is room to think that at a given moment, as the physical consciousness itself progresses consciously and deliberately, well, to a certain extent and increasingly the body itself will be able, first to resist decay—which, obviously, must be the first movement—and then gradually begin to grow in inner perfection till it overcomes the forces of decomposition.¹

The Mother affirms that the laws of nature are not absolute. As she says, the universe manifests itself in a limitless array of combinations, an almost innumerable mixture of varying elements. So, "if the universe is new at each moment of eternity, we have to acknowledge that absolutely nothing is impossible . . ."² How can anything repeat itself, she asks, since no two combinations are alike? So to comply with these 'laws' only

cuts you off from the creative Power of the Spirit, it cuts you off from the



true Power of the Grace, for you can understand that if by your aspiration or your attitude you introduce a higher element, a new element—what we may now call a supramental element—into the existing combinations, you can suddenly change their nature, and all these so-called necessary and in-eluctable laws become absurdities.³

When I read this radical message, I was transfixed by a new world of possibilities. The words inspired me. The body is not necessarily condemned to degeneration and atrophy after all! By conceding such a ‘law of nature,’ I had actually been swallowing a heavily disguised formation. Although deeply ingrained and presumably ‘tried and tested,’ it was still a distortion of the

Truth, an appearance but not a fact. A higher element can always intervene. Indeed, as the Mother says, by complying with this notion, “it is as though you were putting an iron curtain between yourself and the free action of the Grace.”⁴

Yoga

Sri Aurobindo writes that the only means open for man to transcend his nature is yoga. Other than that, one can resort to what he calls the ‘Yoga of Nature’ itself which takes thousands of lifetimes. Yoga, through conscious *sādhana*, affords man the opportunity of doing this work in a single lifetime. The traditional yogas, I understand, had taught man to rise above and detach himself from the cloud of his nature; Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga now teaches him the way to disperse it. In this yoga particularly, every aspect of man’s nature is made malleable to a higher force. No minor detail is ignored; no stone is left unturned. The complexity of man’s nature explains

why there are no short cuts. It is not a piecemeal approach. The whole nature must be transformed for the work to be complete—“nothing is done until everything is done.”⁵

It is an assiduous process, requiring, at least in the initial phases, immense personal effort. I feel that this means will always be needed as long as the notion of a separate self exists in the being. Personal effort, however, as Sri Aurobindo says, is gradually transformed into a movement of the Divine Force, and I know that only Her Force can achieve this goal. I have vividly found too that by surrendering to the Mother, the work of transformation be-

Once indeed, when asked by a sadhak on the ‘best way’ of doing yoga, She replied: “You have to aspire, you have to reject; but the best is if you can keep me in your heart, if you love me, then you will have to do nothing. I shall do all for you.”

comes the responsibility of the Divine itself. When I am living in my truth, the Mother guides me every step of the way. It is as simple as that. Ultimately, like many of us here, I do this work out of love for her: that is what sustains me. Once indeed, when asked by a sadhak the ‘best way’ of doing yoga, she replied: “You have to aspire, you have to reject; but the best is if you can keep me in your heart, if you love me, then you will have to do nothing. I shall do all for you.”⁶

There are so many challenges along the way that without this love, life for me would be like being lost in a desert. With love, the inner Teacher emerges. With love, I also find the joy of service and collaboration. The work simply makes me feel so alive; it is the knowledge that I have, at last, found the purpose of my existence.

There is the joy of adventure too. This becomes particularly apparent to me when I work on the physical being. No other yoga, I believe, can realistically claim the divinization of the body as a professed

aim. Certainly, nothing else can also give clear guidelines on how to achieve it. It really is such a glorious opportunity, one worth dropping everything else for! Occasionally though, I find the physical *sādhana* to be very problematic. I often experience myself trudging through a veritable ‘virgin forest.’ Sometimes I feel myself going round in circles with no noticeable sign of progress. Then, out of the blue, a connection is made, the alignment returns and it is as if the Mother has started walking my steps. The mind simply can’t explain this: it can never be forced.

As I understand it, two factors lie at the root of the difficulty. Firstly the inert nature of the body itself must be conquered. A higher will must intervene. However, Sri Aurobindo informs us that it is the resistance of the subconscious which acts as the greatest barrier to physical transformation.

As a storehouse, it constantly throws up past habits and associations into the outer nature. The only way, I believe, is to open the whole being to Mother’s Force and Light and eventually they will percolate down to the lower domains. Everything must be made conscious, everything must become true. The obstacles are so immense that without the joy of adventure there is no hope. I am convinced too that many quicker ‘fixes’ are available but I feel nowhere else can the complete panacea be obtained. The work is very complex, but essentially the aim is very simple. We must manifest what we are in essence—totally divine! That takes time.

Inner perfection

So the first step of my journey was to become aware of this truth—that, in essence, I am perfect, that deep inside is a core that remains untouched by the distortions of the surface being. That part has no need of transformation; it is a portion of



the Divine already. The key is to translate this perfection into the outer nature. This knowledge is exquisitely expressed by Sri Aurobindo himself: "So also all perfection of which the outer man is capable, is only a realising of the eternal perfection of the Spirit within him. We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature."⁷

The ways of connecting with our inner being are well documented. Concentration, we are taught, is essential: it acts like a laser, fusing all the strands of our being at a single point and penetrating deep into our core. In that vein, I am able to offer myself in adoration to the Mother who is seated deep inside me. She dwells in the very centre of our being, the psychic itself. One doesn't have to look far to find her. Occasionally it will be cloudy and so a strong will may be required. But the way of the heart is, for me, the best. The alchemy is built on true love: it brings an immediate response. The inner being ignites in rapture and the delight of existence unfolds. This, I believe, is the first step to transcending one's nature.

Inner way

Once conscious of this inner perfection, I start trying to attune and harmonize this with the body itself. First, the Mother says, you must realize those points of disharmony that are found on the surface,

You must become aware of the points where this harmony does not exist; you must feel them and understand the contradiction between the inner consciousness and certain outer movements. You must become conscious of this first, and once you are conscious of it, you try to adapt the outer action, outer movements to the inner ideal. But first of all you must become aware of the disharmony.⁸

Really, the Mother does all the work for us! I can only observe, call and offer. I find it a simultaneous process. I summon her Presence, I scan the body and I watch.

I observe the Force flowing through the body. If a knot comes to the surface, I stop and simply become conscious of that point of disharmony. There is invariably an inner reason for an outer disharmony. The awareness invariably produces a radical shift and that point then reintegrates with the divine flow. All then can become aligned; all reverts to a harmonious whole. Sometimes the process may be more protracted. Usually, I find I need to identify the reason for the dislocation. The Mother working inside me and the inherent wisdom of the inner being give me that spontaneous knowledge.

At times, a word may be needed. It's as if I were picking up an intruder with pincers and, through identification, it becomes saturated with her Light and gets transformed. It is the Truth Consciousness in action and I feel that nothing can prevail against it.

This consciousness can change the body; it offers the capacity to transcend its limits. The Mother says "that the method we use to deal with our body, maintain it, keep it fit, improve it and keep it in good health, depends *exclusively* on the state of consciousness we are in; for our body is an instrument of our consciousness and this consciousness can act directly on it and obtain what it wants from it."⁹

Dynamic work

When the body is bathed in light, it is very understandable to remain absorbed in a totally passive state in order to receive this higher force. Sometimes though, whenever the inner connection has been thoroughly established, I have found it very useful to stand up and initiate some gentle movement. Sometimes, it is good to just slowly open the eyes. It depends on the circumstances. Whatever I do, the inner contact must be maintained. A distinct change of vibration and sense of dispersion are sure signs that I am losing it. Sometimes I find it preceded by the faintest stutter inside. The sense of action itself too can sometimes distract me a little from the inner contact, but if I feel the Presence slipping away, I stop, realign myself

inside and attune to her once more. The body simply becomes a channel for the Force. The secret, I feel, is to maintain this contact for a longer interval each time. With practice, the work can rise to a more dynamic level: it is here in action that she initiates the change. When the inner being is aligned, outer alignment too seems to automatically follow and it translates into more conscious action. The body can then become a reflection of its luminous core.

Ideally, all our movements should be imbued with this quality. Sometimes it just emerges spontaneously when I feel the body in a state of joy, but I do find this practice very helpful. I believe it works in a very dynamic way, integrating the inner rhythm to the outer motion. Indeed, the certitude for me is that I so tangibly feel the Mother's Presence whenever I do it.

Ultimately, the aim in this work, for me, is to bring out and integrate the true master of all movement, that is, the psychic being. Its nature, I believe, is one of spontaneous knowledge. What I might call the true movement is based upon this. This movement can never be coerced by the mind. The mind can, in obvious circumstances, really help the body. It can give it a sense of discipline. However, as the journey with the body proceeds, something else has to take over. The sign of this movement is unmistakable: it is totally unpremeditated and it has none of the grating struggle I associate with mental effort. Indeed it is almost effortless and comes from an entirely different domain. To find the key to this realm with the body is one of the richest discoveries I can ever possibly hope to make. After that, I feel, the work must be consolidated into all outer movements. As always, the Mother gives such simple advice on the best way:

And then, when you have seen what does not harmonise, you must gather the will and aspiration to change it and begin with the easiest part. You should not begin with the most difficult thing, you should begin with the easiest, the one you understand the best, most easily, the disharmony which seems most evident to you.



Then from there, gradually, you will go to the more difficult and more central things . . .¹⁰

In practical terms, in my case, this means to begin with more elementary things about the body which are usually taken for granted, like alignment or distribution of weight. Indeed, I find myself often going back to such basics and almost starting from scratch once again. This is a recurrent feature of my work on the body: when things go awry, I recover lost ground in order to regain a solid foundation.

The physical, when there is mental striving, can sometimes find itself tied up in knots in doing this work, but the answer can invariably be obtained through the body itself, but only when it is left to itself. From experience, I have

found that sometimes the simplest of movements prompted from deep inside can facilitate and restore true alignment and harmony throughout the body. The hallmark of this action is its spontaneity; it is totally without calculation. Up to that point, the mind may want to endlessly fidget and adjust. However, I have found that as it quietens, the inherent knowledge will inevitably rise to the surface. A true foundation to this long inner work is then securely laid. A link is made.

Divine momentum

It is interesting that whenever I empty myself of thought and meditate, without specifically calling for any intervention in the body, I also automatically feel a rush of Force flooding through the brain. The Mother has given an explanation for this. She says that once an aspiration, for instance to heal, becomes fixed, the Force can work in any circumstance:

Even if you make yourself an absolute blank, that does not change the nature of your aspiration or alter its domain . . . On the quality of the aspiration depends the force that answers and the work it comes to do. To make yourself blank in meditation creates an inner silence; it does not mean that you have become nothing or have become a dead and inert mass. Making yourself an empty vessel, you invite that which shall fill it. It means that you release the stress of your inner consciousness towards realisation.¹¹

By remembering and calling the Mother before exercise, it brings her into my work. Now, each time before I begin, I pray for her to guide the body to a new level of progress and elevate it to a new plateau of attainment. By being conscious of her at my side, the work becomes a joy, not a mental routine, but a free collaboration in her play.

From the beginning of my life here, I have been blessed with considerable help from a few of the Mother's chosen instruments. Nevertheless, I am still often approached by people who ask why I don't try a certain healer or a new therapeutic approach. My answer is brief—I am cautious about allowing anyone to stand between me and the Mother. To tell the truth, I am a little wary of self-proclaimed channels—the genuine ones usually go quietly about their work and say little. Now and then, someone new may emerge to present a new angle of approach, but I intuitively feel that the 'inner way' is what the Mother wants of me and I am so humbled to adhere to it. Apart from anything else, it is such a beautiful opportunity to unlock the treasures of my inner being. It gives me the chance to gaze straight into the eyes of my inner Teacher.

I also see little sense in chasing after doctors and their prescriptions. I am very mindful of the Mother's often quoted

words that, "all physical remedies . . . are simply palliatives; they are not cures, because they are not strong enough to touch the living centre of the thing."¹²

Besides, for me, the body's recovery is only one aspect of the *sâdhanâ*. Though obviously indivisible from the central objective, it is not an end in itself, although maybe it used to be. True 'wholeness,' I feel, is an inevitable consequence of this practice. I trust in the Divine Grace and its infinite wisdom. In spite of the difficulties, there is so much more richness and plenitude to my life now and that is entirely due to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I feel it is not good to keep asking for proofs: that can only erode one's faith. But in this way, there is a conviction when I observe the body itself. When I feel centered, the

body automatically resonates to a more harmonious tune. On the other hand, no matter what outer work I may be doing, if I feel flat inside, the physical will appear limp and lifeless too. Years ago, the body used to 'run' on adrenalin. Now it depends on joy. I find joy expands the physical consciousness. Joy has become the oxygen of the body; without it, it is sunk.

I feel a balance should be maintained. I do find that methodical exercise helps to make the gross body more supple and energetic. Inevitably, that makes it more plastic to the intervening Force. Sri Aurobindo says:

if we start in any field at the lower end we have to employ the means and processes which Life and Matter offer to us and respect the conditions and what we may call the technique imposed by the vital and material energy . . . It is not that the action from the two ends cannot



meet and the higher take into itself and uplift the lower perfection; but this can usually be done only by a transition from the lower to a higher outlook, aspiration and motive: this we shall have to do if our aim is to transform the human into the divine life.¹³

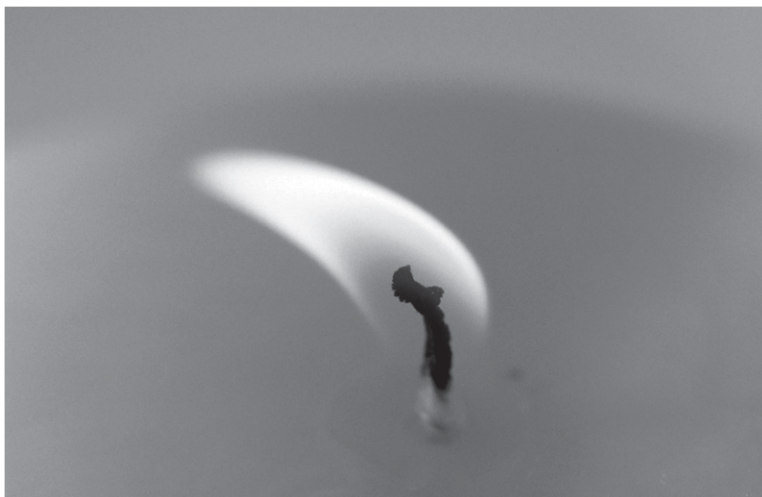
Any exercise, I feel, can be made conscious. By maintaining an inner poise, the body can be elevated

to new levels. By remembering and calling the Mother before exercise, it brings her into my work. Now, each time before I begin, I pray for her to guide the body to a new level of progress and elevate it to a new plateau of attainment. By being conscious of her at my side, the work becomes a joy, not a mental routine, but a free collaboration in her play. As far as the body is concerned, I find that true progress is always accompanied by a feeling of joy.

Obstacles

The implications of this work are so vast that it is not surprising that it is beset with so many obstacles. Armed only with a searchlight, one has to look into the very jaws of the Adversary. The work of transformation begins with the individual. He is the microcosm: one defeat can have vast implications. The Adversary can be quite cunning at times. He searches for our weak point and then burrows deep on that spot until our nerves snap and we throw in the towel. In the worst circumstances, one can become his slave. Ultimately that is perhaps one reason why the Mother says that an unshakeable faith is the best armor.

I guess the biggest bugbears I face stem from an overactive mind. As an instrument, the mind can be a very powerful tool. It has considerable powers of reasoning, clarity and organization, but for me, it



Creating a spiritual atmosphere protects against the shifting currents of the outside world. (Photo courtesy www.bigfoto.com)

seldom knows when to stop and keep quiet. When this happens, my personal effort only translates into a mental striving. At worst, it can truly cramp the being. For me, it has an occasional tendency for self-judgment which is totally counter-productive, manifesting at times in a mood of self-depreciation. I also realize now that it is merely an inverse form of vanity. The Mother says: "To discover how to do the work and what is the best way of doing it is very useful. But to look at oneself doing it and admire and belittle oneself, that's not only useless but disastrous."¹⁴

Both traits, the Mother comments, are "equally bad." That is why she says: "The best thing is not to be occupied with oneself."¹⁵

Preying upon this weakness is a susceptibility to negative formations thrown from outside. I once heard some wise words from a spiritual teacher. He said that if you want to grow a tree, you fence it with wire so that the cattle can't gorge themselves upon it. In the same way, if something worthwhile is quietly growing inside you, it is better to be vigilant so that your aspiration is not snatched away by negative or hostile suggestions.

The only fail-safe way, I feel, of building this protection is to cultivate by practice what Mother calls a 'spiritual atmosphere.' From very early in my *sādhana*, that has included being very careful about

the company I keep. The state comes from living inside and by throwing out anything that opposes the truth. Once established, it gives an enormous protection against the shifting currents of the outside world. It's like living in a bubble constructed by the Mother. However, she warns:

But naturally, if you open all the doors, listen to what people tell you, follow the advice of this one and the inspirations of that one, and are full of

desires for outside things, you cannot create a spiritual atmosphere for yourself. You will have an ordinary atmosphere like everybody else.¹⁶

I find I have to always be alert and vigilant but it is imperative, at the same time, to try to always maintain an attitude of goodwill. I have discovered that a feeling of sourness only attracts what it fears. A sense of balance should be maintained.

If this atmosphere is not in place, I find myself very exposed. In the worst circumstances, the bubble can even get punctured. I then get pulled into an altogether external mode of consciousness. A glib comment, a disparaging remark or even just a look can have very harmful consequences, and the body tends to shrink.

I have also learnt to be watchful about negative formations from the medical profession. Sometimes a snap diagnosis or 'convenient label' is conveyed to me and it can truly jar. Some doctors fail to realize that their labels often have a tendency to stick. Perhaps they don't always appreciate how much trust their position is likely to inspire. When all is said and done though, it is not the comment which damages but the way I react to it. There is no point in looking for excuses. One must truly be a warrior in this yoga.



However, formations can work both ways. A positive formation or an encouraging remark can elicit tremendous hope. I often find helpful company to be a real boon. I also find it good to continually build positive formations for myself. To consistently affirm to myself my wholeness creates a significant shift in the being. One must guard against the prophets of doom in this work. Ultimately though, I find a quiet trust in the Divine is always sufficient.

Changing the body

I find that changing the body can be an interminable task. Every detail has to be considered with minute precision. The body is the proverbial dog's tail: it has to be straightened innumerable times until it stops going back to its original shape. This is the chief obstacle. The Mother says: "To change one's body one must be ready to do millions of times the same thing, because the body is a creature of habits and functions by routine, and because to destroy a routine one must persevere for years."¹⁷

So progress is made inch by inch. Now and then, on rare occasions, the body makes a leap. Sometimes it falters and might even go back. If I have an accident or succumb to illness, for instance, the consequences are more severe and it is almost as if it must start once more at ground zero.

Persistence is, for me, the key. So working inside has become a regular practice. I generally keep a fixed time and place for this as I find the continuity greatly enhances my work. The cells themselves must be taught a new way: the way of light. It is indeed a process. Inevitably, a change of consciousness occurs. Slowly an understanding develops; something like an inner vision emerges. I believe this can be done through repetition as it is the only dialogue the body understands. Each time I feel the body open to the Mother's Force and Light, it becomes lighter and freer. At those times, I feel my movements assume a greater fluidity. The secret, I believe, is to maintain the contact with the Mother longer

each time in order to help it endure. This sustains the flow. Nature inevitably tries to claw back what she has reluctantly relinquished. That is the challenge. I must keep going.

An enduring trust and steadfast patience, I believe, are the only two ways to see this work through to a victorious conclusion. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo names time (*kāla*) as one of the 'Four Aids' to yogic progress. Now I can truly see why. Whenever I truly surrender to the Mother's supreme wisdom, time becomes my ally. The mind quietens and the being regains a harmonious rhythm. On such occasions, I trust that the alchemy will unfold in its own time. On the other hand, if I make time my enemy, the weight of expectation only throttles the being.

The Mother, indeed, comments on this very subject: "But when you tell yourself, 'It is all right, I didn't succeed this time, I shall succeed next time, and I am sure one day or another I shall do it,' then it becomes your friend."¹⁸

Motiveless work

I don't find it fruitful to keep end results in mind when doing this work. Indeed it is only the mind, I feel, that tries to construct results for the being. The Mother constantly reiterated that the results of the work are best left to the Divine. This is actually the Mother's work which I do out of love for her. Why frame boundaries, I ask, when limitless horizons are starting to manifest before my eyes? With a sense of devotion, the work, however arduous, becomes a joy. Even difficulties become opportunities. A new world is materializing in our midst and we must widen ourselves to embrace it. "There must be a great widening," the Mother says, "to make room for the movements of the Supermind."¹⁹ In reality, we make ourselves so small! There is a Vastness tantalizingly close to my reach; I need to work and expand to accommodate it. So work I must. I need to climb higher too, until the day comes when I might make that leap, stretch out my wings and glide down to the golden fields below.

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Source material

Foundations of sadhana: The opening of the psychic being

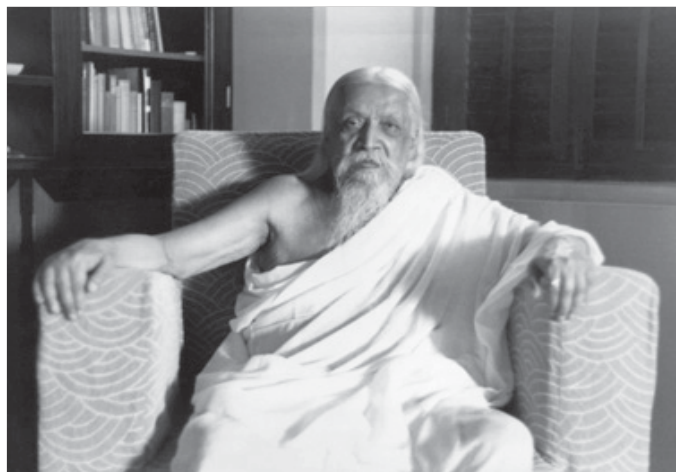
by Sri Aurobindo

There are two main things to be secured as the foundations of sadhana—the opening of the psychic being and the realisation of the Self above. For the opening of the psychic being, concentration on the Mother and self-offering to her are the direct way. The growth of Bhakti which you feel is the first sign of the psychic development. A sense of the Mother's presence or force or the remembrance of her supporting and strengthening you is the next sign. Eventually, the soul within begins to be active in aspiration and psychic perception guiding the mind to the right thoughts, the vital to the right movements and feelings, showing and rejecting all that has to be put away and turning the whole being in all its movements to the Divine alone. For the self-realisation, peace and silence of the mind are the first condition.

Afterwards one begins to feel release, freedom, wideness, to live in a consciousness silent, tranquil, untouched by any or all things, existing everywhere and in all, one with or united with the Divine. Other experiences come on the way, or may come, such as the opening of the inner vision, the sense of the Force working within and various movements and phenomena of the working etc. One may also be conscious of ascents of the consciousness and descents of Force, Peace, Bliss or Light from above. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 636)

It is simply because you are full of mental and vital activities and relations. One must get the power to quiet the mental and vital, if not at first at all times, yet whenever one wills—for it is the mind and vital that cover up the psychic being as well as the self (Atman) and to get at either one must get in through their veil; but if they are always active and you are always identified with their activities, the veil will always be there. It is also possible to detach yourself and look at these activities as if they were not your own but a mechanical action of Nature which you observe as a disinterested witness. One can then become aware of an inner being which is separate, calm and uninvolved in Nature. This may be the inner mental or vital Purusha and not the psychic, but to get at the consciousness of the inner *manomaya* and *prānamaya purusa* is always a step towards the unveiling of the psychic being.

Yes, it would be better to get full control of the speech—it is an important step towards going inward and developing a true inner and yogic consciousness. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 639)



Sri Aurobindo in 1950. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

First aspire and pray to the Mother for quiet in the mind, purity, calm and peace, an awakened consciousness, intensity of devotion, strength and spiritual capacity to face all inner and outer difficulties and go through to the end of the yoga. If the consciousness awakens and there is devotion and intensity of aspiration, it will be possible for the mind, provided it learns quietude and peace, to grow in knowledge. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 640)

Aspiration, constant and sincere, and the will to turn to the Divine alone are the best means to bring forward the psychic. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1100)

If desire is rejected and no longer governs the thought, feeling or action and there is a steady aspiration of an entirely sincere self-giving, the psychic usually after a time opens of itself. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1099)

Of course the ego and the vital with its claims and desires is always the main obstacle to the emergence of the psychic. For they make one live, act, do sadhana even for one's own sake and psychicisation means to live, act and do sadhana for the sake of the Divine. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1099)

Your first experience was that of the opening of the psychic; you became aware of the psychic being and its aspirations and experiences and of the external being in front, as two separate parts of your consciousness. You were not able to keep this expe-



rience because the vital was not purified and pulled you out into the ordinary external consciousness. Afterwards, you got back into the psychic and were at the same time able to see your ordinary vital nature, to become aware of its defects and to work by the power of the psychic for its purification. I wrote to you at the beginning that this was the way; for if the psychic is awake and in front, it becomes easy to remain conscious of the things that have to be changed in the external nature and it is comparatively easy too to change them. But if the psychic gets veiled and retires in the background, the outer nature left to itself finds it difficult to remain conscious of its own wrong movements and even with great effort cannot succeed in getting rid of them. You can see yourself, as in the matter of the food, that with the psychic active and awake the right attitude comes naturally and whatever difficulty there was soon diminishes or even disappears.

I told you also at that time that there was a third part of the nature, the inner being (inner mind, inner vital, inner physical) of which you were not yet aware, but which must also open in turn. It is this that has happened in your last experience. What you felt as a part of you, yourself but not your physical self, rising to meet the higher consciousness above, was this inner being; it was your (inner) higher vital being which rose in that way to join the highest Self above—and it was able to do so, because the work of purifying the outer vital nature had begun in earnest. Each time there is a purification of the outer nature, it becomes more possible for the inner being to reveal itself, to become free and to open to the higher consciousness above.

When this happens, several other things happen at the same time. First, one becomes aware of the silent Self above—free, wide, without limits, pure, untroubled by the mental, vital and physical movements, empty of ego and limited personality,—this is what you have described in your letter. Secondly, the Divine Power descends through this silence and freedom of the Self and begins to work in the Adhara. This is what you felt as a pressure; its coming through the top of the head, the forehead and eyes and nose meant that it was working to open the mental centres—especially the two higher centres of thought and will and vision—in the inner mental being. These two centres are called the thousand-petalled lotus and the *ājñā cakra* between the eyebrows. Thirdly, by this working the inner parts of the being are opened and freed; you are liberated from the limitations of the ordinary personal mind, vital and physical and become aware of a wider consciousness in which you can be more capable of the needed transformation. But that is necessarily a matter of time and long working and you are only taking the first steps in this way.

When one goes into the inner being, the tendency is to go entirely inside and lose consciousness of the outside world—this is what people call Samadhi. But it is also necessary to be able to have the same experiences (of the Self, the workings in the inner consciousness, etc.) in the waking state. The best rule for you will be to allow the entire going inside only when you are alone and not likely to be disturbed, and at other times to accustom yourself to have these experiences with the physical consciousness awake

and participating in them or at least aware of them. (*Letters on Yoga*, pp. 1101-1103)

Once the condition has come in which the thoughts that cross are not believed, accepted or allowed to govern the conduct, it must be understood that the vital mind is no longer dominant—for the nature of the vital mind is always to cloud the true mind's perception and drive it towards action. Neither the vital mind nor the physical mind are things that have to be got rid of, but they must be quietened, purified, controlled and transformed. That will take place fully when the thinking mind becomes fully conscious and when the psychic comes forward and leads and governs both it and the vital and physical being. Your thinking mind is becoming more and more conscious; that is shown by what you write, for the perceptions there expressed are quite clear-seeing and correct and show an increasingly right understanding. Moreover what is making you conscious is the increase of pressure of the psychic behind to come forward. For what you felt as trying to come out from behind was the psychic itself. The feeling of flowers and fragrance and a coolness and peace are always sure signs that the psychic is becoming active. It has been developing in you for some time past, only it was covered over by rushes of the vital mind which did not want to lose its hold or its place. Now that the vital mind is quiet, it is again the psychic that is pressing to come forward and establish its influence.

The thoughts that came afterwards about the defects of your action towards others, repentance and the reasons why you could not establish proper relations with others were the result of this psychic emergence. For when the psychic comes forward or when it strongly influences mind or vital, then one begins to see clearly and rightly about one's own nature and action and about things and about others and to have the right feelings. It was under this pressure of the psychic also that while the mind got these right thoughts and perceptions, the vital felt repentance for what had been done and wished to ask forgiveness. But while this readiness to ask forgiveness was in itself a right feeling, to do so physically would not have been quite the wisest or best action. So the psychic itself at once told you what was the true thing to do, to ask forgiveness instead from the Mother. What was necessary having been done in the mind and vital, the psychic then cleared the whole consciousness and brought back its own quiet and peace. I explain all that to you so that you may begin to understand how these things work within and what is meant by the psychic and its action and influence.

The vision you had of the other luminous and peaceful and beautiful world was a sort of symbolic image of the true physical consciousness and the world in which it lives, the physical consciousness as it is when it is directly under the control of the psychic, and the character of the world which it tends to create for itself. (*Letters on Yoga*, pp. 1106-1107)



Foundations of sadhana: Mental honesty and sincerity

by The Mother

Sweet Mother, what does “mental honesty” mean exactly?

It is a mind that does not attempt to deceive itself. And in fact it is not an “attempt,” for it succeeds very well in doing it!

It would seem that in the ordinary psychological constitution of man, the almost constant function of the mind is to give an acceptable explanation of what goes on in the “desire-being,” the vital, the most material parts of the mind and the subtlest parts of the body. There is a kind of general complicity in all the parts of the being to give an explanation and even a comfortable justification for everything we do, in order to avoid as far as possible the painful impressions left by the mistakes we commit and undesirable movements. For instance, unless one has undergone or taken up a special training, whatever one does, the mind gives itself a favourable enough explanation of it, so that one is not troubled. Only under the pressure of outer reactions or circumstances or movements coming from other people, does one gradually consent to look less favourably at what one is and does, and begins to ask oneself whether things could not be better than they are.

Spontaneously, the first movement is what is known as self-defense. One puts oneself on one’s guard and quite spontaneously one wants a justification... for the smallest things, absolutely insignificant things—it is a normal attitude in life.

And explanations—one gives them to oneself; it is only under the pressure of circumstances that one begins to give them to others or to another, but first one makes oneself very comfortable; first thing: “It was like that, for it had to be like that, and it happened because of this, and...”, and it is always the fault of circumstances or other people. And it truly requires an effort—unless, as I say, one has undergone a discipline, has acquired the habit of doing it automatically—it requires an effort to begin to understand that perhaps things are not like this, that perhaps one has not done exactly what one ought to have done or reacted as one should. And even when one begins to see it, a much greater effort is needed to recognise it... officially.

When one begins to see that one has made a mistake, the first movement of the mind is to push it into the background and to put a cloak in front of it, the cloak of a very fine little explanation, and as long as one is not obliged to show it, one hides it. And this is what I call “lack of mental honesty.”

First, one deceives oneself by habit, but even when one begins not to deceive oneself, instinctively there is a movement of trying, trying to deceive oneself in order to feel comfortable.

And so a still greater step is necessary once one has understood that one was deceiving oneself, to confess frankly, “Yes, I was deceiving myself.”



The Mother in her room. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

All these things are so habitual, so automatic, as it were, that you are not even aware of them; but when you begin to want to establish some discipline over your being, you make discoveries which are really tremendously interesting. When you have discovered this, you become aware that you are living constantly in a... the best word is “self-deception”, a state of wilful deceit; that is, you deceive yourself spontaneously. It is not that you need to reflect: spontaneously you put a pretty cloak over what you have done so that it doesn’t show its true colours... and all this for things which are so insignificant, which have so little importance! It would be understandable, wouldn’t it, if recognising your mistake had serious consequences for your very existence—the instinct of self-preservation would make you do it as a protection—but that is not the question, it concerns things which are absolutely unimportant, of no consequence at all except that of having to tell yourself, “I have made a mistake.”

This means that an effort is needed in order to be mentally sincere. There must be an effort, there must be a discipline. Of course, I am not speaking of those who tell lies in order not to be caught, for everybody knows that this should not be done. Besides, the most stupid lies are the most useless, for they are so flagrant that they can’t deceive anyone. Such examples occur constantly; you catch someone doing something wrong and tell him, “That’s how it is”; he gives a silly explanation which nobody can understand, nobody can accept; it is silly but he gives it in the hope of shielding himself. It is spontaneous, you see, but he knows this is not done. But the other kind of deception is much more spontaneous and it is so habitual that one is not aware of it. So, when we speak of mental honesty, we speak of something which is acquired by a very constant and sustained effort.

You catch yourself, don’t you, you suddenly catch yourself in the act of giving yourself somewhere in your head or here (*Mother indicates the heart*), here it is more serious... giving a very favourable little explanation. And only when you can get a grip on yourself, there, hold fast and look at yourself clearly in the face and say, “Do you think it is like that?”, then, if you are very



courageous and put a very strong pressure, in the end you tell yourself, “Yes, I know very well that it is not like that!”

It sometimes takes years. Time must pass, one must have changed much within oneself, one’s vision of things must have become different, one must be in a different condition, in a different relation with circumstances, in order to see clearly, completely, how far one was deceiving oneself—and at that moment one was convinced that one was sincere.

(Silence)

It is probable that perfect sincerity can only come when one rises above this sphere of falsehood that is life as we know it on earth, mental life, even the higher mental life.

When one springs up into the higher sphere, into the world of Truth, one will be able to see things as they truly are, and seeing them as they are, one will be able to live them in their truth. Then all falsehoods will naturally crumble. And since the favourable explanations will no longer have any purpose, they will disappear, for there will be nothing left to explain.

Things will be self-evident, Truth will shine through all forms, the possibility of error will disappear. (CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 327-329)

“To be absolutely sincere is not to have any division, any contradiction in one’s being.” —The Mother

If you are made of pieces which are not only different but often quite contradictory, these pieces necessarily create a division in your being. For example, you have one part in yourself which aspires for the divine life, to know the Divine, to unite with Him, to live Him integrally, and then you have another part which has attachments, desires—which it calls “needs”—and which not only seeks these things but is quite upset when it does not have them. There are other contradictions, but this one is the most flagrant. There are others, for instance, like wanting to surrender completely to the Divine, to give oneself up totally to His Will and His Guidance, and at the same time, when the experience comes—a common experience on the path when one sincerely tries to give oneself up to the Divine—the feeling that one is nothing, that one can do nothing, that one doesn’t even exist outside the Divine; that is to say, if He were not there, one would not exist and could not do anything, one would not be anything at all.... This experience naturally comes as a help on the path of total self-giving, but there is a part of the being which, when the experience comes, rises up in a terrible revolt and says, “But, excuse me! I insist on existing, I insist on being something, I insist on doing things myself, I want to have a personality.” And naturally, the second one undoes all that the first had done.

These are not exceptional cases, this happens very frequently. I could give you innumerable examples of such contradictions in the being: when one part tries to take a step forward, the other

one comes and demolishes everything. So you have to begin again all the time, and every time it is demolished. That is why you must do this work of sincerity which, when you perceive in your being a part that pulls the other way, makes you take it up carefully, educate it as one educates a child and put it in harmony with the central part. That is the work of sincerity and it is indispensable.

And naturally, when there is a unity, an agreement, a harmony among all the wills of the being, your being can become simple, candid and uniform in its action and tendencies. It is only when the whole being is grouped around a single central movement that you can be spontaneous. For if, within you, there is something which is turned towards the Divine and awaits the inspiration and impulse, and at the same time there is another part of the being which seeks its own ends and works to realise its own desires, you no longer know where you stand, and you can no longer be sure of what may happen, for one part can not only undo but totally contradict what the other wants to do. (CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 284-286)

My experience is like this: whenever you sincerely want to know the truth, you do know it. There is *always* something to point out the error to you, to make you recognise the truth. And if you observe yourself attentively you find out that it is because you prefer error that you do not find the truth.

Even in small details, the very smallest—not to speak of the big things of life, the big decisions that one has to take—even in the smallest things, whenever the aspiration for the truth and the will to be true are wholly sincere, the indication always comes. And precisely, with the method of the Buddhist discipline, if you follow up within yourself the causes of your way of being, you always find out that persistence in error comes from desire. It is because you have the preference, the desire to feel, to act, to think in a particular way, that you make the mistake. It is not simply because you do not know what is true. You do not know it precisely because you say in a vague, general, imprecise way, “Oh, I want the truth.” In fact, if you take a detail, each detail, and put your finger on it, you discover that you are playing the ostrich in order not to see. You put up something uncertain, something vague, a veil, in order not to see behind it.

Whenever there is sincerity, you find that the help, the guidance, the grace are always there to give you the answer and you are not mistaken for long.

It is this sincerity in the aspiration for progress, in the will for truth, in the need to be truly pure—pure as it is understood in the spiritual life—it is this sincerity which is the key to all progress. With it you know—and you *can*.

There is always, somewhere in the being, something which prefers to deceive itself, otherwise the light is there, always ready to guide, but you shut your eyes in order not to see it. (CWM, Vol. 3, p. 192)



Book Review

Eckhart Tolle and Sri Aurobindo: Two Perspectives on Enlightenment by A.S. Dalal

Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz

Having appreciated Dr. Dalal's many excellent compilations of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings over the years, I was delighted to read his new original composition, *Eckhart Tolle and Sri Aurobindo: Two Perspectives on Enlightenment*. Eckhart Tolle is a well-known spiritual teacher who was propelled onto the international stage with his popular 1997 book *The Power of Now*. Since then he has conducted numerous seminars and retreats around the world, and written three more books. What we mainly find in Dalal's new book are the clear, comprehensive, and detailed explanations of the central issues in spiritual practice and experience by a profound scholar of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings, a scholar seasoned through decades of work developing his popular compilations.

I found the book well-organized, cogent, and concise. It seemed to me that everything that should have been said was said, and no more. Starting in the Preface, Dalal explains his motivation for writing the book, and provides a philosophical context from which to better apprehend Tolle's teachings. As Dalal mentions here, Tolle's teaching "beautifully combines elements from Zen Buddhism, Advaita (nondualist Vedanta), and Christianity... However, in its views of the nature of Reality and enlightenment, his teaching is predominantly Buddhist." In the first chapter, Dalal expands on his motivations for writing about Tolle in the context of an interesting personal account of Dalal's own life-long spiritual search. He continues this chapter with what I felt was one of the most valuable sections of the book, an explanation of the chief lessons and psychological insights he has gained from Tolle's teachings, things which were especially helpful to him as a complement to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings.

The second chapter is a transcript of Dalal's interview of Tolle in Pondicherry in 2002. The third chapter consists of a few more questions and answers from an earlier meeting between Dalal and Tolle at Esalen Institute in California in 2001. The first interview touches on the central aspects of Tolle's teachings, which are put in Tolle's relatively simple conversational style. Dalal, coming from Sri Aurobindo's perspective, asks questions that often led Tolle to explain his views in the context of Sri Aurobindo's concepts and terms. For example, Tolle explains how his views of enlightenment and the spiritual Reality are related to such concepts as the witness consciousness, personal effort and grace, surrender, evolution of consciousness, and transforma-

tion. The questions discussed in the third chapter touch on a few other points such as whether there are degrees of spiritual Presence, and the need and meaning of spiritual practice.

The fourth chapter focuses on Sri Aurobindo's concepts of the witness consciousness, the distinction between purusha and prakriti, and the various poises of the purusha as detached witness, as the sanctioner of the movements of prakriti, and as the master of prakriti. One would be hard pressed to find a more succinct and clear explanation of these central concepts of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. The main differences of Sri Aurobindo's and Tolle's views on these matters are briefly stated at the end, and expanded upon in the following chapter.

The long fifth chapter provides a comprehensive comparison of Sri Aurobindo's and Tolle's teachings across a wide range of issues. It covers such concepts as the ego, the Self, Being, evolution of consciousness, mind, mental stillness, parts of the mind, personal effort and surrender, and the aim of spiritual practice. It examines each of these issues from the perspectives of both Sri Aurobindo and Tolle. This analysis provides clear and concise explanations of these issues from both perspectives, highlighting their similarities and differences. One reason why I found the comparisons so interesting and useful is that Tolle's views, while in certain respects unique, are in other respects representative of many spiritual teachings. Therefore, the comparisons highlight differences between Sri Aurobindo's teachings and other widespread views of Reality and spiritual experience.

A postscript chapter brings the comparisons back to a personal level, considering the complementary aspects of the two viewpoints in the context of their value to the author's own spiritual practice and development. While the whole book has a psychological and practical emphasis, the more personal discussions in the opening and closing chapters bring out even more emphatically the practical relevance of the comparisons, as opposed to a merely abstract, conceptual exercise.

To further provide a comprehensive framework in which to understand the book, Dalal follows with three appendices each containing a short essay by Sri Aurobindo—on his teaching, on the three instruments of the spiritual teacher, and on his first major spiritual experience of Nirvana. This is followed by brief biographical notes on Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Eckhart Tolle. An index allows the reader to search for topics of special interest.

Like Dalal, I was impressed by Eckhart Tolle's spiritual Presence, which for me was communicated several years ago in a recording of some of his talks. I felt from his words and way of speaking that he was living in what Sri Aurobindo termed the Self, what Tolle referred to as the Now or the Presence. Tolle's teaching was appealing to me for its simplicity and for its evident, transparent truth. And yet, in many ways, it is distinctly different from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's perspective and emphases. I think Dalal was perhaps struck in a similar way, and embarked upon a deep introspective and intellectual analysis to integrate these seemingly different views and approaches. This book seems to be both a part and a culmination of this effort.



The poetry room

Soul, my soul

Soul, my soul, reascend over the edge of life,—
Far, far from the din burn into tranquil skies,
Cross bright ranges of mind measureless, visioned, white;
Thoughts sail down as if ships carrying bales of light,
Truth's form-robos by the Seers woven from spirit-threads,
From wide havens where luminous argosies,
Gold-robed Wisdom's divine traffic and merchandise;
But there pause not but go far beyond
Where thy natural home motionless vast and mute
Waits thy tread; on a throne facing infinity
Thought-nude, void of the world, one with the silence be.
Sole, self-poised and unmoved thou shalt behold below
Hierarchies and domains, godheads and potencies,
Titans, demons and men each in his cosmic role;
Midst all these in the lone centre of forces spun,
Fate there under thy feet turning the wheels of Time,
The World Law thou shalt know mapped in its codes sublime,
Yet thyself shalt remain viewless, eternal, free.

—Sri Aurobindo

Our need for thee

In our ever present need for thee: Beloved,
Let us know your peace.
Let us be your instruments that break every shackle,
For do not the caged ones weep?

And give us our inheritance of divine love
So that we can forgive like you.
And let us be wise, so that we do not wed another's madness
And make them indebted to us for the deep gash
Their helpless raging lance will cause.

Darkness is an unlit wick; it just needs your touch,
Beloved, to become a sacred flame.
And what sadness in this world
Could endure if it looked into your eyes?

God is like a honeybee,
He doesn't mind me calling that;
For when you are kind—sweet—He nears,
And can draw you into Himself.

What is there to understand of each other:
If a wand turned the sun into a moon
Would not the moon mourn the ecstatic effulgence it once was?

We are all in mourning for the experience
Of our essence we knew and now miss.
Light is the cure, all else a placebo.

Yes, I will console any creature before me that is not laughing or
Full of passion for their art or life; for laughing and passion—
Beauty and joy—is our heart's truth,
All else is labor and foreign to the soul.

I have stood in His rain and now fill granaries as do the fertile
plains;
Giving is as natural to love as sound from the mouth.
There is a courageous dying, it is called effacement.
That holy Death unfurls our spirit's wings
And allows us to embrace God
Even as we stand on the earth.

—St. Francis of Assisi

Manifest thy Godhead

On calm spaces of the mind
A silver silence falls;
Hued memories of thy Love
Paint my soul's diamond walls

With flames of moon-edged dreams
Born of thy ritual fire.
O white Immensity,
Pour from thy ethereal lyre

Songs of an unknown joy
On an earth steeped in pain;
Manifest thy Godhead
In my spirit's secret fane.

Drape with gold utterance
The voiceless hush of my heart,
Stamp on my inert clay
Thy flawless divine art.

In a luminous sea of peace
Let my thought-surges lie
And bubbling foam on the waves
Mirror thy quiet sky.

Under remote stars of vision
Wrap me in solitude
And focus on the stillness
Image of thy heaven-hood.

—Nirodbaran
(with Sri Aurobindo's corrections)



A tiny drop

Only a tiny drop
on the vast ocean,
insignificant, lone, forlorn,
tossed and turned around,
whirling at a dizzying speed,
I sink to the bottomless pit,
dark and strangling!
Is this the end, O Lord?

Answering comes softly
a hand of Grace,
a tender touch
to glide me gently
off to the shore
to freely breathe.

As I lie there awhile
On the itching sands of Time,
the splendid sun invites me
with a burning kiss
to merge forever
in his immortal Bliss.

But before I vanish,
comes an angel sweet
and picks me up
in his heart of love.
He carries me away
with a smiling sweep
back to the ocean-bed
to teach me to dance
on the crest of joy.

He sings me the Song of Life,
spurring me to soar
beyond the grip
of death and strife,

Initiated to the rites of Love,
to the secrets of Life,
where in its inmost chamber
I learn to sing
a symphony of Light,
a chant of Beauty,
a serenade of Love,
a hymn of adoration,
a rhapsody of Bliss,
all-pervading, everlasting.

Now, moved by his call,
fearless I dive

deeper and deeper still
till I reach
the Inconscient base,
there to unveil the resplendent face
of my Lord
seated within,
gracious and beloved,
in absolute peace,
smiling and stark awake.

Truth-conscious and free
I toss and turn as I play
in this limitless ocean
of Sat- Chit- Ananda.
One with the wind,
and raging storm,
one with the sun
and the roaring sea,
I play the game of life
with ever-new wonder
and a candid smile.

Impelled by the indwelling Lord,
immortal and vast I live
with carefree laughter
for the joy of adventure,
ready to plunge
again and ever again.

A tiny drop
in the ever-expanding universe
of infinite Existence,
fulfilled and blest,
forever I roll, on and on,
from shore to greater shore,
from deep to profounder deep,
from height to supernal height,
marveling at the endless vistas
of Beauty and splendor,
forever dancing
on the crest of Joy enticing:
safe in the sacred heart
of Eternal Time.

Only a tiny drop,
I dance and sing
from the centre of Bliss,
the Song of Life,
ever-widening,
ever-heightening,
awakening every atom
of the universe
to burst into



a triumphant symphony
of resplendent Ecstasy
and fill all existence
with luminous Bliss.

In deep gratitude,
my being now sings
an incessant hymn
of adoration:
Victory to the Lord
and the Mother sweet!

—Kailas Jhaveri
(From *I am with you*, pp. v-viii)

Mukti

What deep dishonor that the soul should have
Its passion moulded by a moon of change
And all its massive purpose be a wave
Ruled by time's gilded glimmers that estrange
Being from its true goal of motionless
Eternity ecstatic and alone,
Poised in calm plenitudes of consciousness—
A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown!

Be still, oceanic heart, withdraw thy sense
From fickle lure of outward fulgencies.
Clasp not in vain the myriad earth to appease
The hunger of thy God-profundities:
Not there but in self-rapturous suspense
Of all desire is thy omnipotence!

—Amal Kiran

Still flow her graces

Still,—still flow her mighty graces,
Still fall Her Love's showers!
Still her Light our lives enlaces,
And waits for its ultimate hours.

Though our pettinesses blind our seeing,
Still She watches us beyond our ken,
When from Truth we are fleeing,
Like little foolish-hearted men.

Anon in my depths a voice I hear:
“My child of Light, do not grope
In the alleys of Desire and Fear,
Look up,—I am your only hope.

“Know—I am niched in your being;
Pray, and I will give strength and light

To guide you, in all your seeing;
Turn to me, I am the matrix of all-delight.

“Of the way-faring Life I am the goal;
Seek me, and you shall not fail!
Cling to me, I am in your inmost soul,
Your only Truth in this Falsehood's dale.

“He grieves not, who only me knows;
He falters not, who on me doth rely.
The world's aspiration to me flows,
And I build Future's lucent sky.

“From nescient night to golden dawn
I lead Earth to her destined role;
Mine is the silver sword drawn
To smite miser Nature's triple dole.

“Be brave to climb high, and me adore,
Do not stoop to worship Untruth's gleam!
I am in all succor and in Wisdom's lore,
I am all-Life's blessed Truth Supreme.”

—Kamalakanto

Glimpse of God

Look at me to find the truth
That is well-hidden in my eyes.
Don't be afraid, walk on with trust
And I will shed-off all layers of disguise.
And when you see me standing there
Naked and bare-footed
Under the old Banyan tree
Smile in recognition
For it is thyself
Thou hast found in me.

—Muna Wagner

Crying Rain

The tears I cry are raindrops
Falling from a fathomless sky onto the earth
Forming a river
Running through the landscape of my face
Past mountains, through valleys
Ever searching for the deep blue ocean.
They will never find it.
They will never reach it.
For there is no other salty water than the tears that I cry.
The landscape of my face speaks volumes of the places I have
been.

—Muna Wagner



Apropos

In this Yoga all depends on whether one can open to the Influence or not. If there is a sincerity in the aspiration and a patient will to arrive at the higher consciousness in spite of all obstacles, then the opening in one form or another is sure to come. —Sri Aurobindo

Sincerity is the safeguard, the protection, the guide, and finally the transforming power. —The Mother

Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering. —Saint Augustine

Miracles happen, not in opposition to nature, but in opposition to what we know of nature. —Saint Augustine

When we see everyone is a part of us, that any criticism we make is self-criticism, we will extend to ourselves an unconditional love that will light the world. —Harry Palmer

When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it. —The Alchemist

We are what we imagine ourselves to be. —Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

By banishing doubt and trusting your intuitive feelings, you clear a space for the power of intention to flow through. —Wayne Dyer

Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results. —Willie Nelson

If you're falling off a cliff, you may as well try to fly. You have nothing to lose. —Captain John Sheridan, *Babylon 5*

The minute you choose to do what you really want to do, it's a different kind of life. —Buckminster Fuller

The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred...unforeseen incidents, meetings, and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. —Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

A gift consists not in what is done or given, but in the intention of the giver or doer. —Seneca

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with success unimagined in common hours. —Thoreau

Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, the mind can achieve. —Napoleon Hill

Your only obligation in any lifetime is to be true to yourself. —Richard Bach

The only limitations you will ever face will be those you place upon yourself. —Keith DeGreen

There are so many wizards of the computer, stock market, test tube, and spectator sport, but so few of the art of life. —Mantak Chia

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude. —Thomas Jefferson

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing. —Abraham Lincoln

Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all. —Dale Carnegie

Only when we feel deeply that this world is ephemeral, and we are not attached to it at all, will our souls be clean and pure. —Ching Hai

A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty. —Winston Churchill

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free. —Michelangelo

A loving person lives in a loving world. A hostile person lives in a hostile world; everyone you meet is your mirror. —Ken Keyes, Jr.

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create. —Albert Einstein

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. —Thomas A. Edison

The more we hoard for ourselves, the more we lose; and the more we give, the more we gain, which is the law of the universe. —Ching Hai

The real source of wealth and capital in this new era is not material things...it is the human mind, the human spirit, the human imagination, and our faith in the future. —Steve Forbes

Fear less, hope more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; love more, and all good things will be yours. —Swedish Proverb

All that we are is the result of what we have thought. —Buddha

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge, myth is more potent than history, dreams are more powerful than facts, hope always triumphs over experience, laughter is the cure for grief, love is stronger than death. —Robert Fulghum