

Collaboration

Summer 2009

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 34, No. 1



**Richard Pearson on the Mother's work with flowers •
Larry Seidlitz on the Divine Grace • Martha Orton on Spiritual Knowledge •
Source Material • Current Affairs • AV Almanac • Poetry • Apropos**



About the cover

This untitled sketch by Ashram artist Dhanavanti seems to represent the Mother enfolded within Nature, the immanent Divine within physical nature. From her book, *Tapasyâ: Hymns in colour*, available at SABDA (used with permission).

The authors and poets

The late **Minnie N. Canteenwalla**, was encouraged to write poetry by Sri Aurobindo during a visit to the Ashram at age 18 in 1930 or 1931. Her book *Deep Footprints* was published in 1983.

The late **Georgette Coty** was a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Her book *Sing my Soul*, of poetry and essays, was published in 2001.

Rod Hemsell (rodhemsell@yahoo.com) is a member of Auroville and has for many years hosted Savitri Immersion Workshops at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, Colorado.

Dave Hutchinson is one of the organizers for the upcoming Fundamentalism and the Future conference and has been an organizer for several AUM conferences (dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu).

Shyam Kumari (shyamkumari@auromail.net) is a sadhika of the Ashram, an author, and president of Sri Aravinda Vidyalaya, a Sanskrit institute. Her poems have appeared in *Mother India*.

Martha Orton (martha.orton@gmail.com) is the author of *The Quest for Knowledge and Mastery*, a therapist, and an online course facilitator for Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research.

Richard Pearson, a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since childhood, is an expert on flowers and plants, and a contributor to *Flowers and Their Messages* (richard.kailas@gmail.com).

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) facilitates online courses for Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry, and is editor of *Collaboration*.

Deepti Tewari (deepti@auroville.org.in) has lived in Auroville since 1975. She is a teacher in "Last School," works with young Aurovilians and visitors, and for six years was a researcher and the editor for *Matrimandir Journal*.

The late **Thémis**, a sadhika of the Ashram, was best known for her translation of Satprem's *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. Her book *Poems* was published in 1952/1994.

Prabhjot Uppal, a physician and journalist, has authored three books: *Doctors Are People Too*, *White Coat Tales*, and *The Little Bird Who Found Herself* (prabhjot_uppal@hotmail.com).

Mauna van der Vlugt (mauna@auroville.org.in) is a Aurovilian with various responsibilities such as Auroville International coordination, Press Liaison, and Auroville Webmaster.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, our three main articles pertain to three very different topics. In Chronicles, we present Richard Pearson's reminiscences about his experiences in the Ashram and about the Mother regarding flowers. Richard is well-known due to his travels to the U.S. and Europe, and his generous efforts making many foreign visitors to the Ashram feel at home. One of the most striking things about him is his deep love and connection with the nature. In this account, he focuses on the Mother's deep relation with nature and with flowers in particular, and how this relation developed over time.

In the first of our two Essays, I (Larry Seidlitz) examine the nature and place of the Divine Grace in the Integral Yoga. This article is in a sense a companion to the article I wrote for last issue, in which I focused on practices in the Integral Yoga. It was evident to me that practices and personal effort were incomplete in this yoga without the action of the Grace, and that this subject required a separate treatment. When I began examining Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings pertaining to the Grace, it became increasingly clear how central Grace is in this Yoga, and moreover, how revealing this issue is about the central processes at work in sadhana. The essay focuses on important excerpts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that reveal its nature and action.

The second Essay is by Martha Orton and it examines the nature of spiritual knowledge. This article is based largely on selected parts of Martha's book, *The Quest for Knowledge and Mastery*. This main thesis of this book is that the essential underlying motive of all human behavior is the quest for knowledge and mastery. But this motive works at first subconsciously, without awareness of the deeper nature or source of knowledge and mastery. As the human being evolves through partial and superficial forms which cannot bring lasting fulfillment, eventually he turns to the search for spiritual knowledge and mastery, two things which go always together. This article, the first part of two, examines the nature of this spiritual knowledge and its relation to mental knowledge and other aspects of our nature.

Our Source Material section focuses on selections from Sri Aurobindo's writings and from the Mother's talks on the supramental consciousness and its manifestation.

In our opening section, Current Affairs, we have an article on the upcoming conference "Fundamentalism and the Future." Whereas it appears that this issue of Collaboration may not make it into your mailbox before the conference, there is already an extensive set of literature on the topic available online (see the article for details), and it is likely more will be forthcoming. As evident from the article, this conference is not simply about the response to Peter's Heehs book, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, but examines the issue of fundamentalism in depth in various contexts, with a focus on the future. Also in this section, there is a write up about the three Savitri Immersion Workshops held at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, CO this summer, a center which incidentally is thriving despite Seyril Schochen's passing in December 2006. In the section Briefs, there is a report about AUM 2009, news about several new and established centers, and information about the new publication of Aurovilian Jocelyn's book, *The Antithesis of Yoga*.

In AV almanac, we have two complementary articles about a new documentary film on Auroville by a professional team that focuses on the deeper spiritual aspects of the community. There is also an article on developments at the New Creation Bilingual School, now renamed Aikiyam School, including its accreditation. An important part of this story is the Aikiyam School's support group, which has been important in leading the school to a higher level.

In the Poetry room, in addition to Sri Aurobindo's poems, we feature several of the distinguished women poets of the Integral Yoga. This issue also includes three wonderful sketches by Dhanavanti, an Ashram artist, many flower photos, and Apropos quotes.

The artists and photographers

Dhanavanti's sketches are from her book, Tapasyâ: Hymns in colour, published by Auroville Press in 2008 (available at SABDA).

Martin Littlewood is a member of Auroville International UK. He is a supporter of Aikiyam School and works with its support group.

Giorgio Molinari is one of Auroville's main photographers and a supporter of Aikiyam School.

Flower photos are from the book The Spiritual Significance of Flowers, by the Mother, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 2000.

Publisher: Collaboration (ISSN 0164-1522) is published by the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA), a California nonprofit religious corporation, 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, Suite 203-174, Lodi, CA 95242 USA; e-mail: saa@aurobindo.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 subscription sponsoring an Indian resident 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, 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, Suite 203-174, Lodi, CA 95242 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. Members: Lynda Lester, Vishnu Eschner, and John-Robert Cornell.

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

Fundamentalism and the Future conference to be held in SF

by Dave Hutchinson

A two-day conference will be held Friday, September 11 and Saturday September 12 on the topic “Fundamentalism and the Future.” The conference will be at the California Institute of Integral studies in San Francisco, hosted by the Department of Asian and Comparative Religions. Registration is free. For details on the conference, location, and registration, please see <http://fundamentalismandthefuture.com>.

The conference will cover the historical events that have led to the current international range of fundamentalist movements; the social psychology of fundamentalism, with a focus on the particular type as exemplified by Hindutva; the history and current state of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo; and finally a look at how the future may unfold.

Speakers at the conference include Michael Murphy, the co-founder of Esalen; Richard Hartz, a writer and speaker on yoga, and a resident of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry for almost three decades; Debashish Banerji, a teacher of Asian art history and Indian spiritual culture, and co-founder of the webzine “Science, Culture, and Integral Yoga;” and Savitri, who lived in the Pondicherry Ashram and Auroville for 21 years, is a frequent speaker, and the author of several books.

The organizers of “Fundamentalism and the Future” wish to acknowledge an era of global terror inaugurated by 9/11 in relation to the forces shaping our present world. In a period marked by hegemonic globalization and increasing sectarian hostility, the “future” has become a contested category in which a number of cultural histories and social psychologies have been forced into difficult contact

Willingly or unwillingly, we find ourselves participants of a global jihad vs. McWorld scenario in which the persistence of medieval forms of religious fundamentalism clash with the forces of neo-liberal globalization. Is responsibility for the conflict to be leveled at the history of modernity itself—the Enlightenment, colonialism, Orientalism, nationalism, multiculturalism, cultural relativism and globalism? Are we moving inexorably towards a future determined by the politics of the world market? Or a future of brutal cult-wars in the name of truth, waged by the dispossessed “others” of capitalism, who are intimately entwined and yet beyond the boundary-politics of nation-states?

Does Sri Aurobindo have anything to teach us to help navigate this emerging future? Can his teachings provide useful insights into understanding the nature of the contemporary world

problematic and suggest ways to reconcile its antagonisms? If, as he asserts, all problems are problems of harmony, are there societal lessons that can be drawn from the community he founded?

The publication of a recent biography on Sri Aurobindo by a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the violent condemnation of it by a few because it deviates from orthodox ideology suggests the need for intense reflection on the wider contexts that have made such a reaction possible.

The conference will consider these questions, the zeitgeist of our times, and the future. We will examine and consider a possible future of cosmopolitan exploration and emergence using the conference as an occasion for transforming current conflicts into teachable moments.

For more information on the conference, please see <http://fundamentalismandthefuture.com>. Articles and other materials related to the conference will be posted at the site as they become available. You may also contact:

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Sri Aurobindo Learning Center’s “Savitri Immersion Workshops”

by Rod Hemsell

The third in a series of three workshops at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center finished on August 15th, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo and also the anniversary of Indian Independence, celebrated as Seyril, founder of the center, would have liked best—with a feast and a cake. One of the secret highlights of the sessions was in fact the exceptional quality of the food, prepared daily and often spontaneously by a talented assortment of participants from all over: India, France, California, Canada, Kentucky, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas . . . the spiritual footprint of Crestone is still growing!

Although these Savitri retreats have been happening annually since the early nineties, usually in August, this is the first time that we have held three in one summer, and this has had the advantage—surely be appreciated by other centers and teachers—of allowing us to be exposed to a more thorough, in-depth treatment of the vision and yoga-teaching of Sri Aurobindo. The full intention of his teaching could be grasped better like this, to an extent often not possible for students even after many years of study, because of both the scope and intensity implied by the persistent exposure to a mantric transmission, renewed monthly, and assimilated over a period of several weeks by many participants. The purpose was not only for the participants to be brought face to face with the intention of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga of transformation, but also to make the real purpose of “Savitri”—as a mantric invocation of the divine Word—easily accessible and



effective for new students as well as long-time devotees.

The process was generally spontaneous, harmonious and fun, as it turned out, with opportunities for self expression through music, dance and painting, as well as cooking, in addition to deep meditation. Frequent references to parallels between the yoga of Savitri and other schools and practices of Buddhism and Hinduism were pleasantly reinforced by visits to the Haidakhand Ashram, the Tashi Gomang Stupa, and Dragon Mountain Zen Center. And a bonus, appreciated by many in the community, were the extra activities provided by visiting Aurovilians—Aurelio's Om Choir, and Olivier's dance workshop and his presentation of an alternative economic structure. Participation by friends from Auromesa in Taos and nearby Hummingbird Ranch, in New Mexico, will hopefully weld a more permanent tie between these centers and ours, strengthening the Auroville family and network in this region. Two other factors of the demographics of these workshops that were especially heartening were the increased participation by members of the local community, and the presence of three young PhD candidates from entirely different backgrounds—the former mostly graying but the latter very vibrantly headed for a wonderful future. The future is of course the focus of Sri Aurobindo's light, and the participation of these diverse groups was one of many signs that it is definitely there, spiritually positive, and waiting on the horizon, drawing us luminously, ineluctably forward.

Briefs

AUM 2009 was held from July 8-12 at the picturesque Furman University Campus in Greenville, SC, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The primary speakers for the event were Alok Pandey and Shraddhalu Ranade from Pondicherry, whose numerous talks and question and answer sessions focused on the practice of Integral Yoga and essential philosophical concepts behind it. In addition, Narad (Richard Eggenberger) hosted readings of *Savitri* followed by meditation, as well as several sessions of the improvisational AUM choir, and Dr. Dilip Sarkar presented talks and workshops on Asana and Pranayama. Julian Lines presented talks on Auroville and Auroville International activities, as well as a video on the Dalai Lama's visit to Auroville. In addition, Don Salmon and Jan Maslow led a group meditation with music and movement, a U.S. centers meeting was held, and for recreational activities there was a jazz quartet concert and a volleyball game. H.P. Rama, the principal organizer for the event, captured the enthusiasm generated by the event with the observation that even though asana classes began at 6:30 a.m., large numbers attended the evening question and answer sessions until as late as 11 p.m.

A **Savitri study circle** has started in the Washington DC area with the intention of creating a supportive community. Meeting times are to be announced. Please contact by email if you wish to join. As the group is just starting out, they are flexible and open to the needs of the group as it evolves. Their address is: 5312 N. 32nd

St., Arlington, VA 22207. Contact Sartaj Alag • 703-879-2911 • sartaj.alag@gmail.com

Auromesa, a new center in the Southwest, is being formed at: 101 Coyote Loop, Arroyo-Hondo, NM 87513. Contact Tizia or Paul • 575-776-2212 • auromesa@yahoo.com • Website: <<http://www.auromesa.com>>

Matagiri has a new building plan to provide a place for lodging and for talks and cultural events. Contact Julian Lines regarding contributions and information: julianlines@gmail.com.

Antithesis of Yoga, by Jocelyn of Auroville, has been re-edited and republished by xlibris, an on-demand, self-publishing company. This book, which was enthusiastically reviewed in *Collaboration*, is a nonfictional novel about the early days of Auroville. It is available for sale at the online bookstore: <https://www.xlibris.com>. Note: click on the bookstore tab, then click on the highlighted text "search for your favorites" and enter the title.

AV almanac

Premier of *City of the Dawn*, a new documentary on Auroville

by Prabhjot Uppal

Reprinted from India Tribune, 11 July 2009, with permission.

An eclectic crowd of peace activists, community organizers and artists congregated together at Misericordia Heart of Mercy Village in Chicago for the "Awareness Into Action" conference on June 27. Sponsored by the New Momentum for Human Unity, the event featured the premiere of *City of the Dawn*, a documentary film exploring an experimental township in Tamil Nadu, South India, called Auroville.

Devotees of Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo his close collaborator Mirra Alfassa, known affectionately by the Aurovilians as "The Mother," chartered the Auroville settlement in 1968. Aurovilians Deepti Tewari, Bhavana Dee De Cew and Jean-Yves Lung were present at the event where the *India Tribune* had a rare opportunity to meet with residents of the 40-year-old colony that has escaped many of the constraints of mainstream society. Visually stimulating with in depth interviews, *City of the Dawn* presented a philosophical journey following the progress of a "Universal City" where people from 40 nations have found new ways to coexist in unity without religion, without laws and an economy not based on money.

For most people, the idea of society without money is inconceivable as they focus on success and accumulating material rewards in their fast-paced lives. In Auroville, the work and contributions of the residents are not pursued as personal achievements but for the benefit of the whole community.



Uma Prajapati, an Aurovillian depicted in the film, summed up the problem of the capitalistic models of post-industrial society that the communal group has departed from: "Humanity is serving the economy; economy is not serving humanity."

Frenchman Jean-Yves Lug, who first arrived in 1972 at age 20 and settled there in 1993, has focused on the creation of a "gift economy." Noting the difference between want and need, Lung found letting go of working to support himself a "liberating" experience. "We can live with very much less than we think," he said, "when we don't have all these things we don't miss them, and that's a big discovery."

The Aurovillian society is deep in discovery. Deepti Tewari, educator and member of the Auroville governing structure, described the township as a "kind of university." In addition to offering the same subjects as other schools she has developed an unending education for all ages where there is always room for progress, for growth, for learning. "We want the individual flowering to take place, we want the personality to develop in its own unique pattern and manner," stated Deepti Tewari.

Nurturing a free and creative environment has blossomed a fashion and design institute, architectural developments, a paper factory and even vocational training in fine craftsmanship. The investments into Auroville over the years, however, have not been solely an independent adventure but one that has revitalized the neighboring communities.

Migrating from large cities in India and the West, many of the colonists already had a material base that they sought to escape when they arrived in the poverty stricken Tamil Nadu.

"One of the major difficulties is that the two population groups are at very different stages in their development. The villager's chief ambition is to get regular food, a regular job, education for the kids, a nice house and all those things," explained Aurovillian community organizer Bhavana Dee De Cew, "So you have the villagers aspiring for what the Aurovillians are leaving behind."

Free from state-controls without rigid rules and regulations, members of Auroville have had a positive impact on their neighboring communities by helping people to help themselves.

"Auroville is an aspiration to that oneness which we have to find within ourselves and in the nature. If we find it within ourselves perhaps we can effectually, actually manifest it," described Deepti. Today, Auroville provides around 5,000 local villagers with steady, regular employment.

Nestled on the Bay of Bengal's tropical seaboard, the communal group has managed to thrive, not only amidst abject poverty but environmental challenges, transforming the once desert lands into a lush oasis embodying evolutionary human unity. In the wake of the 2004 tsunami that devastated Tamil Nadu, the Upsana Design Studio of Auroville became actively involved in many tsunami relief projects. Handmade from left over fabrics, local fisherwomen have found much more than employment in creating cloth dolls called "tsunamika" designed by Aurovillian student Prema Viswanathan.

"Giving money to the women as a donation will be the easiest thing to do," stated Uma Prajapati, who conceived the project, "but it will not bring any growth of consciousness in them. When they earn money through work, there is dignity, pride and self-respect in them." Since the project's inception, over 500 local women have been trained and more than two million tsunamika created and gifted unconditionally worldwide.

The progressive philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa has continued to evolve through the years as Auroville has attracted professionals like Tency Baetens of the Auroville Center for Scientific Research located in Pondicherry. Established in 1984, this international voluntary organization is working in the fields of renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and biomass.

Baetens is researching "alternate energies like wind pumps, and trying to replace kerosene lamps with solar lamps," with fewer health problems and greater affordability. Aurovillian researchers have focused not only on renewable energy options for tribal villages but transferring the capabilities "to the tribal people so they can do it themselves," stated Baeten.

Born out of the dreams of Sri Aurobindo, who was inspired by Swami Vivekananda, the golden globe structure called the Matrimandir is the eye of the galaxy-shaped community. Construction of the Matrimandir, Sanskrit for "Temple of the Mother," began in 1971 two years before Mirra Alfassa's passing and was completed last year. An edifice of spiritual significance called the "soul of the city," the landmark structure is situated in a large open space called "Peace."

The Matrimandir does not belong to any particular religion or sect. Deepti Tewari explained the Auroville philosophy of no religion as being based on "the knowledge of inner oneness that India has had for thousands of years; outwardly we are diverse, inwardly we come from a single-consciousness."

"Religion is an object of conflict, said Jean-Yves Lung, "so we certainly stress the importance of spiritual life, but without religion." Embedded within the greater pluralistic India, Auroville's residents have eschewed the frictions of religious faiths.

Without attachment to laws, material objects and religion, one would believe that Auroville has managed to avoid the causes of today's greatest challenges, but some of the problems faced in the greater world are also found there.

"The challenge of Auroville is in diversity," explained an Aurovillian in the film, "we come from social, moral, educational, ethical, religious, rational backgrounds which tend often to be contrary. Everyone has their own ideals of how Auroville should be: different interpretations of what Mother said or what Mother's vision was, and that creates a lot of conflict."

The non-hierarchical system of governing where everyone has a say means consensus also isn't always easy to achieve. "There are times we just don't get to the conclusion that we want and issues drag on for a very long time. Whatever decision that is taken, everyone can own it, there is a way to it—it's not coming from the top, it has really churned and cooked," said Deepti Tewari, pointing to a positive side of the often lengthy township



deliberations.

Threats from the outside have also grown. Forty years ago when construction on the Matrimandir began, local devotees contributed their lands to help realize the community that continues to flourish. Today, nearly 45 percent of the Aurovillian population is indigenous Indian. The redevelopment of the once barren area into a forest-agriculture with contemporary dwellings and burgeoning educational and employment opportunities has made Auroville a desired location.

The progress of Auroville has heightened interest from the outside world making it a target of real estate speculators and giving rise to intergenerational grievances. Descendents of the Indian families who donated lands see potential financial gains in reclaiming the chartered territory.

As the world faces growing challenges of violence, drugs and terrorism, the hope for Auroville's future is an endeavor that affects all of us. The manifest teachings and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother started with an idea "as large as human life and, therefore, failures might be numerous to start with—so the fact that the present structure of Auroville might fail is not unanticipated," said Tewari, "Whether it succeeds or it fails would be in the measure that Aurovilians find themselves. I think we have the possibility to succeed as we are now."

City of the Dawn, produced by Francis Rothluebber with Director of Photography Chip Duncan, is a project of New Momentum for Human Unity (www.newmomentumforhumanunity.org), a nonprofit organization dedicated to "creating a better life on and for this planet through the evolution of human consciousness and the transformation of human relationships." More information about Auroville, including opportunities for visitors, professionals and students, can be found at www.auroville.org.

The inception of the film, *City of the Dawn*

by Deepti Tewari

We were sitting under the tree canopy at Last School, when two elderly Western women accompanied by a younger man, walked through. What started as a friendly hello quickly became a long, thought-provoking conversation about the meaning and purpose of the school and Auroville. Already at this first contact, there was an empathy of shared purpose. They said they planned to be back soon to film Auroville. So many people, in the first flush of enthusiasm, have every intention of bringing Auroville to a wider notice; but to organize the funding necessary for a feature-length documentary, leave aside the logistics of flying in a film crew from the US seemed a little beyond belief. And all this resulting from an inner promise made to The Mother to present Her Dream to an audience in the United States. No funds, just a most heartfelt wish; it did not seem very promising.

But Francis is no ordinary being, nor is the group she has

gathered around her!

In February 2008, Francis, Joan and Chris were back. This time with all the paraphernalia of a very competent professional film crew—one, in addition, that inspired openness and trust. In February 2008 was Auroville's 40th anniversary, and we were experiencing a glut of sorts—almost an excess of film crews were doing the rounds. The collectivity itself was undergoing a somewhat self-congratulatory moment! Not the best occasion perhaps to plumb the profundities that have brought individuals here from around the world, binding them together, almost in spite of themselves, to a commitment they do not fully comprehend or encompass in their outer activities and natures.

This summer, on the 27th of June, at the Jean Marie Ryan Centre of Misericordia, Chicago, *New Momentum for Human Unity* (the organization Francis formed with friends to realize her promise) hosted an event they called "Awareness into Action." A full day's programme, complete with key note address and morning and afternoon panel discussions, arranged to showcase their documentary film: "*The City of the Dawn*." To play a part in this event, the group invited three Aurovilians, whom they flew across the world. Besides Bhavana, Jean Yves, and myself from Auroville, Julian, Bryan and Fanou completed the six member afternoon panel with Francis as moderator.

The film itself will be released on completion of the editing process in September this year. Even so, viewing the rough-cut, one came away with an impression of something quite fine; 'inspirational' was the comment expressed most by the 150 viewers. While it could be argued that less of the material aspects of Auroville's work/people came through; the film clearly focuses upon deeper aspects. Francis wished to present the experiment in its psychological and spiritual dimensions through the voices of Aurovillian personalities. Questions such as why people chose to come here and how their profounder impulses have stood the test of time, what holds Auroville and Aurovilians together in spite of the difficulties of co-existence, or, to what extent is there a continued sense of alignment with the original inspiration, make the dominant motif of the film.

Aurovilians came across as remarkably hopeful of the future, quite down-to-earth persons tested on the crucible of their own impossibilities and yet committed to this attempt at unity and oneness. One had the sense that this might be the very note to strike at this particular moment in time, and the film makes a powerful, effective statement.

The group that has made this film possible is itself quite inspiring. The source and first impulsion is Francis Rothluebber's, and she and Joan are the wise elders of New Momentum, but the other members of the group are likewise committed to a deeper purpose. This was the most moving aspect of our US sojourn: that we could meet people so dedicated to channeling the spirit of Auroville to a larger audience. I returned enriched and inspired by my experience of their sweetness and generosity. Indeed, may their work of bringing an awareness of the possibility of an actual human unity, continue to grow from strength to strength.



Redefining itself: New Creation Bilingual School, now Aikiyam School

by Mauna van der Vlugt, in collaboration with other members of Aikiyam School's support group

An earlier shortened version of this article appeared Auroville Today, May 2008

Most people know the small white buildings, shaped like UFOs, under the enormous banyan trees on the left of the road immediately after entering Auroville's New Creation settlement. They were built in the early eighties by architect André Hababou, at the request of his friend André Tardeil, who had a vision and passion to create a bridge between Auroville and the impoverished population of neighboring Kuilyapalayam and other local villages, by providing opportunities for informal education, training and earning a living.

In the early years these buildings served as a rural training centre, housing small carpentry and tailoring shops, as well as the beginnings of school facilities, often all mixed together. As there was, apart from a Panchayat primary school up to 5th standard, no other school in the neighbourhood, children eagerly came to the new school. Gradually the 'UFOs' were joined by other workshops and classroom buildings to create the well organised lively school campus that it is now.

Beginnings

In the early years several other Aurovilians joined André Tardeil to provide the basics of an education for the village children, but it was only in 1990 that the classrooms and curriculum began to be consolidated. Invited by André and encouraged by Auroville's Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research (SAIER), Roy Wicks, a retired British police officer, arrived in the premises, established some order, and added the bilingual dimension with English classes and some teaching in English. He promoted a more interactive and diversified curriculum than the standard Indian listen-and-repeat approach, or the alternative, 'total freedom without responsibility.'

The mainly untrained Tamil staff worked hard to assimilate this new philosophy and the strategies which accompanied it. The new approaches were introduced at first by educationist Greta

Jackson, also from Britain, who offered a variety of play-way methods, and then by Heidi Watts, a professor from Antioch University in the United States. Heidi began coming regularly for a few months each winter to work with schools and teachers in Auroville and was, and is, a frequent visitor to the New Creation Bilingual School (NCBS).

During the early nineties, the first turn towards a more formal education at NCBS emerged. While André did not entirely agree with a more structured approach to schooling, it was generally appreciated and seen as effective, and fund-raising efforts were rewarded. Among these were substantial grants from the European Commission to build vocational training centers and a computer lab.

"From when Roy came the school only went up," says Pugazhendi, one of the school's earliest teachers. When Roy left for the U.K. in 2001 for medical reasons, the supervision was taken over by a British couple, Mike and Sue, both educators, who introduced assessment techniques and began insisting on prior preparations for classes and adherence to a curriculum. Their good work is still apparent in the school. When they left three years later, there was a leadership vacuum.

More than 200 children ranging in age from 3 to 13, receive academic and vocational education from crèche through 8th grade in Tamil and English.

The new team

Early in 2005, Heidi and Martin Littlewood of AVI UK felt that something had to be

done about this lack of effective leadership in NCBS. The general discontent among village youth was high and it seemed that the best help Auroville could offer to the younger generation of the bioregion was good and solid education, both academic and vocational. Martin and Heidi consulted with Sanjeev of SAIER and approached some long-term Aurovilians if they were willing to form a management team or 'support group' for the school. Janet (Canadian), Mauna (Dutch), Shankar and Suryagandhi (both Indian) accepted the challenge and were much later joined by Diana (British), Françoise (French) and Franca (Italian). No one of these individuals had a clear notion of what lay ahead, but all consented to give the management of the school a try, in addition to their regular commitments in Auroville. Fortnightly meetings soon became weekly gatherings. What became immediately apparent was that the school needed a principal. Up to this point there had only been 'directors' responsible for the overall running of the school but never a 'principal' responsible for the children, teachers, and curriculum. Fortunately, Shankar who was then teaching at Auroville's 'Last School,' agreed to take up the position. As a Kuilyapalam native well known in the villages and in Auroville, and an experienced teacher with a Masters Degree in Tamil and second language teacher training, he seemed tailor-made for the job.



Aikiyam School's Support Group (L to R): Françoise Corbel, Franca Crocetti, H. Suriyagandhi, S. Shankar, Janet Fearn & Mauna van der Vlugt (missing in photo is Dianna Bowler). (Photo by Giorgio Molinari)

Challenges

And so the real work began. There was considerable resistance to change from the teachers who had been used to Western leadership and could not accept that a Tamil principal could do the job. Old misunderstandings and frictions that had built up between New Creation's original initiators and the past leaders of the school also had to be resolved. The Support Group had to move slowly. It had conversations with the teachers where expectations were firmly defined, regular attendance supervision was introduced, as was a school uniform, the latter done to avoid visual differences in the students' economic status.

As principal, Shankar initiated thrice-weekly meetings with the teachers, and was present at the school every day from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Gradually, the Support Group inched forward, bonding as a team, inspired by their common passion to provide underprivileged children a comprehensive and sound education. Health professional Suryagandhi, one of the members of the Support Group says: "In the beginning I was afraid to join a group with all these different nationalities! But Heidi and Sanjeev encouraged me. 'Do it for the children,' they said. Now I can say that I am very happy with the way we work. Sometimes we don't agree but we always come out of it. It naturally happened that each of us has a specific function in the team. It works!"

That it works is clear from the smooth functioning of the school and the visible progress on all fronts, from teacher competence and accountability, to the enthusiasm and cheer evident in the faces of the children. After the first year, positive feedback started coming in from grateful parents who saw that things were changing through the behaviour of their children, meetings with teachers in the school, and a new venture, an active Parents-Teachers Association. They also appreciated the vocational

classes held bi-weekly in computer use, tailoring and woodwork, singing, dancing and art, and an everyday sports programme.

M.J. Kumar, a local entrepreneur and father of three daughters who study in the school feels that since Shankar joined as principal, the school has become more strict, something he is very happy about. "We can be proud of it," he says. "I can see in the way my daughters now prepare for the school day and *want* to do their homework, that it has become real for them. Before Shankar Sir, the school was about eating and playing; now it is not only eating and playing but also learning." He says that his youngest daughter, now in upper Kindergarten, is doing much better than her elder sibling. "She's 100% Kindergarten. But the older one who is now in 4th standard, missed this serious basic training in Kindergarten and I can see that she lacks something."

Another parent, Mercy, wife of a coolie and mother of three children in the school, expresses her satisfaction with the current education the school offers, the child care, and the nutrition provided for the children. "I'm somewhat educated myself," she says, "but can't express in English, while my children can. They correct my pronunciation, and this is very good as English is the common language all over the world. My son tells me everything he learned at school that day!"

"Also . . . in our homes, we beat our children when they do something wrong, but at the school the teachers talk with them and find a solution. This I like very much." Mercy also appreciates the special tutoring sessions that the school offers which her second child benefits from, as well as the field trips organised within and outside Auroville. "I'm grateful for all this."

A major challenge for the school continues to be finances. The school has no regular income and opens its doors to children of the lowest income groups without charging any fees. "We function separately from the French-oriented Free Progress Child Development Centre elsewhere in the New Creation settlement," says Support Group member Janet. "Contrary to the general assumption, the school does not receive any share from New Creation's taxi service or its restaurants. Quite naturally people think that some of this income is channeled into the school, but this is not and has never been the case." To avoid further confusion between the two organizations, NCBS has this year changed its name into Aikiyam School, 'Aikiyam' meaning "harmony, oneness of the soul with those of each other and the Divine, unity in diversity," in both Tamil and in Sanskrit.

While basic expenses, such as most teacher and staff salaries, maintenances, nutrition expenses, and some essential equipment and repairs come out of Auroville's Unity Fund via SAIIR, it is insufficient to run the school properly and to keep up the strong momentum built up thus far. To overcome its financial handicap, the school has for the past four years been regularly publishing a colorful, quarterly newsletter reaching out to Auroville International Centers and other potential donors in Auroville, India and abroad. In it, appeals for funds to support specific projects are made. Response has been forthcoming, as in the case of Priyannam, the school kitchen that doubles as a dining



hall funded by a well-wisher. The same donor also offered seed money for the construction of an additional climate-appropriate school building. In early 2009, this was augmented by funding from the German Government, and presently a new library-cum-science lab is under construction, which also houses a space for Aikiyam's therapeutic 'Special Needs' sessions.

CBSE accreditation

Having applied for it with the approval of SAIIR, in 2007 the school received provisional affiliation for a period of three years from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). CBSE promotes creative education at all levels through the application of learning by doing, the teacher's role is to be 'shifted from being a source of knowledge to being a facilitator,' while resources available in the child's own environment are to be utilised as unifying themes for different subjects. Its general values and approaches were sufficiently consistent with the integral education followed by Aikiyam's team that it had dared to undergo the severe testing by CBSE. The resulting accreditation is quite unique: nowhere else in India has a school in an underprivileged area become CBSE-affiliated and recognized.

Being a CBSE school means that the children will no longer have to sit for State Board exams based on rote learning in grade eight but will write exams approved by CBSE in grade ten at New Era Secondary School (NESS, earlier known as After School), an Auroville-run CBSE high school for village children. For those children who want to go to a State Board high school instead of NESS, Aikiyam School is from this year onward entitled by CBSE to give a recognised 'school leaving' certificate.

A unique experiment

Slowly the uniqueness of the Aikiyam School experiment in integral education for village children, based on the principles of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is beginning to be noticed. Here is an environment where the concept of 'human unity' is a direct and natural experience lived through the mix of an eastern-western team of teachers, volunteers and trainers. The open curiosity and freshness of the students themselves is another of the school's precious assets.

Says Shankar, the principal, "These last four years have been a true challenge for us all, but we are moving ahead and the evidence of this is all around us, especially in the children's smiling faces. We are on the way to becoming a model school for rural areas. The encouragement and trust expressed by the parents, and the fact that they don't transfer their children to other schools any more, speaks for itself. We have a caring, qualified and committed team of 17 Aurovilians, 7 Newcomers and 16 employees, of whom 6 have degrees in education and 5 have teaching diplomas. The fact that western Aurovilians and Newcomers are now joining the school's staff, that more and more exchange takes place between other Auroville Schools and Aikiyam, that our children



Aikiyam School's campus with the typical UFO buildings. (Photo by Martin Littlewood)

participate in Auroville's yearly Nature Camps, and that we are able to organize successful science and other exhibitions, are promising indicators.

"Our 200+ children benefit immensely from the increased self-esteem and enthusiasm of the teachers. With malnutrition, disease, domestic violence and general neglect still occurring in our area, some of the children suffer from traumas that are not being addressed at home. This translates to a fairly large percentage of our students having some learning disability. But through their work with qualified trainers and the introduction of individual education plans, all our teachers have now discovered that 'slow learners' or 'dull' kids may not be 'slow' or 'dull' at all—they may just need another approach to open up. We are grateful that our school now has a 'Special Needs' team that works therapeutically with these children. There is no greater joy in the school than when a small child in our crèche or kindergarten, who just never spoke or laughed, suddenly opens up and communicates!"

During a recent group interaction amongst the Aikiyam team, the members of the Support Group were deeply touched when a teacher shared her experience. "In the beginning we didn't like it when you asked us to prepare the classes better, work on ourselves a bit, and so on," she said. "But now I understand that you have been stimulating us in the same way that we now stimulate our children!"

Says Shankar: "This seems a good enough beginning of integral education to me."

All those who wish to live and work in Auroville must have an integral goodwill, a constant aspiration to know the Truth, and to submit to it, enough plasticity to confront the exigencies of work and an endless will to progress so as to move forward towards the ultimate Truth. —The Mother



Chronicles

The Mother's work with flowers

by Richard Pearson

A somewhat different version of this essay appeared in the book The Golden Path, by Anie Nunnally

To see her was a summons to adore.

—Sri Aurobindo, Savitri

When I first came to the Ashram what used to strike me most when we went “up” and entered one by one—whether department head or us children—was the array of flowers of all kinds arranged in trays or in vases on a shelf at the entrance of the Salon.

The Mother would receive us just inside the open door at the top of the staircase that led from the Meditation Hall. This door is just opposite the door that sadhaks and visitors use nowadays for Darshan or to go to Sri Aurobindo's Room.

And we could hear, while still standing on the steps waiting our turn to meet Her, “Lakshmi, give me ‘Victory!’ Lakshmi give me that flower!”

When we were in Her Presence, She would often choose a flower from a tray held for Her by Lakshmi, the “Queen of Roses” as the Mother called her—often not even looking at the tray but picking the flower while smiling and looking intently into our eyes . . . deep, so very deep!

Sri Aurobindo has reportedly written that “There are three ways of blessing of the Mother: by sight, by touch and through flowers. And it is through flowers that Her blessings are most effective.”

I don't know what my friends would do with the flower She gave, but I would



Richard Pearson seeks to experience and guide others to feel the subtle vibrations of flowers. (Photo courtesy Richard Pearson)

take it straight home and put it in a small bottle. Vases were less common in those days and if we did get a beautiful one from someone we would prefer to offer it to Her on our birthday with a flower of our choice.

When I give them [flowers] I give you states of consciousness.
—The Mother

It was a game I played with these flowers to keep them fresh as long as possible. It's a past-time I still enjoy as it is both rewarding and often deeply instructive, rather indicative of my own aspiration or lack of loving understanding.

This was my first introduction to flowers; we received, besides ‘Victory’ (*Allamanda*), ‘Divine Solicitude’ (*Malvaviscus drummondii*) and even quite often ‘The Divine Presence’ (*Rhoeo*: Moses in the Cradle).

However, the most usual flower She gave at the morning blessings was the Champak: ‘Psychological Perfection.’ I believe also during ‘Children's Darshan’ at around noon (nothing was really fixed, it depended on the Mother's work), she would give either this flower or a little tomato or a toffee. She would give or throw to each of us children and the few teachers crowding in the Darshan Room. The inner Darshan door and both doors to Sri Au-

robindo's would be corridor closed, of course. During special Puja days She would quite often give the flower ‘Victory.’

For those familiar with the endless variety of Frangipani's, I must specify that in those days the commonest flower was the small white one with the yellow center. We did receive too the white one with long separate or rounded petals on occasion (*Plumeria obtusa*), respectively ‘Integral Psychological Perfection’ and ‘Perfect Psychological Perfection.’

Since this flower is so important ‘psychologically,’ I will return at this point to a moment in time when I was not physically present. In 1929-30, She played flower games with a few sadhaks, who—like Nolini, Sethna, Amrita, Pavitra, and Champaklal, of course—were often upstairs working with Her. She would gather a few flowers in Her hand and ask each disciple to make a meaningful sentence using the significances She had given (in English in those days). The 100 odd such sentences

recorded by Champaklal, that ever faithful and meticulously careful disciple who respected every little thing

used by the Mother or Sri Aurobindo and even preserved the Lord's loose hair and nail clippings. Those flowers, listed not as names but as aids, guide-posts, indications of the paths, promises of the goal, show that the Mother's work with flowers was already a “fait accompli,” an accomplished fact, soon after She took charge of the Ashram after 24 November 1926.

Here are two such flower messages: “*Divine Solicitude* is supporting you in the *Disinterested Work* through which you will attain *Transformation*. 23.9.1929,” and “*Love the Victor* will manifest when there will be established through the five-fold *Psychological Perfection* [this flower has five petals] the *Love of the Physical Being for the Divine*—and when through *Loving Consecration* [the earlier name for what She later called “Radha's Consciousness”] there will be a complete *Faithfulness to the Divine*.” [There is noted below this message: “Five-fold psychological



perfection: Sincerity, faith, devotion, aspiration, surrender.]

Much later, in fact, 30 years or more, when talking to the children (in French) about this flower, She described at length how sincerity (She put that first) was really a form of transparency, faith a manifestation of trust in the Divine, gratitude a true expression of devotion, aspiration the ardent symbol of courage, and perseverance the material form of endurance. And as you notice endurance and perseverance have come into the *psychological perfection*, what about Surrender? Well, when summing up in that talk, She says “Sri Aurobindo has said that surrender is the first and absolute condition of doing the yoga. So . . . this is not just one of the necessary qualities, it is the first condition . . . To do the Integral Yoga one must first resolve to surrender entirely to the Divine; there is no other way, this is the way. But after that one must have the five psychological virtues, five psychological perfections.”

Where did the first 100 flowers named by Mother come from in those early days? According to what I heard from my friend Jyotin-da, Mother was so fond of flowers that the old maxim of “beg, borrow or steal” was the method used to procure flowers for Mother to distribute! So with hurricane lantern, a stick and basket in hand, and a pair of nimble legs to climb over walls and run away when espied, our would-be gardeners went out by night or very early morning. Perhaps in those days of rigorous sadhana when you could not go for a walk or visit another sadhak without the Mother’s express permission the end justified the means. But when during one such “sortie” a sadhak who was not quick enough to jump the fence was caught and even put behind bars for the offence, the Mother decided that the time had come to develop gardens and gardening. One of the first gardens—Maret Gar-



Perfect psychological perfection. White. “Psychological perfection in all the parts of the being.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

den—was called “Atul’s Garden” by the sadhaks for Atul, the very same person who went to prison, and who was put in charge! Those were the days when houses or gardens could be haunted by spirits up

Flowers bring with them the smile of the Divine. —The Mother

to some mischief. So dear Atul-da himself had to deal with some not-so-pleasant intruders! Incidentally, part of this garden had been used earlier by the washer people who had built several large tanks and an elaborate water drainage system. When filled with soil they have truly proved till this day to be very effective for growing annuals and even water plants.

After a few years, the town-people too really came to know of the Mother’s magical ways . . . of forcing “matter to express the spirit.” Once She had decided that flowers would be grown in our gardens, She encouraged gardeners to try out all sorts of new varieties of flowers and vegetables to the extent that when a flower and vegetable show was arranged at the Botanical Garden, the flowers and plants displayed by the Ashram created an overwhelming presence of beauty and joyous peace: the beauty and bliss and peace of the Divine Mother’s Grace!

Let us trace briefly at this point the Mother’s visible identification with Nature and with flowers. Even as a child She had experiences of the physical restoration of energy by the contact with Nature, which She described as occurring when lying flat on the grass in the woods. In Japan, after the intense years of inner growth and searching for unification and one-pointed surrender—as Her *Prayers and Meditations* amply and beautifully describe—we find from the beginning of 1917 how in that land of beauty and austere simplicity (she has said

“there is a great beauty in simplicity”), the seeds of the New World were already sown. She wrote how the cherry tree revealed its “current of azure force” and She became one with the tree that is one with all. She experienced the cherry blossoms radiating their divine presence and self-giving.

The Mother’s heart burst forth in exaltation as she wrote: “Each time that a heart leaps at the touch of Thy divine breath, a little more beauty seems to be born upon the earth . . . At these blessed hours all earth sings a hymn of gladness, the grasses shudder with pleasure, the air is vibrant with light, the trees lift towards heaven their most ardent prayer, the chant of the birds becomes a canticle, the waves of the sea billow with love, the smile of children tells of the infinite and the souls of men appear in their eyes.” (*Prayers and Meditations*, 31 March 1917)

This is the feeling one felt when the Mother gave flowers on our birthday, the most special day—individually speaking—in the year! We saw Her several times that day, and each time we would receive a special bouquet or a flower or a garland and Her smile and Her Presence.

Most memorable perhaps—for how can one compare Beauty to Beauty,—was the simple meeting at night upstairs after



the Blessings in the Meditation Hall. Her whiteness equaled by—rather matching—the Jasmine garland She held in Her hand! One was quite overwhelmed with fragrance and perfume, with sweetness, with Grace!

I grew up with Baudet, the donkey, Beauty the dog, and with Jalad-da, a simple, reserved yet lovable and dynamic dairyman. He took me out with him on his bullock cart (the trotting kind of bullock loathe to start yet really fast when returning home!). I wandered in the mornings in gardens or spent time with the gardeners: Jyotin-da, whose day began at three in the morning and who still used to write a line or two of poetry when he awoke at night!; with Parichand-da who never refused me anything I asked and who spent his free time reading *Savitri* or *The Life Divine* aloud to himself (This at a time when perhaps only a handful realised the infinity and the sublimity of this epic). There was Jibon-da, Jyotin-da's own student in the early days, who carried on his work at the Flower Room and who told me most of the flower names.

Yes, the Flower Room! It was once upon a time in the little store-room now used by the School near the Soup Table. It was here that my flower schooling began. I would just stand around as the flowers—in baskets covered with leaves and maybe a damp cloth and tied in neat bundles collected from the previous evening or early that day—would be taken out and arranged. Bouquets would be made for birthdays; special flowers would be carefully laid out in large brass trays to take to the Mother for Her to distribute. All this would be done on the floor. Jyotin-da, moving around and back and forth to the Ashram, Jibon-da squatting on a very low stool with his wooden sandals high enough to



Smile of Beauty. White to pink. "Nature is happy to be beautiful."
(Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

keep his feet dry. It was cool and refreshing and fragrant too. So I would ask, "What is this flower? What is that?" And so on, picking up slowly the name She gave. Many were the stories Jyotin-da

studying to be a ballet dancer!

This reminds me of what Pavitra once asked me when I was enthusiastically trying to persuade him to ask the Mother about a particular significance: "Do you think the Mother gives the name for the flower, or for us?" At that moment I truly believed she gave names to flowers. But over the years and by the effect of experiences and such stories as I have just recounted, I really feel that it is both terrestrial and an individual gift of the Mother Divine!

The other two gardeners whom I came into contact with

was first Nirmal-da, who grew both vegetables and flowers—vegetables for the Mother's kitchen, flower plants for different houses as well as for the Library. When I was young, I could never understand one

of his quaint habits: he would go at night to look at his plants and just stand by the flower or vegetable beds. Much later I

*Answering with the flowers' answer to the Sun
They gave themselves to her and asked no more.
—Sri Aurobindo, in Savitri*

would tell. Let me tell this one since it was one that baffled him as he tried to fathom the Mother's ways with her children.

He told me of a flower I had not seen though I knew the tree. It was in fact 'Jerusalem Thorn' (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) though I saw the formidable thorns only later. He had taken it several times to the Mother when he saw it bloom, near the Lake, I believe, but she had not given it any significance. It seems others had tried asking her too, but in vain. Now, it was during the very early days of Auroville even before the inaugural ceremony, I think, and there was young girl in her teens who had come to the Mother on her birthday and had brought these flowers and feathery leaves to her.

I was told that the Mother smiled as she took the flowers and exclaimed: "Oh, This is Lightness!" This girl, with lovely blond hair flowing over her shoulders, was

fully sensed the contact he was experiencing, more tangible at night than by day!

Now I must tell something of Lakshmi. As in some fairy-tales we are told of a beautiful garden surrounded by a wall, such was the impression of Lakshmi's garden. The door was always well shut, whether she was in or at the Ashram attending on the Mother when She gave flowers. But the flowering trees and shrubs grew a foot and a half apart and spread over the wall giving the most wonderful sight and fragrance—Queen of Roses she was indeed—for in that small garden, roses—all in pots, packed to the rim and with only as much place on the pathways for Lakshmi or her servant to pass between. Nobody visited her, she went nowhere except to the Ashram for the Mother, besides she had a little black Terrier, a dog who barked fiercely if you even came near the door!



Of course, I wanted to see inside but the first few times I asked her she closed the door in my face! Besides, I would never ask her on the road since she was either in a hurry to go to the Mother or in a hurry to go back to see her plants.

Little by little I won her confidence, but she would even after letting me in say: "What is there to see? All roses are gone!" (she meant upstairs to the Mother).

With the children who arrived with their parents after 1939, little by little a new energy was present in the Ashram. One of the first things the Mother did was to use the French name for flowers when talking with the few children who had now settled. By 1943 when the Ashram School officially opened, French became the language of instruction, as Mother would speak in French.

The greetings of *Bonjour!* and *Bonne Fete!* have defied time and space and even now from that a beautiful bond unites us with Her. Incidentally, *Bon Anniversaire* or *Joyeux Anniversaire* is the usual French expression, but She preferred the short and sweet form.

It must be mentioned that the Mother encouraged all forms of art and handicraft—embroidery, painting, carpentry, leather work—all means of expressing beauty by consecrated service and work; consciousness obliging matter to obey the spirit! It may also be noted that there were only a handful of ashram artists in the beginning: Anil-Kumar, Jayantilal, Krishnalal, and Sanjivan; but young and old alike would take things for her to offer on their birthdays.

In 1952, I wrote my last letter in English to the Mother and she replied (in English) to my question of whether I could go for further studies in Botany to England. Her reply indicated that whereas I would find England satisfying intellectually, I would not find the kind of spiritual atmosphere present in the Ashram, and that to move out of this atmosphere would be a great risk for me of losing what I had gained.

In 1953, *Le Role des Fleurs* was published, written by Lizelle Raymond, in which she collected 656 flowers and wrote the most beautiful introduction! This and

the card indexes in four beautiful wooden boxes were my "treasure" with which in 1956 I began a small section of Natural History downstairs in the "Laboratoire" (of Physics and Chemistry). This is where I looked after wounded birds, baby squirrels, and took charge of a few boys who liked to come round and make things for the Mother on their birthdays!

When I saw the book I found some mistakes in the botanical names and in the significances. I wrote to the Mother asking if I could work on a flower book that would contain all the names Mother had given. Mother said "Yes, this could be done." This development began the new classification for the book *Flowers and Their Messages*, but was not completed until 1973. During this work, Pavitra sent messages to the Mother for me. He was another of my mentors. When I went to his room, as soon as I entered, I would feel that I was in the Mother's room, so strong was her Force. In his presence I would feel the Presence of the Mother.

In 1964 began my life with Kailas and soon after began the daily offering of a plate of flowers to the Mother and her blessing of flowers to us: a larger plate for Kailas and a smaller saucer for me. We would send flowers covered with a beautiful cloth. In the Indian tradition, when flowers are given to the guru, they should not be seen, touched nor smelled by anyone else. I used to press all the flowers she sent to us. The last flowers the Mother sent to me were a garland of 'Devotion.'

The work on flowering plants started with great vigour with the first gardens of Auroville when Richard Eggenberger (later named Narad by the Mother) started the Nursery for the Matrimandir. After 1968, he collected many new varieties and built up the first of the Auroville gardens.

Incidentally, there was a period even before the inauguration of Auroville in 1968 when the Mother would give 'Godhead,' a cream-colored, single Hawaiian hibiscus. After 'Godhead,' which she first called Auroville's flower, she preferred to give another flower, 'Beauty of Supramental Love,' for those working in Auroville. She told me that the color of this flower

was similar to the rich red of the soil of Auroville.

Later, other hibiscus flowers would come from the Nursery for the Mother and would be left at the Reception. Kailas and I would go and make a rough sketch, or if possible, paint these flowers before they went upstairs. Many hibiscus (17 to be exact) were given names for Auroville, such as 'The Success of Auroville,' 'The Firmness of Auroville,' 'The Concentration of Auroville,' etc.

When the ideas for the 12 gardens were being worked out by the Mother with Roger, I believe the Mother called me asking to bring them as many hibiscus flowers as I could. I believe I went on Tuesdays at 3 o'clock. Narad helped me. At the first meeting She explained that She wanted to choose a flower (hibiscus) for each of the 12 gardens: "We will choose..." mark her words. I was surprised. She knew everything I told her; but She smiled and said She had forgotten! I was touched at her modesty.

I must say that the biggest gift from the Mother for this work on flowers was the commentaries that she gave on the various flowers for the book *Flowers and their Messages*. The Mother would work on about five flowers a day at a fixed time. She gave them orally and they were checked the following day by Tara. These commentaries were done in 1970 and 1971, and were translated by Tehmi into English. Narad would come in the evening all the way from Auroville to help in the preparation of the book for the press. This was one of the early publications from Auropress. And now, after several editions since the first one in 1973, we prepare for a revised, rather enlarged edition. We are not only continuing to unfold and share more of the Mother's work with flowers, but also we seek her help to contact that source of well-being natural to the flowers' own state of receptivity with the feeling that this language of flowers is a totally new and deeply psychological experience. For it is certain that the Mother put a special force in each flower that she gave us and all depended on how receptive we were to that Action.



Essays

The Divine Grace

by Larry Seidlitz

As Sri Aurobindo wrote in the opening sentence of his important book, *The Mother*, “There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace that answers.” (p. 1) So we see that both are necessary and further that they are complementary, interactive, and synergistic. Therefore, in addition to understanding clearly specific practices that we can implement to make progress in the Yoga (see the previous issue of *Collaboration*), we must understand the nature and action of the Divine Grace, its place in the Yoga, and its relation to our personal practice. In this article, I hope to shed some light on these issues by examining key passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Grace.

What is the Divine Grace?

It may be useful if we can first develop a clearer conception of what Grace is, linking it to our general understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s views about the nature of existence and of yoga. It is no accident that Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the concept of Grace in the opening of his book, *The Mother*, because the concept is closely connected with Her. The Mother is the Divine Shakti, the Divine Power, “the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence,... the consciousness and force of the Supreme.” (*The Mother*, p. 19). He further explains that

In all that is done in the universe, the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action but he is veiled by his Yoga Maya and works through the ego of the Jiva in the lower nature.



Larry hoping the Grace will help him finish his work. (Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz)

In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ananda, acting upon the Adhara and, when it is opened to her, pouring into it with these divine forces that makes the Sadhana possible. But so long as the lower nature is active the personal effort of the Sadhaka remains necessary. (*The Mother*, p. 6)

Sri Aurobindo sometimes refers to the Grace as emanating from the Mother. For example, he writes, “For the grace of the Divine Mother is the sanction of the Supreme and now or tomorrow its effect is sure, a thing decreed, inevitable and irresistible. (*The Mother*, p. 10) In another passage he describes it this way: “Grace is something spontaneous which wells out of the Divine Consciousness as a free flow of its being.” (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 790) In another interesting passage he says,

...this divine grace, if we may so call it, is not simply a mysterious flow or touch coming from above, but the all-pervading act of a divine presence which we come to know within as the power of the highest Self and Master of our being entering into the soul and so possessing it that we not only feel

it close to us and pressing upon our mortal nature, but live in its law, know that law, possess it as the whole power of our spiritualised nature. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 595)

In some other passages, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo make the intimate connection between the physical embodiment of the Mother and the Grace explicit:

The Divine Grace alone has the power to intervene and change the course of Universal Justice. The great work of the Avatar is to manifest the Divine Grace upon earth. To be a disciple of the Avatar is to become an instrument of the Divine Grace. The Mother is the great dispensatrix—through identity—of the Divine Grace, with a perfect knowledge—through identity—of the absolute mechanism of Universal Justice. (*Collected Works of the Mother (CWM)*, vol. 14, p. 83)

It is the work of the Cosmic Power to maintain the cosmos and the law of the cosmos. The greater transformation comes from the Transcendent above the universal, and it is that transcendent Grace which the embodiment of the Mother is there to bring into action. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 50)

In her universal action the Mother acts according to the law of things—in her embodied physical action is the opportunity of a constant Grace—it is for that that the embodiment takes place. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 50)

Thus, we may say that Grace is the conscious Power of the Divine, the Mother, which is behind all action in the universe, but that normally its action is veiled and works through the mechanisms of the lower nature, not directly. When, or in proportion to which, the individual’s nature is opened and surrendered to the Divine, it pours its divine forces directly into the sadhaka.



It is this direct, freer action of the Divine Mother working on the individual that Sri Aurobindo seems to refer to as the Grace, as distinct from her normal veiled activity that works through the mechanisms of the lower nature. He writes:

Destiny in the rigid sense applies only to the outer being so long as it lives in the Ignorance. What we call destiny is only in fact the result of the present condition of the being and the nature and energies it has accumulated in the past acting on each other and determining the present attempts and their future results. But as soon as one enters the path of spiritual life, this old predetermined destiny begins to recede. There comes in a new factor, the Divine Grace, the help of a higher Divine Force other than the force of Karma, which can lift the sadhak beyond the present possibilities of his nature. One's spiritual destiny is then the divine election which ensures the future. The only doubt is about the vicissitudes of the path and the time to be taken by the passage. It is here that the hostile forces playing on the weaknesses of the past nature strive to prevent the rapidity of the progress and to postpone the fulfilment. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 475)

We see that Sri Aurobindo clearly distinguishes between the action of the Grace and the normal mechanisms of karma, in which our life and destiny are largely the natural result of our previous actions both in this life and previous incarnations. It is a higher Power that intervenes in the normal law of the working of the karmic energies, and it can annul or supersede them. Nevertheless, he notes here that while the power and eventual success of the Grace are infallible, the time taken to fulfill its action may be short or long, and is often delayed by the hostile forces.

The Omnipresence of the Grace

We get a somewhat different perspective on the nature of Grace from the Mother's

talks. At first sight, her perspective seems to contradict Sri Aurobindo's view of the Grace as a special intervention acting when the nature is open and surrendered, but I think it is quite possible to reconcile them and find that while emphasizing different aspects, together they give us a more refined view of Grace. In many of her talks referring to Grace, the Mother seems to emphasize its constant and ever present action in the world. For example, she says,

In the whole manifestation there is an infinite Grace constantly at work to bring the world out of the misery, the obscurity and the stupidity in which it lies. From all time this Grace has been at work, unremitting in its effort, and how many thousands of years were necessary for this world to awaken to the need for something greater, more true, more beautiful.

Everyone can gauge, from the resistance he meets in his own being, the tremendous resistance which the world opposes to the work of the Grace. (*CWM*, Vol. 9, pp. 419-420)

We see here that from the Mother's perspective, the Grace is constantly acting everywhere. At the same time, she notes that its action is resisted and opposed by the ignorance of the lower nature, and thus its eventual aim and result of awakening the world to the Divine has required many thousands of years. This idea of the omnipresence of the Grace brings to mind Sri Aurobindo's conception, quoted earlier, that the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action in the universe, but that this action is veiled by his Yoga Maya in the lower nature. According to this view, the Divine Force is constantly pressing on the manifestation to progress, to open, to awaken to the Divine that is within it and supports it and with which it is one in its inmost reality. On the one hand, there are the present limitations of the evolving world which constrain, resist, and deny the free and rapid working of the Divine Force, and on the other hand there is the constant pressure and infallible action of

the Divine Force *working through* all of these resistances in a patient but persistent and compassionate manner.

In one of the most powerful passages on Grace, the Mother says,

I have said somewhere, or maybe written, that no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world.

As soon as you are in contact with It, there is not a second in time, not a point in space, which does not show you *dazzlingly* this perpetual work of the Grace, this constant intervention of the Grace.

And once you have seen this, you feel you are never equal to it, for you should never forget it, never have any fears, any anguish, any regrets, any recoils... or even suffering. If one were in union with this Grace, if one saw It everywhere, one would begin living a life of exultation, of all-power, of infinite happiness.

And that would be the best possible collaboration in the divine Work. (*CWM*, Vol. 8, p. 251)

She expresses here something of the wonderfully complex and intricately powerful action of the Grace, of the divine Power that is at work in the universe, leading it towards the divine realization as swiftly and harmoniously as possible. There is in its action an omniscient, all-comprehending wisdom that is perfectly suited to meet the conditions of the world in the best pos-



sible way. It balances swiftness and vehemence with love and compassion so as to move the evolution forward as quickly as possible without causing undue pain and suffering in its creatures who are as yet subject to the resistance of the mental, vital and physical nature. If it moves too quickly, then more that could not keep up would be destroyed; if it moves too slowly, then the suffering associated with the ignorance would be prolonged. Moreover, it works in all beings and things and events, which are all in dynamic relationship, simultaneously. It puts just the right pressures in the right places at the right times, cognizant of the rippling effects throughout the system. It manages the great descents of light and power in the avatars and vibhūtis that spread throughout the world, and the subtle interventions that prevent a scrape or answer a humble prayer.

Still, it would seem that the Grace acts differently in different people according to their openness and receptivity to the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo says, "If you open yourself on one side or in one part to the Truth and on another side are constantly opening the gates to the hostile forces, it is vain to expect that the divine Grace will abide with you." (*The Mother*, p. 3) When the being is fully open and surrendered to the Divine, the Grace, the Divine Force, can flow freely in and guide, direct, and lead the person forward swiftly and harmoniously. Here the individual consciously moves in the wake of the Divine, lives in its light and power, and is as if carried from delight to greater delight. However, if the individual is closed to the Divine and rejects the Grace, then the person becomes caught in the swirl of the ignorant forces of the mind, vital, and physical nature. The divine Grace is still there and still leads the being *through* this ignorant action, but the way becomes convoluted, fraught with suffering, and the deliverance is postponed. Even here the obstacles, the pain, the delay are a Grace, for the obstacles and pain prevent the person from going even further afield and train the obstinate nature to move in the proper direction, and the delay provides the person additional time

to grow and integrate his wayward parts. In such cases, the Grace even may grant the individual his ignorant desire or indolence, so cherished by the person even at the expense of the divine Presence.

The omnipotence of the Grace

We can understand that because the Grace is equivalent to or comes directly from the Divine Mother this is an omnipotent Power that can do everything. As Sri Aurobindo says of the Grace in *The Mother*,

A little of it even will carry you through all difficulties, obstacles and dangers; surrounded by its full presence you can go securely on your way because it is hers, careless of all menace, unaffected by any hostility however powerful, whether from this world or from worlds invisible. Its touch can turn difficulties into opportunities, failure into success and weakness into unfaltering strength. (p. 10)

When we remember that one aspect of the Mother is Mahakali, we may realize how formidable a force the Grace can carry. Describing Mahakali, Sri Aurobindo writes, "When she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence the obstacles that immobilize or the enemies that assail the seeker." (*The Mother*, p. 29) This is the Power at our disposal for the work of the sadhana, and it is because of this fact that we can cherish the aspiration to carry out and succeed in this sadhana. It is really only because the Grace is there and ready to act and lead and carry us through that the transformation of the nature and the supramental realization are at all possible.

Nevertheless, as Sri Aurobindo explains, it is not easy to have this omnipotent Force work in us in its own native strength and power. For that requires "a total and sincere surrender; there must be an exclusive self-opening to the divine Power; there must be a constant and integral choice of the Truth that is descending,

a constant and integral rejection of the falsehood of the mental, vital and physical Powers and Appearances that still rule the earth-Nature." (*The Mother*, p. 2) Therefore, the power of the Grace that works in us in the beginning of the sadhana and for a long time is normally scaled to the measure of our aspiration and openness. Indeed, its action is usually veiled from the seeker for a time until the outer nature is progressively purified, surrendered, and grows in consciousness. Nevertheless, this is not so much a limitation of the Grace, but is simply its usual way of working. Sri Aurobindo explains that

It is not indispensable that the Grace should work in a way that the human mind can understand, it generally doesn't. It works in its own "mysterious" way. At first usually it works behind the veil, preparing things, not manifesting. Afterwards it may manifest, but the sadhak does not understand very well what is happening; finally, when he is capable of it, he both feels and understands or at least begins to do so. Some feel and understand from the first or very early; but that is not the ordinary case. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 610)

This does not mean that the Grace is not working even when its action is not apparent or recognized, it does, and frequently its action *is* recognized in retrospect.

Moreover, the Grace is not a Power that imposes itself on a resisting or refusing nature, or at least in that case it works in a manner scaled and appropriate to such a nature, not in its own sovereign and direct way. As Sri Aurobindo says,

The Divine Grace and Power can do everything, but with the full assent of the sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the sadhana. It may take time either because of ideas in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness, but these things have to be and can be removed with the aid or



by calling in the action of the Divine Force. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 583)

Thus, we see that whereas the Grace is all powerful and that only through its power can human nature be radically transformed and divinized, normally it does not manifest its full power or possibilities without first preparing the nature gradually over time. Its action at first is often not apparent on the surface, nor recognized by the person. It is as the individual learns to call for the Grace, and sincerely and integrally opens to its action that the Grace begins to work more openly and powerfully. As the Mother put it in her *Prayers and Meditations*, “Thou canst make of me all that I need to be, and in the measure in which my attitude allows Thee to act on me and in me, Thy omnipotence has no limits.” (Dec. 3, 1912).

It may also be noted that in some cases it does act openly and powerfully even from the very beginning of sadhana or without any sadhana or conscious aspiration on the part of the individual. In other cases, a relatively minor effort at sadhana, or a simple, sincere call to the Divine may bring powerful and unexpected results, even of spiritual experiences or permanent realizations. The working of the Grace is incalculable, it is a sovereign force; it cannot be commanded or expected as a right for one’s labor, and in some cases it may act without any apparent cause or justification. As stated by Sri Aurobindo,

Grace may sometimes bring undeserved or apparently undeserved fruits, but one can’t demand Grace as a right and privilege—for then it would not be Grace. As you have seen, one can’t claim that one has only to shout and the answer must come. Besides, I have always seen that there has been really a long unobserved preparation before the Grace intervenes, and also, after it has inter-



Call of the Divine Grace. Light brown. “Not loud but persistent and very perceptible to those who know how to listen.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

vened, one has still to put in a good deal of work to keep and develop what one has got—as it is in all other things until there is the complete siddhi. Then of course labour finishes and one is in assured possession. So tapasya of one kind or another is not avoidable. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 612)

Personal effort and Grace

Since the action and timing of Grace is in the hands of the Divine, it is necessary for sadhaks of the yoga to go on with their personal practice and effort. The two naturally work in tandem. As the personal effort in the form of the aspiration, rejection, and surrender of the sadhak advances and becomes more constant and integral, the action of the Grace becomes more powerful and apparent.

In actuality, personal effort and Grace are really two different ends of a single process. We experience ourselves and our personal effort as separate and independent of the Grace, but as Sri Aurobindo says in *The Mother*, “In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana...” Our own personal effort and sadhana is itself an action of the Mother, is itself the action of the Grace. We perceive that we are doing it, but in reality it is the Divine Mother who is doing it and our ego is sim-

ply taking credit because it is identified with this activity.

It [the idea that the sadhana is done by the Divine rather than by oneself] is a truth but a truth that does not become effective for the consciousness until or in proportion as it is realised. The people who stagnate because of it are those who accept the idea but do not realise—so they have neither the force of tapasya nor that of the Divine Grace. On the other hand those who can realise it feel even behind their tapasya and in it the action of the Divine

Force. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 593)

This personal effort can thus be viewed simply as part of the process of the manifestation of the Grace, which over time brings with it the spiritual realization and the transformation of the nature. The spiritual practice we undertake can itself be viewed as part of the intended change, for the spiritual change involves not only an inner change in the consciousness, but also an entire change of the outer life and action. Part of this outer change is a progressively intensifying sadhana expressing itself through purification and developing perfection of one’s physical, vital, and mental nature, concentration, devotion, and an offering of oneself and one’s activities to the Divine.

How to call the Grace

We have seen that our own personal effort is also integrally related to the action of the Grace, that it is viewed by us as independent from the Grace only because of the continuation of the ego sense, the sense of being a separate individual being with an autonomous will. As long as this ego sense is there, there is a need for our personal effort. We have also seen that part of the personal effort demanded of us is to give our integral assent to the action



of the Grace, to open ourselves to its action in us, and still more actively, to aspire and to call the Grace to act in us and to remove the obstacles to its free and direct working. The question then arises, what is the best way to call the Grace of the Divine to work in us? The Mother has discussed two alternative possibilities and their differences:

If one simply invokes the Grace or the Divine, and puts oneself in His hands, one does not expect a particular result. To expect a particular result one must formulate one's prayer, must ask for something. If you have only a great aspiration for the divine Grace and evoke it, implore it, without asking it for anything precise, it is the Grace which will choose what it will do for you, not you.

That is better, isn't it?

Ah! that's quite another question.

Why, it is higher in its quality, perhaps. But still, if one wants something precise, it is better to formulate it. If one has a special reason for invoking the Grace, it is better to formulate it precisely and clearly.

Of course, if one is in a state of complete surrender and gives oneself entirely, if one simply offers oneself to the Grace and lets it do what it likes, that is very good. But after that one must not question what it does! One must not say to it, "Oh! I did that with the idea of having this", for if one really has the idea of obtaining something, it is better to formulate it in all sincerity, simply, just as one sees it. Afterwards, it is for the Grace to choose if it will do it or not; but in any case, one will have formulated clearly what one wanted. And there is no harm in that.



Gratitude. White to pale pink. "It is you who open all the closed doors and allow the saving Grace to enter." (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

Where it becomes bad is when the request is not granted and one revolts. Then naturally it becomes bad. It is at that moment one must understand that the desire one has, or the aspiration, may not have been very enlightened and that perhaps one has asked for something which was not exactly what was good for one. Then at that moment one must be wise and say simply, "Well, let Thy Will be done." But so long as one has an inner perception and an inner preference, there is no harm in formulating it. It is a very natural movement.

For example, if one has been foolish or has made a mistake and one truly, sincerely wishes never to do it again, well, I don't see any harm in asking for it. And in fact, if one asks for it with sincerity, a true inner sincerity, there is a great chance that it will be granted.

You must not think that the Divine likes to contradict you. He is not at all keen on doing it! He can see better than you what is really good for you; but it is only when it is absolutely indispensable that He opposes your aspiration. Otherwise He is always ready to give what you ask. (CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 255-256)

The state of Grace

In several letters, Sri Aurobindo refers to the development within ourselves of a "state of Grace," an inner condition which is open and receptive to the action of the Grace. For example, he writes:

But the touch of grace, divine grace, coming directly or through the Guru is a special phenomenon having two sides to it,—the grace of the Guru or the Divine, in fact both together, on one side and a "state of grace" in the disciple on the other. The "state of grace" is often prepared by a

long tapasya or purification in which nothing decisive seems to happen, only touches or glimpses or passing experiences at the most, and it comes suddenly without warning. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 621)

It is important then to inquire into the nature of this state of Grace—what are its special qualities? Subsequently in the same letter, Sri Aurobindo points to its central element:

This decisive touch comes most easily to the "baby cat" people, those who have at some point between the psychic and the emotional vital a quick and decisive movement of surrender to the Guru or the Divine. I have seen that when that is there and there is the conscious central dependence compelling the mind also and the rest of the vital, then the fundamental difficulty disappears. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 621)

The Mother discusses a similar state and offers some advice in developing it in the following:

If you have had even a second's contact with the Grace—that marvellous Grace which carries you along,



speeds you on the path, even makes you forget that you have to hurry—if you have had only a second's contact with that, then you can strive not to forget. And with the candour of a child, the simplicity of a child for whom there are no complications, give yourself to that Grace and let it do everything.

What is necessary is not to listen to what resists, not to believe what contradicts—to have trust, a real trust, a confidence which makes you give yourself fully without calculating, without bargaining. Trust! The trust that says, “Do this, do this for me, I leave it to You.” That is the best way. (CWM, Vol. 9, p. 427)

In another letter, Sri Aurobindo alludes to a related aspect of this inner state as follows: “Perhaps one could say that it [spiritual humility] is to be aware of the relativity of what has been done compared with what is still to be done—and also to be conscious of one's being nothing without the Divine Grace.” (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1387) The Mother seems to concur with the central importance of this spiritual humility in being receptive to the Grace, as is revealed in her answer to this question:

What is the way to accept the Grace with gratitude?

Ah! First of all you must feel the need for it.

This is the most important point. It is to have a certain inner humility which makes you aware of your helplessness without the Grace, that truly, without it you are incomplete and powerless. This, to begin with, is the first thing.

It is an experience one can very well have. When, you see, even people who know nothing find themselves in quite difficult circumstances or facing a problem which must be solved or, as I just told you, an impulse which must be overcome or something that has disturbed them... and then they realise they are lost,



Blessings. Pinkish lavender. “Pure and innumerable, manifesting themselves infinitely.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

they don't know what to do—neither their mind nor their will nor their feelings help—they don't know what to do, then it happens; there is within them something like a kind of call, a call to something which can do what one cannot. One aspires to something which is capable of doing what one can't do.

This is the first condition. And then, if you become aware that it is only the Grace which can do that, that the situation in which you find yourself, from there the Grace alone can pull you out, can give you the solution and the strength to come out of it, then, quite naturally an intense aspiration awakes in you, a consciousness which is translated into an opening. If you call, aspire, and if you hope to get an answer, you will quite naturally open yourself to the Grace.

And later—you must pay great attention to this (*Mother puts her finger on her lips*)—the Grace will answer you, the Grace will pull you out of the trouble, the Grace will give you the solution to your problem or will help you to get out of your difficulty. But once you are free from trouble and have come out of your difficulty, don't forget that it is the Grace which pulled you out, and don't think it is yourself. For this, indeed, is the im-

portant point. Most people, as soon as the difficulty has gone, say, “After all, I pulled myself out of the difficulty quite well.”

There you are. And then you lock and bolt the door, you see, and you cannot receive anything any more. You need once again some acute anguish, some terrible difficulty for this kind of inner stupidity to give way, and for you to realise once more that you can do nothing. Because it is only when you grow aware that you are powerless that you begin to be just a little open and plastic. But so long as you think that what you do depends on your own skill and your own capacity, truly, not only do you close one door, but, you know, you close lots of doors one upon another, and bolt them. You shut yourself up in a fortress and nothing can enter there. That is the great drawback: one forgets very quickly. Quite naturally one is satisfied with one's own capacity. (CWM, vol. 6, pp. 322-323)

So we see that the most important element of the state of Grace is spiritual humility, a state in which one feels that one is powerless without the Divine. That naturally creates the condition in which one becomes open and receptive to the Grace to act. On top of this, the Mother adds the importance of aspiration, an intense call to the Divine Grace to intervene. Finally, she adds the importance of gratitude to the Divine after it does help, so as not to shut the door again to the Grace by taking personal credit for its success. The Mother refers to the effectiveness of this combination of spiritual humility and intense aspiration in a different conversation:

One must have a great purity and a great intensity in one's self-giving, and that absolute trust in the supreme wisdom of the divine Grace, that It knows better than we do what is good for us, and all that. Then if one offers one's aspiration to It, truly gives it with enough intensity, the results are marvellous. (CWM, Vol. 7, p. 239)



There are several other qualities that make up the state of Grace. Here Mother points to several of them: "In all cases, without exception, whatever may happen, calm and quietude and serene peace and an absolute faith in the divine Grace—if you have all this, nothing can happen to you." (*CWM*, Vol. 7, p. 82) These same qualities were echoed by Sri Aurobindo, "Rely for the sadhana on the Mother's grace and her Force, yourself remembering always to keep only two things, quietude and confidence." (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1414).

Grace and the psychic being

It may have become apparent that the state of Grace is similar to, perhaps coincides with, what has been referred to as the psychic attitude. There are suggestions in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings that there is an important link between Grace and the psychic being. In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo describes the nature and character of the psychic being, where its relation to the attitude of the state of Grace is apparent:

The psychic does not demand or desire—it aspires; it does not make conditions for its surrender or withdraw if its aspiration is not immediately satisfied—for the psychic has complete trust in the Divine or in the Guru and can wait for the right time or the hour of the Divine Grace. The psychic has an insistence of its own, but it puts its pressure not on the Divine, but on the nature, placing a finger of light on all the defects there that stand in the way of the realisation, sifting out all that is mixed, ignorant or imperfect in the experience or in the movements of the yoga and never satisfied with itself or with the nature till it has got it perfectly open to the Divine, free from all forms of ego, surrendered, simple and right in the attitude and all the movements. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1396)

Sri Aurobindo further explains how the action of the psychic being can stimu-



Integral Intimacy with the Divine. The whole being vibrates only to the divine touch. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

late the action of the Grace: "The Divine Grace is something not calculable, not bound by anything the intellect can fix as a condition,—though ordinarily some call, aspiration, intensity of the psychic being can awaken it, yet it acts sometimes without any apparent cause even of that kind." (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 610) Elsewhere he says simply, "The more one develops the psychic, the more is it possible for the Grace to act." (*The Mother*, p. 332) In another passage, he describes the psychic way to succeed in Yoga:

It is not by tormenting yourself with remorse and harassing thoughts that you can overcome. It is by looking straight at yourself, very quietly, with a quiet and firm resolution and then going on cheerfully and bravely in full confidence and reliance, trusting in the Grace, serenely and vigilantly, anchoring yourself on your psychic being, calling down more and more of the love and Ananda, turning more and more exclusively to the Mother. That is the true way—and there is no other. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 1698)

Finally, the following passage by the Mother reveals the close relation between the psychic being and the Grace:

Psychic life in the universe is a work of the divine Grace. Psychic growth is a work of the divine Grace and the ultimate power of the psychic being over the physical being will also be a result of the divine Grace. (*CWM*, Vol. 7, p. 41)

The transforming power of Grace

There is a miraculous quality to the action of the Grace which bears closer scrutiny. Earlier I had occasion to cite a quotation from Sri Aurobindo that expresses this quality: "Its touch can turn difficulties into opportunities, failure into success and weakness into unfaltering strength." (*The Mother*, p. 10) But as we have seen, this powerful transforming action of the Grace typically requires on our side a state of grace centrally made up of an exclusive faith and reliance on the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo said

A sadhak should always remember that everything depends upon the inner attitude; if he has a perfect faith in the Divine Grace, he will find that the Divine Grace will make him do the right thing at every step . . . But for things to happen like that, you must have a deeply rooted faith pervading your whole being, contradicted by no other movement in you. (*Letters on Yoga*, pp. 1696-1697)

This inner attitude of perfect faith seems to be a key to realizing the transforming effects of the Grace. And a crucial aspect of this faith is the perception that the Divine is always present and leading us through all the experiences of life, whatever their outward appearances, to Himself in the most swift and harmonious way possible. The Mother expresses the importance of the proper attitude, the faith that is necessary, in this passage:

There are no words that can explain the magnificence of the Grace, how the whole is combined so that all may go as quickly as possible. And individuals are miserable to the extent to which they are not conscious of it and



take a false position in regard to what is happening to them. (CWM, Vol. 11, p. 204)

We may put it like this: The Divine is present everywhere at every moment and is leading and carrying the entire manifestation forward to its divine efflorescence as wisely and compassionately as possible. Even the apparent obstacles and evils in the world that oppose us in our evolutionary journey are turned by the Divine into aids and powerful levers that carry us more quickly to himself. When this faith or this perception is perfectly established, then we become aware of the omnipresence of the Divine Grace, together with its transforming power. The Mother has described this phenomenon in the following passages:

It may be said in an absolute way that an evil always carries its own remedy. One might say that the cure of any suffering coexists with the suffering. So, instead of seeing an evil “useless” and “stupid” as it is generally thought to be, you see that the progress, the evolution which has made the suffering necessary—which is the cause of the suffering and the very reason for its existence—attains the intended result; and at the same time the suffering is cured, for those who are able to open themselves and receive. The three things—suffering as a means of progress, progress, and the cure of suffering—are coexistent, simultaneous; that is to say, they do not follow each other, they are there at the same time.

If, at the moment when the transforming action creates a suffering, there is in that which suffers the necessary aspiration and opening, the remedy also is taken in at the same time, and the effect is total, complete: transformation, with the action neces-



Transformation. White. “The goal of creation.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

sary to obtain it, and, at the same time, cure of the false sensation produced by the resistance. And the suffering is replaced by... something which is not known upon this earth, but which is akin to joy, well-being, trust and security. It is a supersensation, in a perfect peace, and which is obviously the only thing that can be eternal. (CWM, Vol. 11, pp. 42-43)

For you are always under the illusion that pain belongs to you. This is not true. Pain is something thrust upon you. The same event could occur, *exactly* the same in all its details, without its inflicting the shadow of a pain on you; on the contrary, sometimes it can fill you with ecstatic joy. And it is exactly the same thing. But in one case, you are open to the adverse forces you want to reject from yourself, and in the other you are not, you are already too far away from them to be affected by them any longer; and so, instead of feeling the negative side they represent, you feel only the positive side the Divine represents in the experience. It is the divine Grace which makes you progress, and with the divine Grace you feel the divine Joy. But instead of identifying yourself with the Grace which makes you progress, you identify yourself with the ugly thing you want to get rid of;

and so, naturally, you feel like it and suffer.

That is an experiment you can make if you are just a little conscious. There is something in you which you don’t want, something bad—for one reason or another you don’t want it, you want to pull it out—well, if you identify yourself ever so little with that thing, you feel the pain of the extraction; if, on the contrary, you identify yourself with the divine Force which comes to liberate you, you feel the joy of the divine Grace—and you

experience the deep delight of the progress you have made. (CWM, Vol. 8, p. 84)

...once one has not only understood but also felt that the Supreme Lord is the originator of all things and one remains constantly in contact with him, all becomes the action of His Grace and is changed into calm and luminous bliss. (CWM, Vol. 10, p. 245)

These passages suggest that the Divine Grace is constantly present leading and helping us to progress, and to the extent that we perceive this, its action and transforming effects become increasingly powerful, harmonious, and blissful. The contrary appearances of struggle, incapacity, and suffering are a falsehood, they represent a denial in our consciousness of the Divine Presence and Grace. We could say that they are a distorted perception of the Truth of existence, and while creating a discordant and painful image of our life, are not fundamentally real. Therefore, they are capable of being transformed into a truer image and finally into the Divine Truth itself. As our perception is corrected and progressively transformed into the Truth, the Divine Presence and Grace become increasingly manifest. The effects of this change are not simply in our mental perceptions, but are integral and transformative of all the levels of our being.



Spiritual Knowledge

by Martha Orton

In Sri Aurobindo's writings which relate to knowledge, he provides a detailed and comprehensive view of the mind, describing aspects and levels of mind and of consciousness itself. He also explores the nature of knowledge and ignorance, Vidya and Avidya, particularly in his major philosophical work *The Life Divine*, as he proceeds to explain the concept of true knowledge, also referred to as spiritual knowledge. This is the highest form of knowledge and is not attainable through the usual processes of the intellect. Instead, spiritual knowledge is the knowledge of spiritual realization. The first part of this two-part article explores the meaning of spiritual knowledge as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. In the second part, which will appear in another issue, Sri Aurobindo's conceptualization of the path of knowledge will be discussed.

Knowledge and the mind

While human beings generally depend on the operations of the mind to obtain knowledge, Sri Aurobindo asserts that the mind and its processes are fraught with problems and limitations. He considers the mind to be not an instrument of knowledge, but rather of "analysis and synthesis."¹ The mind is our normal means of observation, thought, reasoning and cognition, the instrument on which we depend for obtaining and processing information about life and the world around us. It does this through a process of separation and analysis, which begins with observation. The fact that the senses themselves contain potential for error immediately introduces uncertainty as to the validity of mentally acquired knowledge, as do the natural limitations on gathering all relevant information needed to obtain a complete view. Moreover, human thought processes are impacted by preferences, desires, and preconceived notions, in addition to



Martha examines the nature of spiritual knowledge. (Photo courtesy Martha Orton)

the input of information from the senses. The essence of the difficulty lies in the fact that the mind works through seeing things in parts and using its processes of reasoning and synthesis to put things in appropriate relation to each other, thus attempting to make sense of its observations. Sri Aurobindo explains that this results in incomplete and inaccurate knowledge, in effect a "knowledge-ignorance," because the mind cannot see the true wholeness or essence of that which it seeks to know.

Sri Aurobindo regards the separative aspect of mind as a natural and logical consequence of the manner in which individual beings developed out of the One Divine Being, Sachchidananda, conceiving this in the context of the Vedic view of the oneness of the universe and the process of creation of the manifestation. In Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of this perspective, the separative aspect of mind developed as the individual being emerged from the unified existence-consciousness-bliss (Sachchidananda) which is its origin. In order to become further organized and develop effective capacities as an individual, ego came forth, facilitating a separate identity and forming a core for organizing the various aspects of the individual being's nature. This resulted in the ignorance, ignorance being defined essentially as a separation from oneness. Mind, with its

separative and partial knowledge, also derives from this separation. While mind is far removed from the highest reality of Sachchidananda, Sri Aurobindo tells us that there is a connection between mind and Sachchidananda. He writes: "The intermediate link exists. We call it the Supermind or the Truth-Consciousness, because it is a principle superior to mentality and exists, acts and proceeds in the fundamental truth and unity of things and not like the mind in their appearances and phenomenal divisions."² It is from the supermind that mind derived, or fell, and this occurred through the action of the individualized soul. Sri Aurobindo describes this as follows:

It proceeds from the individualised soul viewing everything from its own standpoint and excluding all others; it proceeds, that is to say, by an exclusive concentration of consciousness, an exclusive self-identification of the soul with a particular temporal and spatial action which is only a part of its own play of being; it starts from the soul's ignoring the fact that all others are also itself, all other action its own action and all other states of being and consciousness equally its own as well as the action of the one particular moment in Time and one particular standing-point in Space and the one particular form it presently occupies.³

Therefore it is from this process of separation that the mind derives its means of operation, dealing with things by conceiving of them in parts, rather than comprehending them in their wholeness and integrality and, as a necessary consequence, entering into error. Sri Aurobindo explains:

Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the indivisible whole and contains them as if each were a separate integer. Even with what exists only as obvious parts and fractions, Mind establishes this fiction of its ordinary commerce that they are things with which it can deal



separately and not merely as aspects of a whole. For, even when it knows that they are not things in themselves, it is obliged to deal with them as if they were things in themselves; otherwise it could not subject them to its own characteristic activity.⁴

The fragmented approach of the mind therefore is an obstacle to attaining an accurate view of things. Particularly if we acknowledge oneness as the reality of the universe, we must conclude that the dividing action of the mind opposes grasping reality and arriving at true knowledge. Sri Aurobindo asserts that it is this very quality of mind that results in ignorance, describing the problem of mind as its way of working:

That office [the role of mind] is to translate always infinity into the terms of the finite, to measure off, limit, de-pie-
ce. Actually it does this in our consciousness to the exclusion of all true sense of the infinite; therefore Mind is the nodus of the great Ignorance, because it is that which originally divides and distributes....⁵

Therefore, the mind not only prevents our perceiving things completely as it separates things into parts in order to analyze and process its awareness of them, but it also prevents our consciousness from perceiving a real awareness of the infinite. In this way it binds us to our limited awareness of ourselves, others and the universe. The constrained and partial perception and understanding of the mind separates us from the reality of oneness and delight of existence. One might describe it as a bureaucrat, analyzing, categorizing, organizing, filing bits of information, keeping us within the confined limits of its narrow bounds. In contrast, our inner being seeks to experience true knowledge, not a perception so limited that it can be regarded almost as a fiction, a human-created world within a real world. What is needed is the reality of the soul, the king, not that of his small-minded servant.

Self-identification and aspects of mind

It is difficult for us to conceive a way of knowing apart from the use of the mind. We are usually identified with it and tend to think of it as completely integral to who we are. We also tend to be identified with our bodies. These two identifications merge into a sense of self, in the modern psychological meaning of the term, that is—who we think we are, consisting of our form, our thoughts, beliefs, and all else that comprises our sense of self. Yet Sri Aurobindo explains that this identification with the body increases and intensifies the problem of separation: “This ignorance is farther deepened for man by his self-identification with the body. To us mind seems to be determined by the body, because it is preoccupied with that and devoted to the physical workings which it uses for its conscious superficial action in this gross material world.”⁶ From this identification with the body, we deepen our involvement with our lives in matter, and separate ourselves further from the more comprehensive reality, which includes the life of the spirit. This consequently increases ignorance in separation. Sri Aurobindo explains the problem:

Our ordinary intellectual notions are a stumbling-block in the way of knowledge; for they are governed by the error of the senses and they found themselves on the notion that matter and body are the reality, that life and force are the reality, that passion and emotion, thought and sense are the reality; and with these things we identify ourselves, and because we identify ourselves with these things we cannot get back to the real self.⁷

Sri Aurobindo offers us a unique perspective on mind, not only through his conception of its limitations and his explanation of the origin of these, but also in the nature and types of mind which he has identified. For example Sri Aurobindo explains that our involvement with the body is supported by an aspect of mind, which

he calls the physical mind. This is the consciousness that is focused on and expresses the needs and actions of the body. An aspect of this is the mechanical mind, in which thoughts become firmly implanted and repetitively express themselves. Closely associated with the physical mind is the vital mind, which is focused on the emotions and seeks fulfillment of the desires of the ego and the vital nature. Sri Aurobindo also distinguishes the sense mind and thought mind, two aspects of which we are most generally aware and through which we relate to the world. The sense mind is that of the perceptions of our senses, to which the body responds and to which the thought mind subsequently translates, processes and determines reactions. The thought mind is the aspect which processes thoughts and ideas and has powers of dynamism and effectuation. It also works along with the pure intellect to acquire and synthesize information.

It is at the level of pure intellect that the human mind reaches its height of operation. While envisioning human development of knowledge far beyond that of the intellect, Sri Aurobindo does not at all disparage the development of the intellect and the powers of reason. Instead he asserts their importance in the development of the individual, regarding them as necessary for discrimination and intelligent action, for strengthening one’s capacities for effective life in the world. He writes: “It is true that intellectual deliberation and right discrimination are an important part of the Yoga of knowledge; but their object is rather to remove a difficulty than to arrive at the final and positive result of this path.”⁸ Sri Aurobindo describes the use of the intellect as reaching its highest capacity and being of effective use once one has purified the understanding by removing “sense-error and desire and old association and intellectual prejudice.”⁹ Only then is the intellect free to do its work of analysis and arrangement of conceptions.

Further appreciation of the mind and its powers are observed in Sri Aurobindo’s description that when mind is transcended and viewed from the truth-consciousness,



supermind, it can be seen for what it is, “really a subordinate action and instrumentation of the Truth-Consciousness.”¹⁰ He also points out the positive and essential role it plays in life and explains that mind leads to error when overstepping its intended function:

So long as it is not separated in self-experience from the enveloping Master-Consciousness and does not try to set up house for itself, so long as it serves passively as an instrumentation and does not attempt to possess for its own benefit, Mind ful-

fills luminously its function which is in the Truth to hold forms apart from each other by a phenomenal, a purely formal delimitation of their activity behind which the governing universality of the being remains conscious and untouched. It has to receive the truth of things and distribute it according to the unerring perception of a supreme and universal Eye and Will. It has to uphold an individualisation of active consciousness, delight, force, substance which derives all its power, reality and joy from an inalienable universality behind. It has to turn the multiplicity of the One into an apparent division by which relations are defined and held off against each other so as to meet again and join. It has to establish the delight of separation and contact in the midst of an eternal unity and intermixture.¹¹

This statement clearly describes mind in its proper role, fulfilling its true function, supporting effective life in the world as an instrument of supermind.

The subliminal

Behind the mind, and reaching beyond it, is the subliminal being in the individual. This is the part of the being which



Work of the Enlightened Mind. White turning cream. “It is very powerful in leading the being to the Divine. Can be very useful for progress.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

provides access to that which is beyond the surface mind, including not only the subconscious, the deep unawakened part of the being which is the repository of unconscious thought, memory and atavistic influences from age-old human nature and the individual’s culture, but also the superconscious, the higher reaches of consciousness. The subliminal opens the way to higher knowledge:

Behind, even in our terrestrial being, there is this other, subconscious or subliminal to us, which knows itself as more than the body and is capable of a less materialised action. To this we owe immediately most of the larger, deeper and more forceful dynamic action of our surface mind; this, when we become conscious of it or of its impress on us, is our first idea or our first realisation of a soul or inner being, Purusha.¹²

Nevertheless, this deeper part of the being “is still subject to the original act of ignorance by which the individualised soul regards everything from its own standpoint and can see the truth of things only as they present themselves to it from outside or else as they rise up to its view from its separate temporal and spatial consciousness, forms and results of past and

present experience.”¹³ What is required to transcend ignorance, Sri Aurobindo explains, is to pursue the path of knowledge by which mind itself is transcended and higher reaches of knowledge are attained, levels of knowledge which are not mere representations of the mind, but entirely new states of being. What is needed, therefore, is an evolution of consciousness.

Transcending the mind

In recognizing that mind derives from supermind, but is far removed from this high truth-consciousness, we find

the key to its transcendence and the solution to our ignorance. Finding our way from mind to supermind is the journey which Sri Aurobindo envisions and which he calls the path of knowledge. In the Integral Yoga, he conceives of three paths—knowledge, works and devotion—so integrally intertwined that they become a single path. All lead to the same goal of oneness with the Divine Consciousness and the transformation of human nature to a divine status of being. Each path contains the essence of the other so that both the paths of works and devotion contain knowledge, and the path of knowledge also includes works and love. In considering the path of knowledge, we can discover how Sri Aurobindo describes the progression from ignorance to knowledge. Sri Aurobindo alludes to both the process and the result in describing the action of the supermind in bringing true knowledge:

It is only when the veil is rent and the divided mind overpowered, silent and passive to a supramental action that mind itself gets back to the Truth of things. There we find a luminous mentality reflective, obedient and instrumental to the divine Real-Idea. There we perceive what the world really is; we know in every way ourselves in others and as others, others as our-



selves and all as the universal and self-multiplied One. We lose the rigidly separate individual standpoint which is the source of all limitation and error.¹⁴

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo describes transcending the mind and attaining supermind in the following lines:

Now mind is all and its uncertain ray,
Mind is the leader of the body and life,
Mind the thought-driven chariot of the
soul
Carrying the luminous wanderer in the
night
To vistas of a far uncertain dawn,
To the end of the Spirit's fathomless
desire,
To its dream of absolute truth and utter
bliss.
There are greater destinies mind cannot
surmise
Fixed on the summit of the evolving Path
The Traveller now treads in the
Ignorance,
Unaware of his next step, not knowing
his goal.
Mind is not all his tireless climb can
reach,
There is a fire on the apex of the worlds,
There is a house of the Eternal's light,
There is an infinite truth, an absolute
power.
The Spirit's mightiness shall cast off its
mask;
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the
world's course:
It shall be seen in its own veiless beams,
A star rising from the Inconscient's night,
A sun climbing to Supernature's peak.¹⁵

The reality of consciousness

In order to grasp the meaning of knowledge in Sri Aurobindo's terms, it is relevant to consider his explanation of knowledge in relation to the reality of consciousness, as follows:

To know, we have always to dissolve the rigid constructions of the ignorant and self-willed intellect and look free-

ly and flexibly at the facts of existence. Its fundamental fact is consciousness which is power, and we actually see that this power has three ways of operating. First, we find that there is a consciousness behind all, embracing all, within all, which is eternally, universally, absolutely aware of itself whether in unity or multiplicity or in both simultaneously or beyond both in its sheer absolute. This is the plenitude of the supreme divine self-knowledge; it is also the plenitude of the divine all-knowledge. Next, at the other pole of things, we see this consciousness dwelling upon apparent oppositions in itself, and the most extreme antimony of all reaches its acme in what seems to us to be a complete nescience of itself, an effective, dynamic, creative Inconscience, though we know that this is merely a surface appearance and that the divine Knowledge works with a sovereign security and sureness within the operations of the Inconscient. Between these two oppositions and as a mediary term we see Consciousness working with a partial, limited self-awareness which is equally superficial, for behind it and acting through it is the divine All-Knowledge. Here in its intermediate status, it seems to be a standing compromise between the two opposites, between the supreme Consciousness and the Nescience, but may prove rather in a larger view of our data to be an incomplete emergence of the Knowledge to the surface. This compromise or imperfect emergence we call the Ignorance, from our own point of view, because ignorance is our own characteristic way of the soul's self-withholding of complete self-knowledge. The origin of these three poises of the power of consciousness and their exact relation is what we have, if possible, to discover.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo provides in this statement a concise summary of his perspective on reality and knowledge, emphasizing

that the fundamental reality is consciousness, and that ignorance is a partial emergence of this consciousness from a seemingly inconscient base that is yet instinct with an infallible working betraying a hidden consciousness within it. He sets before us the challenge humanity faces, living in the "intermediate status"¹⁷ of ignorance and seeking to attain knowledge. In order to meet the challenge, Sri Aurobindo assures us of the pervasiveness and power of consciousness which, in its action, mediates between knowledge and ignorance and facilitates our growth and progress.

In considering the characteristics of knowledge as described by Sri Aurobindo, that it consists of the truth and completeness of things and leads to oneness and unity, we can conclude that knowledge has an undeniable appeal for humanity which compels its pursuit as a motivating force. Furthermore, we can conclude that its pursuit represents the further emergence of knowledge out of ignorance beyond the point at which this emergence becomes self-conscious and willed.

Integrity of the path

Although Sri Aurobindo writes of spiritual knowledge as different from the knowledge of the surface mind, characteristic of his integral vision, he does not make a firm distinction between higher and lower fields of knowledge:

...It is not a separation into disparate fields, sacred and profane, that is the heart of the difference, but the character of the consciousness behind the working. All is human knowledge that proceeds from the ordinary mental consciousness interested in the outside or upper layers of things, in process, in phenomena for their own sake or for the sake of some surface utility or mental or vital satisfaction of Desire or of the Intelligence. But the same activity of knowledge can become part of the Yoga if it proceeds from the spiritual or spiritualising consciousness which seeks and finds in



all that it surveys or penetrates the presence of the timeless Eternal and the ways of manifestation of [the] Eternal in Time.¹⁸

In fact Sri Aurobindo asserts that the two types of knowledge—the knowledge of life and the external world, and spiritual knowledge, the knowledge of “something behind life”¹⁹—merge into one:

There are two kinds of knowledge, that which seeks to understand the apparent phenomenon of existence externally, by an approach from outside, through the intellect,—this is the lower knowledge, the knowledge of the apparent world; secondly, the knowledge which seeks to know the truth of existence from within, in its source and reality, by spiritual realisation. Ordinarily, a sharp distinction is drawn between the two, and it is supposed that when we get to the higher knowledge, the God-knowledge, then the rest, the world-knowledge, becomes of no concern to us: but in reality they are two sides of one seeking. All knowledge is ultimately the knowledge of God, through himself, through Nature, through her works. Mankind has first to seek this knowledge through the external life; for until its mentality is sufficiently developed, spiritual knowledge is not really possible, and in proportion as it is developed, the possibilities of spiritual knowledge become richer and fuller.²⁰

Therefore all pursuit of knowledge can be considered as part of the path of knowledge. Intellectual pursuit is part of the preparation for the conscious pursuit of the spirit and can be regarded as helping to form the basis for spiritual knowledge. Seen in this way, all pursuit of knowledge and its accompanying mastery, is actually the seeking of the Divine, consciously or



Integral Wisdom. Cream white. “The wisdom one obtains through union with the Divine.” (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

subconsciously. It begins with seeking to know the creation and workings of the Divine as we observe them in life and nature. This being so, humanity’s pursuit of knowledge and mastery can be understood to take many forms and, yet, to be one thing, whether it appears as seeking basic knowledge of the physical world and the knowledge and skills needed to cope with life and the material existence, or whether it is expressed and acknowledged overtly by the surface mind as the conscious pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo describes all pursuit of knowledge as leading us to the discovery of the Divine:

Science, art, philosophy, ethics, psychology, the knowledge of man and his past, action itself are means by which we arrive at the knowledge of the workings of God through Nature and through life. At first it is the workings of life and forms of Nature which occupy us, but as we go deeper and deeper and get a completer view and experience, each of these lines brings us face to face with God.²¹

He explains, for example, that the study of science leads to the recognition of infinity, that art leads to the discovery of

the spirit in the life of humanity through its exploration of beauty, and that psychology progresses from studying “mind and the soul in living beings to the perception of one soul and one mind in all things and beings.”²² The conscious pursuit of the Divine, of higher knowledge, emerges through a process in the intellect in which a perception of the Divine develops and an understanding of the Divine’s role in the world, a sense that it is only through the Divine that all exists and that we live. Through this awareness, the individual seeks to focus one’s being on the Divine, to serve the Divine, and to express the Divine through one’s life, action and being. It is at this point

that the individual’s spiritual life becomes increasingly active. Sri Aurobindo states, “It is here that Yoga steps in. It begins by using knowledge, emotion and action for the possession of the Divine. For Yoga is the conscious and perfect seeking of union with the Divine towards which all the rest was an ignorant and imperfect moving and seeking.”²³ Once the individual begins one’s conscious seeking of the Divine, the pursuit of knowledge takes a more apparent and complete spiritual character and, though the knowledge of the external world attained by the intellect is not disparaged or disregarded, the focus of the individual turns inward, seeking discovery of the inner being and the knowledge of spiritual realization.

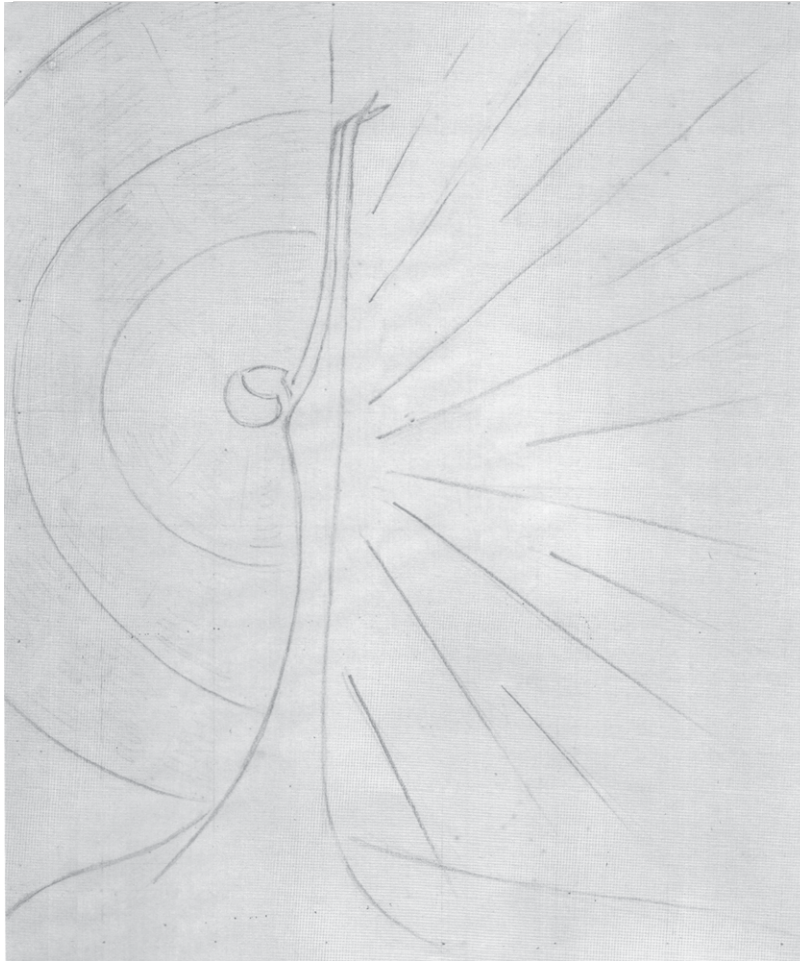
Spiritual knowledge and its aim

When writing of spiritual knowledge, Sri Aurobindo identifies its aim: “The object of spiritual knowledge is the Supreme, the Divine, the Infinite, and the Absolute. This Supreme has its relations to our individual being and its relations to the universe and it transcends both the soul and the universe.”²⁴ In his conception of spiritual knowledge, Sri Aurobindo expands the meaning of knowledge to its highest and most comprehensive. For he does not



only intend a comprehension of the Divine, which in itself would be a significant growth in consciousness, but an experience and an enduring realization in actual union with the Divine. Furthermore, this is understood to have completely transforming effects, in which the entire being is changed from its ordinary human status to the fulfillment of its innate divine potential. This progression in knowledge and consciousness moves from its initial stages of seeking knowledge and mastery of one's self and the world to having knowledge of the Divine and a new level of mastery through that union and transformation. Sri Aurobindo describes the aim of knowledge as follows:

We must recognize that our primary aim in knowledge must be to realise our own supreme Self more than that Self in others or as the Lord of Nature or as the All; for that is the pressing need of the individual, to arrive at the highest truth of his own being, to set right its disorders, confusions, false identifications, to arrive at its right concentration and purity and to know and mount to its source. But we do not do this in order to disappear into its source, but so that our whole existence and all the members of this inner kingdom may find their right basis, may live in our highest self, live for our highest self only and obey no other law than that which proceeds from our highest self and is given to our purified being without any falsification in the transmitting mentality. And if we do this rightly we shall discover



Untitled sketch by Dhanavanti, from her book: *Tapasyâ: Hymns in colour*. (Used with permission)

that in finding this supreme Self we have found the one Self in all, the one Lord of our nature and of all Nature, the All of ourselves who is the All of the universe.²⁵

The realization which Sri Aurobindo describes constitutes the fulfillment of humanity's deep, inherent impulsion for knowledge and mastery, for with this higher knowledge, one not only knows one's self and one's world and lives in the truth of one's being, but also lives in unity with the Divine and manifests the truth of the divine Reality in one's life and action. In this state of spiritual knowledge, all the parts of one's being are pure in their dedication to the Divine and have assumed their highest forms, necessarily existing in harmony within one's self, with no internal

conflict or disharmony in their coexistence and expression. Living in the realization of true knowledge one is fully an instrument of the Divine, being one with the Divine, and one's mastery and effectiveness in life and the world become an expression of that reality.

To be continued in the next issue.

All quotations from: Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970, unless otherwise indicated.

1. SABCL, vol. 18 (*The Life Divine*), 127.
2. *Ibid.*, 143.
3. *Ibid.*, 167.
4. *Ibid.*, 162.
5. *Ibid.*, 163.
6. *Ibid.*, 168.
7. SABCL, vol. 20 (*The Synthesis of Yoga*), 288.

8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. SABCL, vol. 18 (*The Life Divine*), 170.
11. *Ibid.*, 170-171.
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13. *Ibid.*, 498-499.
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16. *Ibid.*, 170.
17. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1993), 704.
18. SABCL, vol. 20 (*The Synthesis of Yoga*), 135.
19. *Ibid.*, 491.
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Source material

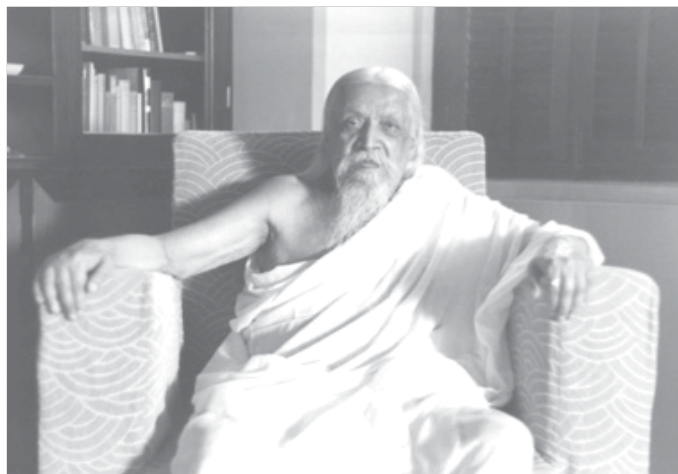
Supermind and the life divine¹

by Sri Aurobindo

Supermind is an eternal reality of the divine Being and the divine Nature. In its own plane it already and always exists and possesses its own essential law of being; it has not to be created or to emerge or evolve into existence out of involution in Matter or out of non-existence, as it might seem to the view of mind which itself seems to its own view to have so emerged from life and Matter or to have evolved out of an involution. In life and Matter. The nature of Supermind is always the same, a being of knowledge, proceeding from truth to truth, creating, or rather manifesting what has to be manifested by the power of a pre-existent knowledge, not by hazard but by a self-existent destiny in the being itself, a necessity of the thing in itself and therefore inevitable. Its manifestation of the divine life will also be inevitable; its own life on its own plane is divine and, if Supermind descends upon the earth, it will bring necessarily the divine life with it and establish it here.

Supermind is the grade of existence beyond mind, life and Matter and, as mind, life and Matter have manifested on the earth, so too must Supermind in the inevitable course of things manifest in this world of Matter. In fact, a supermind is already here but it is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter and not yet acting overtly or in its own power: if it acts, it is through these inferior powers and modified by their characters and so not yet recognisable. It is only by the approach and arrival of the descending Supermind that it can be liberated upon earth and reveal itself in the action of our material, vital and mental parts so that these lower powers can become portions of a total divinised activity of our whole being: it is that that will bring to us a completely realised divinity or the divine life. It is indeed so that life and mind involved in Matter have realised themselves here; for only what is involved can evolve, otherwise there could be no emergence.

The manifestation of a supramental truth-consciousness is therefore the capital reality that will make the divine life possible. It is when all the movements of thought, impulse and action are governed and directed by a self-existent and luminously automatic truth-consciousness and our whole nature comes to be constituted by it and made of its stuff that the life divine will be complete and absolute. Even as it is, in reality though not in the appearance of things, it is a secret self-existent knowledge and truth that is working to manifest itself in the creation here. The Divine is already there immanent within us, ourselves are that in our inmost reality and it is this reality that we have to manifest; it is that which constitutes the urge towards the divine living and makes neces-



Sri Aurobindo in 1950. (Courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

sary the creation of the life divine even in this material existence.

A manifestation of the Supermind and its truth-consciousness is then inevitable; it must happen in this world sooner or later. But it has two aspects, a descent from above, an ascent from below, a self-revelation of the Spirit, an evolution in Nature. The ascent is necessarily an effort, a working of Nature, an urge or nîsus on her side to raise her lower parts by an evolutionary or revolutionary change, conversion or transformation into the divine reality and it may happen by a process and progress or by a rapid miracle. The descent or self-revelation of the Spirit is an act of the supreme Reality from above which makes the realisation possible and it can appear either as the divine aid which brings about the fulfilment of the progress and process or as the sanction of the miracle. Evolution, as we see it in this world, is a slow and difficult process and, indeed, needs usually ages to reach abiding results; but this is because it is in its nature an emergence from inconscient beginnings, a start from nescience and a working in the ignorance of natural beings by what seems to be an unconscious force. There can be, on the contrary, an evolution in the light and no longer in the darkness, in which the evolving being is a conscious participant and cooperator, and this is precisely what must take place here. Even in the effort and progress from the Ignorance to Knowledge this must be in part if not wholly the endeavour to be made on the heights of the nature and it must be wholly that in the final movement towards the spiritual change, realisation, transformation. It must be still more so when there is a transition across the dividing line between the Ignorance and the Knowledge and the evolution is from knowledge to greater knowledge, from consciousness to greater consciousness, from being to greater being. There is then no longer any necessity for the slow pace of the ordinary evolution; there can be rapid conversion, quick transformation after transformation, what would seem to our normal present mind, a succession of miracles. An evolution on the supramental levels could well be of that nature; it could be equally, if the being so chose, a more



leisurely passage of one supramental state or condition of things to something beyond but still supramental, from level to divine level, a building up of divine gradations, a free growth to the supreme Supermind or beyond it to yet undreamed levels of being, consciousness and Ananda . . .

The divine life will give to those who enter into it and possess it an increasing and finally a complete possession of the truth-consciousness and all that it carries in it; it will bring with it the realisation of the Divine in self and the Divine in Nature. All that is sought by the God-seeker will be fulfilled in his spirit and in his life as he moves towards spiritual perfection. He will become aware of the transcendent reality, possess in the self-experience the supreme existence, consciousness, bliss, be one with Sachchidananda. He will become one with cosmic being and universal Nature: he will contain the world in himself, in his own cosmic consciousness and feel himself one with all beings; he will see himself in all and all in himself, become united and identified with the Self which has become all existences. He will perceive the beauty of the All-Beautiful and the miracle of the All-Wonderful; he will enter in the end into the bliss of the Brahman and live abidingly in it and for all this he will not need to shun existence or plunge into the annihilation of the spiritual Person in some self-extinguishing Nirvana. As in the Self, so in Nature, he can realise the Divine. The nature of the Divine is Light and Power and Bliss; he can feel the divine Light and Power and Bliss above him and descending into him, filling every strand of his nature, every cell and atom of his being, flooding his soul and mind and life and body, surrounding him like an illimitable sea and filling the world, suffusing all his feeling and sense and experience, making all his life truly and utterly divine. This and all 'else that the spiritual consciousness can bring to him the divine life will give him when it reaches its utmost completeness and perfection and the supramental truth-consciousness is fulfilled in all himself; but even before that he can attain to something of it all, grow in it, live in it, once the Supermind has descended upon him and has the direction of his existence. All relations with the Divine will be his: the trinity of God-knowledge, divine works and devotion to God will open within him and move towards an utter self-giving and surrender of his whole being and nature. He will live in God and with God, possess God, as it is said, even plunge in him forgetting all separate personality, but not losing it in self-extinction. The love of God and all the sweetness of love will remain his, the bliss of contact as well as the bliss of oneness and the bliss of difference in oneness. All the infinite ranges of experience of the Infinite will be his and all the joy of the finite in the embrace of the Infinite.

The descent of the Supermind will bring to one who receives it and is fulfilled in the truth-consciousness all the possibilities of the divine life. It will take up not only the whole characteristic experience which we recognise already as constituting the spiritual life but also all which we now exclude from that category but which is capable of divinisation, not excluding whatever of the earth-nature and the earth-life can be transformed by the touch of the Supermind and taken up into the manifested life of the Spirit.

For a divine life on earth need not be a thing apart and exclusive having nothing to do with the common earthly existence: it will take up human being and human life, transform what can be transformed, spiritualise whatever can be spiritualised, cast its influence on the rest and effectuate either a radical or an uplifting change. . .

This would be the fulfilment of the divine life which the descent of Supermind and the working of the truth-consciousness taking hold of the whole nature of the living being would bring about in all who could open themselves to its power or influence. Even its first immediate effect would be on all who are capable the possibility of entering into the truth-consciousness and changing all the movements of the nature more and more into the movements of the supramental truth, truth of thought, truth of will, truth in the feelings, truth in the acts, true conditions of the whole being even to the body, eventually transformation, a divinising change. For those who could so open themselves and remain open, there would be no limitation to this development and even no fundamental difficulty; for all difficulties would be dissolved by the pressure of the supramental light and power from above pouring itself into the mind and the life-force and the body. But the result of the supramental descent need not be limited to those who could thus open themselves entirely and it need not be limited to the supramental change; there could also be a minor or secondary transformation of the mental being within a freed and perfected scope of the mental nature. In place of the human mind as it now is, a mind limited, imperfect, open at every moment to all kinds of deviation from the truth or missing of the truth, all kinds of error and openness even to the persuasions of a complete falsehood and perversion of the nature . . . there could emerge a true mind liberated and capable of the free and utmost perfection of itself and its instruments, a life governed by the free and illumined mind, a body responsive to the light and able to carry out all that the free mind and will could demand of it. This change might happen not only in the few, but extend and generalise itself in the race. This possibility, if fulfilled, would mean that the human dream of perfection, perfection of itself, of its purified and enlightened nature, of all its ways of action and living, would be no longer a dream but a truth that could be made real and humanity lifted out of the hold on it of inconscience and ignorance. The life of the mental being could be harmonised with the life of the Supermind which will then be the highest order above it and become even an extension and annexe of the truth-consciousness, a part and province of the divine life. It is obvious that if the Supermind is there and an order of supramental being is established as the leading principle in earth-nature, as mind is now the leading principle, but with a sureness, a complete government of the earthly existence, a capacity of transformation of all upon their level and within their natural boundaries of which the mind in its imperfection was not capable, an immense change of human life, even if it did not extend to transformation would be inevitable.

¹From *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 42-49.



The supramental manifestation¹

by the Mother

Sweet Mother, you have said: *The Supramental has descended upon earth. What does that mean exactly? You have also said: "The things that were promised are fulfilled." What are these things?*²

Ah, that's ignorance indeed! This was promised a very long time ago, this was said very long ago—not only here—since the beginning of the earth. There have been all kinds of predictions, by all kinds of prophets; it has been said, "There will be a new heaven and a new earth, a new race will be born, the world will be transformed...." Prophets have spoken about this in all the traditions.

You have said, "They are fulfilled."

Yes. And so?

Where is the new race?

The new race? Wait for something like a few thousand years, and you will see it!

When the mind descended upon earth, between the time the mind manifested in the earth-atmosphere and the time the first man appeared, nearly a million years elapsed. Now it will go faster because man expects it, he has a vague idea; he is expecting in some sense the advent of the superman, while, certainly, the apes did not expect the birth of man, they had never thought of it for the good reason that they probably don't think much. But man has thought of it and awaits it, so it will go faster. But faster means still thousands of years probably. We shall speak about it again after a few thousand years!

(Silence)

People who are inwardly ready, who are open and in contact with higher forces, people who have had a more or less direct personal contact with the supramental Light and Consciousness are able to feel the difference in the earth-atmosphere.

But for that . . . Only the like can know the like, only the supramental Consciousness in an individual can perceive this Supermind acting in the earth-atmosphere. Those who, for some reason or other, have developed this perception, can see it. But those who are not even conscious of an inner being—just slightly within—and who would be quite at a loss to say what their soul is like, these certainly are not ready to perceive the difference in the earth-atmosphere. They still have a long way to go for that. Because, for those whose consciousness is more or less exclusively centered in the outer being—mental, vital and physical—things



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

need to take on an absurd and unexpected appearance for them to be able to recognise them. Then they call them miracles.

But the constant miracle of the intervention of forces which changes circumstances and characters and has a very widespread result, this they do not call a miracle, for only the mere appearance is seen and this seems quite natural. But, truly speaking, if you were to reflect upon the least little thing that happens, you would be obliged to acknowledge that it is miraculous.

It is simply because you don't reflect upon it that you take things as they are, for what they are, without questioning; otherwise every day you would have any number of occasions to tell yourself, "Really, but this is quite astonishing! How did it happen?"

Quite simply, it is a habit of seeing things in a purely superficial way.

Sweet Mother, what should our attitude be towards this new Consciousness?

That depends on what you want to do with it.

If you want to look at it as a curiosity, you have only to watch, to try to understand.

If you want it to change you, you must open yourself and make an effort to progress.

Will people profit collectively or individually from this new manifestation?

Why do you ask this question?

Because many people who have come here are asking, "How are we going to profit from it?"

Oh!

And why should they profit from it? What are their claims to profit? Just because they have taken a train to come here? . . .



They ask if it will be easier to overcome their inner difficulties.

I shall repeat the same thing. What grounds and what right have they to ask that it should be easier? What have they done, these people, on their side? Why would it be easier? To satisfy people's laziness and indolence—or what? . . .

Mother, when mind descended into the earth-atmosphere, the apes had not made any effort to change into man, had they? It was Nature which provided the effort. But here . . .

But it is not man who is going to change himself into super-man!

No?

Just try! (*Laughter*)

That's it, you see, it is something else which is going to work.

Only—yes, there is an only, I don't want to be so cruel: Now MAN CAN COLLABORATE. That is to say, he can lend himself to the process, with goodwill, with aspiration, and help as best he can. And that is why I said it would go faster. I hope it will go *much* faster.

But even so, much faster is still going to take a little time!

But indeed, this attitude . . . this attitude, which is a little too mercenary, is not usually very profitable. If one aspires sincerely and if one has difficulties, perhaps these difficulties will diminish. Let us hope so.

(*Turning to the disciple*) So this is what you can tell them: be sincere and you will be helped.

Mother, a statement has gone round here, very recently it says, "What has just happened, with his Victory, is not a descent but a manifestation. And it is more than an individual event: the Supermind has emerged into the universal play."

Yes, yes, yes. In fact I said all this, I acknowledge it. So?

They say, "The supramental principle is at work . . ."

But I have just explained all this to you at length (*Mother laughs*), this is terrible!

What I call a "descent" is this: first the consciousness rises in an ascent, you catch the Thing up there, and come down with it. That is an individual event.

When this individual event has happened in a way that proves sufficient to create a possibility of a general kind, it is no longer a "descent, it is a "manifestation."

What I call a descent is the individual movement, in an individual consciousness. And when it is a new world manifesting in an old world just as, for a comparison, when mind spread upon the earth, I call that a manifestation.

You may call it whatever you like, it's all the same to me, but



Untitled sketch by Dhanavanti, from her book: Tapasyâ: Hymns in colour. (Used with permission)

we should understand each other.

What I call a descent is in the individual consciousness. Just as one speaks of ascent—there is no ascent, you see: there is neither above nor below nor any direction, it is a way of speaking—you speak of ascent when you have the feeling of rising up towards something; and you call it a descent when, after having caught that thing, you bring it down into yourself.

But when the gates are open and the flood comes in, you can't call it a descent. It is a Force which is spreading out. Understood? . . . Ah!

It's all one to me, the words you use. I am not particularly attached to words, but I explain them to you, and it is better to understand each other, for otherwise there is no end to explanations.

Now, to people who ask you these insidious questions, you may reply that the best way of receiving anything whatever is not to pull, but to give. If they want to give themselves to the new life, well, the new life will enter into them.

But if they want to pull the new life down into themselves, they will close their door with their own egoism. That's all.

¹From *Questions and Answers, CWM, Vol. 8*, pp. 126-135.

²Mother announced the Supramental Manifestation of February 29 in two messages published in the *Bulletin of April 1956*:

"Lord, Thou hast willed and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled."

"The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

"It is at work here, and one day will e when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it."



The poetry room

The kingdom within

There is a kingdom of the spirit's ease.
It is not in this helpless swirl of thought,
Foam from the world-sea or spray-whisper caught,
With which we build mind's shifting symmetries,
Nor in life's stuff of passionate unease,
Nor the heart's unsure emotions frailty wrought
Nor trivial clipped sense-joys soon led to nought
Nor in this body's solid transiencies.

Wider behind than the vast universe
Our spirit scans the drama and the stir,
A peace, a light, an ecstasy, a power
Waiting at the end of blindness and the curse
That veils it from its ignorant minister,
The grandeur of its free eternal hour.

—Sri Aurobindo

Jivanmukta

There is a silence greater than any known
To earth's dumb spirit, motionless in the soul
That has become Eternity's foothold,
Touched by the infinitudes for ever.

A Splendour is here, refused to the earthward sight,
That floods some deep flame-covered all-seeing eye;
Revealed it awakens when God's stillness
Heavens the ocean of moveless Nature.

A Power descends no Fate can perturb or vanquish,
Calmer than mountains, wider than marching waters,
A single might of luminous quiet
Tirelessly bearing the worlds and ages.

A bliss surrounds with ecstasy everlasting,
An absolute high-seated immortal rapture
Possesses, sealing love to oneness
In the grasp of the All-beautiful, All-beloved.

He who from Time's dull motion escapes and thrills
Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast,
Unrolls the form and sign of being,
Seated above in the omniscient Silence.

Although consenting here to a mortal body,
He is the Undying; limit and bond he knows not;

For him the aeons are a playground,
Life and its deeds are his splendid shadow.

Only to bring God's forces to waiting Nature,
To help with wide-winged Peace her tormented labour
And heal with joy her ancient sorrow,
Casting down light on the unconscious darkness,

He acts and lives. Vain things are mind's smaller motives
To one whose soul enjoys for its high possession
Infinity and the sempiternal
All is his guide and beloved and refuge.

—Sri Aurobindo

Yearning¹

Evening stars and morning suns,
And all the callous, vagrant runs
Of empty days that cross the sea
Of dark, unhallowed memory. . .

Day in, day out, the fiend red sands
Run through death's steely, glassy hands;
And passion's waters break and roar,
Tide in, tide out, upon thought's shore.

And Beauty that awakes to kiss
The soul, but falls in pain's abyss;
Losing all meaning in earth's mesh,
All sanctity within the flesh.

When will You cut the devil-masks
And give us all the spirit asks;
Beyond Time's tainted sands and seas,
Waft us to pristine purities?

—Thémis

O marvellous Friend¹

O marvelous Friend whose beauty binds
The star-worlds in its spell,
Whose wisdom broods within our minds,
Whose love glows in each cell,

When your vast flood of blinding light
Sweeps breaking through the brain,
And shakes the fixities of sight,
And cleans thought's cluttered drain,

The rose-fires burst through clotted clay,
The leashed heart snaps its chain,



Rockholds of darkness shattered away,
Over earth sun-showers rain.

The fields are fields of golden grain,
Each flower a seraph flower,
And nectar flows through every vein,
For eternity's in this hour.

O marvelous Friend, whose love-charms spin
A circle on the deeps,
The earth of gold, entranced within
Your lap of beauty, sleeps.

—Thémis

Earth Hymn²

How long was the waiting, how desperate the searching,
What depth to the desolate hours, what heights to our dreams,
The found hopes for a good end to strife and toil,
Is there measure to it on this sad terrain?
Is there, where you reign?
Who measures the tears shed and who the blood spilt
And who records the cries of woe and the rise of pain?
Who makes weight of desperation, of the biting pangs of needs,
Who heed the calls for rescue, when terror strikes the prey
And horror roams at large?

The pains of the world cry in my heart,
Knowledge of eons rushes through my veins,
All memories are stored in my cells' labyrinthine rounds,
In my bones, all the lands live, rivers flow, mountains rise,
The earth's heart breaks in mine,
In me the loved ones part, never to meet another time,
Men go to war, the women wait, children's sad eyes look into
mine,
Spears of question make their home in my wounds,
Why those born to love and to live must suffer, leave and die?
Who made enemies of brothers and kin,
Who shattered their lands and lives?
Where did all the laughter go and their happy dance?
The devil took their joys away, their cries trouble my nights,
The people weep in my heavy eyes.

Oh high Lord of our souls, Mother of love in Heaven high,
I bring you prayers from this earth, made of tears and sighs,
Prayers made for bread and good, prayers made for love,
Take my treasured archives, accept my burden—
Empty my heavy store! See, large passions burn through my
frame,
Flames of high aims from me rise, aspirations mount to the sky,
My arms outstretched, like a cross,
From my bosom love for all things flows,

Great thoughts get born in my head, utterances in my breath,
Wondrous music wafts from my hair,
My eyes glow like the suns.
Fountains of coloured jets spring where my feet tread—
Beauty is everywhere . . .
My smiles heal all wounds, abolish pain,
Make all things good and right.
Great Mother, who bore me, High Lord, who made of me
An instrument for your heart's strings,
Through me you turned all pains into joy!
Lord of the Worlds, Purushottama! Mother of Light,
Eternal Suns to this darkened world,
Beacons to the searching souls,
Lords of my being—
Salutations,
Om.

—Georgette Coty

Passion Play²

Born with clipped wings, ordained
Not to fly high, save for a dream
Here and now mercifully scattered
To hold out hope for the longing in the dust,
Life being what it may for the limited round,
We lived as best we could
Amidst Philistines and the like,
Waiting, always waiting . . .
Of pain there was much to be had,
A symphony of pain. What a scale to play?
Never true love, never one other who knew
The fire, beauty, passion as
I alone to secret altar brought
My triune offering.
Compromise? Never. Life is absolute.
It had to be all—always it had to be all,
And no one knew why in the dark
The fire burnt bright;
There had to be light, splendour,
Limitless flight.

All was promised before, now paid for,
It is justly earned.
Let me enter at last a vast round of flight,
It has to be now.
There is nothing else, nothing more to be had
At all, at all.
Yesterday's lived and all the tomorrows
Can yield no honey I want.
Dancing images, sham. So pale—against
That known inner right, nothing is alive.
They died, all the pictures died,



My actors went to sleep
And I must keep awake until reality comes.

Push the gate open,
By my right it has to part.
Wedge between fog-worn dreams and being,
Waiting for light . . . breathing,
Unknown birth, bear me,
Great womb, give me life!
Passion burning, waning . . . No,

Back to the flames!
Lit up, ashes scattered . . . done!
I rise again flying,
Burning rise.

—Georgette Coty

The Golden Ship

From still heaven to silent quay
A luminous ship of mystery!
Ether its substance, ethereal its form—
No splash of oar, no breath of storm
Break the trance of its trackless sweep,
Where serene silence converses with musing sleep
And argent shadows of secrecy sway.
Dimensions are absent in its play,
Yet its realities outrun Time's rush
And last beyond earth's abodes.
O golden ship, home of the calm Gods,
Harbour in my soul's deep hush.

—Shyam Kumari

Divine Alchemy

My father! I love Thee.
Wilt Thou not accept my longing?
Fault after fault in me
Seeks Thy perfection.
Dark and dull is my nature,
Yet my soul is Thy fiery portion.
In search of Thy Reality
I have wandered from everywhere to everywhere.
High and low, in each man I find
Only Thy distorted reflection.
On my knees, with arms upraised
I invoke Thee,
“Lift me over Thy threshold
And by Thy alchemy of grace
Turn all my dross to god-gold.”

—Shyam Kumari

Worship-corner³

I have only to shut my eyes in the silent room
And delve into that void beyond my sight
To reach Your sweet Presence awaiting
In the quiet breathing of the night.

Released of thought is the troubled heart
Sinking into Your wordless magic dark—
All pain is painlessness with Your Blessing's touch,
For stamped deep in my mind is its flaming mark.

The blackness round me is light for my eyes;
My heart is cleft like a shell in two—
In the quietude is my silent asking,
And the magical glowing answer is—You.

—Minnie N. Canteenwalla

Album³

A young girl staring in wonder,
Eyes dazzled, throat an aching emotion.
One Face to become my eternal temple—
Deep stirrings of the heart set in motion!

Light, a golden cloud, and my searching
Newly awakened consciousness aglow—
A new sweetness in the mind and being,
Currents of bright awareness begin to flow

Through the emotions and heart, still growing
Year upon year of abundant gifted love,
Sweetness dripping from that jeweled smile
To a young woman, like blessings from the Sun above!

Each passing precious moment of my life,
Leading me ever on towards that light,
Every stepping-stone a divine brilliance—
Anchorless to anchored, sightlessness into sight.

Later in life, matured, unseverably attached,
O beauteous Mother of the undying years!
In my heart a garland of prayer-beads of Your Name,
My eyes still dazzled with unshed gloriously happy tears!

—Minnie N. Canteenwalla

¹ From Thémis, *Poems*. Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1994.

² From Georgette Coty, *Sing My Soul*. Georgette Coty,, Pondicherry, 2001.

³ From Minnie N. Canteenwalla, *Deep Footprints*. Nariman F. Canteenwalla, Bombay, 1983.



Apropos

The inner spiritual progress does not depend on outer conditions so much as in the way we react to them from within—that has always been the ultimate verdict of spiritual experience. —Sri Aurobindo

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

The Snow Goose need not bathe to make itself white. Neither need you do anything but be yourself. —Lao Tse

You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance. —Kahlil Gibran

Seek always for the answers within. Be not influenced by those around you—by their thoughts or their words. —Eileen Caddy

You are never asked to do more than you are able without being given the strength and ability to do it. —Eileen Caddy

Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it, even if I may not have it at the beginning. —Mahatma Gandhi

When you come to the edge of all the light you have, and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing one of two things will happen: There will be something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly. —Patrick Overton

This life is a test. It is only a test. Had it been an actual life, you would have received further instructions on where to go and what to do. —Author Unknown

Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right. —Henry Ford

To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter; to be thrilled by the stars at night: to be elated over a bird's nest or a wild-flower in spring . . . these are some of the rewards of the simple life. —John Burroughs

Love is patient and kind, Love is not jealous, conceited, proud or boastful, it is not arrogant, selfish, irritable or rude. Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth, Love never gives up, and its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal. —1-Corinthians 13:4

Gratitude helps you to grow and expand. Gratitude brings joy and laughter into your lives and into the lives of all those around you. —Eileen Caddy

There is a destiny that makes us brothers—none goes his way alone; all that which we send into the lives of others, comes back onto our own. —Edwin Markham

Often people attempt to live their lives backwards. They try to have more things, or more money, in order to do more of what they want so they will be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are, then do what you need to do, in order to have what you want. —Margaret Young

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you too can become great. —Mark Twain

Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence. —Albert Einstein

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined! —Henry David Thoreau

Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart . . . Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens. —Carl Jung

Say what you mean and act how you feel, because those who matter don't mind, and those who mind don't matter. —Dr Seuss

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want. And if they can't, make them. —George Bernard Shaw

Everything you try to avoid about yourself will keep playing out insidiously in your life. This creates the perfect opportunity for you to embrace, love and heal this part of self. —Melanie Tonia Evans

The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience. —Eleanor Roosevelt

What is right for one soul may not be right for another. It may mean having to stand on your own and do something strange in the eyes of others. But do not be daunted, do whatever it is because you know within it is right for you. —Eileen Caddy

Every intention sets energy into motion Whether you are conscious of it or not. —Gary Zukav

Within you lies the simple silence. Be quiet and listen . . . —Author Unknown

Unless you start doing something different, you are in for more of the same. —Author Unknown

And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count, it's the life in your years. —Abraham Lincoln